Explanation
Theories of discourse
There more to using language, and communicating successfully with other people, than being able to produce correct sentences.

Read the two texts on page 3, and answer the following questions:

1. Which of these two stretches of language is part of a unified whole?
2. What sort of text is it?
3. What is the other one?
4. How did you distinguish between them?
**TASK 1**
Here are two pieces of language:

- **A)** This box contains, on average, 100 Large Plain Paper Clips. 'Applied Linguistics' is therefore not the same as 'Linguistics'. The tea's as hot as it could be. This is Willie Worm. Just send 12 Guinness 'cool token' bottle tops.

- **B)** Playback. Raymond Chandler. Penguin Books in association with Hamish Hamilton. To Jean and Helga, without whom this book could never have been written. One. The voice on the telephone seemed to be sharp and peremptory, but I didn't hear too well what it said-partly because I was only half awake and partly because I was holding the receiver upside down.
TASK 1

- The quality of being meaningful and unified, which the second passage has but the first passage lacks, is known as **coherence**. It is a quality which is clearly necessary for communication and therefore for foreign language learning, but which cannot be explained by concentrating on the internal grammar of sentences.

- Teachers of mother tongue students might argue that their students already have oral and communicative skills, that what they need is to learn and demonstrate **literacy**, that putting full stops in the right place and writing grammatical sentences is a sign of this literacy.
Foreign language teachers might say that their students already know how to communicate and interact in their own language; what they need in the foreign language are formal skills and knowledge-pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar which will provide the basis for communicating and interacting.

Consider the following sentences:
1. 'The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen.'
2. 'The merchant is swimming with the gardener's son, but the Dutchman has the fine gun.'

(Sweet 1899 [1964:73/]}
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*when would we ever use them?*
Such artificial sentences are used in linguistics to study how human language in general works, rather than of how to speak a particular one.

The idea of there being language rules exemplified in such sentences does seem to correspond to some kind of reality, even if people do not always speak according to these abstracted rules.

When would we ever use them?
within the sentence we can establish rules and constraints concerning what is and is not allowed, whereas beyond the sentence, such rules seem either to disintegrate or turn into rules of a different kind-social rules or psychological rules, which are not within the area of linguistic study at all.

linguists too rend to come up with grammatically correct, but somewhat peculiar examples: 'Sincerity may frighten the boy' (Chomsky 1965:63) and so on.

when would we ever use them?
• Colorless green ideas sleep furiously
• The current king of France is bald
• Friends are baskets and hats.
• Wishes are hopping and trees are wet.
• TV shows on radios are lazy.
• Food is sitting with weather flying.
There are types of language use which demand the ability to formulate grammatical, correctly bounded sentences, and being able to exploit the **formal sentence grammar** is one of the most important elements in being able to communicate in a language.
TASK 2

Some of the following are invented examples, for language teaching or grammatical analysis, and some are pieces of language which were actually used to communicate. Is there any way of telling which is which? Can you think of situations where these pieces of language might actually have been used?

1. John considers the analyst a lunatic.
2. Which of you people IS the fish?
3. Please don't throw me on the floor!
4. Cross since 1846.
5. wish someone had told me he was vegetarian: I could have made an omelette.
6. Chicken and vegetable ... hot ... medium hot ... er _rice...pilao rice, er two poppadums and a ... what's a bhindi bhaji?
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two different kinds of language as potential objects for Studying:

1. An abstracted in order to teach a language or literacy, or to study how the rules of language work,

2. One has been used to communicate something and is felt to be coherent (and may, or may not, happen to correspond to a correct sentence or a series of correct sentences).
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• Discourse may be composed of one or more well-formed grammatical sentences – and it often is - but it does not have to be

• It can have grammatical 'mistakes' in it, and often does.
are there rules which limit what kind of sentence can follow another?.

**TASK 3**

Here is a well-formed 'correct', grammatical sentence:

*The girls rode their motor-cycles through the corn.*

Here are five versions which would usually be classed as incorrect. (Following convention, we use an asterisk • to indicate our belief that these examples are wrong.) What kind of mistakes do the sentences contain?

1 *The girl's rode their motor-cycles through the corn.
2 *The girls road there motor-cicles through the corn.
3 *The girls rided their motors-cycle through the corns.
4 *The corn through girls the rode motor-cycles their.
5 *The girls rode their houses through the corn.
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We can identify three kinds of sentence which are considered wrong, in addition to those with writing errors of spelling and punctuation.

**Morphological errors**: where the word endings (or other word parts) are wrong

*The knight kill a dragons.*

**Syntactic errors**: where the word order is wrong

*The a knight dragon killed.*

**Semantic errors**: where the meaning is wrong

*The knight killed a teaspoon.*
In the same way that there are rules within sentences, limiting which words can follow others, so there might also be rules within discourses, limiting which sentence can follow another one, and if I write 'The knight killed the dragon', then there might be limits, or constraints, on what I can put as the next sentence. I might write:

- **The knight killed the dragon. He cut off its head with his sword.**

and this would seem quite reasonable; but could I write this?

- **The knight killed the dragon. The pineapple was on the table.**
How do we recognize a stretch of language as unified and meaningful?

1. we employ language **rules** of the type studied by grammarians and taught in most language textbooks, and that these rules operate between sentences as well as within them.

2. we employ **knowledge** - of the world, of the speaker, of social convention, of what is going on around us as we read or listen-in order to make sense of the language we are encountering.
The paralinguistic features:

If we are face to face with the person sending the message, then we notice what they are doing with their face, eyes, and body while speaking; maybe they smiled, or shook their fist, or looked away.

In a spoken message we notice the quality of the voice as well: maybe the speaker's voice was shaking, or they had a particular accent or hesitated, or slurred their words.
We are also influenced by the situation in which we receive messages, by our cultural and social relationship with the participants, by what we know and what we assume the sender knows.

There have been several schools of thought which believe that context—this knowledge of the real world outside language which we use to interpret it—should be ruled out of language analysis as far as possible.
Sentence linguistics confines its inquiries to what happens within sentences.

Sentence linguists follow one of two procedures:

1. they either **invent** their examples for analysis, using their own intuitive knowledge as native speakers (their *linguistic competence*) as a yardstick,
2. they take language which people have actually used and remove all the features which they believe to be irrelevant to their purposes.

Language in and out of context
A: Right, (.hhh) who's goin' to lift the bottom?
Well ... come o' ... someone's got to take 'old of it.
B: I ain't goin' to.
A: Don't jus' ... Come on will you?

- This is a verbal exchange between two people, and it was recorded and part of it was written down. Inevitably, this involves loss, because it is not possible to reproduce on the page all the features of voices, movements, expressions, and of the situation; but it is possible to keep or discard differing amounts.
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Well ... come o' ... someone's got to take 'old of it.
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sentence linguists would argue that we take away what is incidental and variable in language and leave what is permanent and invariable. They might render the same exchange like this:

A: *Who is going to lift the bottom?*
Someone has got to take hold of it.
B: *I am not going to.*
A: *Come on, will you?*
**Language in and out of context**

- **Idealisation**: the process of eliminating the unique combination of circumstances in which language happens.

- This results in the same kind of sentences as those invented examples for translation or grammatical analysis.
Language in and out of context

- For the discourse analyst, these transient and variable features which enable us to understand the meaning of what is said, and the reason why the order of sentences proceeds in the way that it does.

- The language learner needs to be able to handle language which is not idealized - language in use.
What additional information do you need to make sense of it?

A: That blonde girl over the road there ... Careful don't bang your head ... Sometimes she looks . . .

B: What? Which one? Ow!

A: I said to you don't bang your head. Sometimes she looks quite pretty, sometimes she looks quite ugly.

B: I'm OK, leave me alone.
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