

GRAMMAR AS CHOICE

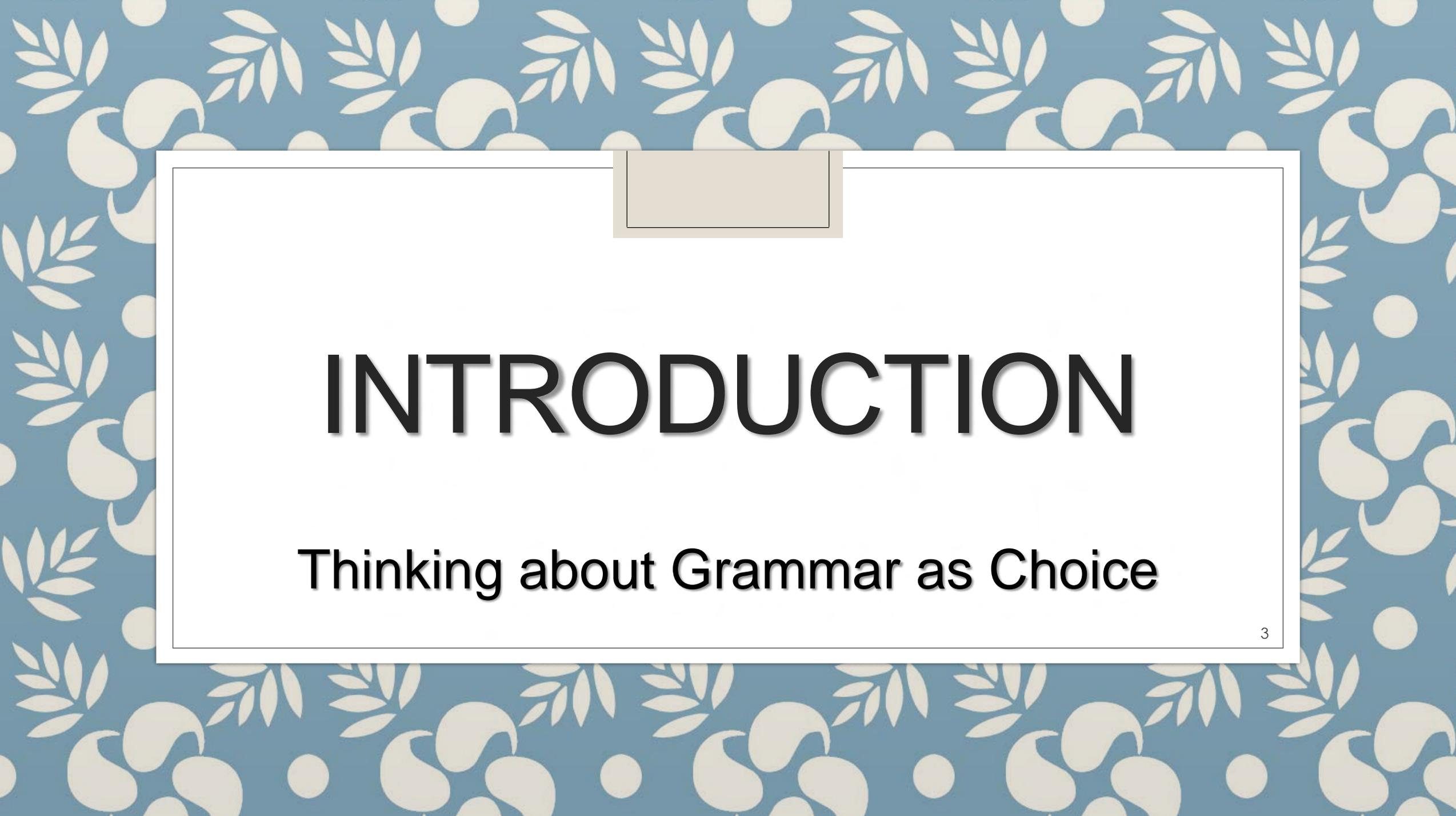
Exploring Writing Choices

With the suitcase in one hand and the trumpet in the other, he dashed out of the cave.

He dashed out of the cave, with the suitcase in one hand and the trumpet in the other.

Taking infinite care, the BFG unscrewed the top of the glass jar...

The BFG unscrewed the top of the glass jar, taking infinite care...



INTRODUCTION

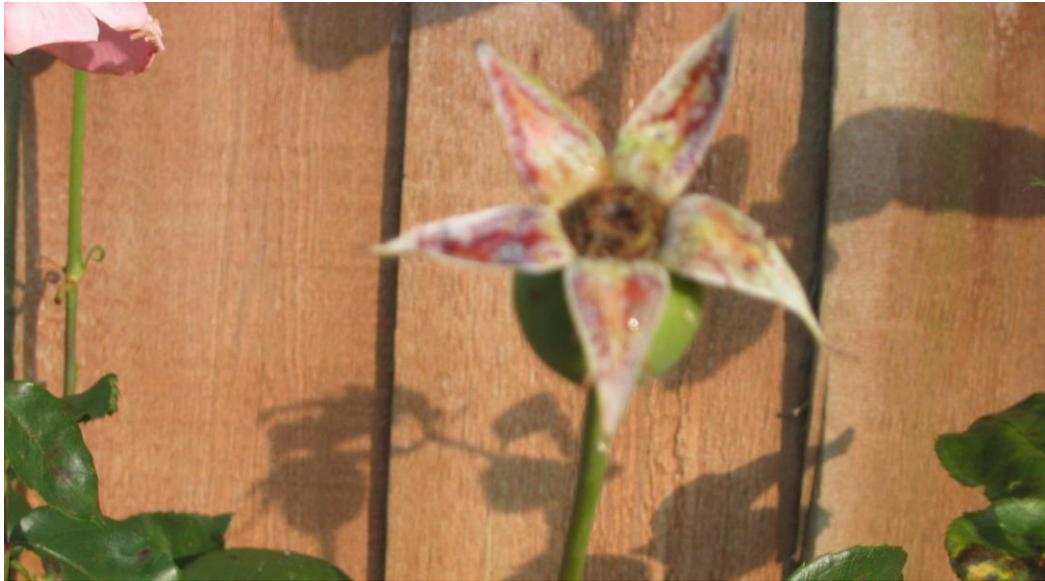
Thinking about Grammar as Choice

The Power of Grammar

*Grammar is a piano I play by ear, since I seem to have been out of school the year the rules were mentioned. All I know about grammar is **its infinite power**. **To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence**, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed. Many people know about camera angles now, but not so many know about sentences. **The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you want can be found in the picture in your mind**. The picture dictates the arrangement. The picture dictates whether this will be **a sentence with or without clauses, a sentence that ends hard or a dying-fall sentence, long or short, active or passive**. The picture tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of the words tells you, or tells me, what's going on in the picture. Nota bene.*

Joan Didion in *Why I Write*

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2012/10/16/why-i-write-joan-didion/>



Grammar as Choice

- ❑ One purpose of linguistic study is to understand the system of language and label it – a valid intellectual enterprise in its own right.
- ❑ Another aspect of grammar is to investigate how the system is used *in action* to create meaning.
- ❑ Carter and McCarthy (2006:7) distinguishes between these two purposes by terming them the '*grammar of structure*' and the '*grammar of choice*'.
- ❑ The choices we make as speakers and writers, both implicitly and explicitly, subtly shape the meanings we create.

Why Teach Grammar?

- ❑ To understand the language system of your first language, or your multi-languages;
- ❑ To know the grammar rules to avoid making mistakes in writing;
- ❑ To understand how language works in different contexts.

- ❑ School grammar has traditionally focused on the first two: form-focused.
- ❑ Linguistics in universities has focused on the third: function-focused.

- ❑ Repeated older research has shown that teaching grammar has no beneficial effect on writing competence: knowing what a noun is does not make you a better user of nouns in your writing!
- ❑ But all the studies were form-focussed: more recent research investigating a functional approach is showing positive results.

Table 1: Contrasting Form and Functional approaches to the teaching of grammar
(adapted from Derewianka and Jones - 2016:15)

The Traditional (Form-Focused) Approach	A Hallidayan (Functional) Approach
Describes language in terms of word classes; nouns, prepositions etc	Describes language in terms of the relationship between form and function of language eg an adverb can provide information about an action (<i>He ran swiftly</i>), or provide a comment (<i>Luckily he escaped</i>).
Operates at the level of the sentence and below	Deals with language from text to word level, and looks at the interaction of these.
Describes the grammar of written language	Describes how written language differs from spoken language and is used with multi-modal texts.
Sees language as a set of rules to be followed	Sees language as a resource and seeks to extend students' potential to make meaning more effectively.
Focuses on grammatical accuracy	Values well-structured sentences, but goes beyond structure to include other functions of language
Presents a decontextualized view of language	Systematically describes how the choices we make in using language are influenced by factors in the context
Uses a pedagogy typically concerned with naming and labelling grammatical forms, often through inauthentic exercises	Draws on a scaffolding cycle that relates students' knowledge about language to the kinds of meanings they need to make in various areas of the curriculum and in their daily lives.

Halliday and Functional Grammar

- ❑ *'What are the essential properties of text ? It is meaning, and it is choice'*. (Halliday 1975)
- ❑ A **meaning-oriented** theorization of grammar, concerned to explore the relationship between text and context, and looking not simply at lexical or syntactical aspects of grammar but also the discourse elements of organization, development and cohesion (Halliday 1994)
- ❑ Essentially about the integral **relationship between form and meaning**.
- ❑ **Choice** resonates throughout the composing process: be that at word level, at syntactical, clause or sentence level; at the level of textual organisation through cohesion, coherence and text structure; or at the level of visual layout or mode of publication.

Grammar as a Set of Choices

- ❑ We can encourage *'writers to recognize and use the grammatical and stylistic choices available to them and to understand the rhetorical effects those choices can have on their readers.'* Kolln and Gray 2016
- ❑ The purpose of grammar is to *'enable pupils to make choices from among a range of linguistic resources, and to be aware of the effects of different choices on the rhetorical power of their writing.'* Lefstein 2009:382
- ❑ *'We need to understand the possible power effects of our choices. We need to understand how our ideational choices construct participants, processes, and circumstances from a particular perspective; we need to attend to our choices of mood and modality, which encode relations of authority and agency between writers and readers; we need to think about how textual choices work to foreground and background ideas, to construct cause and effect, to position information as old or new.'* Janks 2009: 130

Grammar as Choice

Use a fronted adverbial!

X

Why use a fronted adverbial?



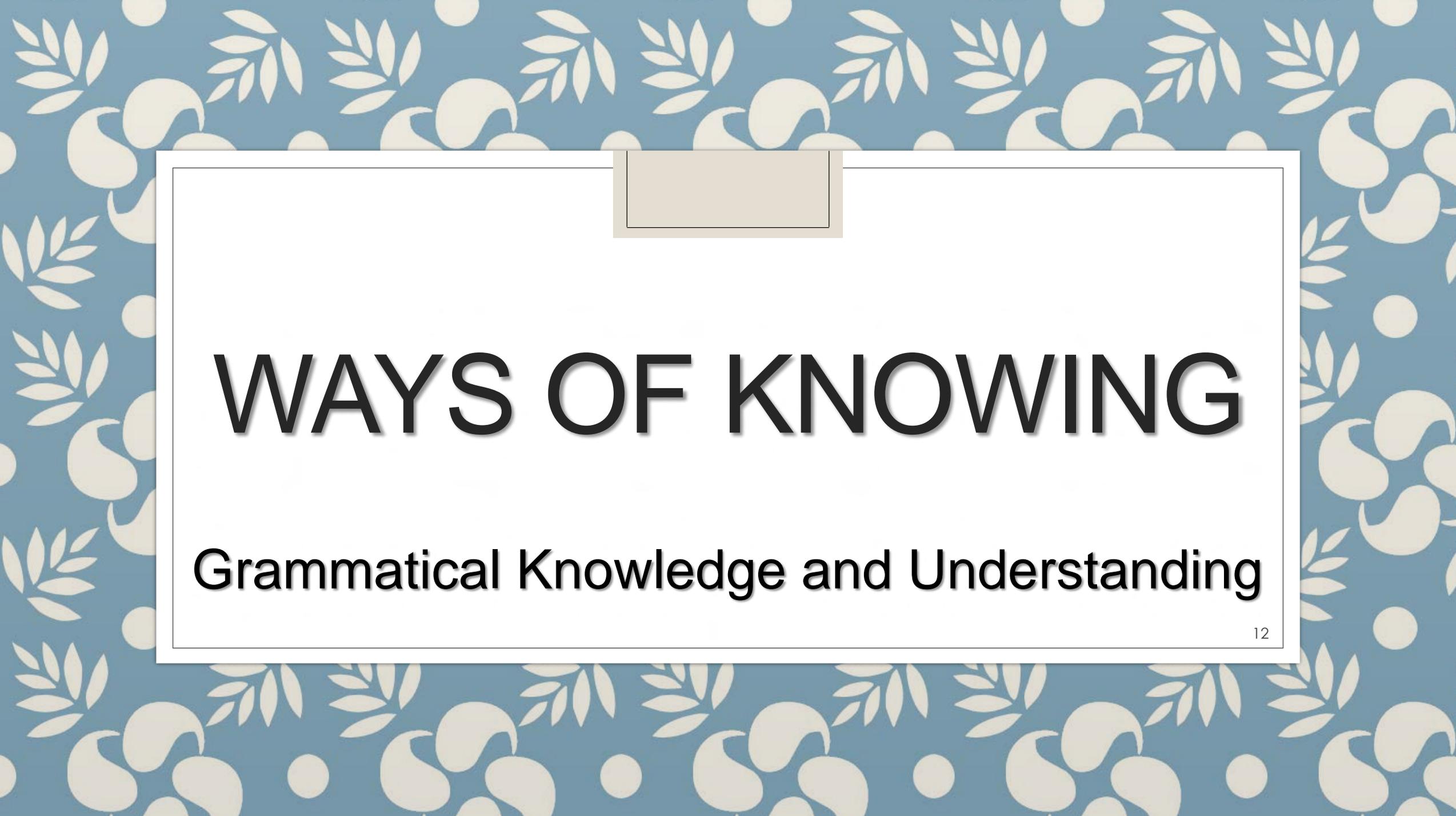
With the suitcase in one hand and the trumpet in the other, he dashed out of the cave.
He dashed out of the cave, with the suitcase in one hand and the trumpet in the other.

Taking infinite care, the BFG unscrewed the top of the glass jar...
The BFG unscrewed the top of the glass jar, taking infinite care...

I used a fronted adverbial.

I used a fronted adverbial here to draw attention to the carefulness of the BFG's action.

- ❑ The first is linguistic labelling (form); the second is understanding of the choice (function).



WAYS OF KNOWING

Grammatical Knowledge and Understanding

Implicit and Explicit Grammatical Knowledge

red	a	
handbag	leather	big

A big red leather handbag

- First language speakers know many of the rules of grammar, but implicitly as users – they cannot explain them;
- English L1 writers make relatively few grammar errors;
- Many grammar ‘rules’ are not rules but views on usage:
 - ‘It is wrong to carelessly split an infinitive’;*
 - ‘It is wrong carelessly to split an infinitive’;*
 - ‘Grammar error is something up with which I will not put.’*
 - ‘Grammar error is something I will not put up with.’*

Explicit Grammatical Knowledge

- ❑ Explicit grammatical knowledge is accessible and usable grammatical knowledge eg
'An adjective provides more information about a noun' or
'I used a passive there to foreground that idea.'
- ❑ Explicit knowledge is 'learning' knowledge: it can be used to develop greater understanding of how to write, to solve writing problems, to share thinking about writing. It is **pedagogically important**.
- ❑ Explicit grammatical knowledge supports students' metalinguistic understanding about writing.

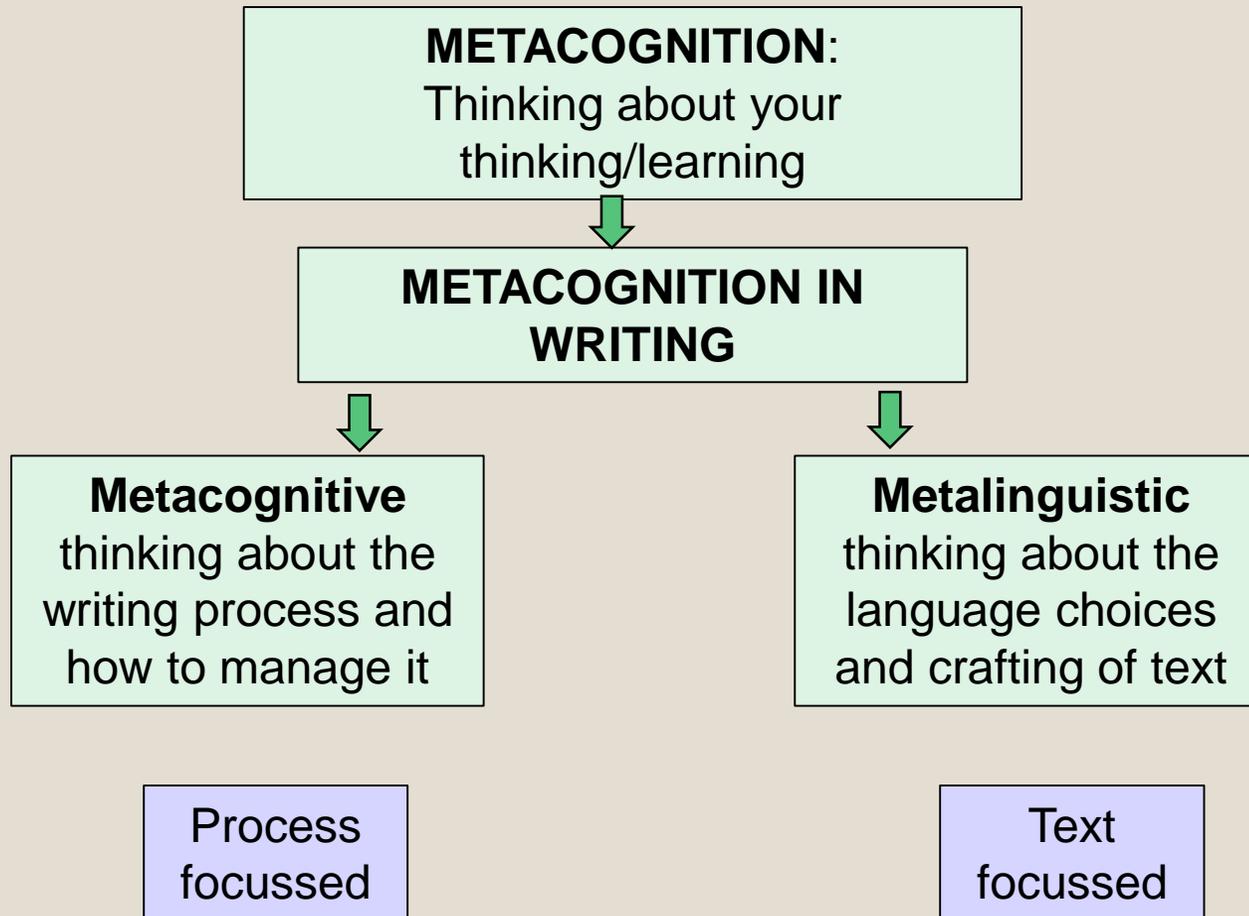
Metalinguistic Understanding

- ❑ Metalinguistic understanding: *‘subfield of metacognition concerned with language and its use – in other words comprising:*
 - 1) activities of *reflection* on language and its use;
 - 2) subjects’ ability *intentionally to monitor and plan* their own methods of linguistic processing (in both comprehension and production)’ (Gombert 1992:13)

- ❑ *‘the ability to take language as the **object of observation** and the **referent of discourse**’* (Camps and Milian 1999:6)

- ❑ *‘the explicit bringing into consciousness of an attention to **language as an artefact**’*
*‘the **conscious monitoring and manipulation of language** to create desired meanings grounded in socially shared understandings’* (Myhill 2012:250)

Going Meta!



Writing: '*deliberate
structuring of the web
of meaning*'
(Vygotsky 1986:182)

Writing: '*the ordeal of
deliberate choice*'
Samuel Coleridge

Useful Knowledge

- ❑ Gombert (1992) distinguishes between **declarative** and **procedural** metalinguistic knowledge: declarative knowledge being the knowledge of and ability to state rules and principles, whilst procedural knowledge is the ability to put this knowledge into action.
- ❑ The difference between **knowing that** a particular word is a verb, and **knowing how** to use verbs in your writing for particular effect.
- ❑ Grammar as choice emphasizes knowing how to use grammar in your writing, and understanding how your choices may affect the reader.

An Example: Using Adjectives

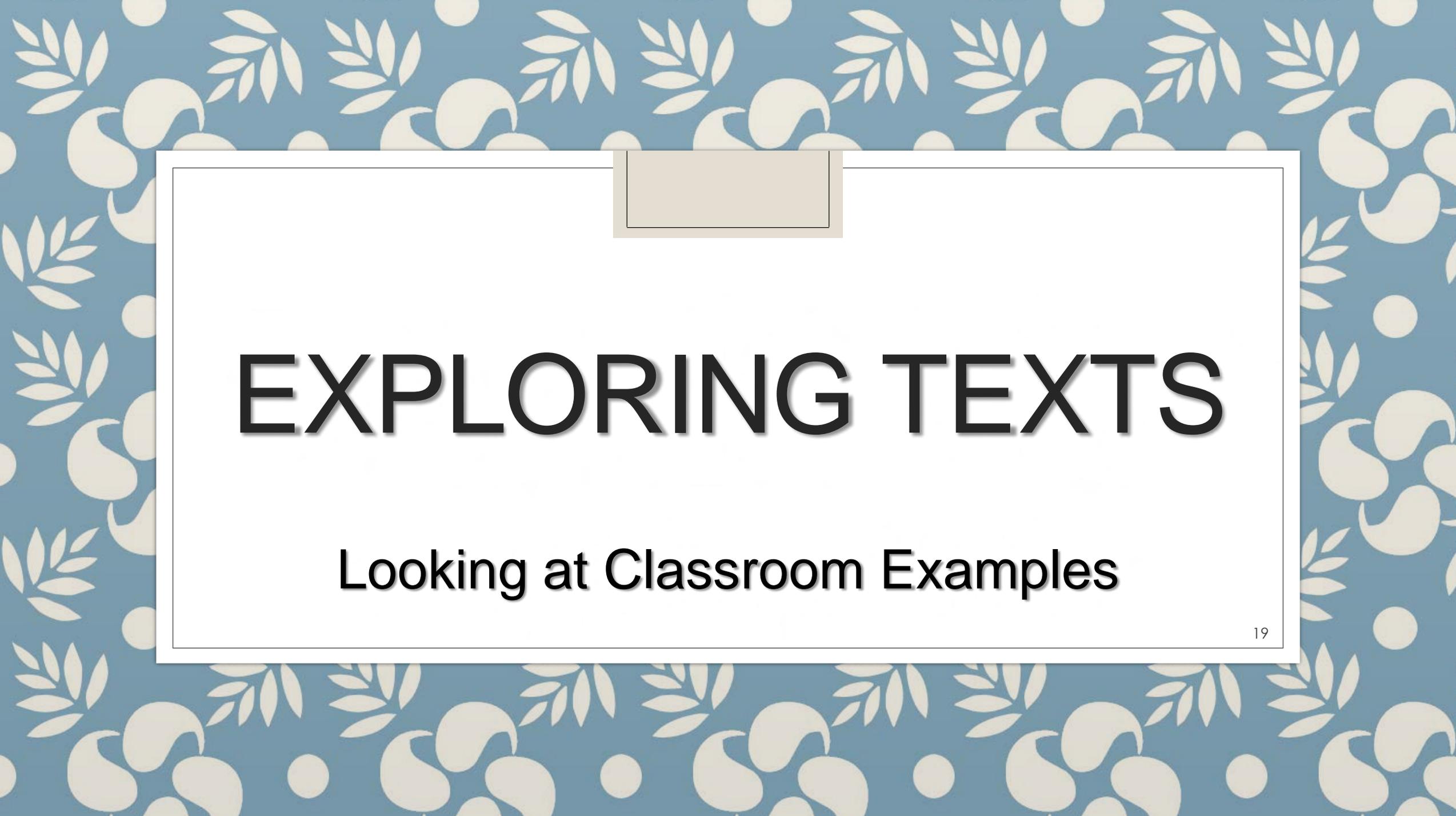
Sitting alone in the room was a girl – no, rather a woman – and beside her a harp. As I strained to see better, I slipped noiselessly on the wet cobbles. But so intent was she on her playing that she did not hear me and she did not look up. Her fingers plucked effortlessly. It was **her fingers, long, white and dancing**, that I loved first. Her hair was the colour of honey, of gold washed in milk. It fell over her face so that I could not see her. But I did not need to, for I knew already she would be perfect.

From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo

Writing Focus: creating character description

Grammar Focus: post-modification of a noun with adjectives (unusual in English speech)

Grammar Meaning Link: you can draw attention to, and emphasise, a description by moving the adjectives after the noun.



EXPLORING TEXTS

Looking at Classroom Examples

Character Description: Noun Phrases

Mr Wonka was standing all alone just inside the open gates of the factory.

And what **an extraordinary little man** he was!

He had **a black top hat** on his head.

He wore **a tail coat** made of a beautiful plum-coloured velvet.

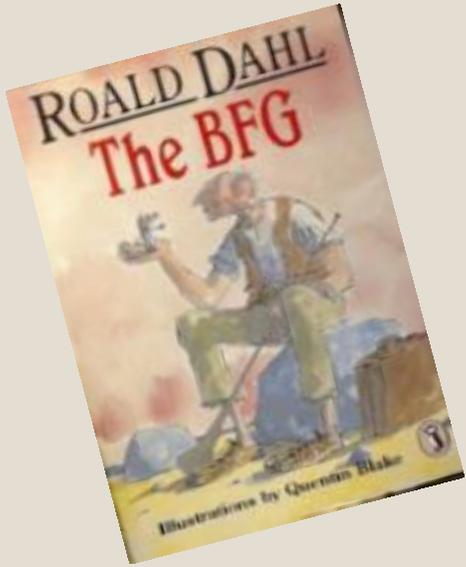
His trousers were bottle-green.

His gloves were pearly-grey.

And in one hand he carried **a fine gold-topped walking cane**.

Consider the noun phrases and how they convey a strong visual image of Mr Wonka. What do they make you infer about this character?

Sentence Patterns



Four different multiply-claused sentences; most of them co-ordinated with *and* or a comma.

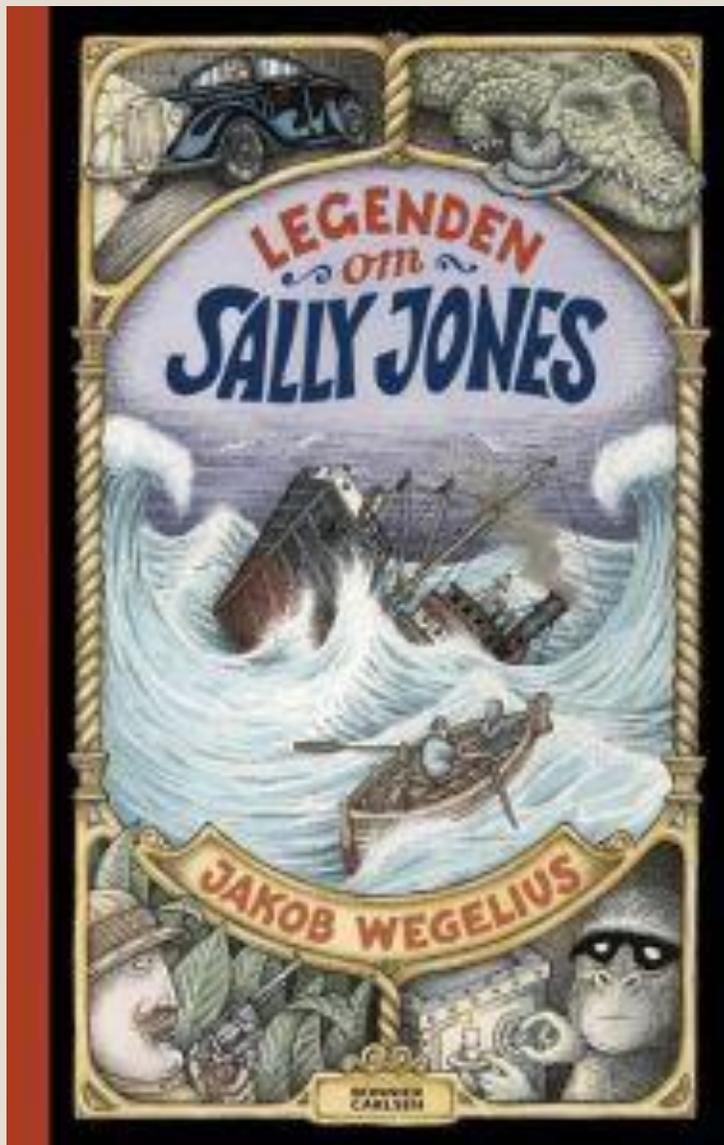
1. They punched and kicked and scratched and bit and butted each other as hard as they could.
2. He rolled and he wiggled, he fought and he figgled, he squirmed and he squiggled.
3. The giants roared and screamed and cursed, and for many minutes the noise of battle rolled across the yellow plain.
4. They stood up, stretched their limbs and started leaping about in fury.

Consider the effect of Dahl's choice to use *and* or to use a comma to co-ordinate; his choice to list or pair verbs; and what might these choices communicate about the giants.

Sentence Patterns

Berättelsen börjar en tropisk ovädersnatt för ett hundratal år sedan. Då föds en gorillaunge djupt inne i den afrikanska regnskogen. Varken måne eller stjärnor lyser den natten. Därför spår flockens äldsta, att den nyfödda kommer att drabbas av många olyckor i framtiden.

Månaderna går och vintern kommer. Sally Jones blir sjuk av kylan. Och ingen vill köpa henne. Ali Kazdim börjar fundera på att avliva det olycksaliga djuret.



Statement Sentences: Argument

There are two main threads to my campaign. First of all, I believe that supermarkets should be legally obliged to hand over all unsold but still edible foods to various food distribution charities instead of it going straight to landfill.

from *The Independent* 1 June 2015

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/im-calling-on-the-government-to-ban-food-waste-because-noone-should-be-starving-in-the-uk-10290009.html>

Saving food is a great opportunity to save some serious money. Did you know that the 2.6 million tonnes of food in Britain thrown away because it's gone out of date is worth £6.7 billion a year?

from the *Love Food Hate Waste* website

<https://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com>

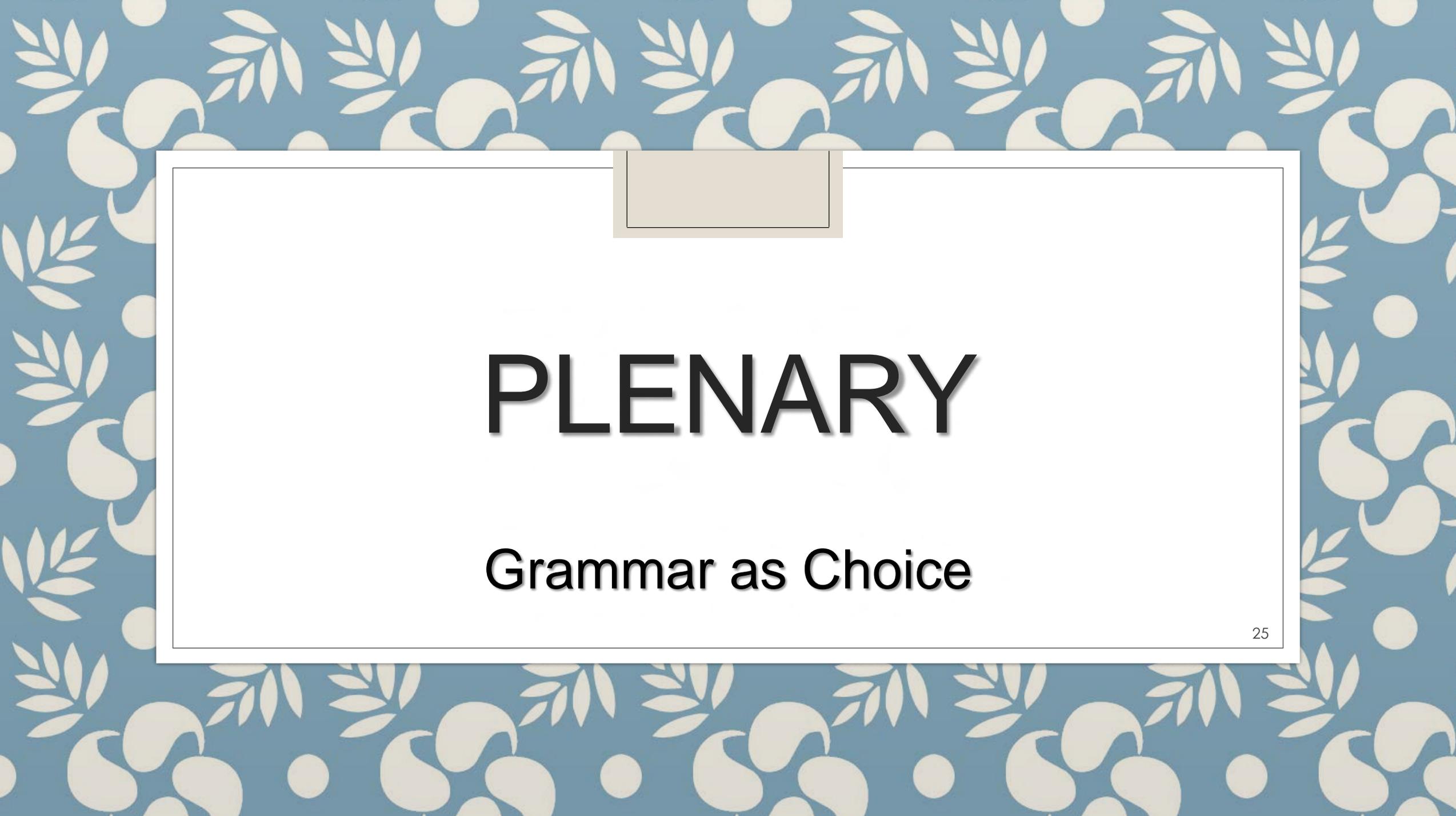
Statement Sentences: Information

Varmere klima og smeltende havis endrer Arktis dramatisk. For dyrene og menneskene som lever lengst nord på kloden vår, er verden i ferd med å forsvinne...

Isen i Arktis har alltid vokst om vinteren og krympet om sommeren. Men de siste tiårene har den smeltet mye mer hver sommer enn den har lagt på seg igjen om vinteren. Siden 1979 har sommerisen krympet med to tredeler!

Forandringene i Arktis skaper ikke bare nye betingelser for natur og mennesker lokalt. De bidrar også til å øke tempoet i den globale oppvarmingen. Når isen smelter, erstattes hvite, snødekte flater med åpent vann. Den lyse isen reflekterer mye av sollyset, mens det mørke vannet tar opp mer solenergi i form av varme. Dermed øker oppvarmingen.

WWF: <https://www.wwf.no/klima-og-energi/arktis>



PLENARY

Grammar as Choice

LEAD Principles

PRINCIPLE	EXPLANATION	RATIONALE
LINKS	Make a link between the grammar being introduced and how it works in the writing being taught	To establish a purposeful learning reason for addressing grammar, and connect grammar with meaning and rhetorical effect
EXAMPLES	Explain the grammar through examples , not lengthy explanations	To avoid writing lessons becoming mini-grammar lessons, and to allow access to the structure even if the grammar concept is not fully understood
AUTHENTIC TEXTS	Use authentic texts as models to link writers to the broader community of writers	To integrate reading and writing and show how 'real' writers make language choices
DISCUSSION	Build in high-quality discussion about grammar and its effects	To promote deep metalinguistic learning about why a particular choice works, and to develop independence rather than compliance

Teachers' Subject Knowledge

Shulman (1987) stresses the importance of subject knowledge and distinguishes between:

- ❑ SCK: subject content knowledge (knowledge of an academic domain);
- ❑ PCK: pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of how to teach that academic domain);
- ❑ PK: pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of how to teach).

Our approach to creative grammar teaching requires good subject knowledge:

- ❑ SCK: strong grammar knowledge;
- ❑ SCK: an ability to analyse texts and notice how they are 'working' grammatically to create meanings;
- ❑ PCK/PK: The ability to plan purposefully, integrating an attention to grammar within teaching units.

Teacher Attitudes towards Grammar

Teacher:	I ask them to start with a preposition. I wouldn't necessarily call it a preposition, I'd call it like a position word or something like that and, and so we do...
Interviewer:	Why would you use position word rather than preposition?
Teacher:	Because they know the word 'position' because it's in everyday life, but preposition isn't.
Interviewer:	So you don't think you should ever teach them new words in English?
Teacher:	Well, no, because as you can see by word of the week, that is how we teach new words in English.
Interviewer:	So why do grammar words differ from other new words?
Teacher:	Oh probably because I hate them ... I do teach them but I think probably because it put me off so much I'm afraid of putting them off.

Re-Thinking Grammar

- ❑ Explicit knowledge is usable 'learning' knowledge: it can be used to develop greater understanding of writing and being a writer.
- ❑ Adopting a functionally-oriented approach to grammar focuses on meaning: *how* we write something is as important as *what* we write.
- ❑ Showing learners the grammatical choices writers make, and the grammatical choices they can make as writers, can enable them to have more *conscious control of how their writing communicates* their intended message.
- ❑ Explicit attention to grammar as a meaning-making resource develops learners' *metalinguistic understanding*.

Resources for Teachers

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/centres/centreforresearchinwriting/grammar-teacher-resources/>

About the pedagogy (including the LEAD principles and mini-PPTS):

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/research/centres/writing/grammar-teacher-resources/grammarchoice/thegrammarforwritingpedagogy/>