

# From clause to text

## Texts

So far, we have looked at very small units of language – morphemes, words, phrases and sentences. In real life, we are more likely to encounter longer stretches of language, such as the following, which is taken from the Wikipedia page shown in Figure 1 on the next page):


### Example 1

<b>Apple corer</b>	1
An apple corer is a device for removing the core and pips from an apple. It may also be used for similar fruits, such as pears or quince.	2 3 4
Some apple corers consist of a handle with a circular cutting device at the end. When pushed through the apple, it removes the core to the diameter of the circular cutting device. The core can then be removed from the apple corer.	5 6 7 8 9
Another type of apple corer can be placed on top of the apple and pushed through, which both cores and slices the apple. This is also often called apple cutter or apple slicer.	10 11 12 13
An apple corer is often used when the apple needs to be kept whole, for example, when making baked apples. Apple slicers are used when a large number of apples need to be cored and sliced, for example, when making an apple pie or other desserts.	14 15 16 17 18

Source: Wikipedia, s.v. *apple corer* (2020-10-28)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple\\_corer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple_corer)

In everyday language, we would call it a **text**, rather than (as I just did), “a stretch of language”. But why? The (everyday) word *text* has a range of related meanings, all of which apply here. First, *text* refers to the linguistic part of a body of writing, rather than, for example, the pictures accompanying it. In this sense, everything on the page except for the Wikipedia logo and the two photographs are text. Second, it

Figure 1: A page from Wikipedia



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## Apple corer

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

An **apple corer** is a device for removing the core and pips from an **apple**. It may also be used for similar fruits, such as **pears** or **quince**.

Some apple corers consist of a handle with a circular cutting device at the end. When pushed through the apple, it removes the core to the diameter of the circular cutting device. The core can then be removed from the apple corer.

Another type of apple corer can be placed on top of the apple and pushed through, which both cores and slices the apple. This is also often called apple cutter<sup>[1]</sup> or apple slicer<sup>[2]</sup>.


An apple corer is often used when the apple needs to be kept whole, for example, when making **baked apples**.<sup>[3]</sup> Apple slicers are used when a large number of apples need to be cored and sliced, for example, when making an **apple pie** or other desserts.<sup>[4]</sup>

### See also

- [Pineapple cutter](#)

### References

- ↑ Jagmohan, Negi (2013). *Food Presentation Technique (Garnishing and Decoration)*. New Delhi: S. Chand. p. 42. ISBN 812193575X.
- ↑ Traverso, Amy (2011). *The Apple Lover's Cookbook* (1st ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co. p. 71. ISBN 0393065995.
- ↑ wikiHow staff. "How to core apples"‡. *wikiHow*. wikiHow, Inc. Retrieved 29 October 2020.
- ↑ Waggoner, Shea (2006). *Homemade in Half the Time: Smart Ways to Cook Delicious Meals Every Time* (1st ed.). Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale. p. 22. ISBN 1594863652.

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This page was last edited on 29 October 2020, at 10:28 (UTC).

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refers to a “body” of writing, i.e., a stretch of language that is separated from other stretches of language in some way.

Looking at Figure 1, the stretch of language cited above is separated from the rest of the written words appearing on the same webpage by various types of boundary signals – it appears in a white box, while much of the other written material occurs in a grey box surrounding it or in grey boxes containing pictures. Other boundary signals are more subtle. For example, there are three sections within the white box, that are signaled by lines with writing in a larger font above each line – the words *Apple corer* in a very large font size and the phrase *See also* and *References* in a slightly smaller font size that is still much larger than that in which the passage cited above appears. In other cases, there are grey square brackets (around the word *edit*) or a little tool icon (next to the notice “This tool article is a stub. You can help Wikipedia by expanding it.”). There is also the phrase “From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”, which appears in a slightly smaller font than the passage cited above and which is separated from it by a larger stretch of white space than those stretches occurring within the passage.

Such external boundary signals (which may even by physical boundaries, such as the edge of a printed page, or the covers of a book), as well as the relationship between different types of visual information that make up a book, webpage, newspaper, etc. (text, images, pictograms, lines and boxes of various colors, etc.) are an area of research in themselves and are studied by scholars interested in the multimodal contexts in which language often occurs.

In linguistics proper, we are more likely to be interested in what is left when all these things are subtracted, i.e., the cited passage itself, which we might refer to as “the (actual) text of the article”. This passage constitutes a text with respect to two aspects that are inherently related to language and that remain constant when we remove the passage from one context (such as the web page shown in Figure 1) and place it in a different context (such as the document you are reading right now).

The first of these aspects concerns the **content**: The passage counts as a text rather than a sequence of unrelated clauses because it deals with a single topic (devices for removing apple cores) in a systematic way. Every clause in the passage contributes information about this topic, systematically building on information provided by previous clauses. For example, the first clause (lines 2–3) defines in general

terms what an apple corer is (a device meant for removing cores from apples), and the second clause (lines 3–4) builds on this definition by pointing out additional uses (removing cores from other fruits with a core). In linguistics, this property of texts is referred to as **coherence**.

The second of these aspects concerns the **form**: The passage counts as a text because the individual clauses contain linguistic expressions that connect them to each other. Some of these expressions are dedicated to signaling specific types of relations – for example, the word *also* in the second clause signals that the information in the second clause is an addition to the information in the first clause (dictionaries give the meaning of *also* as “in addition to”). Other expressions do not signal specific relations, but are limited in their occurrence to clauses that are connected. For example, the pronoun *it* in the second clause refers to the apple corer, but we only know this because the apple corer is explicitly mentioned in the first clause. Similarly, the phrase *other fruit* can only occur in a context where at least one fruit has already been mentioned (in this case, the *apple* in the first clause. In linguistics, this property of texts is referred to as **cohesion**, the type of expressions just mentioned are referred to as **cohesive devices**.

## Coherence

In its broad outline, the text linguistic notion of *coherence* is quite similar to the everyday meaning of the word. To be *coherent* means being “unified, sticking together, making up a whole” and to be “orderly, logical and consistent” (cf. Wiktionary, s.v. *coherent*). Essentially, these properties are also what makes a particular stretch of language coherent, and thus a “text” in this sense.

The Wikipedia entry cited at the beginning of this chapter makes up a unified whole in that it deals with a single topic (apple corers). This separates it from bits of writing on the same page that do not deal with this topic, such as the statement “This tool article is a stub. You can help Wikipedia by expanding it.” at the bottom of the white box, or the statement “This page was last edited on 29 October 2020, at 10:28 (UTC).” in the grey area at the bottom of the page.

The entry is also (relatively) logical and orderly, in that it presents the information about apple corers in a way that makes it easy to follow it. As mentioned above, this is partially achieved by ordering the clauses in such a way that the information they contain builds on in-

formation provided previously: The first clause defines what an apple corer is by describing what it is used for, the second clause adds further uses. The third clause (lines 5–6) adds to our understanding of the device in question by describing its parts, and the fourth and fifth clause (lines 6–9) explain how these parts are useful in performing the function for which an apple corer is used.

This coherence can easily be destroyed by taking the first five clauses and arranging them in a random order, as in Example 2:

### Example 2

<b>Apple corer</b>	1
Some apple corers consist of a handle with a circular	2
cutting device at the end. The core can then be removed	3
from the apple corer. It may also be used for similar fruits,	4
such as pears or quince. When pushed through the apple,	5
it removes the core to the diameter of the circular cutting	6
device. An apple corer is a device for removing the core	7
and pips from an apple.	8

Although Example 2 contains exactly the same clauses as the corresponding lines in Example 1, it does not have coherence. This lack of coherence is not due to the lack of an overall topic – all clauses still deal with apple corers. It is also not due to missing information – the clauses provide the same information as in Example 1. Instead, it is due to the fact that the information is not presented in a systematic way, with the information presented in each individual clause building on the information presented in the preceding clauses.

In other words, coherence depends on the structure of the information provided in a stretch of language just as much as it depends on the nature of the information. The **information structure** is, in fact, encoded in the individual clauses in a very general way: New referents tend to be introduced in post-verbal positions (e.g. direct objects or adverbials), while known referents tend to occur as the subject of a clause – in this way, known information occurs before new information, allowing readers (and, with spoken language, hearers) to connect the new information to the old in a stepwise fashion.

Consider lines 5–9 in Example 1: The first clause has the phrase *some apple corers* in subject position – this is known information, as

apple corers have already been introduced in the preceding paragraph. It then adds new information by introducing the referents of the nouns *handle* and *cutting device* in the object position. The referent of *cutting device* then becomes the subject of the clause *it removes the core*, with the object introducing the referent of *core*; the latter is not strictly speaking new, as apple cores have already been mentioned, but this last mention is further away than the last mention of the *cutting device* – when two referents are both known, the one that has been mentioned more recently (and is still active in the minds of speaker and hearer) is, in a sense, “more known” than the one mentioned less recently. This is also seen in the next clause, where the *core* occurs as the subject, while the *apple corer*, whose last mention is further away, occurs as an adverbial.

Information structure is a linguistic dimension in its own right, one that interacts with textual structure and with grammatical structure in various ways. The main point here was to show how it contributes to textual coherence.

## **Cohesion**

Cohesion is sometimes defined as those aspects of linguistic structure that reflect coherence. In this sense, the information-structural principle of “known information in subject position, new information in post-verbal positions” could be seen as a cohesive device. We will return to the relationship between coherence and cohesion below, but for now, we will use the narrower characterization of cohesion introduced above, and restrict the term to linguistic structures that either explicitly signal a particular relationship between clauses (such as the word *also* in the second clause), or that result from the fact that two clauses are related (such as the pronoun *it* in the second clause. Let us look at these separately.

### ***Devices that signal links between clauses***

There are two groups of linguistic devices signaling that two clauses are related in a particular way: those linking a main clause and a subordinate clause of some sort, and those linking main clauses.

**A main and a subordinate clause** are typically linked by **subordinating conjunctions** (referred to as “complementizers” in the syntax

chapter), such as *if*, *when*, *before*, *although*, etc., or, in the special case of relative clauses, by a relativizer such as *that*, *who* or *which*.

Subordinating conjunctions link two clauses syntactically, and they encode a specific type of relationship semantically – e.g. conditionality (*if*), simultaneity (*when*), precedence (*before*), contradictions (*although*), etc. For example, in lines 13–15 of Example 1, the main clause *an apple corer is often used* is modified by the subordinate clause *when the apple needs to be kept whole* – as signaled by the subordinating conjunction *when*, the subordinate clause describes the type of event or situation in which the event described in the main clause occurs. In English, subordinate clauses are generally indistinguishable from main clauses in terms of their syntactic structure, except for the subordinating conjunction at the beginning. They are referred to as subordinate clauses because they cannot stand alone – they depend on the main clause. For example, it would be possible to say *An apple corer is often used* (leaving out the subordinate clause), but it is not possible to just say *when the apple needs to be kept whole* (leaving out the main clause).

Subordinating conjunctions can also introduce subjectless non-finite clauses. For example, in lines 5–9 in Example 1, the main clause *it [the apple corer] removes the core to the diameter of the circular cutting device* is modified by the non-finite participle clause *when pushed through the apple*, which, just like the full subordinate clause discussed above, is introduced by the subordinating conjunction *when* and describes the event or situation in which the event described by the main clause occurs.

Finally, relative clauses provide additional information about the referent of a noun phrase or about the event described by an entire clause. For example, the relative clause *which both cores and slices the apple* in lines 12–13 of Example 1 provides information about what happens if you perform the action described in the main clause. As you know, relative clauses can also modify noun phrases – for example, we could say *I am looking for an apple corer which both cores and slices the apple*.

**Two main clauses** can be linked by a **coordinating conjunction** (like *and*, *or*, *but*) or by a **linking adverb**. Coordinating conjunctions typically encode specific relationships between the two clauses they link, but these may be more general than in the case of subordinating conjunctions. For example, the coordinating conjunction *and* simply signals that both main clauses are true (as in Example 3), while *but* sig-

nals that the second main clause is in some kind of contrast to the first (as in Example 4).

### Example 3

Apples were introduced to North America by colonists in the 17th century, **and** the first apple orchard on the North American continent was planted in Boston by Reverend William Blaxton in 1625.

Wikipedia, s.v. *apple* (2020-10-27)  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple>

### Example 4

Cider apples are typically too tart and astringent to eat fresh, **but** they give the beverage a rich flavor that dessert apples cannot.

Wikipedia, s.v. *apple* (2020-10-27)

Linking adverbs encode relationships that are very similar to those encoded by conjunctions. We already saw the adverb *also* means “in addition to”, i.e., it is quite similar to *and*. Another example is the adverb *then* in *The core can then be removed from the apple corer* (lines 8–9, Example 1), which signals that the event described by this clause must occur after that described in the preceding clause – we could paraphrase the preceding clause as a subordinate clause using the conjunction *after*, as in **After** *we have removed the core from the apple, it can be removed from the apple corer*.

It should be clear how conjunctions, relativizers and adverbs contribute to the cohesion of a stretch of language – they link two (or more) clauses explicitly and add information about the way these clauses are related. In doing so, they also contribute to coherence, a point we will return to below.

### **Properties of linked clauses**

In addition to the expressions discussed in the preceding section, there are a range of phenomena that do not explicitly signal relationships between clauses but that occur only in clauses that are part of a text. The most important of these are pronouns (and similar expressions), defi-



nite articles and ellipsis (i.e., the omission of constituents that can be guessed from the preceding context).

**Pronouns** are perhaps the most obvious property of a clause that is related to another clause. For example, the subject of the second clause in Example 1 can be the pronoun *it* because it is clear from the preceding clause that it refers to an apple corer. Similarly, the pronoun *it* in the fifth clause in Example 1 (lines 7–8) refers to the *cutting device* mentioned in the fourth clause, and *this* in line 12 refers to *another type of apple corer* in line 10. These pronouns do not signal a relationship, but they depend on a relationship – they could not occur in their respective clauses if those clauses stood by themselves. The same is true of expressions like *similar fruit* in line 3 or *another type* in line 10 – these are not pronouns, but they need an expression in a preceding clause that they can refer back to.

The definite article *the* (and other definite expressions) can occur only in noun phrases whose referent is identifiable by the hearer – otherwise, an indefinite article like *a(n)* must be used. This is why, for example, the phrase *a circular cutting device* in lines 5–6 of example 1 has an indefinite article, while the phrase *the circular cutting device* in lines 7–8 has a definite article: the first time it is mentioned, it is not identifiable by the hearer – cutting devices have not been mentioned and we cannot be expected to know that they are part of an apple corer. The second time it is mentioned, however, it is of course identifiable. In this way, noun phrases with definite articles often depend on a previous clause in which their referent was introduced into the text, and in these cases they can only occur in a clause that is part of a text, not in a clause that stands by itself. However, note that this is not always the case: a referent may be identifiable even if it has not been explicitly mentioned. For example, the NP *the core and pips* in line 2 has a definite article even though *cores* and *pips* have not been mentioned – this is because we can be expected to know that apples have cores and pips, and because the word *apple* is mentioned in the same sentence, *cores and pips* is identifiable for the hearer.

Finally, ellipsis works a bit like pronouns: sometimes, a phrase can be left out completely if it has already been mentioned. For example, in the clauses *Another type of apple corer can be placed on top of the apple and pushed through*, the noun phrase *the apple* would be expected to occur after *through*: If the clause containing *push* stood by itself, it would have to be present: *The apple corer can be pushed through the*

*apple*, not \**The apple corer can be pushed through*. In line 11, it can be left out because it is mentioned in the VP *placed on top of the apple*. Again, ellipsis does not signal a relationship between two sentence but it is possible only in a sentence that is part of a text.

## Coherence and cohesion

Some linguists argue that the distinction between coherence and cohesion is an artificial and unnecessary one and that we could use the term *coherence* for all phenomena described: In this view, *cohesive devices* are just one way of creating coherence, like information structure and the unity of the topic discussed in a particular stretch of language.

In a way, this is a terminological issue – as long as we have more specific terms like *information structure* and *conjunction*, it does not seem to matter too much whether we group all phenomena discussed under a single label or not – especially as coherence and cohesion correlate very highly in natural language use: coherent texts tend to contain lots of cohesive devices and cohesive devices tend to occur only in coherent texts. However, keeping the levels of textual meaning (coherence) and textual forms (cohesion) separate is useful, as it is possible to have just one or the other.

In Example 5, all cohesive devices have been removed from the text in Example 1 (pronouns in line 3 and line 7, the linking adverbs *also* and *then* from lines 3 and 8), the subordinating conjunction *when* from line 6). Every sentence has been rephrased so that it could stand by itself. There is no cohesion, but you probably agree that it is still a coherent text (as opposed to Example 2 above, where we mixed up the individual clauses).

### Example 5

	1
<b><i>Apple corer</i></b>	2
An apple corer is a device for removing the core and pips	3
from an apple. An apple corer may be used for apples or	4
similar fruits such as pears or quince.	5
Some apple corers consist of a handle with a circular	6
cutting device at the end. Apple corers with a handle and a	7
circular cutting device at the end can be pushed through	8
the apple. The circular cutting device at the end of an	9
apple corer removes the core from an apple to the	10

diameter of the circular cutting device. An apple core can be removed from an apple corer. 11

In contrast, Example 6 contains all the cohesive devices also present in Example 1, but it has been created by randomly picking clauses and phrases with these devices from different texts. The result is a stretch of language that we would hesitate to call a *text* because it lacks all coherence.

### Example 6

**Apple corer** 1  
An apple corer is a device for removing the core and pips 2  
from an apple. It may also be used to determine the need 3  
for heart surgery, such as tennis or swimming. 4  
Some areas consist of bare limestone rock without 5  
sufficient soil covering to support vegetation. When 6  
pushed into a wooden board, it removes the distress of 7  
jealousy and failure. The laundry can then be dried 8  
according to routine procedures. 9  
Another type of medication can be tried and drilled 10  
through. This both helps and hinders the technician. This 11  
is also often known as Pascal's identity. 12  
A pneumatic multiplexer is often used when many 13  
pneumatic signals need to be interfaced, such as when 14  
playing jump rope or interrogating the entire database. 15

However, when reading it, we do get a sense of connectedness – we attempt to make connections, for example, between the pronoun *it* in line 3 and the noun phrase *apple corer* in line 2, and we treat the adverb *also* as linking the first and the second clause. Likewise, we attempt to find an antecedent for the pronoun *it* in line 6, and we can see that *vegetation* in line 6 is a possibility; we can also see that the text states that the vegetation will remove the distress of jealousy only in a situation where it is pushed into a wooden board, and that the laundry can be dried only after this has happened. In other words, we can see the connections between the individual sentences even though they do not make any sense – there is cohesion, but no coherence.

This may seem like an academic exercise – texts like Example 6 do not occur in actual language use. However, the point is that cohesive devices will lead us to *try* to find connections. In fact, they signal to us quite clearly that there must be a connection, even if we cannot see it.

In other words, they may help us to establish coherence in situations where the information provided by a stretch of language does not allow us to do so.

So, while coherence and cohesion typically occur together and while there are phenomena (like information structure) that play a role in both, it is best, for analytic purposes, to treat them as separate dimensions of what we intuitively call *text*.

## From text to text type

### Genre

Compare the text in Example 1 to the one in Example 7.

#### Example 7

<b>Baked Apples. Time—½ hour.</b>	1
1 lb. apples, 2 oz. brown sugar, ground cinnamon, 1	2
tablespoonful cold water, rind and juice of a lemon.	3
Wash the apples (if an apple corer be handy core them),	4
notch them across the top, place them in a Yorkshire	5
pudding tin, with the sugar, lemon-rind, lemon-juice,	6
water, and cinnamon. Bake till tender; serve hot or cold.	7
For <i>Apple Snow</i> , pass through a sieve and beat in lightly	8
whites of 2 eggs and 3 oz. castor sugar, then pile roughly	9
on a dish, and decorate to taste.	10

May Henry, Edith B. Cohen, *The Economical Jewish Cook*.

London, 1897

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54045/54045-0.txt>

The two texts are related topically in that they both mention apple corers and the ways in which they can be used (for example, when making baked apples).

But they are very different both in their overall structure and in the lexis and grammar they use. Both have a heading describing their general topic, but in Example 1, the text begins straight away, while in Example 7, there is a list of ingredients before the actual text starts. Example 1 exclusively uses the declarative mood, while Example 7 exclusively uses the imperative mood (with one exception, the subjunctive mood in *if an apple corer be handy*). Example 1 does not seem to make

any assumptions about where the hearer is and what they are doing while reading the text, Example 7 seems to assume the hearer is in a kitchen where utensils such as a pudding tin and a sieve are present.

To some extent, these differences are due to the different functions of these two texts: The first text is an encyclopedia entry meant to *inform* the hearer, and this is naturally done using declarative clauses, whose basic function is making statement; the second text is a recipe meant to *instruct* the hearer, and this is naturally done using imperative clauses, whose basic function is to request actions.

A tour guide informing a group of tourists about the history of the Brandenburg gate, for example, would also use mostly declarative clauses, and if she then wanted to instruct the group to follow her to the Reichstag building, she would switch to imperative clauses – yet her speech would not constitute an encyclopedia article or a recipe.

However, there is often more to a text than can be predicted based on its communicative function. Let us take a closer look at Example 7. While it is natural to use imperatives for giving instructions, there are many other ways of doing so. For example, we frequently use interrogative clauses of the form *Can/could you...*, *will/would you...*, *would you mind...*, etc. Yet, these never occur in recipes (not even very polite recipes). We also often use declarative sentences to give instructions – even cooking instructions. If I were to tell you how to make baked apples, I would probably say something like *You wash the apples and notch them across the top, and then you place them in a Yorkshire pudding tin...*; a TV cook would even say something like *I wash the apples and notch them across the top ...*, while performing the actions. Again, cook books never use these forms.

Thus, the use of imperatives in recipes is motivated, but not determined by their function – instead, it is determined by the practice of recipe writing in the English-speaking world. In other speech communities, other practices have evolved. In Germany, for example, we find declarative constructions (often in the passive form or with an impersonal pronoun), as in Example 8 from around the same time as Example 7, or subjectless infinitival clauses as in the more recent Example 9.

#### Example 8

<b>499. Bratäpfel</b>	1
Weinsauere Äpfel werden im Ganzen geschält. Dann	2
sticht man das Kernhaus mit einem Äpfelstecher heraus	3

und füllt die Höhlung mit Zucker, auf welchen man	4
oben auf ein Schnittchen Butter legt. Im Bratofen in einer	5
kleinen Pfanne lässt man sie braten.	6

Rebekka Wolf, *Kochbuch für israelitische Frauen.*

Frankfurt, 1896

<https://books.google.com/books?id=NZ9EAQAAMAAJ>

**Example 9**

<b>Bratapfel</b>	1
[...]	2
<b>Zubereitung</b>	3
• Das Backrohr auf 200 °C vorheizen.	4
• Die Äpfel unter Heißwasser abwaschen, mit Papier gut	5
abtrocknen und das Kerngehäuse mit dem Ausstecher	6
entfernen.	7
• Die Zutaten der Füllung miteinander vermischen.	8
• Die Äpfel füllen und sobald der Ofen seine Temperatur	9
erreicht hat die Butter in der Form schmelzen lassen.	10
• Die Äpfel in die die Form setzen und für 20 Minuten auf	11
der mittleren Schiene braten lassen.	12

Kochwiki.de (2020-10-30)

<https://www.kochwiki.org/wiki/Bratapfel>

Classes of texts defined by such textual practices are often referred to as **genres** – a term borrowed from the study of literary texts that is extended to refer to any recognizable class of texts with a common function and common formal properties.

In the case of recipes, we can see additional formal properties that are typical of the genre. These include lexical items, such as the noun *tablespoonful* (line 3 in Example 7) or the phrasal verb *beat in* (line 8), fixed phrases such as *serve hot or cold* (line 7), or *decorate to taste* (line 10), and grammatical structures like the fact that constituents are deleted if their referent is obvious from the context, as in *bake ~~the apples~~ till ~~they are~~ tender* (line 7) and *pile ~~the apple snow~~ roughly on a dish* (lines 9-10).

While recipes and encyclopedia articles would not be referred to as genres in literary studies, those classes of texts that are referred to as such in literary studies are often also genres according to the text-linguistic use of the term. Consider Example 9, which is an excerpt from a novel.

### Example 9

"How about some baked apples?" asked Grandmother	1
as the oven door was shut on the potatoes; and Mary Jane	2
noticed that she said it just as though Mary Jane could do	3
anything or cook anything a body might want.	4
"They're good, <i>I</i> think," replied Mary Jane.	5
"So do I," said Grandmother, "and we'll have some. Your	6
Grandfather opened the last box just this morning. You	7
pick out three, Mary Jane, and bring me the apple corer	8
from the drawer and the flat brown bowl from the pantry."	9
By that time, Mary Jane felt as important as any cook in	10
the land. She washed the apples. Grandmother hadn't said	11
to do that, but Mary Jane was sure it should be done. Then	12
she took the bowl and the corer over to where	13
Grandmother was working with her strawberries.	14

Clara Ingram Judson, *Mary Jane – Her visit*.  
New York, 1918

This genre is not defined by a particular mood – the sample contains declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses –, but it does have typical linguistic properties that distinguish it from both encyclopedia articles and recipes. For example, novels typically use the simple past as the tense for the narrative passages and they typically contain passages of quoted speech. Both of these properties are also found, for example, in the genre “news reportage”, but in novels (and short stories), the subject of the speech act verb introducing the quoted speech typically occurs after the verb (...*replied Mary Jane*, ...*said Grandmother*), while in news reportage it typically occurs in the standard position before the verb.

### Other classifications of texts

Not all linguists use the word *genre* in the sense introduced above (though the majority use it in this or very similar ways), and not all linguists agree that genre in the sense introduced here is the most relevant way of grouping texts into classes.

There are, of course, many other dimensions of language use that can be used to do so. Let us briefly discuss some of the more important ones.

An obvious dimension is **medium**, by which linguists tend to mean the large-scale distinction between **written** and **spoken**, but which may be further differentiated (written language may be handwritten, printed, displayed on a computer screen, etc., spoken language may be transmitted face-to-face or via telephone, etc.). Both the broad distinction between speech and writing and the more specific communication channels influence the structural properties of the language produced. Written language tends to use longer and more complex sentences and a more diverse vocabulary than spoken language, there are certain routines and fixed expressions that are typical of a particular channel, such as the fact that people often identify themselves by name at the beginning of a telephone conversation, but not when writing a letter, the fact that letters, but not telephone conversations, typically close with a phrase like *yours sincerely* or *best regards* and the writer's name, etc. Sometimes, these linguistic structures become conventionalized and thus define a particular genre (the term is used for spoken and written language in linguistics) – telephone calls and letters can both be said to constitute genres, which are defined, in part, by the medium in which they occur.

A second frequent dimension for classifying texts is **register**. Like *genre*, the term is used in slightly different ways by different researchers, but it generally refers to the influence that the situation in which a text is produced and the relationship between speaker and hearer influence the linguistic structure of the text. One important aspect of register is the dimension of formality – there are words and grammatical structures, that speakers consider **formal**, i.e., suitable for professional rather than personal situations, and there are those they consider **informal**, i.e., suitable for personal situations. In the texts discussed above, we see signals of formality in the encyclopedia article (for example, the word *device* rather than *thing*, the phrase *to the diameter of* rather than *the size of*, or the fact that many passive clauses are used), and in the recipe (for example, the subjunctive *if an apple corer be handy* instead of *...is handy*). In the excerpt from the novel, we see signals of informality, particularly in the passages of quoted speech (such as the phrase *How about some...* (line 1) rather than *Can I offer you...* or *Would you like..., I think* (line 5) rather than *In my opinion* and *pick out* (line 8) rather than *select*. Again, we can see register as one factor characterizing a given genre – encyclopedia articles are a genre



characterized by a formal register, conversations between grandmothers and grandchildren are characterized by an informal register.

A third dimension that is sometimes used to classify texts is **topic**. This is a useful dimension in many applied contexts – for example, internet search engines can serve results of a better quality if they are able to group web sites according to topic –, it is not really a useful dimension in linguistics. The texts discussed here all overlap heavily in terms of topic – all of them are about coring and baking apples –, but beyond the trivial fact that, because of this, they all contain words like *bake*, *apple*, and *corer*, they have nothing in common that would need to be described from a linguistic perspective, and genres are rarely restricted to a particular topic except in the most general way (such as the fact that recipes are about the preparation of food).