

Department of English Studies

**Syntax in experimental literature: a
literary linguistic investigation**

Gary Stewart Thoms

MRes 2008

Declaration of author's rights

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Act as qualified by University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.5.1. Due acknowledgment must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Aim	1
1.2	Experimental literature	2
1.3	Literary linguistics: methodology	3
1.3.1	Formalism and functionalism	3
1.3.2	What aspect of language to study	4
1.3.3	Syntax as the subject of literary linguistic analysis	7
1.3.4	Which texts to study	10
1.4	Terminology and technical issues	11
1.5	Study structure	12
2	Theoretical issues: reading <i>How It Is</i>	13
2.1	Introduction	13
2.2	<i>How It Is</i>	13
2.3	Grammaticality and the written sentence	15
2.4	Structural ambiguities in <i>How It Is</i>	17
2.5	Experimental style in <i>How It Is</i>	22
2.5.1	‘Chunking’ and reading strategies	22
2.5.2	The contribution of spoken forms of language	26

<i>CONTENTS</i>	iii
2.5.3 Aspects of ‘chunking’: comparisons with other texts . . .	28
2.6 Summary	33
3 <i>How It Is</i>: description and analysis	35
3.1 Introduction	35
3.2 Unproblematic structures	36
3.3 Conjunction	38
3.3.1 Evidence	38
3.3.2 Discussion	41
3.4 Adverbs and parentheticals	43
3.4.1 Adverbs: general characteristics	43
3.4.2 Adverbs: evidence	44
3.4.3 Adverbs of parentheticals?	46
3.4.4 Theoretical issues: Relevance and literary texts	50
3.4.5 Parentheticals and experimental style	52
3.5 Ellipsis and Deletion	54
3.5.1 Introduction	54
3.5.2 Well-formed ellipsis	55
3.5.3 Ill-formed ellipsis	55
3.5.4 Ellipsis and Deletion	59
3.6 Discussion	61
3.7 Summary	63
4 <i>Worstward Ho</i>: description and analysis	64
4.1 Introduction	64
4.2 <i>Worstward Ho</i>	64
4.3 Ellipsis and Deletion	66
4.3.1 Evidence	66

<i>CONTENTS</i>	iv
4.3.2 Deletion of ill-formed ellipsis?	68
4.3.3 Deletion: evidence	69
4.4 Movement	74
4.4.1 Passives: evidence	74
4.4.2 Passives: discussion	75
4.4.3 PP-movement	77
4.4.4 Movement and experimental style	78
4.5 Discussion	79
5 Interpretation of ungrammatical utterances	81
5.1 Introduction	81
5.2 Adverbs and disjunct constituents	82
5.2.1 Background	82
5.2.2 Approaches to parentheticals	83
5.2.3 Conventional implicatures	83
5.2.4 Evidence from the texts	92
5.2.5 Conventional implicatures and the interpretation of un- grammatical utterances	94
5.3 Conjunction	97
5.3.1 Background	97
5.3.2 Approaches to conjunction: conventional implicatures . .	98
5.3.3 A syntactic or pragmatic explanation?	100
5.4 False passives	103
5.4.1 Background	103
5.4.2 Understanding false passives: more conventional implica- tures	104
5.4.3 Conventional implicatures and grammatical constructions	106
5.5 Movement	108

5.5.1	Background	108
5.5.2	Conventional implicatures and more grammatical constructions	109
5.5.3	Conventional implicatures and reconstruction	112
5.6	Deletion	113
5.6.1	Background	113
5.6.2	Pragmatic explanation?	115
5.7	Summary	116
6	Conclusion	118
6.1	Introduction	118
6.2	Kinds of ungrammaticality	118
6.3	Syntax as an object of literary linguistic inquiry	122
6.4	Literary linguistics and experimental literature	125
6.5	Linguistics and pragmatics	128
6.6	Summary	130
A	Stock phrases in <i>How It Is</i>	131

Abstract

This dissertation uses the methods of literary linguistics to investigate syntax in experimental literary texts. It focuses on two prose texts by Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* and *Worstward Ho*, analysing the different kinds of linguistic deviations that occur and considering how they may be related to the experimental style of the texts. The first chapter introduces some of the main issues of literary linguistics and argues for a formalist approach to the study of syntax in experimental texts. The second chapter discusses a number of theoretical issues surrounding the study of experimental texts, describing the style of *How It Is* in detail and how this style impacts on the reading process. The third chapter describes the kinds of unusual utterances that occur in *How It Is*, analysing both discourse features like parentheticals and grammatical features like ellipsis and how they are used and abused in the text. The fourth chapter discusses *Worstward Ho* in a similar matter, and the analysis shows up continuities with the kinds of deviation in *How It Is*. The fifth chapter discusses many issues that arise from the analysis, describing how ungrammatical utterances are interpreted in terms of grammatical and pragmatic theory, and many other issues relevant to linguistic theory, literary linguistic theory and literary theory arise in the course of this discussion.

The conclusion thus states that there are fundamental constraints on ex-

perimentation with syntax in literature, and that these kinds of constraints are peculiar to language as a medium. In most cases, experimentation with syntax does not involve syntactic processes, and that the majority of the interpretation involved in reading experimental texts is pragmatic rather than grammatical. The conclusion also offers an affirmation of the formalist approach to literary linguistics, and proposals for a re-examination of some aspects of pragmatic theory.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Aim

This dissertation uses the methods of literary linguistics to investigate experimental uses of literary language. I consider what kinds of formal experimentation are possible with natural language, examine how the unusual forms of experimental literature are interpreted, and ask what these kinds of experimentation show us about the nature of language. To begin with, I will discuss the goals of this study in detail, outlining the theoretical basis for a linguistic study of experimental literature and what may be learned from such a study.

Literary linguistics is concerned with understanding how literary texts use language, focusing on formal aspects of literary texts and how they are related to the formal features of language. Language is the medium of literary texts, and the formal aspects of these texts - such as metre or genre - are in part enabled by using this medium. To understand regularities in the formal aspects of literary texts, literary linguistics research explores regularities in linguistic form and the ways in which the literary form exploits linguistic form. It has thus been

successful in accounting for kinds of verbal art which belong to specific traditions and are strongly regulated: for example, metrical verse has been explored by generative phonological theory, with regularities across traditions and languages accounted for in terms of linguistic theory (Fabb & Halle 2008).

1.2 Experimental literature

This dissertation will use these methods to explore the formal aspects of experimental literature. This may appear to be a problematic case at first. While writers in literary traditions value adherence to rules and produce texts which are highly regular - as in metrical poetry, or detective fiction - avant garde writers value breaking rules and producing texts which resist regularity to create new forms. However, just as the medium of language enables the creation of literary forms, it also constrains this creation, and even if a writer appears to be breaking many rules in their experimental texts, they may still be constrained by linguistic rules that they may not be aware of. The extent of this constraint on artistic practice is a fundamental issue for theory of the avant garde, and linguistic theory allows us to answer this question based on formal evidence, by exploring regularities in the possibilities and constraints of experimentation with language in literature.

In addition, experimental literary language also presents a number of interesting questions for linguistics. First, the constraints on the practice of experimental writers indicate the extent of linguistic rules, and studying the kinds of rules which can and cannot be broken gives an insight into the nature of these rule systems. Second, the extreme cases of avant garde experimentations with language may provide evidence of deep regularities within linguistic rules that are not readily visible in conventional language. Third, experimentation with language in these texts often produces ungrammaticality, yet these texts are

usually still interpretable even in the most extreme cases. By examining the ways in which these ungrammatical texts hold together and are interpreted, we may be able to consider the difficulties of ascertaining degrees of grammaticality and any absolutes in linguistic study.

Fourth, by considering the results of these inquiries, we may then be able to engage with a fundamental question within literary linguistics. Throughout the history of linguistic studies of literature, scholars have considered what it is that makes a text ‘literary’ - is literary language¹ different from ‘normal’ language? This question can be considered by looking at the linguistic issues listed above. Regarding the scope of linguistic rules, we can ask whether these rules can be broken more readily in literary texts. Regarding the ways in which ungrammatical texts hold together, we may ask whether there is anything about the literary context that allows texts to be interpreted more readily. Asking these questions thus allows to ask whether literary language is discernibly different from normal language, based on the evidence of the formal analysis.

1.3 Literary linguistics: methodology

1.3.1 Formalism and functionalism

Linguistics can be divided into two basic approaches, functionalism and formalism, and these methods are differentiated by their ways of studying language. Functionalism involves studying the connection between the form of language and its function. In literary linguistics, this approach is typified by stylistics, which involves linguistic analysis of language use to develop critical understandings of texts, investigating how formal aspects of style contribute to the meanings of texts. By contrast, formalist studies are not concerned with how form

¹It is important to emphasise that ‘literary language’ is only one aspect of the formal study of literariness, and that there is a great deal of work on the various other aspects. For an introduction to many of these other aspects see Zwaan 1994.

functions to create meaning within texts, focusing instead on how linguistic form is exploited in literary form (Fabb 1997: 9). Whereas for stylistics the focus is on texts, in formalist literary linguistics the focus is language, and as a result this work is more concerned with theoretical linguistics than literary criticism.

This dissertation adopts a formalist rather than a functionalist approach, for important reasons. First, functionalist approaches to experimentation in literature tend towards text and function-specific analyses (see D’Haen et al 1989). In contrast, this study is concerned with examining experimental practice more generally, and this is a typically formalist method. Second, a formalist investigation into experimental literature allows us to ask the questions about linguistic theory mentioned above, whereas a functionalist approach would be more concerned with text-specific readings. That is, one can ask what can be learned from experimental literature as cultural practice, rather than asking what individual authors and texts say. It is arguable that such an approach is truer to the avant garde and its role in literature, and this may explain the close affinity between the two fields in the 20th century, as with the close relationship between the Futurists and Russian Formalists in the 1920’s (Erlich 1980 [1969]; see also Steiner 1984).

Nevertheless, for a study of this scale it is necessary to focus the field of inquiry. Therefore I focus on one specific aspect of language under experimentation in a few specific works by a single author. These choices are motivated by practical considerations.

1.3.2 What aspect of language to study

In choosing an aspect of language for study, there are a number of factors to consider. This study focuses on linguistic rules and their role in experimental literature, and the choice is largely based on a specific definition of what can be

called ‘linguistics’. The majority of linguists agree that linguistics is the study of grammar and the formal aspects of natural language. However, there is continuing debate about the nature of ‘grammar’ itself. For some, grammar can “in large parts or in totality, be reduced to facts derivable from the properties of some general human attribute (i.e. an attribute not specific to language)” (Newmeyer 1983: 96). Implicit in this approach is a rejection of the need to construct a well-defined formal grammar, appealing instead to general explanation in relation to the functions of language, and in the absence of a formal system linguistic rules become so unclear that they are virtually meaningless.

The opposite approach is that of generative linguistics, in which grammar is viewed as an autonomous formal system based in human biology. In this field, grammar is constituted of syntax, morphology and phonology, and these aspects are understood to have a degree of psychological reality that exists independently of meaning and communication. Therefore in the generative tradition, ‘linguistic’ is narrowly defined as anything of or relating to formal grammar, and anything outside of this system, such as discourse or meaning, is attributable to one’s wider knowledge of the world. Linguistic rules are thus narrowly defined and amenable to objective study.

For this research, I focus on one system of linguistic rules, syntax, and this choice is made for a number of reasons. First, since the 1950s syntax has been central to contemporary linguistics, and it remains to this day a fruitful area for theoretical inquiry. The kinds of research questions outlined above are close to the concerns of current theoretical syntax, so the questions asked by this research could have interesting answers. Second, syntax seems to attract experimentation in literature more frequently than morphology and phonology. This could be because the rules of syntax are more readily accessible to introspection, or because syntax is the maximal realisation of linguistic form,

governing whole sentences, whereas morphology and phonology govern phrase and word-internal relations; one may argue that the larger units of language is more readily amenable to manipulation. There are also sociological factors to consider: the central place of syntax in the prescriptive grammars of literate cultures has made it a prime target for rule-breaking in experimental literature². While there have been poetic traditions which attempt to experiment with the rules of morphology and phonology (Rothenberg 1985; Janecek 1996), experimentation with sentence structure is prominent throughout many literary traditions, as evidenced by the amount of critical works on the syntax of a variety of writers³.

Thirdly, and most importantly, syntax is unique in that it facilitates the creative aspect of human language. Whereas “[phonological] and morphological systems are essentially closed finite ones” (Newmeyer 1986: 19), syntax facilitates the recursive and combinatorial abilities of utterance production and allows the language user to create an infinite set of novel utterances (Chomsky 1971 [1957]: 18-25). Syntax is therefore the most important aspect of linguistic form to the creative use of language, so it may be a safe assumption that it has an important part to play in linguistic studies of literature. It should be noted that this use of ‘creative’ refers specifically to the ability to create new utterances of any kind, and it does not necessarily correspond directly to the general meaning of ‘creative’ as ‘artistic and inventive’. This definition of creative has as much to do with the creativity of ideas and meanings as forms of language, so these two uses should not be viewed as coextensive.

²Indeed Taylor-Batty (2007) argues that this is a factor in some of Beckett’s texts, describing how *L’Innommable* is ‘characterised by a style that mimics the forms and formulations of a grammar drill.’

³For example, there have been works on the syntax of Joyce (Wales 1992), Milton (Banfield 1973), Shakespeare (Hope 2003) and Shelley (Austin 1981).

1.3.3 Syntax as the subject of literary linguistic analysis

What, then, is syntax as a subject of formalist literary linguistic analysis? The most successful work so far in formalist literary linguistics has been in metrics, where the advances of generative phonology have enabled the explanation of metrical patterning. The metrical form of a text is a kind of literary form, and it is built by a system of rules and conditions from the underlying linguistic form (i.e. its phonological prosodic form) (Fabb 2002: 4). The description and explanation of the system of rules and conditions that convert linguistic form into literary form is the generative metrics project, and there has been a great deal of progress in developing this understanding (for a recent summary, see Drescher & Friedberg 2006).

Whether we can develop a similar theory for syntax depends on a number of factors. The two areas have certain features in common. Just as metrics involves building literary form by regulating linguistic form, the same occurs with syntax, such as in syntactic parallelism. This involves identifying instances of structural similarity between syntactic forms, and considering what literary effects the repetitions of these structures may have. However, there are fundamental differences between metrical form and syntactic parallelism. Parallelism may not be as tightly constrained by linguistic form as meter, and there is no equivalent to the metrical template in syntactic patterning (Fabb 1997: 159). While there may be regular repetitions in a particular literary text, there is no way of characterising the kinds of repetitions one may and may not generate, or how they are generated, as with metrical form. Outside of a few highly artificial literary traditions⁴, there is no ‘syntactic template’ to match the metrical templates found in literary traditions throughout the world. This fundamental

⁴One example of a tradition that gives rise to this kind of contrived syntactic form is the ‘Oulipo’, a French literary school founded in the 1950s. The Oulipo was founded on the idea of writing under specific constraints, and there are some examples of homosyntactic constraints in Matthews & Brotchie (2005).

difference indicates that a formalist approach to syntax in terms of parallelism would be theoretically limited and unfruitful.

As an alternative approach, some critics advise that the goal of linguistic analysis of literary texts is to describe the “purely syntactic processes that contribute to a given text’s linguistic identity” (Austin 1984: 13). This approach is built for stylistic analysis, and the notion of “linguistic identity” on which it is predicated is text and author-specific, described by generalising the kinds of linguistic choices present in the texts, such as frequently occurring constructions, and ‘deviations’ from normal usage. The former approach is common in many related fields, such as authorship studies, and is particularly useful when dealing with relations of identity, but it is because of this specificity that it resists formalization. The latter - deviation - is more theoretically problematic.

The concept of deviation in linguistic usage has attracted discussion ever since the inception of generative linguistics. In response to Roman Jakobson’s criticism that some of the sentences deemed ungrammatical in *Syntactic Structures* could be found in poetry, Chomsky argued that this point was irrelevant since “it is perfectly plain that deviation from well-formedness is not only tolerable, in prose and poetry, but can even be effectively used as a literary device” (Chomsky 1961: 231). Literary critics have proposed many different ways of dealing with deviation, as summarised by Austin (1984: 27-34): we adjust the standard rules of syntax to accommodate the deviant forms; we propose that the writer of deviant sentences is writing in a specific ‘dialect’ of his or her own, where the rules of syntax allow these forms; or, as Austin suggests, we acknowledge the deviant forms as ungrammatical, “with all possible relevancies of non-standard syntactic usage to the poet’s purpose being fully explored” (Austin 1984: 34).

There are two main difficulties with this programme. First, the effort in

producing these formal accounts does not guarantee the return of a more valid judgment of textual functions like meaning, as the move from formal account to interpretation involves the same subjective leap as an intuitive judgment. The increased rigor of the formalism does not provide the extra theoretical justification that stylistics requires to answer the criticisms outlined above. Second, there is no mention of the degrees of (un)grammaticality exhibited by the deviant texts, or why some kinds of deviant forms occur and others do not. Austin opens his monograph by stating that “[contemporary] theories about the nature of human language should both influence and be influenced by the analysis of literary texts” (Austin 1984: 1), but it seems that his programme neglects one of the fundamental tenets of generative linguistic theory: that any theory about language should exhibit both descriptive and explanatory adequacy. Austin’s project is solely descriptive, as it offers no explanation for why certain forms may occur in literary texts; as a result, it offers no generalisations about language and fails to feed back into linguistic theory.

How then should one proceed in a formalist literary linguistic analysis of syntax? It is clear that there is merit in both of the general approaches identified above. The first approach, modeled on the example of generative metrics, appeals to an analysis which is strictly based on how linguistic form is exploited in literary form; such an approach is theoretically sound as it makes claims about literary form based on verifiable facts of constitutive form, but practically infeasible in dealing with syntactic parallelism, as there is no way of ascertaining whether there is any linguistic basis for broad regularities in discourse structure. The second approach, as suggested by Austin, offers an interesting insight into the kinds of linguistic peculiarities that make literary texts distinctive, but fails to engage this concept with any theoretical scrutiny. In this research, I synthesise these two approaches. First, I consider whether the syntactic deviations of

a text are generated by the grammar, just as apparent deviations from metrical form can be explained by considering the underlying phonological form of a text. Second, I consider whether the use of deviant syntax is related to the literary aspect of the texts, examining the kinds of deviation that occur and why they occur. Therefore the goal of this approach is to consider whether one can produce a formal account of what kind of syntactic structures can be produced in a literary text.

It should be noted that although this study is concerned with syntax and grammatical operations, it is assumed that pragmatic theory will play a great part in any description of the texts. Syntax defines the kinds of structures that form sentences in a text, but the move from these grammatical objects to utterances that communicate thoughts - declarations, commands, questions - always involves inference, and this inferencing process is described by pragmatic theory. For this study we take the Relevance theory of Sperber & Wilson (1995) to be our standard description of pragmatic theory.

1.3.4 Which texts to study

The choice of author is Samuel Beckett, focusing specifically on two of his prose texts, *How It Is* and *Worstward Ho*. The selection from Beckett's work is restricted to his prose, as drama and poetry involve genre-specific features, such as lineation or performance style, which may complicate the study of syntax; while the simplicity of prose is only apparent, it nevertheless involves fewer generic considerations. Beckett's prose writing is recognised as one of the greatest achievements of the modernist avant garde, and its experimentation with language has attracted a great deal of critical attention in literary studies. Indeed there have been many works which have engaged with the complexity of Beckett's syntax before (Abbott 1973; Tseng 1992; Banfield 2003; Taylor-Batty

2007). However, none of these works has engaged in detailed formal study of the texts, and there still remain a number of questions to be answered about Beckett's formal experimentation. Since this is a formalist investigation, I will have little to say about the meaning of Beckett's works or the reasoning behind his experimental practice, but it is worth noting that, as a writer, Beckett was deeply concerned with the limitations and constraints of language. This inquiry therefore has its relevance to studies of Beckett's writing specifically, as it engages with concepts like "the limits of language" (Kawin 1984) that are crucial to Beckett's work.

1.4 Terminology and technical issues

Before proceeding, it may be necessary to clarify the terminology used in this research, specifically the term 'experimental literature'. This term is used as a generic label rather than a claim about a particular kind of practice on the part of writers, and is thus used interchangeably with 'avant garde literature'. A typical dictionary of literary terms defines 'experimentalism' as "intellectual/imaginative/creative activity which entails the exploration of new concepts, techniques, etc., which go beyond convention" (Cuddon 1998: 296), and it is in this sense that the related terminology is used. The relationship between this generic sense and the scientific sense of experimentation lies outwith the domain of this study and I will have little to say about it.

It is also important to note that the first text under examination, *How It Is*, was originally written in French and translated into English by Beckett himself. I have decided to focus on the English texts for practical reasons, as this dissertation focuses on analysis of the form of the texts and is not concerned with changes between versions and their meaningful import. The differences between the French and English texts and their forms of experimentation may

be of great interest for a study of the different possibilities of the languages, but I am leaving this question out of the study in order to focus on the research questions outlined above.

1.5 Study structure

The dissertation will be structured into three main parts. The first part focuses on characterising the experimental practice of the texts, identifying regularities and irregularities by close linguistic analysis. The second section builds on these results, considering the role of linguistic rules and what the regularities of the analysis may indicate in relation to linguistic theory. The third section then looks at the ways in which the texts are interpreted, investigating how unusual or ungrammatical texts hold together and how they are interpreted as literary texts. The dissertation concludes by discussing the results and considering what they may indicate for linguistic and literary theory.

Chapter 2

Theoretical issues: reading

How It Is

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I survey some of the issues at hand in the literary linguistic analysis of experimental texts. For this purpose I consider some of the difficulties raised by reading *How It Is*, discussing the formal characteristics of the experimental style and how it impacts upon interpretation.

2.2 *How It Is*

How It Is was published in 1964, translated from the French version *Comment C'est* by Beckett himself. The novel was Beckett's first substantial prose piece in the ten years since his trilogy of novels (*Molloy*, *Malone Meurt* and *L'Innommable*), and it is often recognised as a major stylistic departure (Pilling 1976). Beckett's previous novels consisted of dense monologues written in long,

heavily punctuated stop-start sentences which ran for pages. *How It Is* returned to similar subject matter, recording the monologue of a mysterious narrator in grim circumstances, but the style of the texts was very different, at least in its appearance on the page. The vast paragraphs and sentences were replaced by brief, unpunctuated paragraphs, made up of short phrases and clauses running together. The novel is often identified as the text which marked Beckett's move to a more "pared-down" style (Cohn 1962; Dearlove 1986).

Since this mode of presentation departs dramatically from conventional prose style, the style of *How It Is* can be described as Experimental. The capitalised term will be used throughout this dissertation as a technical term to refer to a stylistic description of the text, and this description will be clarified in section 2.5 below. The term 'Experimental' has no technical significance beyond this descriptive use, and in using it I do not make any claims about the intentions of the author.

The use of punctuation and typographical presentation is one facet of this Experimentation, and it clearly affects the interpretation of the text¹. In formal terms, the most immediate effect of this way of writing is the lack of clearly defined graphological sentences. A graphological sentence of English can be defined as "a unit beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop" (Leech & Short 2003: 217), and since *How It Is* lacks any full stops or capital letters (except for names), one may argue that the novel is not in fact constituted of graphological sentences. However, the significance of this point should not be exaggerated; while the disregard of such a convention may communicate certain meanings in the literary text, its importance should not be exaggerated since it does not impact directly on linguistic form. Rather, this treatment of graphological sentences is more important for its indirect influence

¹Within the critical literature there are a variety of readings of Beckett's style and its relation to the content; for some examples see Hill 1990; Webb 1970.

on the interpretation of grammatical sentences. The connection between written and grammatical sentences is tied to the larger debate about the relationship between written and spoken language, which is described briefly in the next section.

2.3 Grammaticality and the written sentence

The relationship between written and spoken representations of language is assumed to be irrelevant in some branches of linguistics. Written language is assumed to represent spoken language directly, with the paralinguistic features of speech represented by typographical conventions, such as italicization for stress, commas and full stops for pauses. This tendency is often considered as a continuation of de Saussure's conception of speech as the primary form of language, and it has persisted throughout the twentieth century (Biber 1988: 6). These linguists will conventionally refer to a language user as a 'speaker', with or without the qualification that the same principles they are discussing apply to written language.

In modern theoretical linguistics, the distinction between spoken and written form has not as much been taken for granted as disregarded entirely. This is largely attributable to the competence-performance distinction in generative linguistics, where 'competence' is what the user 'knows' about the structure of the language, as represented in the formal grammar, and 'performance' is the actual use of language and its interaction with situation and language-specific set of influences (Chomsky 1965: 4). Theoretical syntacticians are concerned with the sentence as a mental object and the competence involved in generating these sentences. They regard written and spoken language both as second-order representations of the same mental forms, and the differences between the two forms are matters for performance rather than competence. Thus paralinguistic

features are medium-specific and do not have any ultimate significance for the formulation of the grammar.

There is opposition to this standpoint: Culler suggests that leaving paralinguistic features like intonation contour outside of competence creates a class of structurally ambiguous sentences - 'Flying planes can be dangerous' - that owe more to a linguistics based on writing (Culler 1987: 174). However, arguments of this type seem to be based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of 'competence' in the generative tradition. These explanations tend to overlook the finer details of this point in favour of pursuing the writing-speech dichotomy; for example, intonation contour is not always entirely explicit in speech, and structural ambiguities still exist in oral language use. The representation of these paralinguistic features in writing can be just as graduated in their explicitness - compare 'Flying planes can be dangerous' to '*Flying* planes can be dangerous'. Indeed the disambiguation provided by intonation contour could just as easily be provided by some other means of demonstration, such as a picture of a plane crash or the context of a discussion about hazardous activities. The sentence as a syntactic structure is inherently ambiguous, but the utterance is disambiguated by its use in the context. The contribution of these means would be communicative, and their properties are described by pragmatic theory, such as Relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1995).

Furthermore, it is highly significant that the majority of humans learn languages based on experience of spoken language, and written language is only developed once a basic level of non-written ability has been established. One of the core assumptions of modern generative linguistics is that learning a language involves the setting of basic 'parameters' in the child's mind, based on spoken experience, and these parameters form the basis for the construction of the mental grammar that licenses all future language use (Chomsky 1995:

ch1). As a result, it is generally assumed that reading uses the grammatical knowledge gained from experience of speech (Perfetti, Landi & Oakhill 2005: 237), and that grammatical interpretation of a sentence involves simply converting the graphological representation into a phonological representation in the reader's mind for processing (Fodor 2002)². Therefore the relationship between graphological and grammatical sentences is defined by the ways in which the written medium represents the paralinguistic features of spoken language. It should be pointed out that the only paralinguistic features that are relevant to this discussion are those that contribute to grammatical interpretation, such as those that aid sentence parsing. In conventional writing systems, these features are represented by the use of punctuation.

The example of 'flying planes' sentences above shows that the representation of paralinguistic features can be just as graduated in writing as in speech, and that it has no absolute purpose in written language. This is confirmed by the relatively late development of punctuation in the history of writing. Parkes (1992) describes how it came into use early in the Medieval Period as Latin scribes sought to use commas and full stops to make the syntactic and rhetorical structures of their writing clearer. However, Jajdelska (2007: 57-59) points out that there is no actual distinction between these different uses of punctuation, and that both simply instantiate pauses which then aid some kind of interpretation.

2.4 Structural ambiguities in *How It Is*

What should be taken from this discussion is that punctuation does not create syntactic relations, but helps to clarify them. Its contribution to interpretation is a matter of degree, where some styles of punctuating can be characterised as

²This is implicit in the terminology of modern generative linguistics, where Phonological Form (PF) represents the perceptual interface of language processing (Chomsky 1995: pp). NB Chomsky concedes that the biases of 'perceptual' are for convenience of discussion only, and makes it clear that he thinks it should be a more general term.

‘light’ or ‘heavy’ (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1727). What is certain is that while *How It Is* may seem like an extreme example of a lightly punctuated text, its interpretation is still aided by the use of certain kinds of punctuation, such as spaces between words and letters, and these conventions allow the reader to differentiate word boundaries and breaks in the discourse (like paragraph breaks) that would be likely to correspond to sentence breaks. This can be compared with some examples of concrete poetry, where space between words and letters does not necessarily correspond to relations between parts of language. Therefore there are grounds for judgments of syntactic relations in *How It Is* based on the evidence of punctuation.

The majority of problems that occur as a result of Beckett’s extremely light punctuation involve difficulty in parsing grammatical constituents in the text. The reader can have the choice of parsing the text into different sets of phrases and sentences. Consider the first paragraph of the novel:

- (1) how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts
I say it as I hear it

(Beckett 1964: 7.1)³

There are numerous structural ambiguities within this piece of text alone, some more obvious than others. For example, one may read the words *I quote* as a single sentence inserted parenthetically within the main sentence *how it was . . . before Pim*; alternatively, one may interpret *how it was* as a sentence and *I quote before Pim* as a separate constituent (i.e. with *before Pim* as an adjunct to the verb *quote*). In this case, the grounds for making judgments of which structure is preferable involve considering the appropriateness, or relevance, of the resulting utterance. Regardless of arguments for one interpretation or another, the text remains structurally ambiguous. Structural ambiguity of this

³Page 7, paragraph 1. From hereon all references are to the Grove Press edition, in the form page no/paragraph.

type could arise in oral use, and it is neither exclusive to this kind of writing nor an indication of deviant language use.

That is not to say that the proliferation of structural ambiguities is not important to the formal character of *How It Is*, as the constant availability of multiple interpretation makes the text complex and often difficult to read. However, this tendency for structural ambiguity is for the most part a product of Beckett's style of punctuation, and the effect of punctuation is explained by a theory of communication, such as pragmatics, rather than a theory of grammar. Thus one might consider how Beckett's refusal to show clear sentence structures deliberately flouts Grice's communicative maxim 'be orderly' (Grice 1975), and therefore communicates a variety of meanings relating to the ambiguity of language (all of which may be appropriate in a reading of this text). However, this dissertation is not concerned with the kinds of communicative choices that Beckett makes, but the sentence structures that are made possible by his experimental practice, so I will have little to say about the communicative import of structural ambiguities.

What is important is that, in the cases described above, the structure of the text is ambiguous because there is a lack of syntactic evidence to indicate one specific interpretation over the other. But this is not always the case in the text, despite the lack of punctuation, as often the constituency of phrases is indicated clearly by the reader's knowledge of basic grammatical principles such as phrase structure rules or verbal inflection. For example, in the section quoted above, no speaker of English would fail to recognise that the sequence *before Pim with Pim after Pim* is a series of three preposition phrases, and none would recognise *Pim with* as a constituent. Few would argue that *how it was I quote* is a constituent, as the tense of the embedded clause *I quote* does not agree with the matrix verb, and in most versions of English the embedded clause

would need to be preceded by an overt complementizer *that* (thus *how it was that I quoted...*). Generally, there are a variety of easy decisions for the reader to make when assigning structures to the text.

It is less simple when the text seems to be very unusual or ungrammatical. Consider this example, also from the first page:

- (2) *in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of an ancient voice in me not mine* (7.4)

It is not clear how one might interpret the first few words in this text: *in me that were without*. It seems that *in me* is a preposition phrase, and *in that were without* is a complementizer phrase headed by *that* containing the past tense plural form of *to be*. Given that the complementizer constructions of this kind are normally embedded in a matrix sentence or phrase (i.e. *To them that were without the law*), one could argue that *in me that were without* is a constituent. However, this is still an unusual constituent, and it is difficult to ascertain its meaning or paraphrase in this context. It appears that there is gapping within the complementizer clause; that is, the preposition phrase *without* has an understood (nominal) complement, coindexed to the matrix pronoun *me* (i.e. *I hear voices in me that were without [me]*); otherwise, the preposition is ‘stranded’ and the structure is ill-formed and even less coherent than the alternative. But this is clearly an unusual and strange constituent, in that the interpretation of this structure is difficult given that the matrix clause is not fully formed.

Why, then, should we take *in me that were without* to be a constituent? After all, in this text it appears that there is relative freedom in the selection of constituent structures, and a reader who knows English knows that certain sequences of words do not form constituents. However, the point in this case is that the unusual constituent analysis is the most plausible option available.

For example, the interpretation of gapping in the preposition phrase may have yielded an unusual and semantically strange interpretation, but the alternative reading - where *without* is a stranded preposition - was ungrammatical. It seems that, in dealing with unusual pieces of text such as this, the question of degrees of grammaticality is important, and that the reader would tend to take the most grammatical interpretation of the text at hand.

From this discussion, we can formulate a principle regarding the analysis of deviant structures:

Principle A: in analysing deviant structures in a text, the deviant structure should still be the most likely (or grammatical) interpretation available.

This constitutes an important hypothesis about the way in which readers interpret difficult or ungrammatical constituents, as otherwise there is no way to attest that a text can be read as anything other than a collection of its smallest autonomous constituents, not combined in syntactic structures. This would be a counter-intuitive reading strategy for any native user of English. However, it is not clear why it should be the case that a reader should interpret the largest structure. On the one hand, this seems to be an operation of the mental grammar, parsing and interpreting the largest legible syntactic structure, but there is no theoretical apparatus in modern linguistics to account for such a selection process. On the other hand, this does seem to resemble the cognitive strategies described by Relevance theory, where the communicator takes the meaning of an utterance to be the one most likely intended based on the context. This issue is vital to the discussion of the syntax-pragmatics interface, and I will return to these issues in later discussions. For now, I will take the hypothesis to be true, in lieu of its full explanation.

2.5 Experimental style in *How It Is*

2.5.1 ‘Chunking’ and reading strategies

It should be clear from the above that, while the lack of punctuation is striking and creates many difficulties for reading the text, it is not the only aspect of the text’s style which can be termed Experimental. Another important stylistic feature of *How It Is* is its tendency towards fragmentation, or ‘chunking’. This term is used in preference to the term ‘fragmentation’, as the latter has many varying technical uses in linguistics literature. Here ‘chunking’ is used to describe the style of writing, where Beckett uses small pieces of language - phrases, clauses, small sentences or fragments - and puts them together without concern for explicit syntactic relations between the chunks. Throughout the novel the text is filled with phrases and clauses which do not appear to belong to a sentence, often appearing in lists with no explicit syntactic connections in between. To illustrate this point we can look at the second paragraph:

- (3) voice once without quaqua on all sides then in me when the panting stops tell me again finish telling me invocation (7.2)

In this section, there are two discernible grammatical sentences, *tell me again* and *finish telling me*, both of which are in the imperative mood. The rest of the text is a collection of phrases without any main clauses and few verbs, and one reading may assign the constituency of the phrases thus:

- (4) [voice] [once without] [quaqua on all sides] [then in me] [when the panting stops] [tell me again] [finish telling me] [invocation]

It should be noted that the constituent *when the panting stops* could be contained within the sentence *tell me again* as a subordinate clause in the initial position, but it is not under this particular analysis. This may seem to go against the hypothesis stated above, where the most grammatical reading avail-

able should be taken; in this case, reading the two clauses as related would yield a full grammatical sentence rather than a sentence and an uncontrolled subordinate clause. However, the phrase *when the panting stops* is used consistently throughout the text, often without relation to adjacent constituents:

- (5) in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of an ancient voice (7.4)
- (6) this voice is truly changeable of which so little left in me bits and scraps barely audible when the panting stops so little so faint (15.2)
- (7) this voice once quaqu then in me when the panting stops part three after Pim (20.2)
- (8) all life part one before Pim how it was leaving only with Pim how it was leaving only after Pim how it was how it is when the panting stops bits and scraps I wake off I go (24.3)

The repeated use of specific phrases and sentences is one of the most striking stylistic features of *How It Is*, and their repeated use can produce certain reading strategies throughout (Zwaan 1993). That is, once one reads a construction used in a certain way enough times, it becomes partially ‘lexicalised’ and is read in this manner throughout the text.

There are two caveats on this point. The first is that reading strategies may not account for the above example of *when the panting stops*, as this example occurs in the second paragraph of the novel, when the constituent is yet to be ‘lexicalised’. The second caveat relates to the first: although reading strategies are well attested in the relevant literature, they cannot be formalised in the same way as other discourse features (such as discourse markers), and may only apply for certain readers or readings, as seen in this example. Nevertheless, some of the repetitions which occur in *How It Is* are so persistent that these reading strategies seem relevant to any discussion of the novel’s formal character.

The use of these repeated phrases in this manner is one of the most obvious aspects of the ‘chunking’ of the text, where the constituents, which could sometimes join with adjacent constituents to form larger ones, are moved around the text as autonomous objects. Consider the use of the clause *how it was* in Part One:

- (9) here then part one how it was before Pim with Pim after Pim (7.1)
- (10) here then part one how it was before Pim we follow (7.7)
- (11) the images part one how it was before Pim I see them in the mud (10.5)
- (12) false that old time part one how it was before Pim vast stretch of time (16.6)
- (13) part two with Pim how it was leaving then leaving only part three after Pim how it was (16.10)
- (14) I am in part three after Pim how it was how it is (20.2)
- (15) how it was before Pim first say that (24.3)
- (16) all life part one before Pim how it was leaving only with Pim how it was leaving only after Pim how it was how it is when the panting stops (24.3)
- (17) more or less part one before Pim how it was things so ancient the journey (27.2)
- (18) my traveling days part one before Pim how it was leaving only part two (37.4)
- (19) my travelling days before Pim part one how it was before the others the sedentary with Pim after Pim how it was how it is vast tracts of time (39.3)
- (20) end of part one before Pim that’s how it was before Pim (48.4)

What is striking is that in almost all of the examples, *how it was* is placed next to *part one* and *before Pim* (or a similar PP) in varying combinations, without regard for syntax. The only combination of elements that would yield a syntactic object is *how it was before Pim*, and this occurs as frequently as the other combinations. Looking at this pattern, it seems that the combination of these constituents is not necessarily led by the need to create well-formed sentences; rather, they are moved around as chunks of language which combine syntactically in some instances.

A similar pattern can be seen with the other stock phrases that persist in the novel, such as *bits and scraps*:

- (21) last state last version what remains bits and scraps I hear it (7.7)
- (22) so little left in me bits and scraps barely audible (15.2)
- (23) I hear it natural order more or less bits and scraps in the mud (20.2)
- (24) after Pim how it is my life bits and scraps (20.3)
- (25) all that in the present barely audible bits and scraps (20.4)
- (26) when the panting stops bits and scraps I wake off I go my day my life
part one bits and scraps (24.3)
- (27) the very beginning bits and scraps I come back to me (25.6)
- (28) when the panting stops bits and scraps I murmur them (39.3)
- (29) when the panting stops barely audible bits and scraps (47.4)

The same can be seen with the repetition of other constituents, some of which recur with great frequency throughout the text. To give an indication of the amount of this repetition, Appendix A provides a list of the most common stock

phrases and their occurrences in the first section of the novel. It is interesting to note that some of the repeated constituents are quite complex, such as *I say it as I hear it*, or *brief movements of the lower face*. The chunking of text does not just apply to small phrases but also to larger constituents.

Related to the repetition of constituents throughout the text, there are also many examples of local repetition, or parallelism. As mentioned above, syntactic parallelism is a common formal feature throughout the literatures of the world, but it resists formalism just like reading strategies. Parallelism functions in a similar manner, encouraging the reader to parse the text in a manner that preserves the repeated phrases instead of other combinations.

It is arguable whether this kind of chunking of text leads the reader to interpret the texts in certain ways. In all the cases of structural ambiguity where the parallelism and stock phrases seem to indicate a specific reading, the structural ambiguity remains and the form of the text is not affected. However, the main point here is that this chunking is not as much significant because of the ways in which it dictates reading, but the ways in which this approach to writing can affect form. That is, when pieces of text are placed together and moved about as chunks, disregarding the syntactic combination of these chunks, the resulting text can be incoherent and ungrammatical. The problems experienced from this style will be investigated in the next two chapters.

2.5.2 The contribution of spoken forms of language

This ‘chunking’ style continues throughout the text, and it is one of the most distinctive features of *How It Is*. But why is the text written in this way? One explanation is that the text is written in the style of spoken language. It is often remarked that Beckett was trying to “reduce everything to a voice speaking in the eternal present” (Dearlove 1986: 102), and throughout the novel there are

repeated references to the narration specifically as a spoken one. It is true that fragmentation of this kind is more characteristic of spoken than written discourse (Biber 1988: 21), and it often appears that the fragmentation in *How It Is* is of the kind found in spoken discourse. For example, there are a great number of self-corrections:

- (30) I remember when appetite revives or I forget open another
it's one or the other (8.6)
- (31) an image the kind I see sometimes see in the mud (11.2)
- (32) the tins the opener the cord but the wish for something else
no that doesn't seem to have been given to me (11.8)

There is frequent meta-commentary, reflecting on what is said in the act of speech:

- (33) I pissed and shat another image in my crib (9.6)
- (34) I see me now on my side I clutch it the sack we're talking of the sack
(10.2)
- (35) It's a resource when all fails images dreams sleep food for thought
something wrong there (14.3)

There are also vocal interjections like 'ah', 'aha' and 'oh':

- (36) ah my young friend this sack
- (37) before things got out of hand satisfactory ah the soul I had in those days
- (38) once is enough aha signifying mamma
- (39) at this instant I never so oh I know happiness

However, it should be emphasised that whether the text is written in the style of spoken language is an empirical question, where the "textual dimensions" of

spoken language would be a matter for statistical analysis of the kind found in Biber (1988). This would involve analysing discourse features such as those mentioned above, but also tendencies in grammatical constructions (such as the use of complex nominalizations) and functional-grammatical categories (such as ‘situated reference’). This kind of analysis lies outside of this study, and will not be pursued. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this kind of work reveals different tendencies in the perception of grammaticality in the two kinds of language; Miller (2006: 681) states that spontaneous speech allows certain kinds of unintegrated syntax which are not found in corpora of written language. Since the style of the Beckett text have a demonstrable spoken flavour, the apparent ungrammaticality of some of the texts in Beckett’s work may be explained by appealing to a definition of grammaticality that includes spoken forms.

2.5.3 Aspects of ‘chunking’: comparisons with other texts

Before moving onto the analysis, it is important to clarify a few points about the chunking in the text. The first point is that it is a deliberate stylistic feature of the text rather than an accident of putting text together at random. To illustrate the latter point, we can look at two texts from the same period as *How It Is* that employ aleatory techniques. William S. Burroughs was one of the most famous authors to embrace chance as a methodology for writing, using a ‘cut-up’ method to compose many of his works. The following example is from *Nova Express*:

So many years - that image - got up and fixed in the sick dawn - *No me hagas caso* - Again he touched like that - smell of dust - the tears gathered - In Mexico again he touched - Codeine pills powdered out into the cold Spring air - Cigarette holes in the vast Thing Police - Could give me no information other than wind identity fading out - dwindling - “Mr Martin” couldn’t reach is all - Bread knife in the

heart - Shadow turned off the lights and water [...]

(Burroughs 1968: 29)

In this text dashes are used throughout to separate pieces of text which have presumably been pieced together by chance operations. There are two interesting features to note in this text. First, many of these separate pieces seem ill-formed or incomplete, such as “In Mexico again he touched” and “Could give me no information other than wind identity fading out”. Second, it is often very difficult for the reader to read the text as a coherent discourse, as there seems to be little connection between many of the demarcated fragments. As a result, it is uncertain whether there is a single narrative voice or any specific situation being described.

Another writer who used chance operations in much of his writing is John Cage. This example is from ‘Mureau’:

sparrowsitA gROsbeak betrays itself by that peculiar squeakariEF-
 FECT OF SLIGHTEST tinkling measures soundness ingplease We
 hear! Does it not rather hear us? sWhen he hears the telegraph, he
 thinksthose bugs have issued forthThe owl touches die stops, wakes
 reverberations *d walky* In verse there is no inherent music

(Cage 1973: 35)

Both of the features seen in *Nova Express* are even more obvious in this text. In particular there are few well-formed constituents, and the chance operation seems to affect some word structures as well as the ordering of constituents, producing a text which is often completely incomprehensible. The contrast with Beckett’s text should be clear, as even in the most difficult passages of *How It Is* it is possible to identify constituents and discourse relations between the pieces:

- (40) and yet a dream I am given a dream like someone having tasted of love
 of a little woman within my reach and dreaming too it’s in the dream

too of a little man within hers I have than in my life this time sometimes
part one as I journey (13.6)

- (41) this voice once quaqu then in me when the panting stops part three
after Pim not before not with I have journeyed found Pim lost Pim it is
over I am in part three after Pim how it was how it is I say it as I hear
it natural order more or less bits and scraps in the mud my life murmur
it to the mud (20.2)

There are many difficulties in these sections, but in both cases there are relatively few problems in identifying chunks of texts, and these chunks can usually cohere in some meaningful way in the context. While Burroughs' and Cage's texts use chunks of text like *How It Is*, there is a marked difference between the chance texts and Beckett's text. While it can appear that chunks of texts are simply stuck together without reason, they still cohere as part of a narrative text and the meaning of the discourse is not completely indeterminate.

The difference between the experience of reading the texts that has its root in this issue of indeterminacy. With 'Mureau', the text is not to be read as a clear narrative with cohesive relations between the disparate chunks. Rather, the text is read as a disparate collection of pieces of language, where the aesthetic experience of abnormal forms and juxtaposed meanings is prioritised above the need to infer meaningful relations between the parts. There is a similar experience in the most heavily cut-up sections of *Nova Express* and Burroughs' other works. For both Burroughs and Cage, indeterminacy was a way of escaping the constraints of language⁴; this is manifested in the style of their writing, and the corresponding experience of the reader is one where all emergent meanings are in some way accidental. Meaningful relations between chunks are more likely to be interpreted as 'associations' than connections in a discourse.

This contrasts greatly with Beckett's work: while the aesthetic experience of the chopped-up style and light punctuation is important to the text as a whole, it

⁴Cage 1973: ii; Burroughs in 'The Electronic Revolution' (Internet 1).

does not override the need to create a coherent, determinate discourse from the disparate text. Throughout *How It Is* it is apparent that there is one narrative voice, and that each of the disparate chunks of text should be understood as part of a single discourse, even if that single discourse is continually undermined by moments of incoherence. This is characteristic of Beckett's attitude to writing: while he believed that language was inadequate for true expression, he felt that the goal of writing was not to free itself from language entirely, as with Burroughs and Cage, but to misuse it with intent. He expressed this clearly in the famous 'German letter' to his friend Axel Kaun in 1937:

Let us hope the time will come. . . when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused. As we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it - be it something or nothing - begins to seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today.

(Beckett 2001: 171-172)

This deliberate treatment of language is apparent in the experience of reading *How It Is*, and this is important as otherwise the 'misuse' of language would be interpreted as an accident of a procedure and not as a style of writing. This may be explained in terms of Relevance theory: the reader identifies the fact that the text is a piece of ostensive communication, and interprets the communication by considering its Relevance. If the ostention is diminished, the expectation of Relevance is reduced and the reader is less likely to work to make the communication Relevant. Thus if the style is clearly deliberate, the reader will make more effort to understand the peculiarities that the style may exhibit.

The second point about the chunking of *How It Is* is that the size of the pieces of text is of great significance. The main reason for using the term 'chunking' (or 'fragmentation') to describe the style is to capture the fact that

the pieces of text are not simply full sentences, but rather small pieces and fragments of sentences. A great deal of the problems in the text (which are to be analysed in the following sections) would not occur if the pieces assembled in the unpunctuated text were full sentences. This can be demonstrated by comparison with another near-contemporary example, the ‘Penelope’ section of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*:

Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the City arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul greatest miser ever was actually afraid to lay out 4d for her methylated spirit telling me all her ailments she had too much old chat in her about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world let us have a bit of fun first

(Joyce 1999: 690)

In this section there are few problems in parsing the text into separate utterances, as the breaks between full sentences are obvious. There are a few non-sentential constituents (in bold), but these are just as clearly demarcated:

[Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the City arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan] [that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing] [**all for masses**] [**for herself and her soul**] [**greatest miser ever was**] [actually afraid to lay out 4d for her methylated spirit] [telling me all her ailments] [she had too much old chat in her] [about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world] [let us have a bit of fun first]

There are no major structural ambiguities of the kind seen in examples from *How It Is* (see section 2.5), and no instances of ungrammaticality or illegibility as a result of the unpunctuated style.

It is well attested in the critical literature (Wales 1992; Kumar 1963) that the lack of punctuation, long meandering sentences and dialectal vocabulary is used to represent the character Molly Bloom's thoughts as a stream of consciousness. While the associative jumps from one thought to another provide a suitably disjointed narrative, the language of the text is largely understandable and grammatical. This is in great contrast to *How It Is*, where ambiguities in sentence structure, apparently ungrammatical utterances and incoherent juxtaposition of small chunks of text can create many difficulties for the reader. Both texts share many characteristics, such as use of spoken forms of language, but the main difference between them - the size of the constituents placed together in the unpunctuated text - seems to account for the large differences in their legibility. This may be because there are much more constituents in a smaller space in Beckett's style, and hence there are more possibilities of contrasts or ambiguities. Regardless, it seems clear that Beckett's Experimental style - deliberate chunking of a text into small pieces, without punctuation - produces many difficulties that are not present in most texts, without becoming completely illegible or incoherent.

2.6 Summary

This section has explored some of the key concepts behind a literary linguistic investigation into experimental literature. The discussion of grammaticality and the written sentence highlights some of the formal properties of written sentences, specifically how they relate to the mental grammar. The discussion of the experimental style of Beckett's *How It Is* indicates that the text seems to be composed in 'chunks', and that many peculiarities of the text can be explained by this way of manipulating language. In the following chapter, I examine some specific kinds of linguistic deviation in the text, and I will consider whether

these deviations are produced by this experimental style.

Chapter 3

How It Is: description and analysis

3.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies kinds of linguistic deviation in the text of *How It Is*, considering how they may be produced and why they are deviant. The regularity of some kinds of deviation is one of the most interesting aspects of the text, and it is interesting to consider why some kinds of deviation occur throughout, as this might indicate what effects stylistic experimentation have on linguistic structure. It should be noted that all evidence from *How It Is* comes from the first section (p7-48), as the analysis was concentrated on this section for the sake of focus. All of the regular trends identified can be found throughout the text.

3.2 Unproblematic structures

Before describing the difficulties that occur in *How It Is*, it is important to reiterate that it is not an entirely unstable text. Rather, reading the text can be deceptively simple in places. Indeed one of the most interesting features of the language of the text is that, despite the problems caused by the style, it is still possible to discern a great number of relatively complex sentences. For example, there are right-dislocated objects:

(42) I scissored into slender strips the wings of butterflies (9.7)

(43) I leave for the moment life in the light (9.8)

There are sentences with complex embedding:

(44) that doesn't seem to have been put in my life this time (11.8)

(45) the huge head hatted with birds and flowers is bowed down over my curls (15.7)

(46) others knowing nothing of my beginnings save what they could glean by hearsay or in public records (12.6)

(47) others who had always known me here in my last place they talk to me of themselves of me perhaps too in the end (12.7)

(48) others finally who do not know me yet they pass with heavy tread murmuring to themselves they have sought refuge in a desert place to be alone at last and vent their sorrows unheard (13.1)

These last three sentences are of particular interest. They occur in succession as a set of parallel structures, with a sequential elaboration that leads to a progressive increase in complexity. The three sentences all have the same general structure of NP[Embedded clause]VP, but the second and third sentences exhibit the unintegrated syntax of unplanned speech described by Miller (2006), in

that the subject of the matrix sentence is repeated pronominally following the embedded relative clause; cf Miller's example "this older woman in the class she likes to kid us all on" (Miller 2006: 683). It is important that this only occurs in the two more complex sentences, with embedded relative clauses rather than the shorter gerundial sentence of the first example; this is consistent with Miller's assertion that this kind of unintegrated use arises in order to make the text easier to comprehend.

These examples are interesting for two reasons. First, the example shows that consideration of spoken forms of English is important, as in this case it allows for a principled explanation of a form which may be considered deviant by more restrictive standards. Second, this kind of case is important to studies of syntax, as it appears that it can also be explained by appealing to pragmatic theory. Miller argues that this kind of construction is an instance of unintegrated syntax, and this implies that the reference between the initial subject (*others*) and the verb-adjacent subject (*they*) is bound. However, the alternative pragmatic-based explanation is that the initial subject and embedded clause are not part of a single syntactic construction but independent clauses in the discourse. In this case, the interpretation of co-reference between *others* and *they* could be explained by communicative principles like Relevance. Choosing the correct explanation is a matter for detailed study, but it is important to realise that cases like these are at the "edges of syntax", where it is less clear whether certain constructions are formal, generated by the grammar, or functional, arising from the use in communication.

The general question raised by this example is whether phrases (or clauses) should be treated as separate objects in the discourse or as part of unified syntactic objects. This is uncontroversial in some cases, such as the right-dislocated sentences above. In these sentences, the prepositional phrases are in

non-canonical positions but their relation to the verb is perfectly clear. Thus with the sentence *I leave for the moment life in the light* it is clear that *for the moment* is a modification of the verb phrase *leave life in the light*; it may be moved for emphasis, or to remove the ambiguity of *I leave life in the light for the moment*. There are also phrases or clauses in non-canonical positions which are clearly not syntactically related to the main sentences, such as parentheticals:

(49) we follow I quote the natural order (7.7)

(50) close my eyes not the blue the others at the back and see me on my face (8.8)

(51) I pissed and shat another image in my crib (9.6)¹

However, in a large amount of other cases it is not clear whether syntactic relations hold between constituents, and throughout the text there are many examples of fragments which can seem very strange as a result of these ambiguous relations.

3.3 Conjunction

3.3.1 Evidence

One of the most common sources of this kind of ambiguity is conjunction. Much of the text is made up of small sentences and discrete phrases placed together, but there are also a lot of instances of inter-constituent linkage. In many cases this is unproblematic, producing sentences that are well formed and sometimes complex:

¹It is worth noting that some readers may take *another image* to be the object of the transitive verbs-in-apposition *pissed and shat*, given the text's penchant for odd situations; however, a reader of *How It Is* is unlikely to take this interpretation, as *another image* is an example of one of the 'stock phrases' described above, and is more likely to be taken as a parenthetical than any of the other possible constructions.

- (52) I'm not deceived or I am it all depends on what is not said (37.7)
- (53) ...beginning with the sponges when suddenly I can't stay a second longer (38.7)
- (54) scoop my wallow and stir from it no more (39.2)
- (55) as when exceptionally the worse for drink at the small hour of the garbage-man in my determination to leave the elevator I caught my foot twixt cage and landing and two hours later to the tick someone came running having summoned it in vain (37.6)

In all of these examples, the syntactic and semantic functions of the conjunctions are standard. All join clauses or phrases together into single syntactic objects; *when* in 53, *as* in 55 are subordinating conjunctions, contained within the main clauses. *Or* in 52 licenses contrastive constructions; *as* in 55 implies causality; *when* in 53 and *and* in 54 and 55 imply temporal relations. These constructions are matched by appropriate relations between the conjoined constituents, such as the contrast of negation linked by the *or* in 52.

However, the majority of cases in *How It Is* are less well behaved. Consider the following sample:

- (56) I close my eyes something is lacking whereas normally closed or open (14.6)
- (57) centuries I can see me quite tiny the same as now more or less only tinier quite tiny no more objects no more food and I live the air sustains me the mud I live on (17.7)
- (58) a fancy I am given a fancy the panting stops and a breathclock breath of life head in the bag (19.7)
- (59) enough indeed nearly enough when you come to think of it to make you laugh feel yourself falling and on with a squeak brief movements of the lower face no sound if you could come to think of it (26.3)

- (60) passing time is told to me and time past vast tracts of time the panting stops and scraps of an enormous tale as heard so murmured to this mud which is told to me natural order (27.1)
- (61) only one remedy then pull it in and suck it swallow the mud or spit it out it's one or the other and question is it nourishing and vistas last a moment with that (28.2)
- (62) I part the mouth of the sack and questions what my God can I desire what hunger to eat what was my last meal (33.5)
- (63) if I was born it was not left-handed (35.6)
- (64) and the day so near its end if it is not compact of a thousand days (39.6)
- (65) wake up in a sweat and have met Jesus in a dream (45.5)

The unusual uses of conjunctions here can be grouped into two specific tendencies. First, there is the use of *whereas* and *or* in 56, *if* in 59, 63 and 6, where the semantic content of the conjunctions are not matched by the combination of constituents. For example, the uses of *if* produce complementizer phrases in the conditional voice, but the constituents do not contain propositions that exhibit conditional relations. In 59, there are three constituents that could be read as conjoined by *if*: to the left, the phrases *no sound* and *movements of the lower face* (with *no sound* as a parenthetical); following the CP on the right, the clause *of what you nearly lost*. But none of these constituents are sentences and none of them bear the sufficient propositional content to license a conditional relation to the CP. There is a similar mismatch between semantic content and the combination of constituents with *whereas* and *or* in 56.

The second unusual tendency in conjunction use is the coordination with *and* in the other examples above, which persists throughout the text. Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 1290) state that coordination is subject to a condition of

‘syntactic likeness’, where constituents can only be coordinated if they share a functional likeness (hence expressions like **He left the country and this morning* are not acceptable). Thus 57 involves the conjunction of the NP *no more food* to the sentence *I live*, and most of the other examples above involve the same problem. 65 involves the conjunction of the sentence *wake up in a sweat* to the fragment *have met Jesus in a dream*; this does not work as there is no covert referent for the PRO subject of the second clause, because the first clause is in imperative and has an understood subject (such as ‘you’). *Have* is in its auxiliary form normally cannot take a null-specifier imperative form like lexical verbs (such as *wake* or possessive *have*), but in some usages this is acceptable, in diary or letter writing for example (eg *%Have been working hard this week and haven’t had the chance to reply*). The ungrammaticality of the conjoined text arises from the combination of the non-identity between the clauses; however, it is unclear whether this arises from the functional difference between the two clauses (imperative vs declarative) or their differing grammatical status.

3.3.2 Discussion

These problems with conjunction are prevalent throughout the text, but it is not clear why this is the case. One explanation may be that this is a result of the text’s effort to represent spoken language. Discontinuities in inter-clausal connection are common in spoken language; in fact, some linguists believe that the clause is the maximal unit of spoken language, rather than the sentence, given that the connections between clauses are so frequently abused in speech (Miller & Weinert 1998: ch.2). Regardless of this debate, it seems that this analysis is not relevant to the example of *How It Is*. There are several examples of sentences which are so long and complex that it is doubtful that they could belong to the same spoken description, such as example 55 and some of the examples of com-

plex embedding and movement identified above. The spoken-written dichotomy is useful for explaining the appearance of certain non-standard constructions, such as the examples of ‘unintegrated syntax’ described above, but it does not give a principled explanation for the kinds of errors which appear in examples 56-65; indeed most of these examples would be identified as ungrammatical in spoken use, and would be just as unlikely to occur in either medium.

Alternatively, it could be argued that it is the Experimental style that produces these errors. It has been argued that Beckett’s Experimentation has two main manifestations in the language of the text, the lack of punctuation, and the chunking of the text. The lack of punctuation does not impact on the forms of the text in themselves, but simply on their interpretation, and is not relevant to this particular case. However, the chunking of the kind seen throughout *How It Is* is important to the forms of the text, as it leads to a great amount of phrases and clauses which have no syntactic connection to their adjacent constituents.

In this context, it is arguable that the tendency towards ungrammatical use of conjunction is a result of this chunking. In the majority of cases Beckett’s chunking only affects the coherence of the discourse, where the lack of explicit connection between lists of phrases makes the text unorderedly; in such cases, he disregards communicative maxims such as ‘be orderly’. However, in the examples of conjunction above, chunks of text are placed together within sentences by means of conjunction, and sentences are subject to tighter, formal constraints. Beckett disregards rules about the combination of clauses, and produces ungrammatical utterances.

3.4 Adverbs and parentheticals

3.4.1 Adverbs: general characteristics

Another common feature of the text of *How It Is* is the unusual use of adverbs and adverb phrases. These constituents are used frequently throughout the novel, and this is not surprising considering the style in which it is written. Adverbs and adverbials typically modify verb phrases, as adjuncts, but they can also appear as disjunct sentential adverbs. Disjunct adverbials appear to be attached to sentences by syntactic relations, based on graphological and tonic representations, as in *Personally I don't know what you're on about*. However these constituents have been shown to function much like other disjunct constituents, attaching to the host sentence by pragmatic rather than syntactic means (Blakemore 2006; Burton-Roberts 1998). As a result these constituents are not constrained tightly and can enjoy relatively free distribution in discourse.

In addition, adverbs and adverb phrases also exhibit relatively free distribution across sentences. Consider the sentence *He pushed the piano through the door* as modified by the adverb *quickly*:

He quickly pushed the piano through the door.
 He pushed the piano quickly through the door.
 He pushed the piano through the door quickly.

However, it is important to note that adverbs do not have completely free distribution, as they can only appear as adjuncts at phrase boundaries, hence the unacceptability of **He pushed the piano through quickly the door*, where the adverb appears within the preposition phrase *through the door*. Individual adverbs also show distributional restrictions; Radford (1997: 142-144) explains that some adverbs like *completely* only appear in verb phrases (VPs), but not in inflectional phrases (IPs)², and vice versa:

²Inflectional Phrases are relatively new to the technical literature on syntax, coming into

- They certainly have [ignored her *completely*]_{VP}
 They certainly have [*completely* ignored her]_{VP}
 *They *completely* have [certainly ignored her]_{VP}
 *They *completely* have [ignored her certainly]_{VP}

(from Radford 1997: 142)³

Thus according to Radford's analysis, *completely* is an IP-adverb and *certainly* a VP-adverb. Many adverbs can take both positions, such as *quickly* in the above examples, and some of these distributional tendencies can often be described in terms of semantic relations: for example, epistemic adverbs like *certainly* or *definitely* tend to be IP-adverbs. In summary, the distribution of adverbials within sentences is limited in many cases, so there may be difficulties with interpretation if they are distributed through sentences without some regard for grammatical structure.

3.4.2 Adverbs: evidence

In many cases, the use of adverbs and adverb phrases in *How It Is* is wholly conventional:

- (66) you are in the dark the mud and on you suddenly a hand like yours on Pim (23.5)
- (67) you will have a little voice it will be barely audible (23.6)
- (68) what cannot as much be said could not as much be always said my little host (34.4)

common use with the arrival of Government and Binding Theory in the 1980s Chomsky 1980, and they describe tensed auxiliary VPs or infinitival *to* phrases. See the relevant discussion in Radford (1997).

³The analysis of *certainly* as an IP-adverb may seem inaccurate here, since it can occur in the sentence *They have certainly ignored her* where *certainly* appears to modify the VP. Radford's analysis assumes that an adverb can only be a VP-adverb if it can take up all the possible positions in the VP, and the evidence shows that **They have ignored her certainly* is unacceptable for this reason.

- (69) as when exceptionally the worse for drink at the small hour... (37.6)
- (70) I go on zigzag give me my due conformably to my complexion present formulation (46.7-47.1)

In the examples above, the adverbs are unproblematic, even when there are other problems with the related structures. In 66 it is not entirely clear which phrase the adverb *suddenly* may modify, but it is uncontroversial that the use is grammatical and easily interpreted, as the adverb is between the two distinct phrases *on you* and *a hand*. In 69 the adverb appears to modify a noun phrase as it is directly followed by a definite article *the* (not normally allowed in English cf **completely the idiot*), but the following construction is a grammaticalised adjectival phrase *the worse for wear*, and there is no problem in interpreting this as a well-formed phrase for any reader of English.

However there are also many examples of adverbs which are more problematic. Since adverbs enjoy relatively free distribution in discourse, it is often unclear whether they are syntactically related to adjacent constituents, or independent utterances which appear parenthetically:

- (71) question if other inhabitants here with me yes or no obviously all-important most important and thereupon long wrangle so minute that moments when yes to be feared till finally conclusion no me sole elect the panting stops and that is all I hear barely hear the question the answer barely audible if other inhabitants besides me here with me for good in the dark the mud long wrangle all lost and finally conclusion no me sole elect (13.5)
- (72) my memory obviously the panting stops and question of my memory obviously that too all-important most important this voice is truly changeable of which so little left in me (15.2)
- (73) I'll fall asleep within humanity again just barely (44.7-45.1)

In some cases, the adverbs appear adjacent to nominals to which they cannot be adjoined: in 71, *finally conclusion* occurs twice; in 72, *obviously that too*.

However, these examples are not difficult to interpret, and the adverbs do not modify the adjacent nominals as if they were adjectives. In *till finally conclusion*, adding a definite article to the nominal would yield *till finally the conclusion*, whereas if the adverb formed a constituent with the nominal this would produce **till the finally conclusion* (cf *till the final conclusion*). Therefore the adverbs are independent of the nominals in these cases, and the constituents are not ill-formed. The actual function of the adverbs is not entirely clear, as they could be taken as modifiers for elided verbs (*till finally there is conclusion*) or as unrelated units in the discourse (like exclamations).

3.4.3 Adverbs of parentheticals?

In most of the other unusual examples, the adverbs do not seem to have any direct syntactic relation to the adjacent constituent. In *barely audible* in 71 and *just barely* in 73, the adverbs form constituents with the adjacent words, but these constituents (an AP and an AvP respectively) are not contained within a clause or sentence, and appear as discrete phrases or fragments in the discourse. The AP *barely audible* recurs in this manner consistently:

- (74) I would feel it and brief apostil barely audible not made not really for happiness (18.7)
- (75) the day can begin these scraps barely audible of a fantasy (19.7)
- (76) the couple the abandon all that in the present barely audible bits and scraps (20.4)
- (77) first second now third pant pant the panting stops and I hear barely audible how I journeyed with my sack my tins in the dark (20.5)
- (78) I hear it barely audible enough to make you laugh (26.3)

- (79) bits and scraps in the present things so ancient hear them murmur them
as they come barely audible to the mud (20.5)

The phrase seems to modify adjacent constituents in 76 and 78, a result of structural ambiguity, but this relation is not entirely clear. In the case of 78 it seems that the most likely interpretation of the text leaves *barely audible* as a discrete phrase: *I hear it barely audible enough to make you laugh*⁴, but the multiple structure remains latent. In the rest of these examples syntactic adjunction to the adjacent constituents is problematic, and the more appropriate interpretation is that the phrases are inserted parenthetically. For example, in 77 *I hear barely audible how I journeyed* seems to consist of the sentence *I hear how I journeyed* and parenthetical *barely audible*, as *I hear barely audible* is not a constituent as the verb *hear* does not take an AP as a complement in most versions of English: cf. **I hear good and I hear well*. The same analysis could account for 79.

There are two important points to make about these examples. First, it is almost impossible to tell the difference between a disjunct sentential adverb, where the adverb does not modify any specific constituent (such as *Personally I don't know what you're on about*), and a parenthetical. Both are syntactically independent constituents inserted within a sentence, and it seems that the only difference between them is the tonic or graphological demarcation used to separate parentheticals explicitly. Perhaps the only difference between these types of constituents is their distribution, as parentheticals are inserted within a sentence whereas disjunct adverbials can also appear at either side of a sentence. This point seems obvious, as it is in the definition of a parenthetical to appear within a sentence; if it were to appear at the edges of the sentence, it would simply be an independent adjacent constituent with no parenthesis to speak of, regardless

⁴In 76, the AP could be an attributive modification for the NP *bits and scraps*. This is an ambiguous structure, but note that the decision made here (by a reader) is likely to be based on their knowledge of the text i.e. the reading strategies identified above.

of punctuation or intonation. Some kinds of parentheticals, such as *or-* or *that is-* led insertions, have specific pragmatic constraints on their use and distribution (Blakemore 2007), but for the most part it seems that parentheticals and disjunct constituents behave in the same way within discourse.

The second point is that a lot of the disjunct constituents occur in unusual or awkward locations in the sentence. In examples 77 and 79, *barely audible* is inserted to the right of the verb, within the verb phrases between the verb and the adjoined preposition phrase. The same occurs with the insertion of many parentheticals:

- (80) on from there that moment and following not all a selection natural order vast tracts of time (7.7)
- (81) I see me now on my side I clutch it the sack we're talking of the sack with one hand behind my back (10.2)
- (82) not fear I quote of losing it something else not known (10.4)
- (83) she transfers the leash to her left hand and I the same instant to my right the object now a little pale grey brick (29.6)
- (84) take the sack in my arms strain it so light to me (36.2)

Similarly, there are examples of parentheticals inserted between the verb and the nominal object:

- (85) an apalca llama the history I knew my God the natural (14.1)
- (86) my words mine alone one or two soundless brief movements
all the lower no sound when I can that's the difference great confusion
(21.2)
- (87) we have I imagine our eyes open and gaze before us (29.3)

In some cases, such as 83 and 84 this does not cause any problems, and the sentence structure is not heavily disrupted by the parenthetical. However,

in others there can be difficulties in interpreting the sentence because of the location of the parenthetical. In 80, 81 and 86 the parentheticals are as long as the sentences into which they have been inserted, and they make interpretation of the sentences difficult. Thus in 81 it is not clear whether *with one hand* is an adjunct of *I clutch it* or the parenthetical, even though the only intelligible option would be *I clutch it*, and there are similar problems in 80 and 86. In 82, 85 and 87 the parentheticals create structural ambiguities, as they can merge with the adjacent constituents, but the constituents formed by these readings are unusual or ungrammatical, such as *I quote of losing it*.

In these cases, the parenthetical insertion into the sentence creates disorder in the discourse. The meaning of the utterances can be recovered, as once the reader recognises the parenthetical constituents the containing sentence can be constructed and the meaning of the two utterances and their relation can be inferred. However, it is interesting to consider what role Relevance plays in this process. Sperber & Wilson (1995: 49) point out that Relevance involves the offsetting of effort involved in interpretation with the cognitive effects achieved. In the case of unclear communication, the hearer might not recover the intended meaning if the cognitive effects of the utterance do not justify the effort in interpretation.

Many of the sentences above are examples of unclear communication, where the reader may not take the most 'sensible' interpretation since the effort involved in that interpretation is not outweighed by its meaningful import. For example in 81, the effort involved in interpretation (a), where *the sack we're talking of the sack* is a parenthetical within the sentence *I clutch it with one hand behind my back*, may outweigh the benefits of constructing two sensible constituents; instead, we may be left with interpretation (b), with *the sack with one hand behind my back* as a constituent, an unusual one to say the least.

Principle A in section 2.4 above that the reader tends to extract the most grammatical sentence available, but it seems that in some cases the effort involved in reconstructing the most grammatical reading might not be justified and the reader may 'settle' for a less sensible, possibly ungrammatical interpretation.

3.4.4 Theoretical issues: Relevance and literary texts

Relating to this point, there is an interesting question about whether Relevance operates in the same way in a literary text as in 'normal' communication. Theorists of 'literary competence' argue that reading a literary text involves a greater attention to meaning than normal communication. Culler argues that Relevance is not entirely applicable to the interpretation of literary texts:

... the interpretation of any piece of communication is a function of the assumptions that are brought to bear on it. As the radius of communication expands, the amount of shared background assumptions is attenuated and the indeterminacy correspondingly grows. Literary works are the limiting case in that the radius can be arbitrarily large... while the interpretation of dialogue is constrained by the principle that the speaker formulates his sentences in such a way that the first interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance that occurs to the addressee is the intended one, the reading of literary works is not, and they are consequently open to constant reinterpretation.

(Culler 1987: 187)

According to this argument, with the examples of unclear communication above (such as 81) all readings are available since the reader of a literary text pays more attention to the meanings of a text and absorbs them all as opposed to the first which comes to mind.

However, this argument is flawed in one crucial misunderstanding of Relevance. Culler mistakes the inference process involved in creating an utterance from a linguistic form, with the inference process involved in constructing larger

(i.e. thematic) meanings from a text. The inference process described by Sperber & Wilson is not simply a theory for how speakers interpret meaning in spontaneous conversation, but for the theory for how a language user constructs meaning based on any stimulus (spoken or written language for example). The selection of the most relevant meaning from a stimulus applies to any kind of ostensive communication, and it applies instantly; for example, when someone reads the text of 81, he or she may select interpretation (a) or (b), depending on contextual factors; each is in effect a different utterance, within the same text.

Since the text is a written literary text, the reader may read the text again and notice the reading they missed. However, in both instances, their reading involves the creation of the utterances (a) or (b) from example 81 by inference, and this inferencing process is always constrained by Relevance. Otherwise it would not be possible to resolve the double syntactic structure as two separate utterances, and the text would have no meaning, rather than two meanings. The interpretation of literary meanings may be unconstrained - the reader may recognise an utterance as an allusion or quotation, or as a similar utterance to another within the text - but the inferencing process involved in each construction of meaning is always constrained. Culler mistakes the generation of meaning from text (stimulus) with the generation of meaning from meanings⁵. At this level of pragmatic inference, 'normal' communication and the communication

⁵This confusion is captured in the postface to the second edition of *Relevance* (1995: 260-266), where Sperber & Wilson amend the principle to distinguish between Relevance in communication and cognition. In the revised version, there are two principles of Relevance:

1. Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.
2. Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260)

It is arguable that 1 accounts for 2, but the theoretical discussion of the relationship between communication and cognition does not impact on the strength of the individual claims. Principle 2 is the principle which we are concerned with throughout, since this dissertation focuses on acts of communication.

of literary texts cannot be separated. This is an important issue for literary linguistic analysis, as it demonstrates that there is no distinctive character for the inferential interpretation of linguistic form in literary texts.

3.4.5 Parentheticals and experimental style

It can be seen from the above examples that parentheticals present many problems for interpretation. It seems that the tendency for parentheticals and disjunct constituents is another example of chunking in the text, as this involves moving chunks of text around and putting them in locations where they would not normally go by syntactic operations (Movement) or in an orderly discourse.

However, it should be emphasised that the meaning of the text is still recoverable in most instances. With parentheticals, the constituents can be identified as independent units in the discourse and rendered meaningful by pragmatic inference. With adverbs and adverb phrases, the interpretation of the constituents as adjuncts essentially excludes them from the syntactic representation of the containing or adjacent sentence; they are thus interpreted as independent constituents in discourse and understood in the same way as parentheticals. It seems that, when these chunks of text are found in unusual places or constructions within the text, it is often possible to interpret the problematic text as a non-sentential unit of discourse rather than a constituent of an ill-formed sentence. Therefore in these examples the chunking of the text does not as much produce ungrammaticality, as produce an unorderedly discourse.

It should be emphasised that the relations that tie these chunks to the surrounding discourse are established by meaning, and not by structure. It is in this respect that the examples of parentheticals and adverbs resemble the examples of conjunction above: the chunks of text are combined as chunks of meaning, and are not combined with respect to structural relations. If the adverbs or

parentheticals were moved with respect to structural relations, they would resemble the right-dislocated examples above (42, 43) and would fall under the larger category of Movement-shifted adjuncts. This shows an interesting contrast between conjunction and adjunction: when adjuncts like PPs or AvPs do not adhere to structural restrictions they can easily be interpreted as parentheticals rather than ungrammatical constituents; when conjunction applies without regard to structural constraints, the resulting structure is ungrammatical and does not allow for the same parenthetical interpretation. This indicates that adjuncts have more syntactic autonomy than conjuncts, even though conjuncts can be fully-formed clauses in themselves.

It is important to point out that this procedure of combining units of language with respect meaning relations rather than structural relations is not typical of any use of language. The examples of adverbs and parentheticals violate constraints on discourse, but could easily be generated; however, some of the examples of conjunction violate syntactic constraints on the combination and would not be generated in normal use. It seems that the most significant contribution of the chunking style is that the units of language which make up the text are autonomous meaningful objects, and this reduces the likelihood of sound structural relations between the units. As a result there can be many instances of ungrammaticality, where chunks are combined in a manner in which they would not be in a text led by structural principles, although in many cases these relations can be rendered legible by inference.

The obvious pre-condition for legibility in all of these cases is that the chunks of text are themselves well formed, as otherwise they may not be isolated as independent constituents within the discourse. The following section examines examples of constituent-internal difficulties caused by ellipsis, considering whether they are resolved in a similar manner and whether they can be attributed to

the same feature of the Experimental style.

3.5 Ellipsis and Deletion

3.5.1 Introduction

As mentioned above, *How It Is* is often described as marking Beckett's move to a more 'minimal' style, where he 'pared down language to its most essential parts' (Calder 2001: 72). One of the most significant formal aspects of this reduction is ellipsis, and this features heavily throughout the text. Ellipsis is a common feature of everyday language use and it is used to avoid unnecessary repetition or redundancy. For example:

John will go to the shops, and Mary will too.

Here the meaning of the second clause is *Mary will go to the shops too*; the VP *go to the shops* is elided to avoid repetition and the gap in its place is coindexed with the VP *go to the shops* in the first clause. The peculiarities of the formal constraints on ellipsis indicate that it is a syntactic operation (Lasnik 2003), and it has been assumed throughout generative linguistics that ellipsis is an effective test for structure (Radford 1997: 110). However, it is notable that pragmatic considerations of economy and non-redundancy drive ellipsis, and that the reconstruction of sentence structures may owe as much to communicative principles as to syntactic structures. Regardless, it is uncontroversial that ellipsis is a common feature in language and that it involves highly formalised relations between syntactic constituents. In a text where the relations between constituents are often very unclear, we may expect this to present some difficulties.

3.5.2 Well-formed ellipsis

There are examples of well-formed elided structures throughout *How It Is*. Consider the following examples of nominal ellipsis (an underline represents the gap):

- (88) first one wing then the other__ sometimes for a change (9.7)
- (89) next another image yet another so soon again the third__ perhaps (15.5)
- (90) which leg brief void and barely audible the right __ it's preferable (19.2)
- (91) someone listening another noting or the same __ (25.7)
- (92) I wake from sleep how much nearer to the last __ that of men (27.5)
- (93) it's not said or I don't hear __ it's one or the other the same more or less (22.3)

In examples 88-91, adjectives or determiners appear in NPs where the head nouns are elided, which can be interpreted as *the other wing*, *the third image*, *the right leg*, *the same person* and *the last sleep* respectively. The referents for the gaps can sometimes be unclear or ambiguous, as with *the same* (there is also the pronominal interpretation), but overall these elided structures are unproblematic. This could be because they all have definite articles, which strongly indicate nominal expressions and hence the ellipsis of the head noun.

3.5.3 Ill-formed ellipsis

However, there are also many examples of nominal ellipsis that are more problematic:

- (94) life life the other__ above in the light (8.1)

- (95) vast stretch of time the beginning this life first sign very first... of life
(8.2)
- (96) a crumb of tunny then mouldy... eat mouldy... no need to worry (8.5)
- (97) close my eyes not the blue... the others at the back (8.8)
- (98) move my lips and all around all the lower -- that helps me understand
(18.1)
- (99) words won't come no word not even soundless -- I'm in need of a word
(18.5)
- (100) I close my eyes not the blue -- the others at the back (28.5)
- (101) one or two soundless brief movements of the lower face all the lower --
no sound when I can (21.1)
- (102) ages each heroic seen from the next when will the last come when was
my golden... every rat has its heyday (10.1)
- (103) my pain which of my many -- the deep beyond reach (32.7)
- (104) could not as much be said always said my little -- lost always vast stretch
of time (34.4)

In most of these cases it seems clear that there has been ellipsis in the gap indicated, but it is not always clear what the referent is or what the constituent means. For example, in 94 it seems that *the other* is an elided nominal expression, as nominal *other* (as in *the foreign thing or person*) does not seem relevant. However, it is not clear what may be the referent for this gap, since there is no parallel NP for the gap to identify with, as there was in 88. The most likely interpretation is that the gap is coindexed with *life* in the preceding NP, but there is a clear mismatch between the constituents and the instability

of this structure remains. The same occurs in 103, where there is a mismatch between the singular number of the previous NP *my pain* and the plural *my many*, and 104, where there is no plausible nominal for identity in the preceding text. There is a related problem in 95, where the adjunction of the preposition phrase (PP) to the gap creates an asymmetry in the indexed structures. Elided ordinal constructions are usually unproblematic, as with the related sound construction *the last* in 102, but in this case the adjunction seems to disrupt the interpretation of the gap; usually the PP would adjoin to the first NP and all of the post-head modification would be elided in the second NP i.e. *first sign of life very first...*

In 96-102 the words left in the expressions seem strange in an elided structure. For example, in 97 *the blue* is unusual since the standard use for a colour is *the blue one/ones*, with the nominal filled by a pronoun. This departure from standard use is not entirely uninterpretable, and the meaning can be inferred, but it should be noted that this use is unusual compared to analogous examples, such as *the last* or *the best*. This indicates that the acceptability of certain kinds of elliptical structures is graduated, and that the degree of interpretability varies as a function of the lexical properties of the words left in the structure (the adjectives or determiners). 96-102 are examples from the lower end of that scale, where the acceptability is as low as to indicate that the interpretation of an elliptical constituent may not be plausible. It is debatable whether these examples are grammatically deviant, but it should be noted that the relations which give rise to this strangeness are independent of meaning; there is no difference in meaning to account for why *the blue* is less acceptable than *the last*; this kind of structure can be generated, but it does not occur with *blue*. Regardless of the explanation, it should be clear that these examples of nominal ellipsis are unusual and would not be produced in most standard usage.

There are other examples where it seems words have been omitted by ellipsis. For example, in many cases the subject NPs are missing, but the sentences are not in the imperative:

- (105) saying to myself no worse you're no worse and__ was worse (9.5)
- (106) I see sometimes see in the mud part one __sometimes saw (11.2)
- (107) I have suffered __ must have suffered (23.2)
- (108) be with Pim __ have been with Pim __have him behind me hear it said he'll come back another will come (23.5)
- (109) there's another of my resources __ was once not now any more (25.4)
- (110) the scene is empty a few animals still then __ goes out no more blue I stay there (31.3)
- (111) that old dream back again I live it now at this creeping hour __ know what it's worth __ was worth (39.2)

In some of these cases, such as 107, the missing NP is clearly coindexed to the subject of the first clause; alternatively, it may be that the VPs are in apposition. In most of the rest of the examples the antecedent is less obvious and the clauses are difficult to interpret. In 105, 108, 109 and 110 the local antecedents clash with the inflection of the verbs: in 105, the gap in *you're no worse and__ was worse* does not coindex with the previous clausal subject *you* because of the first-person inflection of *was*. Rather, the gap does not find its coreferent in any nominative first person NP, but in the first-person accusative *myself* in the previous clause; this is not as much a formal connection (consider the ungrammaticality of **myself was worse*), but a relation derived by inference. In 106 and 111 the gaps are separated from the NP with which they coindex by

separate constituents, and the interpretation of the coindexical relations become difficult or implausible.

There are similar problems with VP-ellipsis:

(112) this voice is truly changeable of which -- so little left in me (15.2)

(113) no one will ever come again and shine his light on me and nothing --
ever again of other days (15.4)

In 112 the ellipsis is awkward since the *of which* construction does not combine with the coindexed *is*, unless one also infers a missing expletive *there*. In 113, the coindexed VP does not match the gap because of the adverb *ever*, which lies between the auxiliary and main verb in the first clause but can only come after the main verb in the coindexed gap. All of these examples do not function in the same way as the elided nominal expressions, since there are no antecedent constituents to index the elided words with; rather, the words are simply missing. The relations between the adjacent constituents can still be reconstructed, however, and these examples are not as unusual as some of the nominals with missing or asymmetrical antecedents.

3.5.4 Ellipsis and Deletion

This is an example of one of the chief difficulties in reading a text like *How It Is*, where syntactic connections between separate constituents can be inferred but are not explicit. The ellipsis interpretations of the texts (where it is assumed there are missing prepositions) allow the reader to infer meaningful relations between the constituents and to resolve the problems within the constituents. Inference relations are constrained by the communicative principle of Relevance and can be ignored or amended to fall in line with contextual factors. In contrast, syntactic ellipsis relations are not amenable to change, regardless of the irrelevance of the reconstituted structure, as they are formal and not led by

communicative principles. Consider regular verbal ellipsis, where the reconstitution of the elided gap is constrained specifically by the sentence: in *I went to the shops to buy a loaf of bread and... Europe*, c-command⁶ relations dictate that the gap can only be coindexed to *buy* and not *went*, even though the interpretation may seem implausible. This departs from the inference approach in examples like 108, where the missing NP is recovered by the effort to make the communication Relevant.

Therefore there is a clear difference between ellipsis, which is formally constrained and affected by adjacent structures, and deletion (hereafter Deletion for the sake of clarity), which is inferred for communicative reasons and affected by adjacent meanings. In the examples of nominal ellipsis above, the structural information contained in the stranded adjectives licences the interpretation of elided structures; so in 95, the reconstitution of an elided nominal *in very first... of life* is brought about by the fact that adjective phrases like *very first* cannot contain PPs. The reconstitution of the ellipsis then follows from this structural cue, and is constrained by the adjacent structures like the NP *first sign* that immediately precedes it.

It is unclear how this process of Deletion is implemented. In the above examples, it is evident that there are missing subjects, or that the phrases with definite articles should be headed by nouns, but it is not clear why some of these constituents have been left out. Significantly, there is no discernible formal motivation for the Deletion process: whereas the ellipsis interpretation of 95 is motivated by phrase structure rules and the lexical information contained in

⁶'C-command' is a formal relation in language which holds between the subject of a sentence and an anaphoric element (e.g. pronoun) in its predicate (Matthews 2005: 49). For example, in *John's father hurt himself*, the reflexive *himself* is c-commanded by the NP *John's father*, so *himself* must be a pronoun representing the father of John, rather than John. Later Minimalist linguistic work (Chomsky 1995: 35) has proposed that c-command can be structurally defined in some detail, but for our purposes it is important simply to note that c-command is a strictly controlled grammatical operation that is predicated on hierarchical relations. C-command cannot be overridden by contextual assumptions.

the adjective, the interpretation of missing NP in 107 is only motivated by the (non-guaranteed) knowledge of typical constructions and a desire to reconstitute a more stable discourse.

This is an important point: since Deletion does not seem to have any specific constraint on its operation, it may seem that the entire text is unstable as a result; if words have been deleted in these examples, they may have been deleted in others but not noticed. This is a corrosive strategy for interpretation, as it follows that no structures can be attested uncontroversially, as they may in fact be Deletion-reduced forms of other more primary structures. However, this corrosion does not occur because Deletion is only interpreted when it is relevant; if this interpretation does not serve to produce a more relevant utterance it does not occur. As mentioned above, the principle of Relevance indicates that one chooses the most immediately relevant interpretation, and this principle curbs the unruly problem of recursive Deletion interpretation.

What this does indicate is that there is a sharp distinction to be drawn between syntactic ellipsis and non-syntactic Deletion. Some of the grammatical operations may not be well formed, as with some of the nominal examples given above, but they function on the basis of structural relations and are only unusual because of the malfunction of these structures. However, in some other cases it is not clear whether the deletion process is grammatical or non-grammatical.

3.6 Discussion

In all of these examples, words are omitted either by a syntactic operation of ellipsis, in which the gap should be indexed with a neighbouring constituent, or by Deletion, an extra-grammatical process. Many of the examples would not be generated by any grammar and appear to be examples of Deletion, as they differ in crucial ways from the other well-behaved examples of ellipsis seen

throughout. The question is whether these examples of Deletion are part of the Experimental style of the text.

Instinctively this seems right, as the Deletion seen in *How It Is* is certainly not a feature of normal language use. The text's Experimental style is described above in terms of the chunking of the text, where pieces of text are moved around without regard to orderly discourse or syntactic movements. The general characteristic that unified the examples of chunking seen above was a treatment of language that disregards structural relations and moves pieces of texts as units of meaning. These examples of Deletion seem to exhibit similar properties, as pieces of text are Deleted without regard to structural relations in a manner which resembles but does not replicate syntactic operations. The Deletion examples might not be regarded as a direct result of Beckett's chunking style specifically, but more as a product of a certain way of writing, where parts of language are moved around and deleted in a disorderly fashion.

Therefore it seems appropriate to generalise the definition of the Experimental style to encompass these kinds of non-syntactic Deletion: the Experimental style of the text treats units of language as autonomous units of meaning, without regard to some structural constraints. Meaning-related chunks are conjoined in spite of structural asymmetries (examples 56-65); parenthetical chunks are inserted in spite of the structural disruption (53, 79, 80-82, 85-87); gaps are coindexed by Relevance-led meaning relations in spite of structural requirements (94-101, 108-113). When these syntactic connections seem awkward or disjunct, pragmatic inference connects these meaningful chunks and constructs a coherent discourse.

It should be emphasised that this kind of Experimental writing is a radical departure from normal style. Structural dependency is one of the fundamental characteristics of language as a formal system (Chomsky 1971 [1957]), but it

seems that structural relations are ignored in favour of combining pieces of language according to meaningful relations in the style of *How It Is*. As a result, the procedures by which a great deal of the text is formed is not in fact ‘linguistic’, and the Experimental style moves away from the naturalism of representing actual linguistic forms to a system of non-linguistic combinatory procedures. We will return to this point in section 4.5.

3.7 Summary

It is interesting to note that while the examples above disregard clausal or VP-adjunct syntactic relations, they leave phrase-internal and predicator-object relations intact. The Experimental style of the text involves the displacement and Deletion of chunks of text without regard to many syntactic relations, but the units of text which are moved around are largely well-formed internally, and those that are less well-formed (such as some of the examples of NP ellipsis above) can usually be recovered by pragmatic means. It seems that the Experimentation of the text, despite the problems it may produce in some instances, does not cause significant problems for many kinds of linguistic structure. In most of the cases discussed above, pragmatic inference can still recover legible utterances from the deficient or disorderly structures.

However, it should be noted that *How It Is* is not Beckett’s most radically Experimental text, as he developed this ‘minimalist’ style further as his career progressed. In the following section I will examine *Worstward Ho*, Beckett’s last substantial text and one of his most radically Experimental works, to see if this Experimentation developed in any significant way and whether the texts show any other kinds of irregularities that might be of interest.

Chapter 4

Worstward Ho: description and analysis

4.1 Introduction

This section explores the linguistic deviations in *Worstward Ho*. Since the extent of the experimentation in *Worstward Ho* seems to be much higher, we find that there are more deviations and many different kinds of deviations not found in the other text. I discuss whether these deviations can be explained in a similar manner as with *How It Is*.

4.2 *Worstward Ho*

The works that followed *How It Is* continued with Beckett's radical program of reduction. In his dramatic works, this took the form of a move towards monologues, as with *Not I* and *Eh Joe*. This seemed to reach its logical conclusion in 1970 with *Breath*, a play which consisted of a single breath on a stage filled with

rubbish and a solitary listening figure. However, Beckett continued to write relatively substantial plays, which concentrated on geometrically precise bodily movements and despairing monologues. In his prose work, Beckett continued to experiment with punctuation and tended increasingly toward short forms, although he still produced a number of relatively substantial novellas like *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *Company* and *The Lost Ones*. Published in 1983, *Worstward Ho* marked the last major development in Beckett's prose style, where the fragmentation of language that had characterised his prose reached its peak.

Yet despite the years of stylistic development and experimentation that intervened, *Worstward Ho* nevertheless shares a great deal in common with *How It Is*. Visually the texts are very different, and this can be seen from the opening page of *Worstward Ho*:

(114) Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still. (7.3)¹

It was explained above that punctuation does not create grammatical relations but provides guidance for their interpretation. The style of punctuation in *Worstward Ho* is the converse of *How It Is*, over-prescribing sentence breaks where the punctuation of *How It Is* provided too little guidance. The results are similar in that orthography does not appear to dictate the interpretation of grammatical sentences as it does in conventional use; for example *For the body* and *to be in* will be interpreted as syntactically related by adjunction in the majority of readings, but the orthography indicates that they are separate (incomplete) units. The precise effects of over and under-punctuation may be markedly different, but they both destabilise the grammatical interpretation of the text in a similar manner.

The texts also share the Experimental chunking style described above, as

¹Hereafter referencing page number and paragraph number in Beckett (1999 [1983]).

it can be seen from the above example that *Worstward Ho* contains a great deal of disjunct and unconnected pieces of text placed together. While the interpretation of constituents is not fully constrained by the punctuation of text, it is clear that the tendency for abruptly demarcated units of text leads to a text composed of chunks of text rather than full sentences. However, it should be noted that the extent of the chunking-fragmentation in *Worstward Ho* is far greater than in *How It Is* or any of Beckett's works, and there are significant differences between the texts as a result. In the following section I will discuss a few of the tendencies for difficulty or ungrammaticality in *Worstward Ho*, and I will consider whether they may be related to this extensive stylistic Experimentation.

4.3 Ellipsis and Deletion

4.3.1 Evidence

The main cause of the difficulty in reading *Worstward Ho* is the extensive use of deletion. The examples from *How It Is* above show that ellipsis is a prominent feature of Beckett's writing. In most cases the deletion seems to follow normal syntactic procedures of ellipsis, although sometimes the indexing of the gap to another filled constituent is disrupted by other structural anomalies (3.5.2). However, in some of the examples (3.5.3) it seems that the process is not constrained by syntactic relations; instead, words are simply Deleted without regard to structural relations. As a result the text was sometimes rendered illegible, although in most cases pragmatic inference could resolve these problems to construct a meaningful interpretation.

In *Worstward Ho*, both kinds of ellipsis are used very heavily, often causing serious problems for interpretation. There are many cases of verbal ellipsis

where structural asymmetries make coindexing the elided gap difficult:

- (115) It stands. What? Yes. Say it stands. Had to__ up in the end and stand. (8.2)
- (116) Say yes that the bones may__ pain till no choice but stand. Somehow __ up and stand. (8.2-9.1)
- (117) A place. For the body. To be in.__ Move in. __ Out of. (7.3)
- (118) No knowing how know only no __out of. __ Into only. (7.3)
- (119) Where then but there see now another. Bit by bit __ an old man and child. (13.6)

In these examples, it seems that verbal ellipsis is the process by which the text is interpreted, but there are structural problems in reconstructing the VPs. In 117, there are subtle problems with the reconstruction of the elided VPs, particularly in the second gap.

These problems are exacerbated by the heavy punctuation of the text, as they indicate separate sentences whereas the constituents are all tied to the one structure. The punctuation and subsequent prosody suggest that *to be in* and *move in* are in apposition, but in fact *be in* and *move in* are in apposition (*to be in, to move in*), where the *out of* then adjoins to the *move in* clause, taking *move* as the index for its elided verb (*move out of*). Therefore the punctuation implies the interpretation *a place for the body to be in. Move in, move out of*, but this does not work since the *move* clauses appear to be imperative and the second one is ill-formed because of the stranded preposition². Since the imperative reconstruction is prevented (because of the presence of the preposition *of*), the other plausible reconstruction is *To be in, move into, out of* (where the *move* constituents are coindexed IPs); however, it can be seen that this explanation

²Note that in the non-imperative interpretation *to move out of*, the preposition is not stranded since it is part of the infinitival verbal construction.

does not account for the deletion of the *to* in *into*. Therefore it does not seem that there is a principled ellipsis explanation for the reconstruction of this text. This appears to be caused by a clash between the different chains of elided gaps; the gap in *... Out of* indexes to the IP *... Move in*, and this does not work since the IP is itself unfilled and coindexed to another constituent; cf **I will meet John, move into my new house and out of the old place*. A similar explanation can account for 118.

In 115 and 116, the preposition *up* occurs on its own in a VP position (contained within an IP in 115; coordinated to a VP and with an adjoined adverb in 116), indicating that there are elided verbs. However, in 115 there is difficulty in coindexing the gap for several reasons. First, the immediately available verb for coindexing, the 3rd person present-inflected *stands* in *Say it stands*, does not correspond to the infinitival position of the gap in *Had to up*. Second, *stand* seems unlikely since the gap is followed by coordinated VP *stand*; the reconstructed sentence *Had to stand up in the end and stand* suffers from many problems. Third, the other verb that precedes the gap, *Say*, could not coindex since it could not take the prepositional complement *up*. Therefore the ellipsis interpretation is riddled with problems because of asymmetries with the surrounding constituents. A similar explanation can account for 116.

4.3.2 Deletion of ill-formed ellipsis?

Despite the fact that these examples deviate from normal syntactic ellipsis, it is unclear whether they can be described as non-syntactic Deletion. Rather, it may be that these examples are simply ill-formed examples of ellipsis. Indeed it is worth noting that they can all be interpreted by appealing to the context. In 115, it is clear that a verb like *get* should fill the elided gap, even though there is no referent in the preceding sentences, and in 117 the relations between the

VPs are fairly easy to interpret, despite the unusual processes of reconstruction that are involved. Regardless, it should be clear that these examples indicate a disregard for the structural relations involved in verbal ellipsis, and that the kind of problems caused for interpretation are similar to those seen in some of the examples seen in *How It Is*. In examples like 117, it is clear that the chunking of the text into short orthographic sentences causes these problems, and it is arguable that these examples of ellipsis indicate that the Experimentation of Beckett's style causes problems for grammatical interpretation.

4.3.3 Deletion: evidence

This is more obvious in many other examples of heavy-handed ellipsis and Deletion throughout:

- (120) Dim white and hair so fair that in that dim light dim white. (15.3)
- (121) So sudden gone sudden back unchanged as one dark shade plod unreceding on. (15.3)
- (122) The void. How try say? How try fail? No try no fail. (17.3)
- (123) Where if not there it too? (18.4)
- (124) The same narrow void. Before the staring eyes. Where it too if not there too? (19.1)
- (125) Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. (19.3)
- (126) First back on to three. Not yet to try worsen. (22.2)
- (127) Clenched eyes clamped to it alone. Alone? No. Too. To it too. (22.2)
- (128) How better worse so-missay? (25.1)

(129) No words for what when words gone. (28.2)

(130) Just enough still to joy that only they. (29.2)

(131) What were skull to go? (46.2)

In these examples, it is apparent that some constituents are missing, but the evidence for this comes from inferencing and not syntactic structures. For example, in 120 there are no clear syntactic links between *in that dim light* and *dim white*. It is indicated by the surrounding structure that they are related, since they are preceded by the complementizer *that*, which takes a clausal complement, but there is no ellipsis process to explain the deletion of the missing constituent, which can be inferred as it is or some similar structure (*that in that dim light it is dim white*).

Similar interpretations are necessary to understand the other examples, and in many cases it is unclear what this deleted constituent should be. In 121, there must be a subject for the verb *plod*, which might be understood as pronominal *they*, but there is no antecedent for ellipsis reference. In 125, the *if* clause is missing a subject, which might be inferred as a pronoun like *you*, and there is no clear relation between *say* and *no knowing*, which might be inferred to be something like *there is* or some other basic relation that doesn't require a clear antecedent. In 126, the relation between the adverbial *Not yet* and the IP to try worsen is unclear; since they are in the same sentence one might presume the adverbial adjoins to the IP, but this does not work and it seems that there is a deleted main verb to which both of these constituents should be connected, although it is not clear what this could be.

In 127, the constituent *To it too* seems almost illegible, but this can actually be reconstituted by ellipsis relations. However, this interpretation requires that we infer the constituent is to be read as an online clarification of the kind found

in spoken language; an example like *Clenched eyes clamped to it alone. To it too.* would not licence the extensive ellipsis reconstruction required, since it needs to be clarified that *too* is intended to be a replacement for *alone* before it can be understood as a constituent connected by ellipsis. Therefore this example does not display Deletion as such, but ellipsis relations licensed by Relevance. It also shows that Beckett's use of ellipsis is not always motivated by economy in language use, but also by more superficial demands, as the elided form *To it too* is as much a play on words as a meaningful sentence; that is, the punning meaning of the repetition is just as prominent as the deeply buried ellipsis meaning. This is a minor point, but there are other examples of this kind of contrivance, as will be seen below.

In 122, all of the question clauses seem to be missing words, like a subject NP, infinitival *to*, or *do*-support for the question form. There are no antecedents for the reconstruction of any elided constituents, and it is unclear how the verb *try* (presumably a main verb, given its position) relates to the following verbs (presumably in infinitive form). Thus it is unclear who or what is being asked a question, and what is being asked. The utterance might be reconstituted by Relevance relations, piecing together the meanings 'try' and 'say' and inferring from the context that the speaker is asking 'how should one try to say something'. But this is clearly unstable and it is possible that many readers might find this example illegible.

123, 124, 128 and 131 all suffer from similar problems; the orthographic sentences have question marks, but the necessary constituents in English questions are missing, so it appears that these constituents have been Deleted for some reason. Crucially, this causes the texts to become almost completely illegible. For example, how could one paraphrase a meaningful utterance based on 131? There is no clear relation between the IP *to go* and either *skull* or the question

word *What*, and *skull* does not combine readily with the VP *What were*. It seems that the Deletion of so many constituents necessary for the question form causes this constituent to become entirely illegible.

The malformation of questions is in fact one example of two related trends in *Worstward Ho*: the evasion or Deletion of function words, and the malfunction of crude Movement. This first trend can be shown by the following example, which are missing functional *do*-support:

(132) Where it too if not there too? Ask not. (19.1)

(133) The head. Ask not if it can go. (19.2)

(134) Time to lose. Gain time to lose. As the soul once. The world once. (20.1)

(135) Go no nor come again. (40.1)

(136) So skull not go. What left of skull not go. (46.2)

There are also some related examples of unusual and contrived negation, where the related paraphrase would involve *do*-support, as with examples 125 and 126 above and the following:

(137) The no face bad. The no hands bad. (21.2)

(138) One can go not for good. (26.3)

One explanation of examples 132, 133, 135 and 136 may be that the negation is in an archaic non-standard form, and that the evasion of *do*-support is not through Deletion but simply a feature of a dialect. This may be true to some extent, as archaisms are found throughout Beckett's writing as a stylistic device (Pilling 1976: 49-50), but example 138 indicates that this dialect is not consistent throughout. In Early Modern English dialects of the kind mimicked

here, the negator *not* would go before the main verb *go*, not after it, as in many Shakespearean examples (Radford 1997: 223). Thus 138 would be *One can not go for good*, and the version above would not be generated by either the standard or non-standard version English. Rather, it appears that the placement of *not* in this example is an imitation of the non-standard dialect, and the fact that it is a non-generated example indicates (but does not guarantee) that the other examples of non-standard negation are not generated but rather are contrived in order to avoid functional *do*-support. This cannot be guaranteed since Beckett mixes dialects and registers throughout his work (Pilling 1976; Cohn 1962), but this theory does cohere with a lot of the other evidence relating to the Deletion of function words. *Do*-support is certainly conspicuous in its absence, as there are no examples of auxiliary *do* in the entire text, but there are 62 (orthographic) questions and many more instances of verbal negation³.

It can also be seen from the examples of ellipsis and Deletion already shown that auxiliary *be* and *have* are also used infrequently. There are no present tense forms of *have*, only two occurrences of past tense *had* (paragraphs 8.2, 39.2), and no tensed forms of auxiliary *be* in the entire text. There are few occurrences of main verb forms of *be*, and these forms are frequently elided when adjacency can allow the reader to infer the predicative relation (as in 120 above); as a result, there are no occurrences of functional operators like expletive *there* and *it*. However, there are many occurrences of *be* in the imperative tense, and it is used frequently throughout in a series of constructions that appear to mimic passivisation.

³The instances of verbal negation cannot be counted since the number of verbal constructions is uncertain due to the excessive Deletion and ellipsis throughout. As an indication, there are 61 occurrences of *not* alone, although some may or may not be involved in verbal negation.

4.4 Movement

4.4.1 Passives: evidence

This question malformation is an example of the second trend for malfunctional Movement processes, which occurs in many forms throughout the text. There are many examples of texts which seem to mimic passivisation:

(139) Say on. Be said on. (7.1)

(140) Say for be said. (7.2)

(141) See for be seen. (13.2)

(142) Bow it down. Be it bowed. (21.2)

(143) Be they so said. (27.2)

(144) Said for missaid. For be missaid. (37.1)

Most of these examples appear to be in passive imperative forms, as in *Be warned*. Passive imperative constructions are unusual constructions:

Because the agentive role is associated with subject function, passive imperatives are relatively infrequent. This reflects the fact that in declarative whose predicate assigns an agentive role to one of the arguments the argument concerned is aligned with the subject of the active, not the passive. Compare active *Kim attacked him* and passive *He was attacked by Kim*, where only the former has an agentive subject. Thus *Attack him* makes perfectly natural imperative, but *Be attacked by Kim* does not.

(Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 932)

The verb *Say* follows a similar pattern: *Kim says it* becomes *It was said by Kim*, and *Say it* becomes *Be said by Kim*. The crucial difference between this example and the *Attack* example is that patient role is recoverable in the

passive as the null pronominal subject with *Attack*, but not with *Say*; this is because the null pronominal subject in an imperative can only be 2nd person or first person (singular and plural), but the patient pronominal patient of verbs like *Say* (shifted into subject roles in passive) can only be third person; consider **I say he*, **I say we* ⁴.

The examples from *Worstward Ho* seem to have been transformed into the passive in this manner, and the problems of agency seem to explain why these utterances are difficult or not impossible to interpret. 139 seems to be an obvious example of passivisation, since the apparently passive *Be said on* is preceded by the matching untransformed imperative *Say on*. This example is further complicated by the inclusion of the adjunct *on*, which has an obvious structural connection to the imperative *Say* (although the meaning may be unclear) but not to the passivised version. 140 and 144 seem to involve a similar process with *Say* and *Missay*. 142 and 143 involve similar processes (*Bow* has the same patient restrictions as *Say*), but both include the null subjects after the imperative verbs. 141 seems to mimic the same process that is seen in 140, but it is not uninterpretable in the same way, since *See* does not encounter the same agency restrictions as *Say*; rather, *see* behaves like *Attack* in taking any kind of patient pronoun. This indicates that it is indeed passivisation that is attempted in these examples, but without respect to the syntactic restrictions placed upon the process.

4.4.2 Passives: discussion

There are two points to make about these examples. First, one of the most striking aspects of these failed transformations is their uninterpretability. Some of the examples of ellipsis or Deletion above could be reconstructed into mean-

⁴Note that *I say 'we'* would work, as *'we'* would not be functioning as a first person pronominal patient but as a nominalised third person patient equivalent to *'this word'*.

ingful utterances by referring to the residual structural information and what it might indicate about missing structures that would fill the utterance. In the examples of passives, this is not possible, since the recoverability of the passive construction is dependent on hierarchical structural relations, and violation of any structural restrictions results in the unrecoverability of the agency relations that allow the verbs to create predicative relations. Thus one cannot interpret who or what has *Said* or *Missaid* in the examples above, and what has been *Said* or *Missaid*. In these cases, the ungrammaticality leads to uninterpretability.

This effectively reduces the utterance to a sequence of words, rather than a sentence or grammatical constituent. Deriving meaning from the text involves inferring a connection between the semantic meanings of the individual words, and considering how these meaningful objects might be connected in a passive relation, producing often paradoxical results. Crucially, the impetus to connect these parts in a passive relation does not come from structural information, but from some sort of meta-structural information gained from knowledge of the familiar surface structure. That is, the reader recognises the passive form of *Be + past participle*, and infers that there may be passive relations to be extracted, but he/she does not process the utterance as an instance of syntactic passivisation.

Related to this, the second point is that these examples of failed passivisation could not be generated, and this indicates that the utterances above are not genuine imperative passives, but texts created based on the surface structure of similar utterances. In most use, passivisation is driven by a need to make agent-patient relations more explicit, but constructions like *Be said on* cannot be driven by this since these relations are missing. Rather, it seems that this passivisation is not a genuine Movement process, but an artificial combinatory process driven by non-syntactic requirements in direct contravention of

the structural requirement of Movement operations.

4.4.3 PP-movement

There were also examples of Movement in *How It Is*, where PPs had been shifted regardless of the problems these procedures caused (3.4). There are many examples of this kind of behaviour in *Worstward Ho*:

(145) Worse failed. With care never worse failed. (9.2)

(146) See in the dim void how at last it stands. (10.4)

(147) Backs turned both bowed with equal plod they go. (13.1)

(148) Slowly with never a pause plod on and never recede. (13.1)

(149) From it in it ooze. (33.3)

(150) To last unlesenable least how loath to leasten. (33.3)

(151) Of the two worse in want the skull preying since unsunk. (34.2)

(152) Into it still the hole. (46.2)

In examples 145-148, the Moved PPs are unambiguous since the sentences contain main verbs to which they can adjoin. In 145 it is ambiguous whether *failed* is an adjectival past participle or a past tense verb, since and there is no subject or object to indicate verbal relations, but there is no other local constituent to which it could adjoin. All of the sentences seem to have similar structures, where the adverbial elements are Moved forward and the verb is delayed until the end. Optional Movements of this kind are motivated by stylistic concerns, and here this does not present any problems for interpretation.

However, in examples 149-152 there are apparent Movement operations that do not seem to behave as well. Each example has a sentence-initial PP which seems to have been Moved from some other location in the structure. But since there are no clear main verbs in all of the texts, it is unclear where they may have come from as identifying the Movement involves locating the trace in the VP from which it has been Moved. As a result these examples are near-uninterpretable, since the lack of structural information for the PPs essentially reduces them to non-sentential particles. In 149 and 152 in particular the residual structures of the text does not contain enough information for inference to reconstruct any possible structural relation between the disjunct PPs and the other constituents. As with the passive examples above, these examples show that a breakdown in the predicative relations required for Movement⁵ can result in disorder so extensive that interpretation can become impossible.

4.4.4 Movement and experimental style

The artificial Movement process shares many similarities with the Deletion process described above: the combinatory procedure mimics actual linguistic Movement, as Deletion does ellipsis; they both lead to problems of illegibility that do not occur in grammatical usage, as even the most unusual grammatical occurrences can be recovered (as with *To it too* in 127, or *Be attacked by Kim* above); they both involve manipulation of language in contravention of fundamental structural restrictions. Movement and some kinds of ellipsis are stylistic choices in normal language use (Chomsky 1995: ch3), and the procedures by which these optional operations are performed are constrained by structural relations.

The artificial procedures of Movement and Deletion are also stylistic choices,

⁵Hereafter capitalised Movement is used to distinguish the syntactic procedure ‘Move α ’ (Chomsky 1995) from informal usage.

but they do not seem to be constrained by structural relations in the same way as with the natural language equivalents. The reasons for this difference between natural and artificial procedures will be discussed in chapter 5, but for the moment it is important to point out that these choices are stylistic in a fundamental sense; that is, the departure from canonical constituent order in the examples marks an optional change of some description that can be generally attributed to ‘style’. It follows that the artificiality of the procedures above, and the problems that they cause for interpretation, are the products of an Experimental style that tries to manipulate language in non-standard ways by moving pieces of language about as units of meaning, as argued in the section 3.6.

4.5 Discussion

What all the above examples have in common is that they involve the combination of morphemes and words without regard to structural restrictions; the morphemes are treated as meaningful objects to be combined regardless of these restrictions. The resulting expressions suffer similar complications to the examples of syntactic processes seen above: when the objects combined are highly functional parts of language with specific structural roles, the meaning of these parts can be lost in the unrestricted combination. In the examples where the meaning can be understood without too much difficulty, the reader appeals to a meta-structural knowledge in order to resolve how the meaningful parts should be related. In the examples of false passivisation above the reader inferred that the meaningful objects in the structure should be considered to have passive relations since the overall structure resembled an actual passive construction; essentially, the false passives are not processed by the grammar, but are handled by a meta-knowledge of grammar that infers the constituents should be related

in a manner like passivisation.

All of this shows that whereas Beckett's Experimentation only tended to affect the combination of well-formed constituents in *How It Is*, in *Worstward Ho* the Experimentation extends to within phrases. As a result, *Worstward Ho* is a far more challenging text for even the most prepared reader, containing more ungrammatical and uninterpretable sentences in a few pages than in the entirety of Beckett's mid-period prose.

In both texts the Experimental style causes problems for interpretation, and the evidence presented above shows that many of these problems are caused by Beckett's manipulation of syntax. However, it is interesting to note that these difficulties can be overcome in many cases, and sometimes even the most complicated text can be interpreted. It is also interesting that the difficulties in interpretation are far greater in *Worstward Ho* than in *How It Is*, and that there are significant differences in the kinds of Experimentation that might account for this sharp difference in interpretability. The following section will discuss these two issues in more depth, investigating whether there is a specific process by which ungrammatical utterances can be interpreted, and why they cannot be interpreted in some of the most extreme cases.

Chapter 5

Interpretation of ungrammatical utterances

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended as a more in-depth theoretical exploration of the issues raised in the previous chapters, aiming specifically to consider how the kinds of ungrammatical utterances described above are interpreted in the texts. One of the most striking features about experimental texts (exemplified by the two discussed above) is that they are almost always interpretable in some way, despite a great deal of ungrammaticality and disorder in the discourse. In pursuing this analysis, I will consider what kind of knowledge is used in the interpretation of these ungrammatical utterances, and why this may be the case.

5.2 Adverbs and disjunct constituents

5.2.1 Background

In the analysis above (section 3.4.3) it was stated that the examples sampled from *How It Is* in 71-79 were treated as disjunct constituents analogous to the parentheticals in 80-87. The utterances in which these disjuncts appeared were not examples of ungrammaticality as such, but simply of unordered discourse, where the position of the parentheticals caused minor problems for the interpretation of the host utterances. However there is much debate in the literature on the contribution of parentheticals to the interpretation of host utterances, as described by Blakemore (2006); in some versions, such as that proposed by Potts (2002, 2003), the parentheticals are integrated syntactically into the host sentences. This is an important issue for the study at hand, as cases like this are subject to great debate within linguistics: for some, parentheticals can be described as part of syntax, whereas for others they are explained by non-linguistic knowledge i.e. pragmatics.

Therefore cases like these are important in the present study, since they indicate how we should draw the boundary between linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. In Beckettian terms, these cases may be described as lying at “the edges of syntax” (Banfield 2003); although a formal account of parentheticals is by no means essential to the study of Beckett’s texts, the theoretical implications of the division of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge are significant. In the following, I will outline the different accounts of how parentheticals relate to their host sentences.

5.2.2 Approaches to parentheticals

In one approach (Haegeman 1988), parentheticals are “radical orphans” with no syntactic relation to the host utterance, and they modify the host only at a conceptual level of interpretation by pragmatic inference. One initial problem is that parentheticals may contain gaps (such as in *as you know...*) that are not c-commanded, since the parenthetical is syntactically independent; Haegeman answers this problem by proposing that the gaps in the parenthetical are interpreted by pragmatic inference in a similar manner to non-commanded pronouns (*John_i said that he_i was going out*). However, Potts (2002) provides evidence to prove that this pronominal explanation is not valid, and instead resolves the problem of the incomplete parentheticals by proposing that they are integrated into the syntactic structure by pragmatic inference; that is, once the grammar has failed to provide an adequate filler for the gap in the parenthetical, pragmatic inference “kicks in” to index the gap with the host.

5.2.3 Conventional implicatures

Potts explains that the grounds for this pragmatic inferencing of structural relations are in the conventional implicatures licensed by connectives like *as*. In the pragmatics literature, conventional implicatures are implicatures that follow from the conventional meaning of words (like *as*) that do not necessarily alter the truth conditions of the main proposition. Consider:

(153) He was poor but honest.

(154) He was poor and honest.

(Matthews 2005: 75)

These sentences do not have the same meaning, but they both have the same truth conditions; for either to be true, he needs to be both true and honest. The

difference in meaning lies in the conventional implicatures of *but*, which imply a relation of contradiction. Thus in 153, the implication is that his poorness may be expected to exclude honesty, but it is not so in this particular case. Since these implicatures seem to be licensed by the meaning of specific words, some linguists (Grice 1989; Levinson 2000) argue that they should be explained by semantics, and that the pragmatic inferencing that is involved in conventional implicature is licensed by the conceptual (i.e. semantic) information encoded by the expressions; essentially, the grammatical properties of the word license the pragmatic inference. Thus in accounting for parentheticals, Potts argues that the semantics of the connective expressions like *as* license the inferential indexing of gaps in the parenthetical expression. Essentially, the parenthetical is integrated into the syntactic structure of the host by the semantic properties of the connective.

However, Blakemore (2006) argues that this account is inadequate, since its explanation of gap-filling involves a syntactic reconstruction process that does not occur in analogous cases. She shows that with other elliptical expressions, such as elliptical answers to questions, the gaps are not filled by grammatical reconstruction:

(155) Q: Did anyone see Jo?

(156) A: Yes (*Anyone saw Jo)

(157) Q: Would you like a drink?

(158) A: No, but how about some lunch? (*How about I would like some lunch (instead of a drink))

(Blakemore 2006: 1677)

It seems that the grammatical reconstruction analysis does not need to be invoked to explain gap filling in parentheticals, as it is possible to see gap-filling

in parentheticals as the same phenomenon as elliptical answers, which we know to be pragmatic.

Potts argues that these pragmatic processes can still be accounted for in the integrated syntax model, where the pragmatic enrichment acts on compositional semantic features, which he sees as part of the grammar. This is influenced by Levinson (2000), where it is argued that some parts of pragmatics (such as conventional implicature) should be allowed to be covered by semantics as an alternative to relevance theoretic accounts of contextual effects. Levinson's case says that the relevance theoretic approach, in which truth conditions are assigned by context and not by semantics, one cannot capture traditional sense relations (like entailment, contradiction) in semantic terms. Blakemore states that this argument misses the point, as

in a relevance theoretic approach, truth conditions are assigned not at a level of linguistic representation, but at a level of conceptual representation which is derived inferentially from the input provided by the grammar in accordance with pragmatic constraints. This is the level where, according to Haegeman, parenthetical adverbial clauses are interpreted.

(Blakemore 2006: 1679)

To make this clearer, consider the following example:

(159) He is, as you know, a complete idiot.

In processing this utterance, the grammar produces the structure of the host *He is a complete idiot* and the parenthetical *as you know*; truth conditions are assigned to the conceptual representation of the host; then the conventional implicature licensed by the connective *as* acts as a pragmatic constraint on relevance (Blakemore 1987), guiding the interpretation of the conceptual relations between the host and parenthetical after the truth-conditions have been assigned.

Differing theoretical approaches

One source for this disagreement is the definition of conventional implicature. Blakemore (1987, 1992) and Wilson & Sperber (1993) argue for a semantically minimalist definition: their explanation rejects Grice's account of conventional implicature as a process licensed by conceptual semantic properties of connectives, and instead posits a procedural account of conventional implicature. In this model, the connective expressions do not encode the conventional implicatures, but they provide "semantic constraints on relevance" that tell the reader how they should understand the utterance. Blakemore (1992: 150) demonstrates this with the discourse connective *so*. In some examples, the Gricean account of the conventional implicatures is feasible:

(160) A: David isn't here.

(161) B: So Barbara's in town.

In this example *so* could encode the meaning of the conventional implicature, which can be summarised as 'explanation'.

However, in some examples the conventional implicature is licensed where the summary 'explanation' does not match:

(162) A: (as B walks into the room carrying many parcels) So you've spent all your money.

Here *so* does not explain anything since there is no previous utterance for it to explain, but there is a conventional implicature similar to that in 161 licensed by the connective. Blakemore explains that this is because this kind of use of *so* and similar expressions like *but*, *after all* and *moreover* "do not contribute to a propositional representation, but simply encode instructions for processing propositional representations" (Blakemore 1992: 150-1); that is, they indicate the direction in which relevance should be sought. This accounts for the many

subtle contextual differences that can be found in these examples, as well as the multiple distinct kinds of conventional implicatures that can be instantiated by single expressions (for examples with *and* see section 3.3).

Wilson & Sperber point out that the procedural account is preferable for a number of reasons, such as the fact that discourse connectives are

notoriously hard to pin down in conceptual terms. If ‘now’ or ‘well’ encodes a proposition, why can it not be brought to consciousness?... The procedural account suggests an answer... Conceptual representations can be brought to consciousness: procedures can not. We have direct access neither to grammatical computations nor to the inferential computations used in comprehension. A procedural analysis of discourse connectives would explain our lack of direct access to the information they encode.

(Wilson & Sperber 1993: 17)

What this indicates is that the inferencing process in conventional implicature is not licensed by conceptual (semantic) information, since it often resists paraphrase, as in 162. Wilson & Sperber point out that grammatical relations often resist paraphrase in a similar manner; it is arguable that this similarity may contribute to a conflation of grammatical and procedural pragmatic processes in the contested argument.

There are further theoretical points to back up the relevance theoretical account. For example, the extension of the grammar into a semantic-pragmatic region is not necessary to explain the properties of parentheticals shown; rather, it is part of an effort to retain a strong semantics which can account for truth conditions in the grammar, thus accounting for sense relations (contradiction etc). Indeed Blakemore argues that the difference between these approaches is rooted in two different views of the distinction between pragmatics and linguistic semantics:

there is a fundamental theoretical difference between a pragmatic

intrusion approach and the relevance theoretic one: Levinson's commitment to Grice's assumption that any content derived inferentially through conversational maxims constitutes an implicature leads him to posit a system of default inference rules attached to certain expressions and constructions which are involved in the recovery of what is said. These inference rules are distinct from, but parallel to, the inferences involved in the recovery of particularized conversational implicatures. In contrast, relevance theory is committed to a unitary theory of pragmatic inference, constrained by the same communicative principle, and there is no set of default rules.

(Blakemore 2006: 1679)

With all of the analysis of unusual constituents above, one of the implicit assumptions has been that the unified theory of Relevance is correct, and that instances of disjunction or ungrammaticality are interpreted as ungrammatical utterances (by various means) or as disjunct constituents in a discourse of separate pieces. The question of theory is much larger than this discussion, but as indicated above the empirical evidence seems to favour the relevance theoretic account.

As mentioned above, Levinson's departure from the relevance theoretic account is motivated by a desire to account for sense relations within the grammar, and Wilson & Sperber's contention is that this requires a set of exceptions for particular situations. In the tradition of Chomskyan generative grammar, this constitutes two related problems: the admission into the grammar of phenomena that can be explained by other means, and the creation of a non-unified theory for the explanation of a single characteristic (Chomsky 1995). This is not necessary, since Blakemore shows that these parentheticals do have a set of distinctive conceptual properties, and that the description of these properties does not require alteration of the grammar. Specifically, Blakemore's explanation is that parentheticals perform meta-linguistic commentaries on how the hearer should interpret the host utterance (as with *as you know*).

Generally, it seems that “in every case. . . we can say that the role of the parenthetical is to indicate how the host proposition achieves relevance” (Blakemore 2006: 1683). This indicates that the perceived effect of the parenthetical on the host proposition is not to alter its content or truth conditions, but to direct the inferential interpretations of the proposition. So with example 159, *as you know* indicates that the hearer should appeal to his own knowledge of the person under discussion in order to understand the proposition that ‘he is a complete idiot’; this does not alter the proposition in itself, but merely indicates how the hearer should go about understanding it. Blakemore (2007) demonstrates a number of other kinds of parentheticals that give similar contributions to relevance.

Advantages of the procedural account

The advantage of this procedural account is that it does not rely on a specific set of grammatical properties for these relations to come about. For example, it would seem that many parentheticals that are not introduced by connectives have a similar import into the host utterance:

(163) we follow I quote the natural order (7.7)

In this example from *How It Is*, the parenthetical *I quote* has a similar illocutionary force to something like *as I said*; that is, it indicates how one should go about interpreting the host utterance inferentially without affecting the proposition in itself.

In previous examples the conventional implicature is licensed by the presence of a connective, and this licensing is based on procedural rather than conceptual information in the connective. Similarly, in the example from *How It Is*, there is no linguistic expression for the introduction of the parenthetical and for the instantiation of conventional implicature, but it still contributes a meta-linguistic commentary to the host. Considering these parallel examples it could be argued

that the procedural information that instantiates a conventional implicature is not entirely contained by the connective itself, but rather by information delivered by the structural relations between the host and parenthetical. That is, the structural fact of inserting an incomplete parenthetical utterance within a complete host utterance indicates a conceptual hierarchy, where the host proposition is the main point of relevance in the utterance as a whole.

The effects of conventional implicature derived from this simple fact can be explained by Relevance: the parenthetical creates a disfluency in the host utterance, increasing the processing effort in interpreting the utterance, but the presumption of optimal relevance ensures that this disfluency is compensated by increased cognitive effects. Since the increased effort is situated in accommodating the parenthetical within the host, the presumption is that there is a relevance relation between these two propositions, and that the relevance should be sought in the direction of the dominant host utterance. A connective may narrow the way in which this relevance relation is sought, but its absence does not jeopardise the interpretation of the utterance.

‘Bare’ and ‘specific’ conventional implicatures

This indicates that there is a distinction between kinds of conventional implicature that are instantiated with specific words or phrases, such as *that is-* and *or-*parentheticals, and those that arise without these phrases, such as the ‘bare’ example *I quote* discussed above. In his account of conventional implicature Grice (1975) made a distinction between ‘generalized conventional implicature’ and ‘particularized conventional implicature’; here we are making a similar distinction but in a different (relevance theoretical) paradigm, so the term ‘bare conventional implicature’ is used for the bare examples and ‘specific conventional implicature’ for the examples with connective expressions. Both of these sets function due to the properties of bare conventional implicature, which are simply

procedural properties of parenthetical insertion that follow from the ‘structural fact’ of insertion of an incomplete unit within a host unit. But with specific conventional implicatures the additional phrases like *that is* contribute extra information to the interpretation, based on their individual semantic and procedural properties; they direct the constraints on relevance in a specific manner (as with ‘parentheticals of reformulation’; see Blakemore 2007). This accounts for the fact that many different phrases can make different contributions to conventional implicature, and that they can be separated by semantic properties, as argued by Potts, but not accounted for entirely by those semantic properties, as shown by Blakemore and Wilson & Sperber.

One question that may arise from this discussion is whether there is any need to cordon off ‘bare conventional implicature’ from general operations of Relevance. It is true that these two have a great deal in common: bare conventional implicature arises from acknowledging the context in which a piece of language appears and inferring relations between the context and inserted unit based on a presumption of Relevance; all other processes of inference involve a similar procedure, where context is assessed and Relevance sought.

However, the value of the distinction between these processes is that it captures operations of Relevance that are specific to language use: the property that licenses the direction of Relevance towards the host is the distinction between host and parenthetical, which is rooted in the grammatical distinction between complete and incomplete constituent. This absolute distinction does not have an equivalent in any other system of meaning (Chomsky 2005); for example in a sequence of photos or gestures, there would be no way of distinguishing a ‘parenthetical’ unit, since the meanings delivered by these means of communication do not have any inherent notion of subordination or incompleteness. Bare conventional implicature captures this kind of specifically linguistic

property.

5.2.4 Evidence from the texts

Capturing the relations between parentheticals and hosts in this general manner thus allows us to explain the use and misuse of parentheticals in the examined texts. Many of the examples of bare parentheticals from *How It Is* function much like some of the examples of *that is*-parentheticals or similar constructional forms:

- (164) I see me now on my side I clutch it the sack we're talking of the sack
with one hand behind my back (10.2)
- (165) not fear I quote of losing it something else not known (10.4)
- (166) we have I imagine our eyes open and gaze before us (29.3)

All of the parentheticals in these examples direct the interpretation of the host utterance. In 164, the parenthetical explicitly clarifies the referent of the pronoun *it* in the host; in 165 and 166, the parentheticals explain the context of the host utterances specifically. Although the parentheticals are inserted abruptly without any clear demarcation or introductory phrase, the fact that these constituents appear within larger sentences without explicit syntactic connection indicates that they should be understood as directing the interpretation of the hosts rather than as entirely separate constituents. For example, *I quote* is not understood as a separate statement of the speaker's action at some separate time and place, but rather it is understood as clarifying that the host is in fact a quotation.

The fact that this connection is inferential and brought about by structural factors primarily can be explained by referring to an analogous artificial example like *not fear I swim of losing it*: the utterance is odd, since the meaning of the

parenthetical does not match with the expectation of an elaborative Relevance that comes with the structural role. To interpret this kind of utterance, the reader would have to understand the odd parenthetical as a flout of one of the conversational maxims (Grice 1975), where the flout would be understood as a meaning itself; the jarring of the unconnected image might be understood as a ‘poetic effect’ (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Pilkington 2000).

There are similar examples in *How It Is*, although the dissociation of the parenthetical from the host is often understandable by inference:

- (167) on from there that moment and following not all a selection natural order vast tracts of time (7.7)
- (168) take the sack in my arms strain it so light to me (36.2)
- (169) an apalca llama the history I knew my God the natural (14.1)
- (170) my words mine alone one or two soundless brief movements all the lower no sound when I can that’s the difference great confusion (21.2)

The referent of the pronoun *all* in the parenthetical in 167 is unclear, and as result the meaning of the parenthetical and its contribution to the host sentence is unclear; nevertheless it seems to function as a correction or elaboration of something which is at issue in the host utterance, despite the fact that the referent is unclear. In 168 and 170 the parentheticals seem to provide further information about the objects at issue in the host utterances, even though the referents are unclear. However, if the reader does not detect these inferential connections between the hosts and parentheticals, it does not mean that the utterances are uninterpretable or ungrammatical; rather, the reader understands it as a flout of conversational maxims, where the discourse is deliberately¹ unorderly. The contained utterance is understood as an ‘interruption’ rather than

¹The importance of this understanding of deliberateness is explained above in section 2.5.3; see also Sperber & Wilson 1995: 49-64.

a parenthetical, and the disruption of the presumption of Relevance is offset by some other cognitive effects relating to this kind of stylistic choice: for example, reinforcement of the latent theme of indeterminacy. Note that the presumption of Relevance would not put this indeterminacy reading forward ahead of the parenthetical reading in this case, since it seems that the text is disorderly but not entirely chaotic.

5.2.5 Conventional implicatures and the interpretation of ungrammatical utterances

What all these examples show is that bare conventional implicature can hold even when the communication of the host or utterance is not clear, and that the strangeness of certain uses of parentheticals can be explained as a product of specific expectations of Relevance and not of ungrammaticality. Conventional implicature is an example of a pragmatic property that resembles a grammatical property, since it involves constraints on usage based on structural information, but it is notable that any breaks from these constraints are understood as flouts and are normalised under a general presumption of Relevance.

This is because propositions are inherently productive²; any proposition p yields the proposition ‘ p is a proposition’, so any apparently deviant proposition can be apprehended as ‘ p is a deviant proposition’, which is in itself a stable proposition and easy to understand. By contrast, breaks from grammatical structural relations are not recoverable by general principles: in **John thinks that she thinks himself to be clever*, there is a violation of the c-command relationship between *she* and the reflexive pronoun *himself*, and this is not amenable to inferential recovery since the reader does not meaningfully apprehend the

²Note that the productive power of propositions is not uncontrolled, as the principle of Relevance provides controls the recursive nature of propositions. Sperber & Wilson (1995: 42) explains this matter with respect to “mutual manifestness.”

c-command relation when interpreting it. When syntactic structures fail (or ‘crash’ in modern terminology), there is no reflexive operation to make sense of them; since they cannot be interpreted as clear propositions, they cannot be framed like ‘ p is a proposition’ and recovered.

This is a significant difference between grammatical and pragmatic relations, and its explanation gets to the heart of the distinction between grammar and pragmatics generally. While both kinds of relations seem to involve the interaction of structures and structural properties, there are major differences between how they access structure. With grammatical relations, structural properties are below the level of consciousness and are not clear upon introspection; as a result they cannot be paraphrased or reduced to simple propositions or meanings. In contrast, pragmatic use of structure involves something very similar to paraphrase of structure. Once the reader has parsed the sentence, he/she arrives at a set of structures that are apprehended as a sequence³, and the iconicity of the given sequence - in the case of parentheticals, the interruption of one expression by another - is interpreted as a structural relation. This sequential-structural information then forms the basis for pragmatic relations, as in parentheticals, where the recognition of the containment of the parenthetical is required for the licensing of the conventional implicatures (as explained above).

There are two important points to make about this process. First, the sequential-structural information is not grammatical information: it is derived from a conceptual interpretation of the surface structures of the parsed sentences, and does not involve interpreting grammatical relations between the parenthetical and host. This process essentially involves apprehending parsed sentences as linear objects, and thus converting their sequential appearance

³It should be emphasised that this is not how sentences are parsed in grammatical interpretation; rather, sentences are parsed as objects with hierarchical structure, in which linear order is only a surface feature of the structures produced by the hierarchical arrangement of phrases (Chomsky 1971 [1957]).

into meaningful relations. Second, it is a pragmatic process that is specific to language, since the relationships of sequential structure can only be arrived at once the grammatical structures have been established in parsing. Relevance and other systems of maxims account for communication generally, and this can be non-verbal as well as verbal, but in this example of conventional implicature the pragmatic relations rely on structural properties specific to grammar.

It should be emphasised that this does not mean conventional implicatures are generated by the grammar; rather, they occur as a result of non-generated pragmatic interpretation of generated structure. This is explained by the inherent ‘doubleness’ of language, which is captured in the traditional generative distinction between deep structure and surface structure: grammatical processes act within the hierarchical deep structure, while pragmatic processes apprehend language as linear surface ‘strings’, or representations of structure. The kinds of flexibility in interpretation that can be found with these pragmatic examples (as with flouts) can be explained by general properties of meaning relations, specifically Relevance.

By explaining ‘structural’ pragmatic operations as iconic representations of structure, we solidify the claim that pragmatics involves the relations of meanings in context and reiterate that pragmatic and linguistic knowledge are distinct. The examples of bare conventional implicature seem to be at “the edges of syntax” but are in fact instances of pragmatic inference between representations⁴ of syntactic structure. In the following section I will reconsider another case which is at the “edges of syntax”, coordination, in light of this discussion. I will consider what role conventional implicature plays in the interpretation of the texts, and whether the texts can be understood as entirely ungrammatical.

⁴Note that the use of the term ‘representation’ from here down is not used in the technical-linguistic sense, as described in Chomsky (1980) and Uriangereka (2002), but in the philosophical sense as defined by Goodman (1976). The concept of a ‘representation of language’ may be understood as a ‘picture’ or some other depiction of the objects of language.

5.3 Conjunction

5.3.1 Background

In section 3.3 we saw examples of conjunction from *How It Is* that were unacceptable and this was explained by Huddleston & Pullum’s condition of “syntactic likeness” (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1290) for coordination. However it has been shown (Sag et al 1985; Cormack & Smith 2005) that syntactically unlike pairings can be generated by the grammar:

(171) John is [in a temper]_{PP} and [surrounded by fools]_{VP}.

(172) John is [hungry]_{AP} and [in a temper]_{PP}.

(Cormack & Smith 2005: 401)

Cormack & Smith explain this by appealing to the “rule of thumb” for coordination structures: “each conjunct or disjunct behaves as if it were the host”, and problems with this are caused by clashes of categorial selection (c-selection). The main verb *to be* can take many different categories as complements, so a variety of different coordinates can be added without any problem. Some of the examples from section 3.3 can be reanalysed according to this:

(173) you laugh feel yourself falling and on with a squeak (26.3)

(174) is it nourishing and vistas last a moment with that (28.2)

(175) I part the mouth of the sack and questions (33.5)

In these examples, the ungrammaticality of the utterances arises from problems with c-selection: in 173, *feel* does not take the complement *on with a squeak*; in 174, there is a selectional clash between the singular inflection of *to be* and the plural *vistas*; and in 175 *part* does not take the NP *questions*. However, in many of the other examples this explanation does not hold. Consider

the following examples 7, 8, 10 and 11 from *How It Is*, which are renumbered for reference:

- (176) no more objects no more food and I live the air sustains me the mud I live on (17.7)
- (177) a fancy I am given a fancy the panting stops and a breathclock breath of life head in the bag (19.7)
- (178) the panting stops and scraps of an enormous tale (27.1)
- (179) only one remedy then pull it in and suck it swallow the mud or spit it out it's one or the other and question (28.2)

In these examples, there are no specific problems with c-selection: in 176, there is no controlling verb for the coordination; in 177 there is no constituent to which *a breathclock* is coordinated, and there is a similar problem in 178; in the first coordination in 179, there is no problem for *to be* to take the NP complement question, but the problem is with extraction from the idiomatic phrase; if the idiom is read as a parenthetical, it is unclear what the NP should coordinate to.

5.3.2 Approaches to conjunction: conventional implicatures

What, then, is the explanation for the unacceptability of these examples of coordination? Since the examples all seem to involve clashes in the coordination of NPs with clauses, it might be argued that nominal and clausal coordination involve the use of coordinators with different properties, but this seems unlikely since there is no such requirement for the coordination of APs or PPs, as seen above. Alternatively, it could be argued that the problem is not with grammatical structure, but with the conventional implicatures borne by the conjunctions.

The conventional implicatures of *and*-conjunctions are well acknowledged in the literature and in everyday use:

- (180) He ran up to the open window and jumped.
- (181) She kicked the TV and the screen went blank.
- (182) She drank a cup of tea and watched the blank screen.

In these examples, *and* licenses different kinds of conventional implicatures. In 180, the conventional implicature is of temporal order, where his running up to the window is followed by his jumping; these are often referred to as ‘narrative’ conventional implicatures. In 181, the conventional implicature is much like that of the temporal examples, but carries the implicature of causality; that is, it is assumed that the TV goes blank because she kicks it. In 182 there is a conventional implicature of simultaneity, where she drank a cup of tea while watching the blank screen.

As with the examples of parentheticals above, Blakemore (1987) argues that these implicatures are procedurally rather than conceptually derived, and this is supported throughout the literature (Carston 1993, 2002; Blakemore & Carston 1999). In concurrence with the analysis of parentheticals given above, Cormack & Smith (2005) argue that the conventional implicature interpretations of the coordinations are

based on *iconicity*, with temporal events paralleling the temporal order of the relevant phrases, and the cause-effect ordering relying on the temporal non-commutativity of cause and effect.

(Cormack & Smith 2005: 401, their emphasis)

It may then be argued that these examples of coordination can be accounted for under the generalised form of ‘bare conventional implicature’ discussed above; that is, the structural fact of one utterance following another

carries a general implication of causal or temporal order or argumentation. The presence of specific conjunctions facilitate specific readings; for example, *and* produces fairly standard implication of order, whereas *but* implies negation or contradiction. Blakemore (1992) and Carston (1999) provide detailed analyses of these phenomena and their different effects on the direction of Relevance. It is also arguable that there are similar cases of bare conjunction to match the examples of bare parentheticals seen above, as with asyndetic coordination of phrases and clauses. As with all examples of conventional implicatures, the coordination conventional implicatures can also be flouted for effect, as with *I might be fat, but I'm also slow*.

5.3.3 A syntactic or pragmatic explanation?

The question, then, is whether the conventional implicatures explain the unacceptability of the examples from *How It Is*. In all of the examples, the initial explanation (guided by Huddleston & Pullum) was that the unacceptability arose from the lack of syntactic ‘likeness’ between the coordinated utterances, but it has been argued that these conditions are not syntactic given some counterexamples. If we reconsider the problem as potentially one involving the conventional implicatures, the conditions of likeness would not hold between syntactic structures, but propositions. That is, there must be a ‘likeness’ of propositional content at a basic structural level; declarative propositions must be coordinated with declarative propositions etc:

(183) I need that book and you need to help me find it.

(184) No more runways and no more airport expansions.

(185) What is the time and when do I need to leave?

(186) *I need that book and where is it?

(187) *No more runways and we hate airport expansions.

(188) *No more runways and when will you listen to us?

Note that the conjoined utterances in the unacceptable examples are relevant to the previous conjuncts; this indicates that the problems are caused by structural relations rather than meaning. This account also explains the unacceptability of the other examples from *How It Is*, repeated above as 176-179. In 176, the first conjunct *no more food* has the illocutionary force of an imperative command, whereas *I live* is a declarative proposition; in the other examples, the mismatch is between declarative propositions and non-propositions (NPs).

However, all of the individual conjuncts are interpretable as propositions or phrases, and the overall utterances are not uninterpretable. The unacceptability of the utterances are derived from the inability to construct conventional implicatures to connect the conjoined utterances, as there are no inferred conceptual relations between the conjuncts, as seen in examples 180-182. This might be explained in Relevance terms: two utterances are combined by a conjunction to produce a longer utterance, which takes more effort to process; but there are no extra cognitive effects to compensate (since the conventional implicatures fail), so the utterances violate Relevance principles and are interpreted as unacceptable communication⁵.

As stated above, the ‘iconic’ information of one conjunct following the other forms the basis for the conventional implicatures, indicating combination, elaboration, and a specific linear order of precedence from left to right; hence the non-conventional interpretation of *He jumped and ran up to the open window* in contrast with 180 above. This ‘linear order’ processing of sentences is analogous to the processing of ‘insertion’ in the examples of parentheticals: both

⁵It should be noted that in many cases where pragmatic operations are explained in terms of Relevance, a similar Gricean account could be given, in which specific maxims are described as contributing to cognition. Relevance subsumes the maxims under a general principle, but Grice’s maxims are useful for understanding the specifics of inferential relations.

involve surface structure interpretations of language for the formation of basic conventional implicature relations. It shows that, in establishing conventional relations between parts of language, pragmatics does not have access to actual grammatical structure, but only partial representations of grammatical structure.

Ultimately, what this discussion indicates is that there are pragmatic constraints on linguistic communication, and that these constraints arise due to complexities in the decoding process that are specific to language. Communication involves decoding stimulus, and inferencing from the decoded information, based on context and constrained by the presumption of Relevance. Thus when Peter sees Mary pointing to the other side of the room, he first decodes the visual stimulus to discern a pointing hand, and then based on his knowledge of pointing and the presumption that Mary's pointing is an act of ostensive communication, he infers the communicated utterance 'look over there'.

However, in language use there is an additional complication in the decoding of the stimulus: when Peter hears the sentence *He ran up to the window and jumped*, he decodes the sentence first as a grammatical object, with hierarchical relations between subject, verbs and adjuncts, and second as an utterance in space and time, where there is a linear order from left to right and one part placed after another. It is arguable whether the second process can be described as 'decoding', since it is a pragmatic process and constrained by Relevance like any other inferential relations that follow; nevertheless, it is clear that this process is specific to the 'doubleness' of linguistic form, and that it can be considered as an automatic process which takes place following all grammatical decoding processes.

5.4 False passives

5.4.1 Background

In this section, we examine examples of unrecoverable ungrammaticality - that is, constituents that cannot be understood as grammatical sentences - and consider how they are interpreted in the texts. To begin with, we can examine one of the most prominent examples of ungrammaticality in *Worstward Ho*, the ‘false passives’ identified in section 4.4.1, which are repeated below for reference:

(189) Say on. Be said on. (7.1)

(190) Say for be said. (7.2)

(191) See for be seen. (13.2)

(192) Bow it down. Be it bowed. (21.2)

(193) Be they so said. (27.2)

(194) Said for missaid. For be missaid. (37.1)

It was argued above that these examples seem to mimic imperative passives like *Be warned*, and that in the non-linguistic imitation of Movement operations the sentences became completely uninterpretable in examples 189, 190, 192, 193 and 194. The problems are caused by the conflation of agency relations; the sentences ‘crash’ because the agency relations are not recoverable, and recoverability is the primary requirement for Movement. Thus in 189, it is not clear who or what is ‘said’, and who or what does the ‘saying’. This is a fundamental loss of meaning for an utterance, and such problems predication should make the utterance entirely uninterpretable.

However, there are a few features of these utterances that seem to contradict this assessment. The most obvious feature is that these utterances can be understood as ‘passives’ in some way. The defining feature of passive Movement is the reversal of the canonical positions of subject and object, and these examples lack both components; rather, the only grounds for the passive ‘flavour’ is the arrangement *to be* + past participle. As mentioned in section 4.4.2, the ‘false passives’ are not interpreted as passives, and do not pass through the grammar when they are interpreted, so this seems to indicate that the interpretation of passive is at some non-linguistic level. It should be clear that the relation is not encoded conceptually by the sequence *to be* + past participle, since the grouping ‘past participle’ is categorial and founded on formal rather than conceptual properties.

5.4.2 Understanding false passives: more conventional implicatures

A more likely explanation is that the relations are derived from conventional implicatures carried by the procedural properties of *to be* + past participle. Blakemore points out that conventional implicatures ‘may be associated with certain grammatical constructions’ (Blakemore 1987: 74), as demonstrated with the example of cleft constructions:

(195) It was Ben who ate the apple.

(196) It was the apple Ben ate.

(197) Someone ate the apple.

(198) Ben ate something.

The cleft construction in 195 takes the proposition in 197 for granted (*it was Ben who ate what?*), whereas in 196 it is the proposition in 198 that is taken or granted (*it was what that Ben ate?*). However, both of these propositions are non-at-issue, since they do not contribute to truth conditions, as utterances 195 and 196 are only true if and only if Ben ate the apple; thus 197 and 198 are conventional implicatures of 195 and 196 respectively, and the difference between the different implicatures is produced by the different uses of the cleft construction. A similar pattern can be seen with passive constructions:

(199) Ben ate the apple.

(200) The apple was eaten by Ben.

(201) Ben ate something.

(202) The apple was eaten by someone.

199 corresponds to the proposition in 201, and 200 to the proposition in 202, and both implicatures are non-at-issue since 201 and 200 are true if and only if Ben eats the apple. As with the clefts, the difference between the conventional implicatures is licensed by the constructional differences between 199 and 200.

It is well established that the conceptual properties of Movements are not encoded by the grammatical constructions (Chomsky 1971 [1957]: 42-43; Newmeyer 1986: 27)⁶, so the conceptual notion of ‘passivity’ must be a pragmatic aspect of the utterance interpretation. It is arguable that this notion, which is often associated with a loss of agency, is communicated by conventional implicatures that come from the grammatical constructions of passives, and may be associated with a generalised form of the proposition in 199. This explains the fact that these conventional implicatures can arise even in ungrammatical ‘false

⁶Note that in the referenced texts the older terminology of ‘transformations’ is used in place of Movement.

passives' as well as normal passives, since the conventional implicatures are produced on the basis of representations of linguistic structure rather than linguistic structure. Even if the construction is insufficient to produce meaning as a grammatical utterance, it still presents a representation of the surface structure of a passive (*to be* + past participle), which provides the basis for the conventional implicature of 'passivity' propositions.

5.4.3 Conventional implicatures and grammatical constructions

It should be noted that these conventional implicatures do not amount to full meaningful interpretations of the false passives seen in *Worstward Ho*. The sentences are not processed by the grammar and do not communicate full utterances as a result; yet the surface structure of the sentences communicate partial conventional implicatures that explain the general interpretation of the utterances as 'passive'. These conventional implicatures cannot themselves be paraphrased definitively, since they are 'filled' relative to the base utterance as non-at-issue explanations, conclusions etc. For example, the conventional implicature *The apple was eaten by someone* arises from the general form [*Something specific*] was X'd by [*some general person or object*], where the underlined verb cluster is equivalent to the general form *to be* + past participle; with the base utterance *The apple was eaten by Ben*, the [*something specific*] is filled by *the apple* and *X* is filled by *to eat*.

Nevertheless, the conventional implicatures are not produced by the base utterance itself, but by procedural properties of the interpretation of surface structure facts of representations of language; thus in the case of the ungrammatical examples above, the conventional implicatures can arise, but they are in effect 'hollow', without definitive base utterances to fill them. Any interpreta-

tion of the utterances must involve inferential construction of a base utterance (based on the conceptual information provided by the residual structure of the ungrammatical utterance), followed by the production of equally fuzzy conventional implicatures. This explains the fact that many varied interpretations can be provided for the false passives⁷, but that they all must acknowledge ‘passivity’ as important to the interpretation.

The example of false passives shows that even the most ungrammatical sentences can be read in some way, and that language-specific pragmatic processes like conventional implicature do not require wholly legible linguistic structures to function in a text. The interpretations that are produced by these pragmatic means are very different from those produced by syntactic decoding, delivering conceptual content rather than utterances which may yield full propositions. The reading process with these ungrammatical utterances requires a high level of attention from the reader, as the filling of ‘hollow’ propositions described above involves inferencing from residual fragments of language rather than sentences and this effortful process can only proceed if there is an expectation of cognitive rewards for the reader.

As stated above, the important claim in this account of false passives is that these ungrammatical sentences can be read in some way, and that language-specific pragmatic processes like conventional implicature do not require wholly legible linguistic structures to function in a text. In the following section I will consider whether this account can explain the interpretation procedures that take place with other kinds of ungrammatical sentences, to see whether we

⁷For example with *Be said on* there are multiple available interpretations: one interpretation may take *on* in the sense in which it is used throughout, as an adverbial meaning ‘continually’, and thus produce the interpretation ‘It should be said continually.’ By contrast, in Colin Greenlaw’s ‘elaborations’ (Internet 2) of the text - where he fills out the experimental forms to produce fully grammatical sentences that try to capture the meaning of the text - this sentence is rendered as ‘Let ‘on’ be said.’ This interpretation appears in brackets in Greenlaw’s version, indicating the uncertainty about such an interpretation. Note that it involves interpreting *on* not as an adverb or as a preposition, but rather as a representation of the word, where it is understood as a nominal (interchangeable with ‘something’).

could formalise the general property of language that allow non-linguistic interpretation after linguistic form has failed to produce an interpretation. Such a formalism is of great value to the project at hand, as it indicates that any linguistic constraints on the production of legible utterances can be overcome by other non-linguistic means, and that any limitations imposed on experimentation by the medium of language can be overcome through meaning relations.

5.5 Movement

5.5.1 Background

One set of relevant examples for this discussion is the group of ‘artificial movement’ examples seen in section 4.4.3, repeated and renumbered here:

(203) From it in it ooze. (33.3)

(204) To last unlessenable least how loath to leasten. (33.3)

(205) Of the two worse in want the skull preying since unsunk. (34.2)

(206) Into it still the hole. (46.2)

As argued above, these sentences seem to contain Moved preposition phrases but they do not work since there are no clear verbs to which they can be adjoined. As with the examples of false passives, the structure of the sentences cannot be recovered syntactically, so the movement reading fails. However, these examples are also like the false passives because they can be recognised as ‘Movement’ examples; that is, although they are not examples of Movement, they resemble them because they both have sentence-initial PPs, and might be interpreted like Movement sentences even though the syntactic structure is deficient.

The question is whether they are interpreted by similar pragmatic means as the false passives. There are clear differences between the passives and these

Movement examples: whereas the passive movements communicated a conceptual notion of ‘passivity’, PP-movement does not have an equivalent conceptual paraphrase, and would not seem to contribute to the conceptual representation of either grammatical or ungrammatical utterances. Nevertheless it should be remembered that conventional implicatures do not necessarily have conceptual paraphrase, since primarily they present procedural constraints on how relevance is sought in subsequent conceptual inference; whether the constraint on relevance has a paraphrasable conceptual import depends on the individual construction. The procedural constraint on relevance provided by the false passives is towards ‘passivised’ interpretations, which may be characterised as ‘without agency’ etc. The question is whether the Movement examples also provide procedural constraints on relevance, regardless of whether this constraint can be characterised by a particular concept.

5.5.2 Conventional implicatures and more grammatical constructions

With the previous examples, the conventional implicatures were instantiated by structural facts of the sentences: for the parentheticals, this was the insertion of an incomplete structure within a complete structure; with conjunction, the appendage of one structure onto another structure; with passives, the presence of a canonical verbal form *to be* + past participle. These constructions produced non-at-issue implicatures and were licensed by the structures at hand. As shown by the following examples, a similar pattern can be seen with sentence-initial PPs:

(207) The blood oozed from the wound.

(208) From the wound the blood oozed.

- (209) The second attempt was the worst of the two times.
- (210) Of the two times the second attempt was the worst.
- (211) The blood oozed from something.
- (212) From the wound something oozed.
- (213) The second attempt was the worst of some set of possibilities.
- (214) Of the two times a specific thing was the worst.

207 conveys the implicit assumption in 211, while 208 implies 212; 209 implies 213 as 210 implies 214. As with the passive examples, the difference is the change in focus brought about by the grammatical structure; the truth conditions for all of 206-210 remain unchanged, but the non-at-issue implicatures are altered by the change in focus. What this indicates is that PP-movement, and any other optional movement which alter the surface structure of the utterance, will alter the non-at-issue propositions borne by the host utterance.

It should be noted that in both the passives and the PP-movements seen above, the moved grammatical structures affect the not-at-issue propositions in the same way: they shift focus from the subjects to the objects or adjuncts, where the taken-for-granted element in the non-at-issue proposition becomes the leftmost constituent. That the non-at-issue propositions should be affected by linear position in the utterance may be obvious, as it is clear to any user that the primary effect of movement is to emphasise the moved constituent. But it should be emphasised that there is nothing syntactic to this emphasis: there is no alteration of hierarchy within the grammatical structure, since the structure of moved sentences are recoverable by nature; the location of the adjunct or object does not create any meaningful differences in the syntactic relations. It seems

that any given sentence carries a set of non-at-issue propositions, or conventional implicatures, and the form of these propositions is underdetermined by the linear order of the parts of the sentence. Any alteration to the order leads to an alteration of the conventional implicatures.

As with the examples of parentheticals and conjunction, these examples of Movement can be explained in terms of relevance. In English, sentences have a basic unmarked Subject, Verb, X-element order (where the X-element can be an object, adjunct or any other adverbial modification). This terminology in itself demonstrates a ‘bias’ of sorts towards the subject, where the subject is an established part of the sentence whereas the X-element is interchangeable or optional. This is reflected in the kind of focus phenomena shown in the non-at-issue propositions for the unmarked examples in 207, 209, 211, 213; with [*The blood*]_s [*oozed*]_v [*from the wound*]_x, the non-at-issue implicature is *The blood oozed [in some manner]*, where the optionality of the X-element is reflected in the unemphasised X-element in the implicature. When the X-element is moved to the front, however, the new word order is marked, and the moved element becomes the object of emphasis in the not-at-issue implicatures, as seen in examples 208, 210, 212 and 214.

It is arguable whether these implicatures can be explained in terms of extra processing cost⁸, but what these examples do show is that the conventional implicatures of grammatical structures are apprehended relative to the linear surface structure representations of the sentences, rather than the grammatical structures themselves. This indicates that, in the relevance interpretation of the utterance, the production of implicatures operates in a left-to-right manner in

⁸The ‘processing costs’ that Sperber & Wilson (1995) refer to are cognitive and conceptual, involving inferential processes rather than grammatical ones, so any argument that the Moved sentence structure involves more processing cost because of extra work in the decoding process would be fallacious. Nevertheless, it might be argued that in the interpretation of a non-canonical sentence, where conceptual items are found in a less common order, is more cost-intensive simply because it involves combining conceptual items in a non-linear order.

the absence of cues to indicate otherwise; this form of interpretation is settled by the unmarked SVX order, and relevance processes act on this pre-existing pattern.

5.5.3 Conventional implicatures and reconstruction

It should be clear from the examples discussed that the conventional implicatures that come with simple grammatical structures like these do not necessarily add a great deal to the interpretation of the utterance. Whereas the conventional implicatures carried by conjunctions are often rich and important to the understanding of the utterance, the implicatures discussed above seem to do little other than state premises for the inferential interpretation of the text: for example, the implicature *The blood oozed from something* does not seem to add much to that which is already encoded in *The blood oozed from the wound*. Nevertheless, these implicatures are still vital to the interpretation of the utterance, as they provide a ‘blueprint’ for the relevance interpretation of the decoded utterance, implying the direction in which relevance should be sought and establishing canonical emphasis.

It is important that features like emphasis should be created inferentially, based on knowledge of canonical structures of surface structures, rather than linguistically in specific components of language, as were they to be encoded in linguistic form then separate linguistic forms would be required for all utterances. For example, if one wanted to emphasize *the Queen* in the utterance *He swore at the Queen*, it would require a new linguistic structure where the emphasis-carrying component (say, the subject) was *the Queen: the Queen was sworn at by him*, whereas in normal use tonic emphasis, as in *He swore at the Queen!*, would suffice to overcome the conventional emphasis. However it would not be appropriate to presume that emphasis was completely free to in-

ference, since this would not provide any explanation for the fact that emphasis in utterances (such as those examined above) typically falls on the initial component. Therefore it seems appropriate that emphasis and such relations should be derived initially by conventional implicatures, since this explains the fact that they exhibit specific formal tendencies but are amenable to change with other communicative cues.

For this study, the most important feature of the conventional implicatures is that they do not need fully grammatical structures to function, and that the ‘blueprints’ provided by the implicatures provide a means of deriving the structure in the absence of a full grammatical structure. Because they are derived from surface structure representations rather than grammatical structures, conventional implicatures function wherever there is a legible resemblance of the relevant surface structure; for example, in *From it in it ooze* the conventional implicature carried by the non-canonical location of the PP indicates that the PP is in fact moved from a canonical post-verbal location, thus implying that there should be a recoverable sentence within the residual structure which would take the PP as an adjunct. The blueprint for relevance serves to direct the inferential reconstruction of the Deleted constituent, thus allowing interpretation of the utterance in spite of many structural deficiencies⁹.

5.6 Deletion

5.6.1 Background

While conventional implicatures are important to the reconstruction of the above examples, it is less clear whether they contribute to many other examples seen in the texts. A set of relevant data is the group of Deletion examples

⁹NB this partial legibility condition reinforces the language-specific nature of these implicatures: there is no analogous set of conditions for other kinds of communication.

from *Worstward Ho*. As with the false passives and Movement examples, the acknowledgment of Deletion itself involves acknowledging that syntactic structures appear to be present in some altered form. Consider this selection of the examples given in section 4.3.3:

(215) Dim white and hair so fair that in that dim light dim white. (15.3)

(216) Where if not there it too? (18.4)

(217) Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. (19.3)

(218) How better worse so-missay? (25.1)

(219) No words for what when words gone. (28.2)

(220) What were skull to go? (46.2)

As explained above, the interpretation of these examples involves inferring the absence of words or constituents, which have been removed by non-syntactic Deletion rather than by recoverable syntactic processes of ellipsis. However, to know that these pieces are missing the reader must recognise the familiar linguistic context: for example, in 215 he/she must recognise the complementizer *that* and realise that it takes a clausal complement, so to make sense of the utterance he/she must infer that the following constituent is a clause, and hence missing a subject and a verb to control the adjuncts.

There is a similar process with the *if*-clause in 217, where there is a missing subject, and 219, where there is no auxiliary verb the past participle gone in the *when*-clause. In 216, 218 and 220, it is clear that the utterances should be understood as questions, since they have sentence-initial question words and orthographic representation of question intonation through question marks. To interpret these sentences as questions, the reader is required to infer the absence

of verbs, *do*-support and other aspects of question syntax which are absent here. In 216 and 218 this is possible without too much complication, but in 220 it is still almost impossible to reconstruct a plausible structure, since there are various mismatches between the constituents in the residual structure.

5.6.2 Pragmatic explanation?

In the current discussion, the question is whether these reconstructions are informed by conventional implicatures in the same manner as the examples of Movement, conjunction and parenthesis. At first it may appear that this is the case, since the complementizer and question constructions seem to license the pragmatic inferencing that reconstructs the utterance. However, it should be noted that the information that informs these pragmatic processes is linguistically encoded in the residual structures. With the complementizer constructions, the fact that the complementizers take clausal complements is a grammatical feature of the lexical entries for *if* and *that*. The detection of the complementizer construction relies on knowledge of grammatical structure, rather than relevance interpretations of surface structures, and any clause-internal conventional implicatures would be attributed to the same source as those identified in the section on Movement (i.e. to the implicatures of simple SVX structure) rather than to the grammatical construction itself.

With the questions, it is less clear whether conventional implicature plays a part in the reconstruction of the utterance since there are so many complications involved in interpretation. Questions are not propositions in themselves, so there can be no not-at-issue conventional implicatures, even though there can be implicatures based on what is asked: *What did he say?* implies *He said something*. Nevertheless, it is clear that any such implicatures do not play any part in the reconstruction of the missing *do*-support or verbs in the questions,

as these implicatures only give guidance for the interpretation of the premises of the question rather than any information about the question itself; the propositional form of the implicature does not match the question form, so it does not give any guidance on the utterance structure. Rather, it seems that the reconstruction of the questions is a conceptual inferential process, where the conceptual information derived from the question words and the orthographic question mark indicates that the ungrammatical utterance should be understood as a question.

5.7 Summary

These examples show that conceptual and grammatical properties also contribute to the reconstruction of ungrammatical sentences. It is likely that an empirical study of the text and the instances of these different procedures would show that grammatical and conceptual properties alone are involved in the reconstruction of ungrammatical utterances more often than with the aid of conventional implicatures, as these properties are found in any piece of text where there are discernible syntactic or meaningful relations. Nevertheless, the existence of constraints on pragmatic inference that are specific to language, and that are processed procedurally below the level of consciousness, is a highly significant point for experimental literature. The Experimental strategy of the Beckett texts was described generally as ‘chunking’, where pieces of language seem to be moved about and combined without respect to syntactic relations. In the resulting discourse, different chunks were connected by Relevance relations between conceptual representations; that is, they were held together by meaning and not by structural relations.

However, the examples of conventional implicature show that in linguistic communication some kinds of non-grammatical structural relations are estab-

lished between parts of discourse before the interpretation of conceptual representations, and that these relations are established below the level of consciousness. This indicates that there are structuring principles which act on all inferential interpretations of linguistic communication, and that they apply in advance of any conceptual interpretation. Essentially the writer has no control over the fact that the reader will interpret structural relations between pieces of text: even if the discourse is willfully unorderedly and this unorderedness is one of the main themes of the text, the ordering principles will apply before the conceptual theme of 'unorderedness' is brought to bear on the text.

This is a fundamental constraint on experimentation in literary texts, and it undermines the nature of experimentation with language to a great extent. While many texts may seem to be radical in their disruption of structure and discourse, the discussion above shows that there are aspects of meaning which will be constrained regardless of experimental intention. This reflects a basic fact about experimental texts: as long as there are discernible meanings within the texts, the reader can construct a meaningful discourse and arrive at a coherent interpretation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we have seen evidence from *How It Is* and *Worstward Ho* that indicate the existence of specific trends in Beckett's Experimentation, and in chapter 5 we have seen that this evidence can be explained in terms of grammatical and pragmatic theory. In this chapter we collect the findings from the previous chapters and explain the implications for the fields under investigation, considering to what extent the argumentation presented answers the questions set down in the introductory chapter. For the sake of clarity the findings of the dissertation are summarised as a series of claims based on this evidence.

6.2 Kinds of ungrammaticality

One of the findings that arises from the description and analyses above is that there are several different kinds of unacceptable utterances in the texts. Some violated pragmatic principles: the parentheticals (3.4) were examples of un-

orderly discourse, and could be understood by simple conceptual inference; the conjunctions (3.3) showed the violation of conventional implicatures, which resemble grammatical relations and which are lost with the imbalance of propositions. Some other examples violate grammatical constraints: the PP-movement examples (4.4.3) are not grammatical sentences, since they lack tensed verbs for the PPs to adjoin to, but they are easily understood; the examples of Deletion (4.3) were ungrammatical but could be reconstructed by pragmatic inference to resemble propositions of grammatical utterances; the false passives (4.4.1) were ungrammatical and could only be partially interpreted after significant reconstruction by inference. What this shows is that the experimentation of the texts could affect interpretation in many different ways, and that some kinds of relations are less susceptible to experimentation than others.

As mentioned in section 3.4.5, there is an interesting contrast between conjunction and adjunction, where the sentence-internal grammatical relations of adjunction seem more malleable than the largely pragmatic relations of conjunction. When conjunctions are misused, the conventional implicatures are lost since there is a mismatch in the propositional content of the conjoined utterances; as a result the utterances seem unacceptable, and it is difficult to comprehend a meaning for the conjunction relation other than simple sequential ordering as in a list. The misuse of a PP involves its detachment from a sentence, but this does not cause any major problems for interpretation, since for the most part the PPs are well-formed in themselves and they can appear as non-sentential adverbials within the discourse. This shows two things: that the loss of grammatical relations is not always fatal for the recovery of a legible utterance, and that loss of procedural pragmatic relations can cause more problems than loss of some grammatical relations.

Why is this? One of the main differences between these two different sets

of examples is that, in the PP-movement examples, the constituents that are moved around are relatively self-sufficient units of meaning. In contrast, in the conjunction examples the units under experimentation, the conjunctions, do not have simple conceptual paraphrases, since their meaning in these cases is represented by procedural conventional implicatures; therefore the misused conjunctions cannot be recovered when they are misused, since they cannot be isolated and interpreted as meaningful units in themselves. This indicates that an utterance under experimentation is more likely to be recovered as a meaningful utterance if the alteration involves a conceptually or semantically self-contained constituent, and that experimental operations on formal relations are far less likely to be recovered as meaningful utterances. This is confirmed by the contrast between false passives and PP-movement examples, as well as the contrast in acceptability between parentheticals and conjunctions.

There are two points that follow from this. The first point is that all kinds of ungrammatical utterance interpretation involve the grammar in some capacity. This builds on the discussion in section 5.2.5 about conventional implicatures: it only becomes apparent that reconstruction can take place once the sentence has passed through the parser, when the sound constituents (such as PPs) have been recognised and the deficiency of the sentence has been acknowledged.

The second point is that this is the only involvement of the grammar in the interpretation of the utterances, and that the reconstruction that is involved in the interpretation of the utterances is conceptual and never grammatical. This is evidenced by the fact that conceptual content affects the recoverability of the constructions, accounting for the difference between PP-movements and passives; by contrast, there is no conceptual factor in the recoverability of well-formed grammatical movements. Thus, an experimental form is parsed as a group of well-formed and ill-formed constituents, and pragmatic inference

proceeds to reconstruct utterances, but not grammatical sentences; an ungrammatical sentence is not ‘corrected’ by pragmatic inference, but it is interpreted by contextual enrichment and understood conceptually.

Ultimately, what this indicates is that experimentation does not bring about any changes to grammatical structure. Experimentation may lead to loss of grammatical relations, as is obvious from much of the evidence presented above, but there are no examples of experimentation bringing about new forms. This allows us to make one of the most important claims of this study:

Claim 1 *Experimentation does not produce new grammatical forms.*

As mentioned in the introduction, many critics claim that, by experimenting with language, writers can develop their own forms of language, reforming the existing system in the service of poetic means. However, the evidence above seems to indicate that the alterations made to language are not in fact linguistic; rather, they involve pragmatic relations between conceptual representations. The alterations of language do not access linguistic form, but rather they act on representations of language; any correspondence between grammatical form and the forms that are altered arises as a result of the fact that the forms are associated with specific conceptual relations.

In the examples of PP-movement, the experimentation does not in fact involve the movement of a PP, as it is not recoverable as part of a grammatical utterance and the conscious experimentation does not have access to the grammatical structure ‘PP’; rather, a piece of linear surface structure is placed in a sentence-initial position and the resulting construction resembles a grammatical structure at the level of surface structure representation. There is a similar explanation for the false passives and other examples of experimentation: the experimental writer does not have access to grammatical structures, so the processes that create these artifacts act on surface representations of those

structures, and ungrammaticalities and odd effects develop as a result of this extra-grammatical manipulation of linguistic material.

6.3 Syntax as an object of literary linguistic inquiry

Another strong outcome from the analysis above is an affirmation of the formalist literary linguistic approach to syntax. As described in section 1.3.3, Austin (1984) proposes that studies of syntax in literary texts should focus on the aesthetic effects syntactic deviation, and that we should devise “methodological principles for analysing non-standard structures” (1984: 130) in order to conduct these stylistic analyses. This approach assumes that the forms under analysis are still syntactic, and that the description of the non-standard forms should be in terms of breaches of syntactic rules specific to syntax. This line of argumentation may be associated with the kind of literary linguistic theory proposed by Kiparsky (1972), which suggests that there may be a grammar specific to poetic texts, and that the ‘poetic grammar’ may contain the specific computations necessary to account for the rule-breaking in literary texts.

However, in much of the evidence presented above, it is clear that syntactic rules cannot account for the processing of many ungrammatical utterances. It is shown in some cases that the apparent syntactic rule-breaking in fact involves violation of pragmatic principles, and that in other cases the ungrammatical forms could not be generated and cannot be recovered by any means as grammatical forms. In some of Austin’s examples from Romantic poetry, it seems possible to argue that deviant forms are processed by special computations within the syntax, and it seems plausible that the processing of deviation in literary texts involves attending to a grammar specific to poetic texts. His examples show spe-

cific rules that are bent in the poetic text, and if we were to follow the literary linguistic theory of Kiparsky, the poetic grammar may resemble the everyday grammar plus the bent rules. But if this is the case then the grammar would also have to account for the examples of false passives (4.4) and Deletions (4.3) shown above, and this is clearly untenable since the resulting poetic grammar would generate sentences that are not even interpretable in the most basic sense.

The reply to this argument may argue that experimental texts are ‘exceptions’, and that the kinds of ungrammaticality described would not be accounted for within a poetic grammar since the reader understands that the text is ‘experimental’ and acknowledges that the forms should be experienced as deliberately odd. Nevertheless, this would not offer any explanation for how these texts are read. Furthermore, it would not be able to explain how one separates ‘experimental’ texts from other texts, since ‘experimental’ is a socially constructed description and does not describe a specific set of properties that can be brought to texts to separate experimental from non-experimental. This is clear enough from the critical heritage of literary texts in itself, since the notion of the ‘experimental’ has changed throughout literary history with changes in convention (D’Haen et al 1989); for example, the Romantic texts examined by Austin were regarded as in some way ‘avant garde’ in their own time, as evidenced by the contemporary scandal that met the genre experimentation of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

Indeed it seems that the evidence above shows up some crucial theoretical deficiencies in the theory of ‘poetic grammar’. First, grammar as a theory is only useful if it can be formally defined and constrained, but in the case of poetic grammar this is not possible. ‘Poetic’ is a concept and it cannot be formally defined, and indeed some would argue that it is in the nature of the ‘poetic’ to resist such formalism; as a result the kinds of rule-breaking that occur in

literary texts cannot be formally defined, and thus ‘poetic grammar’ cannot be constrained or defined.

Second, there is a fundamental problem with the assumption that deviant forms are processed by the grammar. Generative theory is founded on the assumption that the grammar generates a specific set of grammatical sentences, and that ungrammatical sentences are performance errors in the use of that grammar. However, to assume that ungrammatical sentences are produced by the grammar is to assume that errors are not founded at the level of performance but within the grammar, and that these errors can be apprehended as a specific set of computations with specific meanings. Essentially this imbues the grammar with an ability to mark generated sentences conceptually as ‘grammatical’ and ‘ungrammatical’, whereas these concepts only exist as observations on the output of the grammar. This is not possible since the grammar is a formal system and does not attach concepts to generated forms in this manner.

It can be seen from chapter 5 that the explanation for the interpretation offered in preference to specific syntactic computations is one based on pragmatic theory, specifically Relevance theory. In doing so we agree with the proposals put forward in Fabb (2004) to arrive at the following claim regarding literary linguistic theory:

Claim 2 *deviation in literary texts is not interpreted by form-specific linguistic computations, but by pragmatic inference with respect to context.*

In addition to the preceding negative evidence against the form-specific computation analysis, there is also a great deal of positive evidence offered by the analysis in this dissertation. Chapter 5 offers a theoretical description of how experimental texts are experienced by readers, accounting for the ability to interpret texts of varying degrees of ungrammaticality, including some which do not even allow one to interpret agency or other fundamental relations. The range

of kinds of ungrammaticality found in the text also seems to confirm this claim, as the evidence of the texts did not seem to offer any specific kinds of linguistic form that were invulnerable to experimentation. Indeed the only restriction that seemed to apply was that the text resembled some form of language: even though the false passives could not be processed as linguistic expressions (with clear agency relations), they could still be experienced as language, conveying some of the meanings that language usually encodes. This kind of process is characteristic of pragmatic inference rather than formal linguistic relations.

It should also be recalled that this claim adds substance to Principle A in section 2.4. There it was proposed that in analysing a deviant structure, we should take the most grammatical reading available, and this seemed to be more of a pragmatic guiding principle than one for grammatical interpretation. However, what the above argumentation shows is that deviant structures are not interpreted by grammatical means but largely by pragmatic means, based on the most relevant interpretation of the base stimulus of the residual structure. This shows that Principle A was not in fact a statement about grammatical parsing, but simply a reiteration of the fundamental role of Relevance in interpreting deviant utterances.

6.4 Literary linguistics and experimental literature

One of the other main points of discussion in literary linguistic theory is whether there is anything special about literary language, or whether the literary context allows one to do things with language that could not be done in other forms of communication. It should be clear from the argumentation above that this study concludes that literary language does not have any specific properties,

and this can be formulated in a fairly uncontroversial, but important, claim:

Claim 3 *The language of literary texts does not have any linguistic properties that are not found in non-literary texts.*

This kind of claim may not be of particular importance to most linguists, but it is an important claim to make with respect to literary theory, not least since it is formulated on the basis of analysis of highly experimental texts. What this indicates is that the rules of language cannot be reformulated, and that literary experimentation cannot bring about any meaningful change to the medium of language. That one may try to ‘get behind’ language in order to find a truer unmediated form of expression is a popular myth, inherited from Symbolism, espoused by many Modernist writers and exhibited by the quote from Beckett seen in section 2.5.3, and this kind of analysis affirms that it is indeed a myth.

It should be noted that while there is nothing specific to language in literary texts, the kinds of pragmatic computations described in much of the analysis would probably not be found in any other kind of communication. The inferring processes described involve a great deal of processing and ‘work’ on the part of the reader, as evidenced by the fact that these texts are experienced as ‘difficult’ or challenging’. In the context of a deliberately crafted text, the expectation of Relevance is much higher, and as a result the reader puts in the extra effort in the belief that they will reap some rewards from the experience of interpretation. But this expectation of Relevance has nothing to do with language as a formal system, but with the cultural identity of literature, so there is no need to alter our theoretical description of language.

That experimentation cannot effect any changes on linguistic form may seem like a problem for avant garde theory, as it indicates that the artist cannot bring about any change to the very medium in which they work. On the other hand, the fact that literary experimentation is not defined by the formal system of

language would appear to assert a certain degree of freedom on the part of the experimental writer. Since the forms of experimental texts are communicated by inference, they can effectively be labeled as ‘meanings’, and since there is no limit to the number or kinds of meanings that can be produced then it would seem that the experimentation of literary texts is essentially limitless.

However, we may recall from section 5.7 that the ‘doubleness’ of the linguistic medium of literary texts always ensures that as long as texts resemble linguistic forms, the inferencing of meanings will be underpinned by conventional implicatures. While these implicatures can be overridden like any other implicatures, the fact that they come about indicates that the knowledge of the conventions of surface structures is always involved in the processing of language; as a result, it is implausible to assume that literary experimentation is entirely free, since any reader will always project their knowledge of standard linguistic form onto the experimental texts at hand. This is an important point regarding avant garde theory, so it is reiterated as another claim:

Claim 4 *Knowledge of conventional linguistic form always informs the interpretation of non-standard forms.*

Thus while the production of experimental texts may not be defined by the formal system of language, the specific properties of language impose specific constraints on the interpretation of all linguistic communication.

Related to the discussion of avant garde theory, another interesting outcome of this study is the affirmation of the value of studying experimental texts. As stated above, the kinds of deviation discussed by Austin (1984) occurred in Romantic texts, and the theory that the deviations should be considered in terms of syntactic rules was derived from the fact that syntactic rules could be discerned in these texts.

However, in experimental texts like those studied, the deviation is far more radical than that found in the poetry of Byron and Shelley, and as a result it becomes impossible to construct syntactic rules for the production of these utterance. This point showed up a crucial deficiency in this theory of deviation, and showed that to base our data on the more conservative texts would be unwise. The experimental texts act as limit cases for literature, and as a result their radical forms direct the theory of form. To direct and redirect the theory of literature is one of the main goals of the avant garde, and this dissertation shows such a redirection in literary linguistic study.

6.5 Linguistics and pragmatics

It should be clear from the material above, and in chapter 5 in particular, that the explanation of experimentation in literary texts does not involve a great deal of syntactic theory. Rather the extent of the contribution to syntactic theory in this dissertation is to assert that there is no need to extend its scope to account for unusual use, since it is clear that to extend the grammar to account for the examples encountered would cause fundamental problems. Rather the explanation of experimental texts is in terms of pragmatic theory, and throughout it is asserted that Relevance theory provides the best explanation for the phenomena observed.

It was stated in the introduction that one of the main goals of any formalist literary linguistic investigation is to be able to ‘feed back’ into linguistic theory, that is to try to gain an understanding of how language works in general by observing closely how it works in literary texts. While there is little to offer to syntactic theory other than an affirmation of the value of constraining the grammar, it does seem that the discussion of the interpretation of ungrammatical utterances offers evidence for some important claims about pragmatic

theory.

In section 5.2.3 it was asserted that the procedural account of conventional implicatures was the only plausible explanation for the evidence at hand, but it was then proposed that the kinds of conventional implicatures observed in a variety of unusual grammatical forms could be generalised as ‘bare’ or ‘specific’ conventional implicatures, where the conventional implicatures are licensed by knowledge of surface structures of language (for example SVX and marked variants). This involved a Relevance theoretic generalisation of conventional implicatures analogous but not concurrent with the (linguistic semantic) explanation offered by Levinson (2000) and Grice (1989).

This discussion may give rise to a claim about pragmatic theory, specifically about conventional implicatures:

Claim 5 *Conventional implicatures arise as a result of a reader’s knowledge about the conventions of the surface structures of linguistic form.*

One of the most important points to observe in this claim, and in the generalisations made available by the evidence, is that the pragmatic inferencing processes described only ever involve knowledge of surface structure representations of linguistic structure, and never actual linguistic structure. That is, pragmatic inference does not access aspects of linguistic structure like phrase structure or phrase order, and the instances in which it seems to act on linguistic structure (for example with conjunction), in fact it is only accessing representations of structure, and these representations are conceptual, based on ‘iconicity’ and other non-linguistic knowledge. This might lead us to a more contentious and provocative claim, that pragmatic knowledge does not have access to linguistic form, but since the only pragmatic theory under examination here has been conventional implicatures it would not be possible to make such a claim regarding pragmatic theory in general. However the evidence presented does

seem to indicate that such a claim may be plausible, and it may be a point worthy of further investigation.

6.6 Summary

In this dissertation I have tried to explore a number of important questions regarding literary theory, linguistic theory and literary linguistic theory, and this conclusion arrives at a number of claims regarding these different fields. It is notable that many of these claims seem to offer as much for one field as another, and this indicates the value of examining this kind of literature in this manner. However I also hope that these claims also open up a number of questions for the fields of inquiry, as this must be the highest expectation for any study of this size on topics as wide-ranging and fascinating.

Appendix A

Stock phrases in *How It Is*

This appendix provides details of a set of the ‘stock phrases’ in the part section of *How It Is*, as described in section 2.5. In the following set of data, the numbers describe the page no.paragraph no coordinate of the occurrences, as above. The purpose of including this data is to give an indication of the extent of the repetition in the text, as this is an important factor in establishing the existence of the ‘chunking’ style described above.

- *bits and scraps*: 7.7, 15.2, 20.2, 20.3, 20.4, 24.3(x2), 25.6, 39.3, 47.4
- *brief movements of the lower face*: 7.5, 14.5, 18.4, 26.3, 36.6, 44.6, 44.7, 46.4
- *how it is*: 7.1, 16.10, 20.2, 20.3, 24.3, 39.3
- *how it was*: 7.1, 7.7, 10.5, 16.6, 16.10(x3), 20.2, 24.3(x4), 27.2, 37.4, 39.3(x2), 48.4
- *I quote*: 7.1, 7.7(x2), 8.3, 10.4, 16.9, 28.1
- *I say it as I hear it*: 7.1, 10.1, 10.5, 14.5, 15.2, 19.3, 20.2, 20.6, 27.3, 28.7, 28.5, 31.7, 34.3, 40.4, 42.1, 46.3

- *it's one or the other*: 8.6(x2), 11.7, 18.2, 22.3, 24.4, 28.2, 44.7, 45.7, 48.1
- *it's preferable*: 7.6, 19.2, 19.3, 24.4, 25.7, 32.7, 33.5, 47.3
- *murmur in the mud* (in some variations i.e. *murmured in the mud*): 7.3, 9.8, 10.5, 14.5, 15.2, 20.2, 20.5, 24.3, 46.3, 47.4
- *something wrong there*: 8.6, 9.4, 10.3, 14.3, 16.6, 25.2, 28.6, 34.2, 37.4, 40.1, 43.1, 43.7
- *vast stretch* [or *tract*] *of time*: 7.7(x2), 8.2, 9.1, 16.6, 16.10, 18.8, 22.2, 25.7, 27.1, 34.4, 39.3
- *we're talking of* [*the sack* & some variations]: 8.3, 10.2, 14.7, 15.3, 26.5, 33.8, 34.3, 36.3, 47.2, 47.4
- *when the panting stops*: 7.2, 7.4, 12.3, 15.2, 20.2, 20.4, 24.3, 39.3, 47.
- Multiple stock phrases occurring in single paragraphs: 10.5, 14.5, 16.10, 20.2, 24.3, 39.3, 47.2

Bibliography

- [1] Abbott, H.P., 1973. *The fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and effect*. University of California Press: London.
- [2] Austin, T., 1981. 'Constraints on syntactic rules and the style of Shelley's 'Adonais': An exercise in stylistic criticism.' From Freeman, D.C., 1981. *Essays in modern stylistics* (pp 138-165). London: Methuen.
- [3] Austin, T., 1984. *Language crafted: A linguistic theory of poetic syntax*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- [4] Banfield, A., 1973. 'Stylistic transformations: A study based on the syntax of 'Paradise Lost.' Diss. University of Wisconsin.
- [5] Banfield, A., 2003. 'Beckett's tattered syntax'. *Representations*, November 2003, pp. 2-69.
- [6] Beckett, S., 1964. *How It Is*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- [7] Beckett, S., 1972. *The Lost Ones*. London: John Calder.
- [8] Beckett, S., 1990 [1986]. *The complete dramatic works*. London: Faber & Faber.
- [9] Beckett, S., 1992 [1982]. *Ill See Ill Said*. London: John Calder.

- [10] Beckett, S., 1999 [1983]. *Worstward Ho*. London: John Calder.
- [11] Beckett, S., 2001 [1983]. *Disjecta: Miscellaneous writings and a dramatic fragment*. London: John Calder.
- [12] Beckett, S., 2003 [1980]. *Company*. London: John Calder.
- [13] Beckett, S., 2003 [1959]. *Trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. London: John Calder.
- [14] Biber, D., 1988. *Variations across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [15] Blakemore, D., 1987. *Semantics constraints on Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [16] Blakemore, D., 1992. *Understanding utterances*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [17] Blakemore, D., 2006. 'Divisions of labour: The analysis of parentheticals.' *Lingua* 116, pp 1670-1687.
- [18] Blakemore, D., 2007. 'Or-parentheticals, *that is*-parentheticals and the pragmatics of reformulation.' *Journal of Linguistics* 43, pp 311-339.
- [19] Blakemore, D., Carston, R., 1999. 'The pragmatics of and-conjunctions: The non-narrative cases.' *UCL working papers in linguistics* 11, pp 1-20.
- [20] Burroughs, W.S., 1968 [1964]. *Nova Express*. London: Panther.
- [21] Burton-Roberts, N., 1998. 'Parentheticals'. From Collins, P., Lee, D., eds, 1998. *The Clause in English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp 35-52.
- [22] Cage, J., 1973 [1969]. *M: Writings '67-'72*. London: Calder and Boyars.
- [23] Calder, J., 2001. *The philosophy of Samuel Beckett*. London: John Calder.

- [24] Carston, R., 1993. 'Conjunction, explanation and relevance.' *Lingua* 90, pp 27-48.
- [25] Carston, R., 2002. *Thoughts and utterances: The pragmatics of explicit communication*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [26] Chomsky, N., 1961. 'Some methodological remarks on generative grammar.' *Word* 17, pp 219-239.
- [27] Chomsky, N., 1965. *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [28] Chomsky, N., 1971 [1957]. *Syntactic structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
- [29] Chomsky, N., 1980. *Rules and Representations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- [30] Chomsky, N., 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. London: MIT Press.
- [31] Chomsky, N., 2005 [2000]. *New horizons in the study of language and mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [32] Cohn, R., 1962. *Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- [33] Cormack, A., Smith, N., 2005. 'What is coordination?' *Lingua* 115, pp 396-418.
- [34] Cuddon, J.A., 1998. *Dictionary of literary terms and literary theory*. St Ives: Penguin.
- [35] Culler, J., 1987. 'Towards a linguistics of writing.' From Fabb, N., Durant, A., Attridge, D., McCabe, D., eds, 1987. *The linguistics of writing: Arguments between language and literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- [36] D'Haen, T., Grubel, R., Lethen, H., eds, 1989. *Convention and innovation in literature*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [37] Dearlove, J., 1986. 'The Voice and its words: *How It Is* in Beckett's canon.' From McCarthy, P.A., 1986. *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*. Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co, pp102-119.
- [38] Drescher, B.E., Friedberg, N., 2006. *Formal approaches to poetry: Recent developments in metrics*. Berlin: M. de Gruyter.
- [39] Erlich, V., 1980 [1969]. *Russian Formalism: History-doctrine*. The Hague: Mouton.
- [40] Fabb, N., Durant, A., Attridge, D., McCabe, D., eds, 1987. *The linguistics of writing: Arguments between language and literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- [41] Fabb, N., 1997. *Linguistics and literature*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [42] Fabb, 2002. *Language and literary structure: The linguistic analysis of form in verse and narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [43] Fabb, N., 2004. 'Form as fiction.' *Belgian Journal of English Language and Literature*, New Series 2, pp63-73.
- [44] Fabb, N., Halle, M., 2008. *The meter of a poem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [45] Fodor, J.D., 2002, 'Psycholinguistics cannot escape prosody.' From Bel, B., Marken, I., eds. 2002. *Proceedings of the speech prosody conference, Aix-en-Provence, France, April 2002*. Aix-en-Provence: Laboratoire Parole et Langage.

- [46] Goodman, N., 1976. *Languages of art: An approach to a theory of symbols*. Cambridge: Hackett.
- [47] Grice, H.P., 1975. 'Logic and conversation.' From Jaworski, A., Coupland, N., eds 2004 [1999]. *The discourse reader*. London: Routledge.
- [48] Grice, H.P., 1989. *Studies in the ways of words*. London: Harvard University Press.
- [49] Haegeman, L., 1988. 'Parenthetical adverbials: the radical orphanage approach.' From Chiba, S., ed, 1988. *Aspects of modern English linguistics*. Tokyo: Kaitakushi.
- [50] Hill, L., 1990. *Beckett's fiction: in other worlds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [51] Hope, J., 2003. *Shakespeare's grammar*. London: Thomson, The Arden Shakespeare.
- [52] Huddleston, R.D., Pullum, G.K., 2002. *Cambridge grammar of the English language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [53] Jajdelska, E., forthcoming. *Silent reading and the birth of the narrator*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- [54] Janecek, G., 1996. *Zaum: the transrational poetry of Russian Futurism*. San Diego, CA: San Diego University Press.
- [55] Joyce, J., 1999 [1922]. *Ulysses: The 1922 Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [56] Kawin, B., 1984. 'On not having the last word: Beckett, Wittgenstein and the limits of language.' From Hawkins, P., Schotter, A.H., eds. *Ineffability: Naming the unnamable from Dante to Beckett*. New York, NY: AMS Press.

- [57] Kiparsky, P., 1972. 'Explanation in phonology.' From Peters, S., ed, 1972. *Goals in linguistic theory*, pp 189-227. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [58] Kumar, S.K., 1963. *Bergson and the stream of consciousness novel*. New York: New York University Press.
- [59] Lasnik, H., 2003. *Minimalist investigations in linguistic theory*. London: Routledge.
- [60] Leech, G.N., Short, M.H., 2003 [1981]. *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*. London: Longman.
- [61] Levinson, S., 2000. *Presumptive meanings; The theory of generalised conversational implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [62] Matthews, P.H., 2005. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [63] Matthews, H., Brotchie, A., 2005. *The Oulipo Compendium*. London: Atlas Press.
- [64] Miller, J., Weinert, R., 1998. *Spontaneous spoken language: Syntax and discourse*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [65] Miller, J., 2006. 'Spoken and written English.' From Aarts, B., McMahon, A., 2006. *The handbook of English linguistics*, pp 670-691. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- [66] Newmeyer, F.J., 1983. *Grammatical theory: Its limits and its possibilities*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- [67] Newmeyer, F.J., 1986. *Linguistic theory in America*. London: Academic Press inc.

- [68] Parkes, M.B., 1992. *Pause and effect: An introduction to the history of punctuation in the West*. Aldershot: Scholar Press.
- [69] Perfetti, C.A., Landi, N., Oakhill, J., 2005. 'The acquisition of reading comprehension.' From Snowling, M.J., Hulmes, C., eds, 2005. *The science of reading: A handbook*, pp 227-247. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [70] Pilkington, A., 2000. *Poetic effects: a Relevance theory perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [71] Pilling, J., 1976. *Samuel Beckett*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- [72] Potts, C., 2002. 'The syntax and semantics of as-parentheticals.' *Natural language and linguistic theory* 20, pp 623-689.
- [73] Potts, C., 2003. 'Conventional implicatures, a distinguished class of meanings.' From Ramchand, G., Reiss, C., eds, 2003. *The Oxford handbook of linguistic interfaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [74] Radford, A., 1997. *Syntactic theory and the structure of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [75] Rothenberg, J., 1985. *Technicians of the sacred: a range of poeties from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.
- [76] Sag, I.A., Gazdar, G., Wasow, T., Weisler, S., 1985. 'Coordination and how to distinguish categories.' *Natural language and linguistic theory* 3, pp 117-171.
- [77] Sperber, D., Wilson, D., 1995 [1986]. *Relevance: Communication and cognition, Second edition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- [78] Steiner, P., 1984. *Russian Formalism: A metapoetics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- [79] Taylor-Batty, J., 2007. 'Imperfect mastery: the failure of grammar in Beckett's *L'Innommable*'. *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol 30, No. 2, pp 163-179.
- [80] Tseng, L.-L., 1992. 'Samuel Beckett's 'For to End Yet Again': A conflict between 'Syntax of Energy and 'Syntax of Weakness'. *Twentieth century literature*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 101-123.
- [81] Uriangereka, J., 2002. *Derivations: exploring the dynamics of syntax*. London: Routledge.
- [82] Wales, K., 1992. *The language of James Joyce*. London: Macmillan Education.
- [83] Webb, E., 1970. *Samuel Beckett: a study of his novels*. London: Peter Owen Ltd.
- [84] Wilson, D., Sperber, D., 1993. 'Linguistic form and relevance.' *Lingua* 90, pp 1-25.
- [85] Zwaan, R.A., ed, 1993. *Aspects of literary comprehension: A cognitive approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [86] Internet 1 - Burroughs, W.S., 'The Electronic Revolution', published by UbuClassics:
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/21291/Electronic-Revolution-by-Burroughs>
- [87] Internet 2 - Greenlaw, C., 'Elaborations' on *Worstward Ho*:
http://samuel-beckett.net/w_h.o.htm