5 Written Registers, Genres, and Styles

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we turn our attention to three commonly encountered general written registers – news reports, academic prose, and fiction. A fundamental difference between the spoken registers in the last chapter and written registers concerns the availability of time for planning and revising. Of course, you can choose to write a quick note, or you can even write a quick academic paper (perhaps with disappointing results when you get the grade!). Unlike speech, however, writing allows you to sit and think about what you want to say, look over what you have written, and revise it. As we shall see, these characteristics have important consequences for the language of written registers generally. But writers can also choose to use their planning and revising time to create very different kinds of texts, and this chapter also illustrates some of the variation that exists among different written registers.

One major situational characteristic shared by many written registers is a primary focus on communicating information rather than on developing a personal relationship. At the same time, it is possible in writing to be interpersonal, and registers like email messages or electronic text messages can be focused more on sharing personal feelings and attitudes than conveying information. But for many general written registers – exemplified in this chapter by news reports and academic prose – readers and writers usually do not expect to share personal connections with the author. In fact, you may never even know the name of the person who wrote a news report if there is no by-line, and even if you do see a by-line, it is unlikely that you know that person. Similarly, that writer does not know you. The focus is on communicating information about the story, rather than revealing personal details about the author or attempting to learn about the personal lives of readers.

In this chapter we also use news and academic prose to further illustrate the idea that it is possible to identify registers with varying levels of specificity. We first discuss these two general registers in contrast to conversation, and in relation to each other. We go on to discuss variation among sub-registers within each

of these registers – first comparing editorials with news reporting, and then comparing academic research articles with textbooks. (Chapter 6 further explores this topic, showing how even the major sections within academic research articles can be described from register and genre perspectives.)

The final analysis in the chapter focuses on a very different kind of register by examining fiction. Unlike the other written registers described in the chapter, the primary goal of fiction is not to convey information, but rather to tell a story, with the underlying goals of entertaining or providing social commentary in an entertaining way. Fiction is further distinguished from almost all other registers by including imaginary worlds and authors' stylistic choices, which actually have more influence on the linguistic characteristics than the real-world situational characteristics do. The investigation of fiction thus incorporates analysis of style into the register analysis.

Throughout the chapter, the analyses illustrate how the register perspective facilitates understanding of the challenges that writers and readers face. Informational written registers are among the most important registers to master for gaining access to information and for success in school; understanding their complexity is especially helpful for teachers and students. The analysis of fiction, on the other hand, illustrates the linguistic sophistication of creative texts, increasing your appreciation of the ways in which language can be manipulated for stylistic purposes.

5.2 Situational Characteristics of News Reports and Academic Prose

When you begin investigating a register, certain situational characteristics are likely to strike you as obviously important. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, it is useful to think through as many situational characteristics as possible as you begin your analysis. To illustrate this process, Table 5.1 summarizes the major situational characteristics of news reports and academic prose, illustrating the application of the analytical framework presented in Table 2.1.

When the situational characteristics of registers are laid out comprehensively, certain similarities and differences usually become clear. Here, one notable similarity for news and academic writing is that a number of the characteristics cannot be specified. That is, since these are *general* written registers, many situational characteristics vary among the sub-registers within the more general category.

For example, consider the different communicative purposes among sub-registers within news. An editorial is meant to express an opinion overtly and persuade readers to that opinion. However, a news report is expected not to state an overt opinion but rather to describe the event with as little bias as possible.

Table 5.1 *Situational Characteristics of News Reports and Academic Prose*

Situational characteristic	News reports	Academic prose
I. Participants		
A. Addressor		
1. Single / plural / institutional / unidentified	may be single, plural, institutional or unidentified	usually singular or plural, sometimes institutional
2. Social characteristics	often adult journalist but varies with sub-register (e.g., any reader can post a comment or write a letter to the editor)	often adult trained professional but varies with sub-register (e.g., can be student)
B. Addressee		
1. Single / plural / unenumerated	group (very general)	group (more specialized than for news reports, including other professionals in the academic field, students, etc.)
2. Self / other	other	other
C. Onlookers?	N/A	N/A
II. Relationships among participants		
A. Interactiveness	no direct interaction, although readers can post comments on many news websites	no direct interaction
B. Social roles	varies	varies
C. Personal relationship	none	none
D. Shared knowledge	varies (e.g., some knowledge of the city and previous current events might be expected in local news reports)	varies

Table 5.1 (*cont.*)

Situational characteristic	News reports	Academic prose
III. Channel		
A. Mode	writing – can be printed or in electronic format available online	writing
B. Specific medium	printed and/or online	printed and/or online
IV. Processing Circumstances		
A. Production	time for planning, revising, editing (often includes tight deadlines); often have strict space constraints.	time for planning, revising, editing; space constraints vary.
B. Comprehension	varies depending on reader – careful reading or skimming; opportunity for re-reading	often careful reading but may be skimmed quickly; opportunity for re-reading
V. Setting		
A. Time and place shared by participants?	no physically shared time or place but expected to be read on same day as produced	no shared time or place
B. Place of communication		
1. Private / public	public (available for others to view)	public (available for others to view)
2. Specific setting	usually associated with a specific city; may be read more widely; certain articles may be produced by a wire service with no specific setting	no specific setting
C. Time period	contemporary (in this study)	contemporary (in this study)
VI. Communicative purposes		
A. General purposes	informational – reports events; some articles do analysis; editorials and reader comments are likely to be much more opinionated	informational – inform and explain/interpret

B. Specific purposes	varies, with informing, reporting/narrating, and personal opinion purposes (e.g., news reports report daily events, human interest stories may seek to entertain, editorials and reader comments express opinions and seek to persuade)	varies, with informative, explanatory, and persuasive purposes (e.g., research articles present new findings, textbooks explain information for novices; but most academic texts also try to persuade readers about an interpretation of empirical findings)
C. Purported factuality	factual reports separated from opinion pieces	factual with interpretation
D. Expression of stance	varies – not expected to be overt in news reports, but common in editorials and reader comments	varies by discipline (see Chapter 6)
VII. Topic		
A. General topic area	current newsworthy events in many areas; varies with different sections of paper	varies
B. Specific topic	varies	varies

Similarly, although both research articles and textbooks are academic prose, they have different specific purposes and embody different sets of relationships between writer and reader. Research articles published in academic journals must present new findings, but they also need to convince readers of the trustworthiness of the research and the significance of the findings relative to what is already known about the topic. The readers are expected to already have expert background in the research area and so they are relatively equal in status to the writer. A textbook, on the other hand, is meant to explain concepts to readers who are new to the field. The author has considerably more background in the field and more authority than the readers.

In addition, some situational characteristics vary by the individual situation. For example, one reader might skim a news article or academic article very quickly, while another reader might read the same article in detail. Writers and editors know that both types of readers exist. Linguistic features may relate to meeting the needs of both such readers.

Of course, there are other situational characteristics that can be specified for these two general registers, and Table 5.1 shows that the registers are similar with respect to several of those. For example, both news and academic prose conform to the prototypical production and comprehension circumstances of writing. The authors have time to plan, revise, and edit. Even a news reporter working under a tight deadline has much more time for planning and revising than a participant in a conversation. Readers also have the opportunity to re-read what has been written as many times as they care to.

A second situational similarity between these two general registers is that there is no direct connection between the reader and writer. They have no personal relationship, no direct interaction, and do not share the same setting (except to the extent that most local news stories are read in the same city where they are produced and usually on the same day).

A third important similarity concerns the communicative purposes of the registers. Both have a generally informational purpose (as opposed to, for example, mystery novels, whose purpose is to entertain). The content is generally factual, not imaginative, and the overt expression of stance is generally not expected (except, as noted above, in editorials or in reader comments).

At the same time, these two general registers also have some clear situational differences. One concerns their specific communicative purposes. News reports recount events, describing what happened, rather than offering interpretations. The distinction between news reports and analysis/interpretation articles is often made clear, with a label on the "news analysis" piece. Editorials, which are overtly opinionated, are presented on a special page of the news website. And reader comments, which are also overtly opinionated, are clearly identified. On the other hand, all academic writing is expected to go further than just presenting information or narrating events. It needs to explain and interpret the

information that is presented, constructing an argument in support of one perspective over alternative perspectives.

The two registers also differ in their topic areas. Although both have variation in specific topics, news reports are always focused on current newsworthy events. Even a historical event will be connected to its present-day anniversary, survivors or continuing impact. For academic writing, it is impossible to specify a topical focus. Different disciplines – history, biology, medicine, mathematics, etc. – all have different foci, and the attention paid to current relevance depends on the more specific register (a research article must make its current significance clear, but a textbook explaining historical developments might not).

5.3 Linguistic Features in News Reports and Academic Prose

In this section, we survey the linguistic features typically used in news and academic prose, connecting them to the situational characteristics discussed in the previous section. We begin by contrasting both of these general written registers with conversation, the prototypical spoken register (described in Chapter 4), and then move on to comparing the two written registers to each other.

5.3.1 Writing versus Conversation

Table 5.2 provides an overview of fifteen linguistic features that are typical of news and/or academic prose. In a study of your own, you would have frequency counts from a small collection of texts in each register. The description here is based on large-scale corpus analyses of these two registers. Many more features could, of course, be included in a study; we use these fifteen to exemplify a range of different kinds of linguistic features.

A quick glance at Table 5.2 shows that nominal features are one of the most obvious ways in which these two written registers differ from conversation. All of the features having to do with noun phrases – nouns, premodifiers of nouns (i.e., other nouns and attributive adjectives), postmodifiers of nouns (e.g., prepositional phrases and past participle clauses) – are much more common in the written registers. In contrast, personal pronouns and most verb phrase features (e.g., present tense and modal verbs) are more common in conversation than in the written registers.

Text Samples 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate the complex kinds of noun phrases common in informational writing. Text 5.1 is from a textbook about foodservice, and Text 5.2 from a news article about beer.

Table 5.2 *Distribution of Selected Linguistics Features in Two General Written Registers*

Linguistic feature	News	Academic prose	Conversation
1. Nominal features			
nouns	very common, even more common than in academic prose	very common	less common
nominalizations	common	extremely common, especially *-tion*	rare
prepositional phrases after nouns	common	extremely common	less common
attributive adjectives	common	extremely common	less common
nouns as premodifiers of nouns	extremely common	common	rare
personal pronouns	slightly more than in academic prose, still uncommon	rare	extremely common
2. Verb characteristics			
present tense	less common than in academic prose; slightly more common than past tense	more common than in news; far more common than past tense	very common
past tense	much more frequent than in academic prose; slightly more common than in conversation	rare	uncommon
modals	uncommon; slightly less common than in academic prose; *will* and *would* most common	uncommon; slightly more common than in news *can* and *may* most common	more common than in news or academic prose (about 15% of all finite verb phrases)
passives	about 15% of all finite verbs	more common than in news; about 25% of all finite verbs	rare

3. Circumstance adverbials of time and place	time by far most common; place also common	time and place adverbials rare	time and place adverbials both common
4. Linking adverbials	rare	very common	*so* and *then* are very common
5. Other features			
sentence structure	standard syntax	standard syntax	many fractured clauses, incomplete utterances, etc.
questions	rare	rare	very common
type–token ratio	higher than academic prose	higher than conversation	lowest

Based on Biber (1988), Biber et al. (1999), Conrad (1996), Conrad (2001)

Text Sample 5.1 Academic Prose: Textbook about Foodservice

WHAT PEOPLE EXPECT

Diners walking into a commercial facility for the first time bring with them a number of expectations. They expect good, safe food, clean surroundings, and pleasant service. Together these elements make up a pleasant dining experience.

It is a challenge to managers of commercial and noncommercial establishments to direct a number of activities at once, including employee training and management; and the purchasing, preparation, and service of food. Foodservice managers generally expect to meet the diners' expectations. Managers *assume* that they are going to provide good, safe food in clean surroundings with friendly service. This assumption, especially regarding safe food and clean surroundings, should be based not only on a foundation of goodwill and good intentions, but on a sound understanding of sanitary policies and procedures.

Educational Foundation of the National Restaurant Foundation, *Applied Foodservice Sanitation*, 4th edn., 1995, Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, pp. 3–4

Text Sample 5.2 News: Story about Harvesting Hops

A peak beer experience

It's hop harvest – time to revel in the fleeting season of fresh-hop beer

The 20-foot-tall vines are mostly harvested now, hacked down and denuded during several weeks of 'round-the-clock bustle [. . .]

Most hops are dried and pressed after pickling so they can be baled for use through the year. Some are frozen; some are processed into dry pellets; some are distilled into essential oils. So fresh-from-the-vine hops are a fleeting thing available only during the hop harvest, and brewers are taking full advantage with a round of beers and parties to celebrate dear old *Humulus lupulin*.

It seems a curious object of veneration, this sticky, weedlike cousin of cannabis that grows inches a day during high summer. Its cones are used for nearly nothing but the preservation of beer and giving it varying degrees of bitterness, tasks for which they are uncannily perfect – far better than the witches' brews of herbs and spices that brewers used in the centuries before hops became the standard. Without hops in the mix, beer would be a sweet grainy gruel where bad bugs would thrive.

The Oregonian, September 25, 2007, pp. FD1 and 7

The sentences are long in these text excerpts, often containing only one finite verb but many nouns, resulting in a much higher frequency of nouns than verbs. The first sentence in the textbook, for instance, has one main verb (*bring*) and five nouns (*diners, facility, time, number, expectations*), in a total of seventeen words. Although the news article starts with a higher frequency of verbs, the first sentence of the third paragraph has one verb in the main clause (*seems*), and one verb in the relative clause (*grows*), but seven nouns (*object, veneration, cousin, cannabis, inches, day, summer*).

Further, nouns tend to be modified by adjectives and prepositional phrases in these texts, so that the referents are very specific. For instance, the textbook refers to not just any "managers" but *managers* ***of commercial and noncommercial establishments***. The text encourages not just any "understanding" but *a* ***sound*** *understanding* ***of sanitary policies and procedures***. The news article refers to ***fresh-from-the-vine*** *hops, a* ***curious*** *object* ***of veneration****, this* ***sticky, weedlike*** *cousin* ***of cannabis***. In contrast, Chapter 4 showed how conversational participants make frequent use of pronouns and other kinds of vague expressions, relying on the physical context to identify the specific reference.

It is easy to see how these features relate to the differences in purpose, production/comprehension circumstances, and physical settings of informational writing versus conversation. News and academic prose have a general purpose of informing, and there is plenty of time for planning, revising, and editing the language. Informing readers about a specific topic requires precise noun phrases. The time allowed for production of the text enables writers to formulate the more dense noun phrases, and they know readers will have time to process them. Furthermore, these specific noun phrases are useful for identifying the precise concepts that will be covered in the textbook, e.g., *employee training and management*; *the purchasing, preparation, and service of food*; *sanitary policies and procedures*. In the news article, the noun phrases name a variety of objects that are associated with the general topic (*hops*): *dry pellets, essential oils, hop harvest, brewers, cones*, etc. Conversation, on the other hand, is produced and processed in real time, by people who are face to face, sharing personal information and developing a personal relationship. Shorter noun phrases result from both the communicative focus – on *you* and *I* – and the fact that the participants are together in the same place and time.

Several other linguistic features are tied to the communicative purpose and production circumstances of the written versus spoken registers. These written registers have a high "type–token ratio": a measure of how many different words are used in a text. This characteristic reflects the precision of noun phrases with their variety of modifiers, the need to be precise about the reference of noun phrases, and the variety of topics raised. The complete, well-formed syntax of the written texts also results from the time for production and editing.

In sum, there are major linguistic differences between conversation and informational writing, associated with the major situational differences between these general registers. At the same time, there are interesting linguistic differences between the two informational written registers as well. These are discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 Comparison of News Reports and Academic Prose

Although news reports and academic prose appear quite similar to each other when compared to conversation, there are also intriguing linguistic differences between them, and these differences relate to their differences in situational characteristics. Two of the differences between news and academic

prose are their specific purposes and topics. We noted in Section 5.2 that news reports focus more on current newsworthy events and have more emphasis on simple reporting, while academic prose is always expected to analyze and explain, not just report. Certain linguistic features clearly relate to these differences, most notably present versus past-tense verbs, types of circumstance adverbials, and linking adverbials (see Table 5.2).

Academic prose uses far more present-tense verbs than past-tense verbs, while in news the frequency of the two tenses is about the same. With respect to circumstance adverbials, news has more time adverbials than other adverbials, but also use place and process adverbials commonly. In academic prose, neither place nor time adverbials are common.

The focus on reporting current events in news stories clearly corresponds to these verb tense and adverbial choices. For example, news reports commonly use past-tense verbs to narrate what recently happened. Text Sample 5.3, from a lead story about a man's encounters with a rattlesnake, illustrates the use of past tense to narrate a sequence of events. The sequence is further clarified through the use of time adverbials, such as *in early August, three weeks afterward*, and *a short time later*. Since readers are expected to be reading the article the same day that the edition was published (a Wednesday), even a time adverbial such as *Tuesday* is useful for understanding the events. Finally, the physical setting of the events is made clear with place adverbials such as *off the highway near Maupin*.

Text Sample 5.3 News Article

In early August, snake collector Matt Wilkinson of Southeast Portland grabbed a 20-inch rattler off the highway near Maupin.

Three weeks afterward, in a show of daring for an ex-girlfriend, Wilkinson stuck the snake in his mouth.

A short time later, he was near death with a tongue swollen to the point it blocked his throat when emergency room and trauma surgeons at OHSU Hospital saved his life.

The 23-year-old became a celebrity of sorts Tuesday when broadcast and cable news all over the country learned about his story. On the phone, still out of sorts with sore muscles and nerves from the venom, he sounded circumspect.

The Oregonian, September 19, 2007, p. D1

In the retelling of the events in Text Sample 5.3, it is also easy to see why no linking adverbials are used. The sequence of events makes it possible for the reader to infer the cause–effect relationships. Readers are expected to understand on their own that the man was bitten by the snake when he put it in his mouth, and that the bite is what caused his throat and tongue to swell. Making the relationships even more explicit with linking adverbials such as *consequently, therefore*, or *as a result* is unnecessary.

Present-tense verbs are also common in news articles, because they describe current events. For example, Text Sample 5.4 discusses a plan for a bird protection program. Every main verb in the opening paragraphs is in the present tense (*has come up with, lays, like, are, wander, relies*, etc.) In this case, the news report explains facts about the birds, and also describes a current plan, but gives background information in the past tense (e.g., *the plover was listed as threatened*).

Text Sample 5.4 News Report about a Bird Protection Program

Education is big part of plover protection

Recovery | Private and government groups will warn beach visitors that nests may be underfoot

By Patrick O'Neill
The Oregonian

The federal government has come up with a way to protect a tiny beach-dwelling bird that lays its eggs in areas where people like to play Frisbee.

At less than 2 ounces, western snowy plovers are no match for the increasing number of humans who wander through their nesting grounds without every realizing the nests are there.

The plan, released Monday by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, relies heavily on cooperative efforts between private organizations and government agencies to help the birds. Because the plover shares the beach with people, the plan uses a large public education component.

[. . .]

Laura Todd, field supervisor for the Newport office of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said the number of plovers has grown from about 50 along the Oregon and Washington coasts in the early 1990s to about 104 plovers in Oregon and 60 in Washington in 2005. The plover was listed as threatened in 1993 under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Oregonian, September 25, 2007, p. B1

Academic prose is similar to the news article in Text Sample 5.4 in that the communicative focus is usually on facts that have continuing relevance. Text Sample 5.5 illustrates this pattern in an introduction section of a research article that concerns the same bird species as in the news article. All the information is in present tense (*is widely believed, include*, etc.), informing readers of the most current knowledge about the breeding of the birds.

Text Sample 5.5 Academic Prose: Research Article about Breeding of Birds

Long-distance breeding dispersal of snowy plovers in western North America

Lynne E. Stenzel, Jane C. Warriner, John S. Warriner, Katherine S. Wilson, Frances C. Bidstrup and Gary W. Page

Introduction

Breeding site tenacity is widely believed to be characteristic of most species of birds that depend on relatively stable resources. Potential advantages include intimate familiarity with the food resources and habitat characteristics of a site, the latter possibly beneficial for birds seeking refuge from predators or defending sites in intraspecific conflicts (Hinde 1956; Harvey, Greenwood & Perrins 1979; Greenwood 1980; Horn 1983). Recognized benefits of dispersal, even in stable environments, include increased gene flow, increased access to potential mates, and reduced competition with relatives or conspecific (Hamilton & May 1977; Greenwood 1980). Dispersal theoretically has been shown to be of additional benefit in temporally variable habitats (Roff 1975), as exemplified in the extreme by the movements of nomadic species (Andersson 1980). Sex bias with respect to breeding dispersal is a well recognized phenemenon (reviewed in Greenwood 1980, 1983). [. . .]

Journal of Animal Ecology 63, 1994, p. 887

Text 5.1 from the foodservice textbook is also written in the present tense, since the authors discuss food sanitation generally, not a specific case of it (as might be reported in a news article).

The discussion of general (sometimes abstract) patterns and concepts in academic prose is also connected with another linguistic difference from news reports: academic prose tends to have a higher frequency of nominalizations. In the research article introduction, concepts such as *breeding site tenacity, familiarity*, and *benefits of dispersal* are discussed. If these ideas were expressed without nominalizations (that is, with verbs or adjectives), the focus of the discourse would change. Consider this rewriting of the opening sentences of the research article:

> Most species of birds that depend on relatively stable resources are tenacious about breeding sites. They may have an advantage when they are familiar with food resources . . . When the birds disperse, they benefit from increased gene flow . . .

In these rephrased sentences, the birds themselves, as grammatical subjects, become the topic of the discourse, and the introduction is no longer about general concepts. Similarly, the foodservice textbook in Text Sample 5.1 discusses *management, expectations*, and *intentions.* The focus of the entire book is about *foodservice sanitation* – a general concept rather than a specific action.

Since academic prose is expected to develop arguments rather than to simply report events, linking adverbials are more common. Data in an academic text is not just reported: rather, an interpretation must be made, and a conclusion reached. Here, for instance, is a passage from another research article about animal breeding, in this case about a mouse (Peromyscus californicus). In this excerpt from the discussion section, the author is comparing his results to previous studies:

Text Sample 5.6 Academic Prose: Research Article, Discussion Section

[Linking adverbials are in **bold**]

However, their field data from nine females indicate an average of 1.8 litters per season (McCabe and Blanchard 1950; p. 118). Number of litters per breeding season does not appear to vary considerably among Peromyscus, but **rather** the days between litters correlates positively with length of breeding season (Millar 1989). The primary breeding season in this study was around 8 months long (Fig. 1a and b) and average interbirth interval within a season was 60.3 days. **In contrast**, interbirth intervals for other Peromyscus species range from 25 to 30 days . . . Data from P. californicus **thus** agree with the general trend . . . There was, **however**, considerable variation in interbirth intervals . . .

D. O. Ribble, Lifetime reproductive success and its correlates in the monogamous rodent, Peromyscus californicus, *Journal of Animal Ecology* 61, 1992, p. 466

The author repeatedly marks the connections he is making, whether contrast (*however, rather, in contrast*) or summing up the significance of the review (*thus*).

Another difference between the two written registers is the devices used to identify sources of information, an aspect of stance. Research articles all have references with names and dates in parentheses – e.g., *(McCabe and Blanchard 1950)* and *(Millar 1989)* in Text Sample 5.6. News articles, on the other hand, give attribution to sources less precisely. Some articles (e.g., Text Sample 5.4) name a specific individual: "Laura Todd, field supervisor for the Newport office of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said . . ." But more commonly, news articles rely on less precise attribution, using the phrase *according to*. Information in news articles can be attributed to a variety of sources, including other documents, organizations, or unnamed people:

according to court documents
according to a government report
according to a source close to the case
according to diplomatic sources
according to the Criminal Justice Institute
according to the army

From AP wire stories

Finally, the dense use of passive verbs in academic prose is interesting because it has been so stigmatized, with some critics claiming that it is used merely to sound objective and to distance the practice of science from human agents (compare *No significant differences were found* to *We found no significant differences*). While it is conventional to use passives to report research findings in many fields, there are also functional factors that affect the choice of passive.

In fact, the passive often serves important functions in academic registers. Even a brief analysis of passives shows that general prescriptions to students such as "avoid passive voice" are misguided.

In many cases where passives are used, the subject of an active voice verb would just be a vague group of researchers, perhaps *The members of our research team who did the statistical analysis found no significant differences*. In these cases, the passive voice expression (*no significant differences were found*) is easier to read and equally informative.

Even more importantly, passive voice allows concepts and objects (rather than people) to be the grammatical subject of the sentence, making the discourse topic clear. This is not just important for research articles; consider this advice (Text Sample 5.7) from the foodservice textbook (our italics added):

Text Sample 5.7 Foodservice Textbook

Meats, poultry, and finfish *should be checked* for color, texture, and temperature on delivery. Live molluscan shellfish and crustacean *must be delivered* alive or properly packed fresh or frozen. Produce must be fresh and wholesome. Milk, eggs and other dairy products *must be checked* for temperature and freshness.

Applied Foodservice Sanitation, 1995, p. 114

In this paragraph, each sentence begins with the object that is being discussed, while disregarding irrelevant information about the people doing the actions. Using active voice would require rewriting sentences, resulting in much more cumbersome prose; for example:

> Whoever receives a delivery should check meats, poultry and finfish for color, texture, and temperature. When someone delivers molluscan shellfish and crustacea, they must be alive . . .

In cases like these, rephrasing the sentences with active voice would make it difficult for readers to skim quickly and see the main points by looking at the subject of each sentence. An academic writer's preference for passive voice thus often corresponds to clearly organized informational prose.

Passives occur in news reports less frequently but with similar functions. In many cases, the agent is obvious, irrelevant, or simply not known. For example, in (a) it is obvious that "a police officer" is the human agent who arrested a suspect, while in (b) it is simply not known who stole the truck:

a. The suspect ***was arrested*** after . . .
b. The truck ***was stolen*** Monday and still was missing Wednesday.

From AP stories

In both of these examples, using active voice and trying to specify the agent would obscure the main point of the discourse – the suspect and the truck.

However, there are other news articles where agents and their acts are the point of the story, and so active voice is preferred. For example, the report concerning the snake bite in Text Sample 5.3 and the story of the plan to protect the breeding birds in Text Sample 5.4 have no passives. Thus, news reports overall have a lower frequency of passive voice than academic prose does.

5.4 Variation within the General Registers

We noted in Section 5.2 that there are several sub-registers within each of these two general written registers. For example, news websites have pages relating to numerous more specialized sub-registers. Current news reports are sub-categorized according to location (e.g., Portland, Clark County, USA, World) and according to topic (e.g., crime, politics, education, environment, health, finance). In addition, the news website includes numerous articles from several other sub-registers, including sports news, entertainment/lifestyle, opinion (including editorials, letters to the editor, reader comments), and movie/restaurant reviews. These sub-registers differ in their particular communicative purposes, and so we would predict that there will be corresponding linguistic differences. In the following sections, we provide two examples of the linguistic variation among sub-registers: news reports versus news editorials (within the general register of news), and research articles versus textbooks (within the general register of academic prose).

5.4.1 News Reports and News Editorials

In basic news reportage, it is expected that the writer will not overtly state opinions about an issue. Editorials, however, have the specific purpose of stating an opinion and arguing for it. Consider the excerpts from editorials in Text Sample 5.8:

Text Sample 5.8 Editorials

A. . . . something needs to be done. Here's one suggestion.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski should pick up the phone today and offer DHS director Bruce Goldberg a simple reminder . . .

The Oregonian, October 1, 2007, p. E4

B. If any good can come from the incident in which U.S. security contractors are alleged to have killed at least eight Iraqi civilians, it's that it focuses attention on a largely unseen facet of the war. While debate in this country has focused on diplomatic initiatives and the role of the military, the largest component of the U.S. presence in Iraq is a privately employed army of cooks, technicians and gun-carrying security guards who, in some cases, operate with minimal insight. . . .

If the United States is truly interested in cultivating what President Bush calls "a free nation than can govern itself, sustain itself and defend itself" in Iraq, it can start by making its contractors accountable. It can take steps to ensure that contractors operate under the same rules of engagement as military forces.

And it can help root out contractors who undo diplomacy by firing their weapons too freely.

The Oregonian, September 19, 2007, p. D6

C. Beginning soon, though, the bureau's 9–1–1 operators will put callers who don't have true emergencies on hold while screening the next call. In the long term, this change could be lifesaving. In the short term, it may mean that 9–1–1 operators don't sound as polite as usual.

The operators shouldn't use it as an excuse to amp up the rudeness, though. This is still Oregon. There's still room for a little politeness, even when a house is on fire.

The Oregonian, September 19, 2007, p. D6

In all of these editorials, opinions are clearly stated, evaluating what happened and recommending what should happen. Specific linguistic features are used for these functions. For example, there are frequent modals in editorials compared to typical news reportage. Many of these are directive, telling people the best behavior to follow. The modal *should* is common, as illustrated in editorials A and C above:

> Gov. Ted Kulongoski ***should*** pick up the phone
> The operators ***shouldn't*** use it as an excuse to amp up the rudeness

Other modals are used to identify preferred actions, as in this example with *can*:

> it ***can*** start by making its contractors accountable. It ***can*** take steps to ensure

Since many editorials describe future events or possible future consequences, modals are also used for a predictive function:

> Beginning soon, though, the bureau's 9–1–1 operators ***will*** put callers who don't have true emergencies on hold . . .
> it ***may*** mean that 9–1–1 operators don't sound as polite as usual.

Editorials also tend to have a high concentration of conditionals to discuss hypotheticals (often in conjunction with modals), predicting events if particular actions are or are not followed:

> ***If*** the FCC were to reimpose the Fairness Doctrine, talk radio ***would*** no longer be part of the GOP base. *Los Angeles Times* circa 2007 (reprinted p. C4 of *The Oregonian*, October 8, 2007: Behind all the talk about talk)

In contrast to the overt opinions of editorials, consider the news report in Text Sample 5.9 (about the same events as in Text Sample 5.8 B):

Text Sample 5.9 News Report

Employees of Blackwater USA have engaged in nearly 200 shootings in Iraq since 2005, in the majority of cases firing their weapons from moving vehicles without stopping to count the dead or assist the wounded, according a new report from Congress.

In at least two cases, Blackwater paid victims' family members who complained, and they sought to cover up other episodes, the congressional report said.

The Oregonian, October 2, 2007, p. A1

The news report simply narrates the event. There are no opinions overtly expressed, no suggestions for next steps, no discussion of hypothetical situations or possibilities for the future. Correspondingly, modals and conditionals are absent.

Editorials and news reports are included on the same website (or as part of the same printed newspaper) and read by the same audience. However, they have distinct communicative purposes. Even examining just two linguistic features – modals and conditionals – it is easy to see how different sub-registers within a single general register have systematic linguistic differences associated with their different purposes.

5.4.2 Research Articles versus Textbooks

Just as there is a range of sub-registers associated with a daily edition of the news, academic prose similarly encompasses many different kinds of publications. Research articles and textbooks are two of these.

The comparison of these two more specific academic sub-registers has interesting implications in a university educational context. Many university classes ask students to read textbooks, and these are likely to be the register students are most familiar with, having used textbooks throughout their school years. However, in many cases, even in low-level university classes, students are asked to write original research papers, using the register features of research articles. As they advance, they are asked to read more research articles as well. Many students find the move from textbooks to research articles to be challenging – and the register perspective helps to explain why.

The most obvious situational differences between research articles and textbooks concern their participants and communicative purposes. Research articles are usually written by professionals who are experts in a specific field, and they are written for other experienced professionals. In contrast, textbooks are written by experts for novices in the field. Although both of these registers have a

general purpose of conveying information, their specific purposes vary. Research articles must contribute new knowledge to the field and convince other experts that this knowledge has scientific merit; in contrast, textbooks generally seek to inform students of knowledge that is already established in a field of study. Even from these situational characteristics, it is immediately easy to see why research articles are often difficult for students to read: they are not the intended audience, and they are probably unskilled in recognizing established knowledge versus new knowledge, and in evaluating scientific merit. When they write an article, students are also in an awkward position. They are faced with producing a new register, but they must also adapt that register for their school context (since they are students writing for instructors, not experts writing for other experts).

Several linguistic features correspond to the situational differences between textbooks and professional research articles. Text Samples 5.10 and 5.11 illustrate the typical linguistic characteristics of the two registers. Both texts are from the discipline of biology, and both discuss the same general topic: the response of organisms to their environment. However, Sample 5.10 reports findings from a new research study (from an academic research article), while Sample 5.11 reports more general information for the non-expert reader (from a textbook), summarizing the results from several previous research studies.

Text Sample 5.10 Research Article: Biology

There were marked differences in root growth into regrowth cores among the three communities, both in the distribution of roots through the cores and in the response to elevated CO_2. In the Scirpus community, root growth was evenly distributed throughout the 15-cm profile, with no significant differences in root biomass among the 5-cm sampling intervals within a treatment (Fig. 1). Exposure to elevated CO_2 has a pronounced effect on root regrowth . . .

P. S. Curtis, L. M. Balduman, B. G. Drake, and D. F. Wigham, Elevated atmospheric CO_2 effects on belowground processes in C3 and C4 estuarine marsh communities, *Ecology* 71, 1990, p. 2003

Text Sample 5.11 Textbook: Biology

Migration, thus, is not an easy out; but for many bird species there is no alternative. Physical or behavioral adaptations to particular feeding strategies alone may dictate fall flight. The herons, for example, with their stilt-legged manner of fishing for a living in shallow water, have no way of coping with even a thin, temporary cover of ice. They have, in effect, become too specialized. The fly-catchers, as well, once their insect prey have metamorphosed and become sedentary for the winter, must move southward to find food on the wing. And so, too, must the soaring birds of prey . . .

P. J. Marchand, *Life in the cold: an introduction to winter ecology*, second edn., Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991, p. 4

One important linguistic difference between research articles and textbooks is the use of complex noun phrases. We noted the preponderance of complex noun phrases when we discussed the general register of academic prose. However, research articles and textbooks differ in their reliance on these structures. In the research article above, a specific research topic is discussed – root growth into regrowth cores – and complex noun phrases are used to facilitate precise identification of the referents. Thus, many noun modifiers are used, including attributive adjectives, nouns premodifying nouns, and prepositional phrases – *marked differences in root growth into regrowth cores among the three communities*; *no significant differences in root biomass among the 5-cm sampling intervals within a treatment*.

In the textbook passage, the description is more general, with fewer complex noun phrases. The passage discusses a more general concept – reasons for migration – and uses several examples to illustrate the concept – herons, flycatchers, and birds of prey. There are some simple statements with simple noun phrases, such as the opening: *Migration, thus, is not an easy out*. More description is given for many of the referents, rather than just naming them. For example, herons are described in a sentence that has no complex noun phrases: *They have, in effect, become too specialized*. The greater emphasis on explanation and exemplification of a concept thus corresponds to a lower density of complex noun phrases.

Oddly enough, the complex noun phrases can be both a help and a hindrance to students. On the one hand, the complex noun phrases contain more information and more precise, technical information, and are therefore more difficult to understand or produce. On the other hand, the noun phrases in a research article cover a very limited technical topic. Especially for second language speakers, the restricted vocabulary and topic might make an article easier than a textbook, which will have a greater diversity of vocabulary and more idiomatic language (such as "an easy out").

Another interesting linguistic difference between the two academic registers concerns the use of passives. Textbooks tend to use passive voice less often than research articles. The following passage from a history textbook illustrates the common use of active voice:

Text Sample 5.12 Textbook: History

They [English colonial planters] ***hoped*** to reproduce Spanish successes by dispatching to America men who would similarly ***exploit*** the native peoples for their own and their nation's benefit. In the 1580s a group that ***included*** Sir Humphrey Gilbert and his younger half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh ***promoted*** a scheme to establish outposts that could trade with the Indians and ***provide*** bases for attacks on New Spain. Approving the idea, Queen Elizabeth I ***authorized*** Raleigh and Gilbert to

colonize North America. Gilbert failed to plant a colony in Newfoundland, dying in the attempt, and Raleigh was only briefly more successful.

M. Norton, D. Katzman, P. Escott, H. Chudacoff, T. Paterson, and W. Tuttle, *A people and a nation, vol. I: To 1877*, 3rd edn., 1990, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 20

The greater use of active voice in textbooks results in more passages with an action-oriented narrative. In contrast, research articles often use passive voice to focus on objects rather than people, for example:

> The dimensions of the wild bison resource on the Southern Plains, and the Great Plains in general, ***have been much overstated*** in popular literature.[1]
>
> Runaway ads ***were published*** in a milieu that took seeing and describing seriously.[2]
>
> Most often, however, early maps ***are not read*** as documents, but ***reduced*** to decorations.[3]

Overall, then, there is less action in research articles, with more emphasis on the significance and interpretation of events or documents. This different emphasis is required as researchers argue the importance of their research (a crucial function for student researchers to learn), while the more action-oriented textbooks are likely to be more engaging for student readers.

5.5 Variation in Fiction Due to Style

Many people simply read fiction for enjoyment, while literary scholars often analyze fiction for characteristics like character and plot development. However, fictional texts can also be analyzed linguistically, just like any other texts. A linguistic analysis makes it especially clear just how complex fiction is and how adept authors are at manipulating language for different purposes and effects, even if they are not consciously aware of their linguistic expertise. Fiction provides yet another perspective on how a general register can vary. As explained below, in this general register a great deal of linguistic variation comes not from specialized sub-registers, but from deliberate choices by authors depending on how they want to convey a story. Therefore, analysis of fiction must cover characteristics of the imaginary world and choices of style: choices whose functions are associated more with aesthetic preferences than the real-world situational context of the register.

From a situational perspective, fiction is one of the most complicated registers. Like news reports and academic prose, fiction is produced by an author who has extensive opportunity for planning, revision and editing of the text. Fiction is further similar to news reports in that it is written for a large, general audience,

who has little personal knowledge about the author and also does not share a high level of professional/specialist knowledge with the author. There is normally no interaction between author and reader, and readers normally do not know the time and place where the text was written.

However, these external situational characteristics have almost no influence on the linguistic characteristics of a fictional text.[4] It is almost irrelevant whether the author interacts with the reader, whether they know one another, etc. This is because the relevant situational context for a fictional text is the fictional world that the author creates in the text itself. Thus, fictional characters interact with one another in that fictional world, even though the author of the text never interacts with the reader. Further, fictional characters often reveal their own personal thoughts and attitudes, even though the author herself never directly describes her own personal attitudes. The determining factors for the language used in a fictional text is the way in which the fictional world is constructed, rather than the "real-world" situation of the text.

One of the most important factors that influences fictional style is the perspective that the author chooses for narrating a story. Is the story told from a first-person perspective, as if the author were one of the main characters? Or is the story told from a third-person perspective, as if the author were an outside observer of the events? This distinction obviously has immediate linguistic consequences.

For example, the Sherlock Holmes stories are told from the first-person point of view of Dr. Watson, as if Watson (rather than Arthur Conan Doyle) were the author (Text Sample 5.13).

Text Sample 5.13 Fiction: Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of The Baskervilles,* 1902

An instant afterwards he [Sherlock Holmes] gave a little cry of satisfaction, and, following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now proceeding slowly onwards again.

"There's our man, Watson! Come along! We'll have a good look at him, if we can do no more."

At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab.

First-person fiction obviously has frequent occurrences of the pronoun *I*, like any first-person narrative, where someone is narrating events that they personally experienced (e.g., in a personal letter or a conversation). In addition, first-person fiction usually reports the sensual perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes of the narrator, as in *I saw* and *I was aware of* in Text Sample 5.13. As described in Chapter 4, this results in frequent complement clause constructions (*that*-clauses

and *to*-clauses), where the verb or adjective in the main clause expresses a "personal stance" about the information in the complement clause, as in the following examples from the same Sherlock Holmes story:

That-clauses:

> I could not doubt **that some grave and deep reason lay behind it**
> I was suddenly aware **that I was not the only witness of their interview**.
> It seemed to me **that she was straining away from him**
> It seemed to me **that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry**

To-clauses:

> I was surprised **to observe that by the gate there stood two soldierly men**
> But I was eager **to get back to my charge**.
> I was astounded to see Miss Stapleton sitting upon a rock
> I was deeply ashamed **to have witnessed so intimate a scene**

In contrast, a third-person narrative is told from the point of view of an external observer. In this case, the book's narrator can be a normal observer, who can observe only the physical phenomena that any of us could observe, or a super-human observer, who is aware of the inner thoughts and feelings of characters. In the former case, the description of events is relatively "objective," in some ways similar linguistically to the prose in a news report with frequent third-person pronouns, past tense, communication verbs, etc. The following passage from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (Text Sample 5.14) illustrates this style of prose. Here the narrator describes the pain and emotion evident on a character's face, but cannot directly detect her actual internal thoughts and feelings:

Text Sample 5.14 Fiction: Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 1906

She stood in the doorway, shepherded by Cousin Marija, breathless from pushing through the crowd, and in her happiness painful to look upon. There was a light of wonder in her eyes and her lids trembled, and her otherwise wan little face was flushed. She wore a muslin dress, conspicuously white, and a stiff little veil coming to her shoulders. There were five pink paper roses twisted in the veil, and eleven bright green rose leaves. There were new white cotton gloves upon her hands, and as she stood staring about her she twisted them together feverishly. It was almost too much for her – you could see the pain of too great emotion in her face, and all the tremor of her form.

In contrast, an omniscient third-person narrator is able to describe the inner thoughts and feelings of characters, as in the following excerpt from *Lord of the Flies*:

Text Sample 5.15 Fiction: William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 1954

Piggy and the parody were so funny that the hunters began to laugh. Jack felt encouraged. He went on scrambling and the laughter rose to a gale of hysteria. Unwillingly Ralph felt his lips twitch, he was angry with himself for giving way.

The fictional world described by an omniscient external narrator includes numerous stance expressions, because the narrator is privy to the inner attitudes and feelings of characters. One linguistic reflection of this characteristic is frequent mental verbs controlling complement clauses, similar to the style expected in a first-person narrative. Examples from *Lord of the Flies* include:

Ralph . . . decided **that the shadows on his body were really green**.
He . . . decided **that a toothbrush would come in handy too**.
for a moment they felt **that the boat was moving steadily astern**.
Startled, Ralph realized **that the boys were falling still**
He noticed **that he still held the knife aloft**

A second major parameter of variation among fictional stories is the extent to which the author decides to report the dialogue of characters. For example, in *The Hound of The Baskervilles*, much of the story is portrayed through the dialogue of characters rather than through narrative prose. In this case, Watson is the first-person narrator, but much of the story is presented as dialogue with Sherlock Holmes. The reader observes Holmes solving a mystery, understanding what happened by listening to Holmes talk about the various possibilities:

Text Sample 5.16 Fiction: Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of The Baskervilles,* 1902

[Holmes said:] "I think we have drawn as much as we can from this curious letter; and now, Sir Henry, has anything else of interest happened to you since you have been in London?"

"Why, no, Mr Holmes. I think not."

"You have not observed anyone follow or watch you?"

"I seem to have walked right into the thick of a dime novel," said our visitor. "Why in thunder should anyone follow or watch me?"

"We are coming to that. You have nothing else to report to us before we go into this matter?"

"Well, it depends upon what you think worth reporting."

"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life well worth reporting."

Sir Henry smiled. "I don't know much of British life yet, for I have spent nearly all my time in the States and in Canada. But I hope that to lose one of your boots is not part of the ordinary routine of life over here."

"You have lost one of your boots?"

"My dear sir," cried Dr Mortimer, "it is only mislaid. You will find it when you return to the hotel. What is the use of troubling Mr Holmes with trifles of this kind?"

"Well, he asked me for anything outside the ordinary routine."

"Exactly," said Holmes, "however foolish the incident may seem. You have lost one of your boots, you say?"

This style of fiction thus employs many of the grammatical features that are common in face-to-face conversation, such as second-person pronouns (in addition to first-person pronouns), present-tense verbs, questions, contractions, and ellipsis. (We show in Chapter 8 how authors' representations of fictional dialogue have changed historically over the past three centuries to become increasingly similar to actual face-to-face conversation.)

Other fictional styles incorporate little dialogue. For example, a first-person narrative can simply report past events and places as observed by the main character, but omit reports of conversational interactions. This style of fiction is in some ways similar linguistically to other kinds of reflective first-person writing, like diaries. There is a high frequency of first- and third-person pronouns (but not second-person pronouns), past-tense verbs (but not present-tense verbs), adverbials of time, markers of personal stance, etc. Text Sample 5.17 provides an example of this style from a mystery book, with the typical features highlighted:

Text Sample 5.17 Fiction: Sue Grafton, *'C' Is For Corpse*, 1986

I met Bobby Callahan **on Monday of that week**. **By Thursday**, **he was** dead. **He was** convinced someone **was** trying to kill **him** and it **turned** out to be true, but none of us **figured** it out in time to save **him**. **I**'ve never worked for a dead man before and I hope I won't have to do it again. This report is for **him**, for whatever it's worth.

[. . .]

It **was August** and I'**d** been working out at Santa Teresa Fitness, trying to remedy the residual effects of a broken left arm. The days **were** hot, **filled** with relentless sunshine and clear skies. I **was feeling cranky and bored**, doing push-downs and curls and wrist rolls. **I'd just** worked two cases back-to-back and **I'd** sustained more damage than a fractured humerus. I **was feeling emotionally battered** and **I needed** a rest.

The same distinction in dialogue use is found in third-person narratives. For example, the prose in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (Text Sample 5.18) focuses mostly on the inner thoughts and feelings of the main character, together with a narration of past events as perceived by that character. There is very little dialogue reported in this style of fiction, and thus few features typical of face-to-face conversation.

Text Sample 5.18 Fiction: Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, 1970

But **now he wondered** whether **he had** not drawn too close, whether **he had** also been seen seeing. **He wore** smoked glasses, **at all times** protecting **his** vision, but **he** couldn't be taken for a blind man. **He did**n't have the white cane, only a furled umbrella, British-style. Moreover, **he did**n't have the look of blindness. The pickpocket **himself wore** dark shades. **He was** a powerful Negro in a camels-hair coat, **dressed** with extraordinary elegance, as if by Mr. Fish of the West End, or Turnbull and Asser of Jermyn Street. (Mr. Sammler **knew** his London.) The Negro's perfect circles of gentian violet banded with lovely gold **turned** toward Sammler, but the face **showed** the effrontery of a big animal. Sammler **was** not timid, but **he had** had as much trouble in life as **he wanted**. A good deal of this, waiting for assimilation, would never be accommodated. **He suspected** the criminal was aware that a tall old white man (passing as blind?) **had** observed, **had** seen the minutest details of **his** crimes.

In contrast, a novel like *Lord of the Flies* integrates the full spectrum of information: narration of events, description of the personal feelings of characters, as well as extensive dialogue with characters talking to one another; for example:

Text Sample 5.19 Fiction: William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*, 1954

The fair boy began to pick his way as casually as possible towards the water. He tried to be offhand and not too obviously uninterested, but the fat boy hurried after him.

"Aren't there any grown-ups at all?"

"I don't think so."

The fair boy said this solemnly; but then the delight of a realized ambition overcame him. In the middle of the scar he stood on his head and grinned at the reversed fat boy.

"No grown-ups!"

The fat boy thought for a moment.

"That pilot."

The fair boy allowed his feet to come down and sat on the steamy earth.

"He must have flown off after he dropped us. He couldn't land here. Not in a plane with wheels."

"We was attacked!"

"He'll be back all right."

The fat boy shook his head.

As Text Sample 5.19 illustrates, this style relies on both conversational features and narrative features. For example, there are frequent present-tense verbs, modal verbs, contractions, ellipsis, and questions – typical of conversation – as well as frequent past-tense verbs and third-person pronouns, typical of prose narration.

An alternative style to all those described above is to narrate the story as though it is being told orally or in a personal letter to a specific addressee. Consider this example from *Slaughterhouse-Five:*

Text Sample 5.20 Fiction: Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 1969

I would hate to tell you what this lousy little book cost me in money and anxiety and time. When I got home from the Second World War twenty-three years ago, I thought it would be easy for me to write about the destruction of Dresden, since all I would have to do would be to report what I had seen. And I thought, too, that it would be a masterpiece or at least make me a lot of money, since the subject was so big.

In this case, there is little direct reported dialogue, but there are numerous linguistic features of conversation, because the story is written as if it were an oral telling of the personal events, feelings, and attitudes of the narrator. First-person pronouns are common, since the story is told from the perspective of a first-person narrator. The addressee is directly addressed as *you*, as if the narrator were actually sitting in our living room telling us the story. And the narrator tells us his own personal feelings and attitudes, using frequent modal verbs, complement clause constructions, stance adverbials, etc. However, the entire passage is written in past tense, because the focus is on the report of past events.

A final parameter of variation among fictional novels is whether the story is told as a narration of past events, or as a description of events as they occur at the time of the telling. The more common style is to narrate past events, as in all of the text excerpts given above. However, in a few cases, the story is written as if the narrator is describing the events in real time, as they are occurring. This style of discourse results in frequent features like present-tense verbs and time adverbials, describing events that are actually in progress, as illustrated in this sample from *The Middleman*:

Text Sample 5.21 Fiction: Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman*, 1988

All day I **sit** by the lime green swimming pool, sun-screened so I **won't** turn black, going through my routine of isometrics while Ransome's indios **hack** away the virgin forests. Their hate **is** intoxicating. They **hate** gringos – from which my darkness **exempts** me – even more than Gutierrez. They **hate** in order to keep up their intensity.

I **hear** a litany of presidents' names, Hollywood names, Detroit names – Carter, chop, Reagan, slash, Buick, thump – **bounce** off the vines as machetes **clear** the jungle greenness.

We spoke a form of Spanish in my old Baghdad home. I always **understand** more than I **let** on.

[. . .]

Meanwhile, Ransome **rubs** Cutter over his face and neck. They'**re** supposed to go deep-sea fishing today, though it **looks** to me as if he'**s** dressed for the jungle. A wetted-down towel **is** tucked firmly under the back of his baseball cap. He'**s** a Braves man.

This stylistic choice helps to create a greater sense of immediacy and involvement than in typical past tense narratives.

In summary, fiction is one of the most complex varieties to analyze from a register perspective, because the author must create a fictional world and can choose to describe that world from many different possible perspectives. In the present section, we have been able to describe only a few of the many variations possible in fictional prose: the choice of first versus third-person perspective; the choice of a normal or omniscient third-person narrator; the extent to which the author reports dialogue, narration of events, description of people and places, or the inner thoughts and attitudes of characters; and the choice of narrating in past or present tense. These choices are all stylistic choices. That is, their use is not associated with the real-life situational context of the writer and reader, but with the authors' preferences for how they want to tell their stories. The linguistic features do have functions, as illustrated in the text samples, but the variation concerns style, rather than register.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored three general written registers and illustrated the analysis of those registers with increasing specificity. On a general level, two informational written registers – news articles and academic prose – were shown to share certain situational characteristics and linguistic features that set them apart from conversation. At the same time, the two general registers differ from each other with respect to their specific topics and communicative purpose, and these situational differences are reflected in linguistic differences for verb tense, voice, time and place adverbials, and modals.

On a more specific level, we described patterned variation corresponding to the specific sub-registers within these general registers. Thus, editorials differ from news reports, and research articles differ from textbooks. And even more specific sub-registers, such as the sections within research articles, can be distinguished by their linguistic patterns of use.

Finally, the analysis of fiction illustrated how linguistic variation can be influenced by style choices rather than the normal factors that determine register differences. We return to these three registers in Chapter 8, showing how the register, genre, and style perspectives can all be applied to the study of historical change.

Chapter 5 Activities

Reflection and Review

1. The popular impression of prototypical speaking is that it focuses largely on interpersonal concerns and is unplanned. In contrast, prototypical writing is concerned

with conveying information and contains carefully planned and revised language. Can you think of registers (besides those already mentioned in this book) that vary from these prototypes? Can you think of registers other than face-to-face conversation, news writing, and academic prose that fit these prototypes?

2. Choose another general written register – for example, magazine writing, letters, drama, comic books, children's books, or some other register of your choice. Fill in a table outlining all the situational characteristics of that register. Which characteristics can you specify the least because of variation among more specialized registers within the general register?

Analysis Practice

3. Analyze the use of three to five linguistic features in three pages of this book. Is your analysis consistent with the findings of previous studies of academic prose and textbooks as described in this chapter? Why or why not?

4. In Chapter 2, we introduced the concept of a "hybrid" text: a text that combines multiple communicative purposes. Text Sample 2.1, repeated below as Text Sample 5.22, illustrates how some travel blogs can be regarded as hybrid texts that integrate narrative and informational communicative purposes. Carry out an analysis of linguistic features in this text excerpt, contrasting the use of grammatical features in the paragraphs that have narrative purposes (Paragraphs 1 and 4) with the use of grammatical features in the paragraphs that have informational purposes (Paragraphs 2, 3, and 5).

Text Sample 5.22 Travel Blog (repeated from Text Sample 2.1)

"Let me guess," said the stationmaster at Lancaster as he showed me where to stow my bike on the connecting train to Morecambe. "You wouldn't be cycling to Bridlington, by any chance?" When I replied in the affirmative his small audience on the platform were most impressed. At his accuracy, I mean, not my pedalling power. "It's quite simple really," he explained. "Anyone taking a bike to Morecambe must be going to Bridlington. This train never saw any cyclists for donkey's years, now we get dozens of them and they are all doing the same thing."

Beyond a shared desire to turn back the holiday clock by about 70 years, not much would appear to link Morecambe and Bridlington, but now a coast-to-coast cycle route does, and the Way of the Roses is evidently becoming quite popular. Even in March I met others riding it and in under two years, cafes and hotels all along its 170-mile length have begun to sprout "cyclists welcome" signs.

The name is a slight misnomer, since all but the first 20 miles are in the White Rose county and the route only touches the outskirts of Lancaster. A short detour to the city centre would be perfectly possible, but extra mileage is never an appealing prospect for the cyclist looking to fit in 78 miles on the first day.

In order to complete the route in two days I had booked overnight accommodation at Ripon. I was aware most of the hills would come on the first day – and all too painfully aware by the end of it – but I felt I had to aim for something close to halfway to avoid a 100-mile ride on the second. You don't want to be going that far with bags on your bike.

> The route is superbly signposted throughout, so much so that you can almost leave the map in your pocket. After following the Lune upstream for a few miles, the flat top of Ingleborough pops into view to give you a chunk of Yorkshire to aim for. Just below Ingleton, the distinctive two-note call of the curlew accompanied me across the county border – the sort of perfect moment that lingers long in the mind after the ride is over to remind you why you do this sort of thing.
>
> www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2012/may/05/british-bike-rides-long-distance

5. Choose five articles from your favorite news magazine, and analyze the communicative purposes and factuality of the articles. To what extent are these articles instances of hybrid registers, because they combine communicative purposes (e.g., informational, opinionated, and/or persuasive purposes)? Then, identify at least five grammatical features that function to express those communicative purposes. Give specific instances of each grammatical feature from each article.

6. Choose two fictional authors who you have studied in other courses. From a literary perspective, how would you characterize the style of each author? Then, analyze the use of grammatical features in one to two pages of prose written by each author. Discuss the relationship between characterizations of literary style and the pervasive use of grammatical features in these texts.

Project Ideas

7. Choose another specific sub-register from news (other than news reports or editorials), and compare the use of linguistic features in that sub-register to those described in this chapter. Gather several sample texts from at least two news websites, analyze ten to twelve linguistic features, and interpret your findings with reference to the situational characteristics of the sub-register.

8. In recent years, news reports and opinion articles have been commonly distributed on social media sites, in addition to the more traditional news texts published on the web (i.e., texts associated with local and national media companies). Collect a small corpus of news reports from three different social media sites. Analyze the sub-registers represented in your corpus from both situational and linguistic perspectives. Then, compare the results of your analysis to the description of traditional news reports.

9. Compare a popular science article (from a news website or popular magazine) to an article on the same topic from an academic research journal. Compare the use of eight to ten linguistic features, including verb tense and voice. How do the differences and similarities in the use of the linguistic features correspond to the situational characteristics?

10. The web has greatly expanded the number of written documents that are readily accessible to readers, and as a result, it has also facilitated the development of new registers. Blogs are one of the most discussed of these new registers. However, it can be difficult to distinguish this register from other web registers, and there is an incredible range of sub-registers grouped under the general umbrella of "blogs."

Collect a small corpus of blogs from at least three different websites. Analyze the sub-registers represented in your corpus from both situational and linguistic perspectives. Then, attempt to write a register description of blogs, describing how this general register differs from other web registers, and also describing the characteristics of particular blog sub-registers.

11. If you write fictional short stories, analyze one or two of your own stories. Compare the style features of your stories to those discussed in Section 5.5.

Notes

1 D. Flores, Bison ecology and bison diplomacy: the southern plains from 1800 to 1850, *The Journal of American History*, 78 (2) (1991): 469

2 J. Prude, To look upon the "lower sort": runaway ads and the appearance of unfree laborers in America, 1750–1800, *The Journal of American History*, 78 (1) (1991): 127

3 G. H. Nobles, Straight lines and stability: mapping the political order of the Anglo-American frontier, *The Journal of American History*, 80 (1) (1993): 11

4 The one exception here is the production circumstances: authors need extensive time to plan, revise, and edit a fictional narrative.