Grounding in English and Arabic News Discourse
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1.1 Aim and Scope of the Study

GOAL
The main goal of the present study is to account for *grounding*—the major theoretical notion of the study—in terms of the *foreground (FG)-background (BG)* structure and to examine certain manifestations of that structure in both English and Arabic news texts. In the vast literature (see 1.5), differing and sometimes conflicting treatments have failed to dissipate the theoretical confusion about the concepts and notions involved. Definitions have been imprecise, levels of description confused and, above all, analyses have been rather limited in scope, for example in terms of individual lexical items or the topic-comment structure of the sentence.

We use various notions to describe distinct features and distinguish levels of description. Taking a text-level approach to grounding and its manifestations, we focus on propositions and examine the FG-BG structure in plausible discourse-semantic terms and its manifestations in discourse-pragmatic terms. It will be shown that grounding is an additional requirement of textuality. We present first the level of discursive manifestations—so-called 'superstructural' categories that occur in this type of news discourse and that are crucial in determining the way surface structure prominence signals the FG-BG articulation. For surface structure manifestations of grounding, we focus on entities that occur in sentence-initial position and examine their grounding-signaling function. In addition, we present and explain empirically-based observations about differences between English and Arabic news texts in entities in that position. Arabic news texts will therefore be used in order to explore and discuss in detail the influence of the FG-BG structure on surface structure expression. It will be argued that grounding considerations account for the occurrence in these texts of 'prefatory' sentences: They are a syntactic manifestation or marking of grounding at text-level. Thus a language-specific illustration will
provide further evidence that not only grounding but also its expression are crucial for textuality.

In the course of the study, we will use the terms 'text' and 'discourse' interchangeably. That is because 'discourse' does not refer only to dialogue and conversation, and a written text may also be a 'monologue discourse' (van Dijk 1977: 8). In fact now 'text takes on more of the interactive qualities of discourse' (Garrett and Bell 1998: 2), and although important differences exist between spoken and written languages, both terms denote forms of linguistic expression.

DATA
The research reported in this study is based on authentic short news texts taken from the International Herald Tribune (IHT) and the international edition of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram. The Arabic data will be explained in chapter 4. The English data consist of a sample of 100 short news items, randomly drawn from the section entitled 'World Briefs', which appears daily on the second page of the IHT, over a six month period (January-June 1985). The sample is assumed to be large enough to be representative of English-American news discourse, and to provide sufficiently accurate results for research purposes.

The short news item is a specific type of the news story. It belongs to the news genre, which is central among media genres (see e.g. McQuail 1991, Bell 1991). Other types of media discourse, such as news editorials, background features, and interviews are excluded (but see chapter 4). The texts are limited to printed daily news; neither radio and TV news nor news in weeklies are considered. The limitation to one type of discourse and one medium has been made in order to insure the homogeneity of the corpus. Practical reasons are also involved in the choice of short news items: they are easy to quote fully and to examine in more detail and depth. In addition, they have not as yet been studied—at least not in detail—as a special (sub-) genre, and on this ground alone they merit investigation. Furthermore, in a compact form they exhibit features of longer news texts which have been 'globally' studied, and they are also similar to other forms of short (summarized) news items such as those in TV news programs. More importantly, short news items are suitable because, as a result of their epitomic nature, the sentences show the expression of different grounding-values in close succession.
ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTER
The organization of this chapter will be as follows: After explaining the aim and scope of the study in section 1.1, section 1.2 will be an informal introduction to the FG-BG structure as a textual phenomenon and will show its place among several other structures and levels of expression. As part of our theoretical analysis, we will introduce some basic distinctions. Thus, we distinguish between information—and its distribution in mental models of events and situations—and the way it is textually constructed in semantic representations, that is, meaning and its organization in text. In section 1.3 we distinguish between two main principles of (overall) meaning organization in discourse: coherence, that is, meaning and its organization in terms of a macro-micro structure and local (conditional and functional) propositional coherence and grounding, that is, meaning and its organization in terms of a FG-BG structure. Then we examine the notion of importance and present rules that distinguish or assign information importance. In section 1.4 we present the FG-BG structure as a scale of grounding-values and describe the criteria for their assignment in news texts. After that we examine two major constraints on grounding: perspective and relevance. Finally, in section 1.5 we review the literature on the various aspects of the phenomenon of foreground and background, show a number of deficiencies, and explain the place of the present study as well as its contribution. Since this study is about news, a few words would be necessary about the contribution of other linguistically-oriented news discourse studies.

1.2 The Nature of the FG-BG Structure
Underlying the FG-BG articulation is the organizing principle of objects in terms of 'figure' and 'ground'—two gestalt notions whose perceptual distinction goes back to the Gestalt psychologists (see Koffka 1935; Köhler 1929). (For a review of the first generation of Gestalt psychologists' contribution to the cognitive revolution, see Murray 1995.) These notions are linked to the discourse notions of foreground and background (see Talmy 1978) in terms of which meaning and its organization in text are described.

In order to get an idea about the nature of this textual phenomenon, let us first consider the following short news text, T5, referring to its serial number in the sample. The sentences are numbered and indented at para-
Savimbi Reported Seriously Wounded

LISBON (AFP)—(1) Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan rebel leader, has been seriously wounded during an attack by government forces on his headquarters in the south of the country, the Portuguese news agency said Wednesday.

(2) In a dispatch from Luanda, the Angolan capital, the agency quoted Angolan military sources as saying the attack by elite troops in helicopters with heavy air support took place late last month.

(3) The troops struck at the headquarters of Mr. Savimbi's guerrilla organization, the Union for the Total Independence of Angola, at Jamba, a small town near the border with South-West Africa (Namibia), it added.

(4) Rumors that Mr. Savimbi had been captured by Angolan troops circulated in South Africa in mid-December.

(5) He has not appeared in public for several weeks, and did not make his usual address at Christmas.

When we examine the text we realize that it is coherent; it has both local and global coherence relations (see 1.3.1). Intuitively, we also realize that it manifests a FG-BG structure or a figure-ground segregation (see Ungerer and Schmid 1996). The headline and the first few sentences seem to organize or express more 'figure' or important meanings—i.e. about the fact or event that Savimbi was wounded in an attack—than later sentences, which organize or express meanings about the precise circumstances of that event. The writer, then, seems to have selected and distinguished some meanings as foreground and some other meanings as background. According to this characterization, foreground ends with S3, which terminates the report on the main event proper, and background is expressed in sentences S4 and S5, since S4 denotes meanings other than those about the main event, namely rumors about Savimbi's capture, and S5 provides evidence that supports these rumors.

In addition to the organization of meanings in the text into (a binary opposition of) foreground and background, it is assumed that there are meanings that are neither the one nor the other. Meanings expressed in sentences S2 and S3 are about specifics of the main event: the troops and the attack they carried out. These meanings are assumed to differ from those expressed in the headline or the lead sentence. They are assumed to serve a different grounding function from that served by meaning ex-
pressed in S1, since the underlying information is interpreted to be less important than the information that Savimbi has been seriously wounded. On the other hand, these meanings are assumed to be more important than meanings expressed in sentences S4 and S5 that are assumed to be background and to have a lower degree of information importance.

In addition to the cognitive organization of information, and the distinction between foreground and background in the textual propositions that encode that information, there are concrete visual signs of the FG-BG structure. In the spatial organization of objects, the 'figure' occupies a prominent position in the text as a headline. Being in bold, language users would recognize it easily as such and would focus their attention on it to the exclusion of other 'objects'.

From this preliminary examination of the FG-BG structure in T5, we make a few observations. Some of them are about notions that will be distinguished and features that will be examined in more detail in subsequent sections and chapters.

1- Information structure has been referred to as 'organizational meaning' (see Beekman et al. 1981; Larson 1984; Kopesec 1988). Our approach to information is that:

a. it is not a property of text but of the cognitive structure and the knowledge of language users, e.g. as represented in their mental models of events (Johnson-Laird 1983; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983) underlying the text.

b. it may be more or less important. Importance is taken as a measure for information in terms of the size of its knowledge implications. Thus 'importance of information is defined relative to the social cognitions (knowledge, attitudes or ideologies) of a social group, including (the representation of) their goals, norms and interests' (van Dijk 1995: 263). The assignment of importance to information occurs in a certain (viz. the present) context, hence it may vary according to context, but also according to medium or text-type. It should be added that we are only able to infer such importance assignment to information from the organization of the manifestations of such information in discourse meaning, precisely by the surface structure expression of the FG-BG structure.

2- Although we will further ignore a cognitive analysis of mental models,
it is nevertheless important to make a theoretical distinction between mental models or information/knowledge about events, viz. model information, and the way information is textually constructed or manifested in semantic representations, viz. text meaning, in terms of a FG-BG organization. The semantic meaning of discourses typically selects and hierarchically orders information from models. Thus information as beliefs about events is mapped on semantic representations as propositions, or rather as event propositions, e.g. action, process, or experience. It should be added that while meaning will be described in terms of propositions, no claims will be made about the units or nature of information in models, which might be 'propositional' or 'non-propositional' (see Oakhill and Garnham, eds. 1996).

3- The FG-BG structure is not a binary opposition but a gradual scale of meaning distribution that is based on the assignment of degrees of importance to information (see 1.3.2.1) as well as on criteria for grounding-value assignment in news texts (see 1.4.1).

4- That the organization of meanings as a FG-BG structure involves a distinction among several grounding-values is in accordance with the basic assumption that human communication does not manifest one and the same grounding-value throughout. Events and participants do not enjoy the same significance or insignificance. In fact, a text or a 'story in which every character was equally important and every event equally significant can hardly be imagined' (Callow 1974: 49), and people who produce and comprehend discourse, or language users in general, 'lend more importance to some information than to other information' (Wallace 1982: 208).

5- The organization of discourse meaning as a FG-BG structure makes texts interesting and contributes to their overall coherence. This is a task that defines another kind of coherence than global (macro) coherence or local (micro) coherence between propositions as defined later. The FG-BG structure influences the hierarchical structure of the mental models that readers build about events referred to by the textual propositions. In other words, the FG-BG articulation manages an important aspect of text comprehension and interpretation, viz. how readers assign greater or lesser importance to specific properties of events they read about. In fact, foreground may update readers' knowledge (mental models) of the world
by introducing features of current or new events and developments. On the other hand, sup-plying background may serve an anchoring function that puts foreground in perspective and integrates it properly in the entire structure. It may also help readers keep track of previous events that they are supposed to have known about already for instance from earlier news texts.

6- Properties specific to text-type are assumed to determine the way events and states of affairs are evaluated and referred to in propositions that vary in grounding-values. In news discourse, events must fulfil several conditions such as meaningfulness and unexpectedness (see Galtung and Ruge 1973) in order to get into the news, that is, to be selected for expression: propositionally and sententially. Thus, the specific properties of the short news item may dictate that reference be made to one single event in a foreground proposition. On the other hand, narrative foreground has been associated inter alia with a summary of a story or a collection of temporally successive events.

7- Properties specific to text-type may also determine the way surface structure signals the FG-BG distinction. In the short news text, the most important information is mapped on textual propositions that are expressed first, that is, in a prominent way, in the headline or the lead sentence. This is typical of news texts and is in accordance with newspaper reporting which 'imposes a certain demand that the main content be given in the first opening sentences, and that in the rest of the story the details be given in successive sentences and paragraphs' (Longacre 1983: 2; for details see van Dijk 1988a). This pattern of organization in news texts is 'in order of generally decreasing importance so that if the story needs to be cut to fit a particular space on the page, that which is cut out will be less important than what is left in' (Thorndyke 1979: 97).

8- While this realization pattern generally applies, as the example we examined shows, and although background, which tends to map less important information is expressed less conspicuously in the surface structure, i.e. later in the text, not everything that may be cut out from the end of the news text automatically has an underlying background meaning. We assume that in certain situations propositions that may be expressed towards the end of the text— or even cut out— may denote other grounding-values,
and that their deletion or non-prominent signaling is based on a lower degree of **relevance** (i.e. the usefulness or newsworthiness for readers), which may not necessarily coincide with a similar degree of **importance**. This means that there could be different sources for the way the FG-BG structure is prominently or non-prominently signaled. It should be noted that surface structure prominence serves a communicative function in text, namely to influence the perception of readers of what has been reported.

### 1.2.1 Levels of Textualization

Before we further explain the FG-BG structure, and distinguish it from other semantic structures, it is perhaps necessary to look at its place within the broader framework of the realization-/textualization-process. In that process, we identify four structures (see Figure 1) that operate at different stages— from 'deep'/underlying structures, that is the basic, cognitive information-level (a and b) to textual/expression levels (c and d). The four structures are briefly explained.

**a. The structure of facts in the 'world'**

Facts in 'reality' are concrete world events, actions or states of affairs, in terms of time and place. They may be historical or fictitious (as in novels), but in our study of news texts, we will deal with facts that are purported by journalists to be historical or 'true', whether or not they are actually the case. That is, we do not hereby claim that news is always true.

Facts are causally as well as temporally arranged in a sequence: one fact \( f_1 \) precedes or causes another fact \( f_2 \). If we look at the *Savimbi story* in **T5** cited earlier, we find a number of propositions that represent the following temporally or causally related events 'in the world':

1. Rumors circulated in mid-December that the Angolan rebel leader, Savimbi, has been captured by Angolan troops.
2. Savimbi has not been seen in public for several weeks and has not delivered his usual Christmas speech.
3. Elite government troops attacked the headquarters of his UNITA guerrilla organization at Jamba late in December.
4. The troops used helicopters with heavy air support.
5. Savimbi has been seriously wounded during the attack.
The structure of facts in the world is therefore the raw material for other (subsequent) representations in which language users perceive or select differently. There may be, of course, isomorphism between the structure of facts in the world and other representations. This is evident in the case of chronological story telling, where earlier facts or events (which may also be causes) are presented before later ones (which may also be consequences). In this case, the linear representation of events is the 'natural' text ordering (see Levelt 1989), since it coincides with causally/temporally
structured or related facts 'in the world'.

b. The structure of facts in the minds of language users

Cognitively, facts in the world exist for people because of the way these facts are conceptually organized in their minds as mental model structures of the world talked about (Johnson-Laird 1983; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). Mental model structures, then, represent how language users perceive, interpret, and segment the world on the basis of their knowledge (or personal experience), whether of events (i.e. event models) or situations (i.e. situation models). It is to be noted that mental models do not represent or describe features of the text itself but the (reporter's) knowledge of what the text is about: that is, events, objects and processes described in the text (Glenberg et al. 1987). This is the case in the Savimbi story. The journalist's mental model structure of the facts about Savimbi includes information inferred from parts of scripts: For example, information about Angola, the power-struggle, the position of different parties in it, general geographic knowledge, and background knowledge of previous events.

Since people in general and journalists in particular know much more about events and situations than they (need to) tell or write, mental models are typically much more extensive than the texts derived from them (or than the texts on which they are based). This is also true because language users will activate and integrate in their models large portions of general, socially shared knowledge about people, events, actions or situations, for instance about armies or warfare in the model underlying the Savimbi story. This means that texts in principle will only feature the information of a model that is contextually relevant for expression in communication and interaction.

People understand the facts about Savimbi— as one manifestation of the organization of the world— because of their 'model of the situation', which is an episodic (subjective) knowledge structure representing these facts. This knowledge structure is the result of the interpretation of relations between these facts: \( f_2 \) might have been observed or inferred first and \( f_1 \) might have been observed or inferred later. So, in ordering or linearizing facts, attention may have been focussed first on \( f_2 \), then it is observed that \( f_2 \) is a consequence of \( f_1 \). This shows that sometimes ordering 'in the mind' (viz. in models) is not the same as ordering 'in the world', because earlier events may be noticed or represented— understood or perceived— after later events. But often there is parallelism: models and reality have a simi-
lar mapping, that is, earlier (cause) events are also represented or understood before later (consequence) events, given the temporal direction of events in the world as it is experienced by language users.

This leads us to the ways in which knowledge or information in models may be organized. We suggest that it may be organized in terms of:

1- level/hierarchy: That is, model information is organized in macro and micro terms. It may be mapped on meaning organization in discourse, i.e. semantic structures or representations, as textual macrostructures or propositions and microstructures or propositions. This mapping is subject to possible interference and influence of context constraints. In this case, macro-information in a model may not coincide with topics or macro-propositions in the semantic structure of a text.

2- importance: That is, model information is organized in terms of greater or lesser importance. Information (or fact) importance is defined in terms of how consequential the facts are in the world. This suggests that importance implies a hierarchy of facts or events (e.g. with respect to the structure of the world, causes and consequences) as represented in the mental models of language users. For example, the information about death is in general more important than the information about sickness, since it has more serious consequences. This means that importance in news usually has more news value or newsworthiness, as is the case in the Savimbi story.

3- relevance: That is, model information is organized in terms of the roles, intentions, goals, perspectives, and expectations of language users. These also define what information about an event is more or less relevant for language users in the present communicative situation, and hence their context models. Information relevance, then, is defined in terms of how consequential facts are in the life of writers and readers in the present (media use) context. For example, the writer may attach more or less relevance to the information for what he/she considers to be the possible significance, effect, or consequences of this information for (some) people. This means that information relevance need not always be the same as information importance, since information is selected on the basis of a relevance criterion. It also means that the importance of information in a model need not always coincide with macro-information in the model. On
the other hand, information that is relevant in the present context may be expressed in the semantic structure of the text as topics or macropropositions and sub-topics or micropropositions. In surface structure, the semantic representation of important or relevant information would usually tend to be expressed earlier in the news text.

c. Semantic representations
The third level or stage in the process of textualization pertains to the conceptualization of fact-representations in propositions, i.e. meanings of texts to be produced. Semantic representations are not (and need not be) as detailed as models: only the contextually relevant and often the unknown information of the model is included in the propositions of the text. So semantic representations are formed as a function of what speech participants or writers want to include as information from their knowledge about a situation (that is, from their models). This semantic mapping of text—i.e. the 'preverbal message' (see Levelt 1989) or the propositional content—is based on a distinction between more or less important or relevant information. It involves a decision on two distinct features of semantic representations:

1- A decision to assign grounding-values to meanings or propositions. This decision is subject to general importance rules (see 1.3.2.1) and more specific criteria (see 1.4.1). In the Savimbi story, the information that Savimbi has been seriously wounded is considered important and relevant. It has wider political consequences, and hence it should be included in the semantic representation and assigned foreground interpretation.

2- A decision to assign a macro-micro structure to meanings or propositions. This decision involves:

i. The choice or construction of a global topic (e.g. the wounding of Savimbi), which is an abstract, high-level meaning. Being a global macrostructure, the global topic is neither the grammatical subject (see Givón 1977) nor the topic of the sentence, which is the surface manifestation of the underlying semantic/pragmatic structure of the sentence (see van Dijk 1981). The global macrostructure is thus the discourse topic, which includes both a central referent and the major predications involving this referent, possibly mapped to a single macro-proposition (van Dijk
ii. The choice or construction of specifics of the global topic (e.g. specifics of the attack by the elite troops on Savimbi's headquarters). Specification is provided by propositions that are lower in the abstract macrostructure or by the actual propositions expressed in the text. These textual propositions are organized by various coherence relations (see 1.3.1).

This characterization underscores the difference between the importance of information in models (which is a property of what language users know about events, and which is also personally or contextually constrained), and coherence (i.e. the macro-micro structure) within semantics (which is a property of the meaning of language users' discourse, that is, of what they say or write about events). It underscores on the other hand the relation that might be there between information that is included as a textual macroproposition and a certain grounding-value (viz. foreground).

d. Manifestations of organization and surface structure expression
In addition to— and subsequent to— decisions on semantic representations of texts, there are actual production processes: manifestations of the organization of textual propositions as well as surface structure expression. Figure 2 displays the direction in the process of textualization from meaning— two distinct semantic structures or phenomena (see 1.3): the macro-micro structure (viz. coherence) and the FG-BG structure (viz. grounding)— to the various manifestations of organization and surface structure expression. It should be noted that surface structures not only express semantic meaning but also properties of the context model, such as roles and relations of language users, setting, knowledge or goals.
Semantic structures

1- Macro-micro structures: high (general, abstract), low (specific, concrete)
   local coherence (functional) relations

2- FG-BG structure: a hierarchy of 'propositional importance'

organization features and surface structure expression

hierarchy/linearity

discursive salience: schemata (textual organizers)
   (Main Event, Previous Event, ...)
   Position: Headline, Lead Sentence, last sentence
   Sequence: first-last

syntactic ordering

hierarchy of syntactic structure (e.g. main-subordinate, left-right)
syntactically based prominence (sentence-form), defined in terms of sentence grammar as well as text grammar, i.e. over sequences of sentences or whole texts

stress, intonation

graphical signals (headlines, bold)

Figure 2 From meaning to expression

Figure 2 shows that as part of semantic structures, the FG-BG propositional structure could be organized in terms of schemata (see chapter 2) that show salience and that are expressed in surface structure more or less prominently by syntactic means such as initial ('topical') position in sentences, word-order and hierarchy (see chapter 3). These features may serve as manifestations of prominence or prominence markers (see van Dijk 1995) that signal the perspective of the writer on how to express the FG-BG structure in surface structure.

1.3 Coherence Phenomenon vs. Grounding Phenomenon

After having presented some basic properties of the grounding phenomenon and shown the place it occupies within the process of textualization, we examine in more detail the similarity, difference, or parallelism between it and the coherence phenomenon. That the two phenomena are often conflated is perhaps due to the fact that both are semantic representations, described in terms of (relations between) propositions, and have to
do with the meaning of discourse. The conflation may be also because the highest— top-most— macroproposition (topic) and foreground seem to be isomorphous, as is usually the case in news texts.

In spite of this conflation, overlapping, or co-occurrence, the two phenomena represent different dimensions of semantic representations, and foreground and background are not the same conceptual pair as macro- and micro-levels of the semantic structure of text. In fact, both are not necessarily co-extensive, and grounding has distinct traits that distinguish it in a number of essential ways from coherence.

1.3.1 Propositional Coherence

One basic difference between the FG-BG structure and the macro-micro coherence structure is in the kind of meaning organization. The latter accounts for global and local (conditional and functional) types of relations (see below). Propositional coherence, then, pertains to sequences of propositions that are properly related relative to a macroproposition (i.e. globally coherent) and to each other (i.e. locally coherent). It has to do with a global meaning that is a macrostructure, which is 'a theoretical reconstruction of intuitive notions such as the "topic" or "theme" of a discourse' (van Dijk 1985c: 115). The global topic has to do with the 'information'— the conceptual content or rather the plan (for example of a story) or the cognitive structure (of facts, events) that writers have in their minds. It is the top-most information that is derived from the propositions of the (whole) text, and from propositions evoked (by the text) in the knowledge of language users.

The global or highest-level topic is represented in discourse by a macro-proposition that subsumes a sequence of lower level micropropositions. These micropropositions are linked with the macroproposition by means of three semantic mapping macro-rules (van Dijk 1980), which reduce, viz. summarize, information by:

1- deleting: local detail information that is no longer relevant in the rest of the text.
2- generalizing: replacing a sequence of propositions by a general, short statement.
3- constructing: replacing a sequence of propositions that denotes usual conditions, components of an event, by one summarizing macro-proposition that denotes the event as a whole.
At the global level, coherence is realized when all propositions—expressed in a text or a text fragment—share the same topic, that is, if they can be subsumed under the same macroproposition or several macropropositions. Hence, a text is globally coherent if it has at least one macroproposition, which denotes a macro-fact or a macro-event. A macroproposition is sometimes, though by no means always, expressed in the text itself, as for example in the headline and the lead sentence of the short news text (see chapter 2).

At the local level, coherence is defined in terms of two basic types of relations: conditional and functional.

1- Conditional relations: or extensional, that is referential semantic relations. In this case, propositions are connected 'through' the links between the facts they denote (viz. fact relations) in some cognitive or logical model. (For studies on local coherence, see e.g. van Dijk 1977; de Beaugrande 1980.) A sentence S1 will be coherent with another sentence S2 if S1 denotes an event or a situation that is a possible, probable, or necessary condition of the event or situation denoted by S2. So a sequence of sentences or micropropositions (part of the same macro-fact denoted by a macro-proposition) is coherent only if the facts to which it refers are related as for example reasons, causes or consequences. In this case, the propositions denote conditionally and/or temporally related facts.

2- Functional relations: or intensional semantic relations. In this case, propositions themselves are connected (viz. propositional relations). Each proposition has a function relative to other propositions (e.g. generalization, specification, explanation). These functional relations may also exist between speech acts, and will then be called 'pragmatic functional relations' (see van Dijk 1979). The semantic-pragmatic distinction (e.g. van Dijk 1981), which is similar to the internal-external distinction (e.g. Halliday and Hasan 1976), and ideational-pragmatic relations (Redeker 1990), defines the 'source of coherence' (Sanders et al. 1992) in discourse.

It should be added, however, that both functional and conditional relations may obtain for the same proposition-pair; the language user may use (and imply the existence of) for example a causal relation—a (referential) conditional relation—in order to produce a specification or an explanation. But these relations exist within the discourse of the language user, not
in the reality he/she is committing himself/herself to.

We look finally at the following example that consists of a collection of propositions— the propositional content of a still to be expressed text. Each proposition includes a single event or state and immediately related concepts (Larson 1984: 189). (Illustrative examples other than those from the sample are serially numbered in the chapter.)

(1)

p1 Food prices increased in Nicaragua.
p2 Nicaragua's ministry of internal trade raised the price of meat and milk about 100 percent.
p3 Eggs increased 110 percent.
p4 Chicken increased more than 50 percent.
p5 The price of basic grains might be increased later.
p6 The move spotlighted economic troubles.
p7 The war against insurgent forces partly caused the economic troubles.

It is evident that the propositions are globally coherent; there is one macroproposition, p1, which denotes a general concept about increasing food prices in Nicaragua. Subsequent micropropositions denote functional and conditional coherence relations. Thus, p2-p5 are more specific examples of the items that have been/might be increased, and p6 denotes the context of the proposition about increasing food prices. The last proposition, p7, refers to the cause of the situation referred to in p6 and is therefore referentially/extensionally coherent with it.

1.3.2 Discourse Grounding

The preceding analysis shows that coherence has to do with the organization of meaning in text at the levels of generality and specificity: what is topic and what is more detailed meaning as well as local, sequential relations. It tells us how facts are related in models or reality. It is therefore a minimum requirement of textuality. Coherence does not have a dynamic aspect of meaning so as to distinguish between propositions as regards their grounding-values. For example, the propositional content in (1) does not tell us which meaning is foreground and which meaning is background. Foreground need not be the general proposition p1 that is abstracted from subsequent specific propositions but it may be assigned to a
more specific and concrete proposition such as p5, which is about the probability of increasing the price of basic grains. Furthermore, coherence does not show where a foreground proposition will be expressed in text. If for example there is an Agent role, the macrostructure does not say anything about the way that role is being realized in actual discourse. It may therefore be said that the macrostructure is FG-BG neutral or insensitive to the grounding phenomenon. We have seen in T5 that the proposition expressed in the headline and the lead sentence is about a concrete event, namely that Savimbi has been seriously wounded, and that it is organized as a foreground proposition. This proposition, however, is not the highest-level topic (that subsumes most other propositions) of the text. Such a topic is not expressed in the text, but, of course, can be derived from lower-level propositions and may be something like: An attack on the Angolan rebel leader.

THE NEED FOR DISCOURSE GROUNDING
What would be also required for textuality is another dimension that organizes meaning in terms of what part of the structure of meaning represents what information of the model that is more or less important in the present (con)text. In other words, what is required is discourse grounding that distributes whole propositions in text in terms of a FG-BG structure. Looked at from the perspective of language production, discourse grounding is a dynamic process (Givón 1987); a dynamic unfolding of the meaning of a text for readers. It has to do with meaning as it develops and as it is presented in linguistic form in text, chronologically or linearly speaking, from the beginning to the end. What contributes to the dynamic process of discourse grounding is the role that communicative relevance may play, namely in terms of mapping onto textual propositions the information that is considered relevant in the present context for both writers and readers.

Discourse grounding, then, is a further requirement of textuality. It is required in order to map the (abstract) semantic structure onto actual expression. The FG-BG structure is a link between the cognitive or psychological structure and a specific linguistic realization. It might therefore be closer to actual expression or realization strategies of cognitive information than the macro-micro structure. (For a discussion of the notion of strategy, see van Dijk and Kintsch 1983: 61ff.) As such, conceptualizing the FG-BG structure would be a decision that is taken consequent to the construction
of the abstract content or text meaning. It may therefore be said that discourse grounding manipulates the macro-micro structure as well as relations among propositions in order to distribute propositions along a continuum of grounding-values (see below).

FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCE

Not only do coherence and grounding phenomena represent different ways of mapping reality, but they also serve different functions. The macrostructure allows readers to read only part of the text, namely the top-most macroproposition that cognitively controls lower level propositions, and still understand the topic of discourse. It serves thus a strategic control function of letting readers know the topic. In this respect, the top-most macroproposition would be similar to a label that denotes the name of something—like the name of a painting, which is not the painting itself.

In addition, the macro-micro hierarchy of text meaning manifests how language users understand events or states of affairs and how they might have represented them in their mental models, independently of interestingness, newsworthiness, and communicative goals. Thus, propositions at the highest level of generalization need not be foreground. Any model information may in principle be assigned greater importance and mapped as foreground meaning. Foreground, we have seen, has a different basis. It also serves a different function in the sense that it does not necessarily summarize a discourse topic or give a complete picture of it. Readers, therefore, may not understand much of the discourse topic on the basis of foreground only. Accordingly, announcing a discourse topic is not necessarily the same as expressing meaning as foreground. This suggests that foreground is more limited than background. The 'figure', indeed, is less frequent; it stands out vis-à-vis the more frequent 'ground' (Givón 1990).

That foreground tends in general to be more limited or less frequent is evident in short news texts where it is usually assigned to a proposition that denotes the main event and that is expressed in the lead sentence. The lead sentence may therefore express something different from what the headline expresses. In example (1) cited earlier, the macroproposition about increasing the price of food in Nicaragua (p1) defines the discourse topic and hence may be expressed as a headline of a news text. But it does not necessarily express foreground. A specific proposition—for example about the increase in chicken prices—may map highly relevant model information and represent foreground. It may eventually be expressed as a
lead sentence.

The foregoing discussion touches on an important feature of functional differences between coherence and grounding. While a proposition about a low-level detail is assigned foreground interpretation, a high-level proposition is assigned background interpretation. Consider the two versions of the same 'story' in example (2).

(2)

a. The French President's visit to the U.S.
   (1) The French president Jacques Chirac and the American president Bill Clinton discussed yesterday the bilateral relations.
   (2) During the dinner at the White House yesterday evening, Chirac was jovial and exchanged jokes with his host.
   (3) The French president pays a four-day official visit to the U.S.

b. French and American presidents exchange jokes
   (1) During the dinner at the White House yesterday evening, the French president Jacques Chirac was jovial and exchanged jokes with his host, Bill Clinton.
   (2) Chirac discussed with Clinton yesterday the bilateral relations.
   (3) The French president pays a four-day official visit the the U.S.

The headline in (2a) summarizes the high-level topic (i.e. the visit), which is the most general meaning and top-most proposition. S1 focuses on one component part of that proposition that denotes a concrete event. S2 expresses a proposition that is subsumed under the general topic and that denotes a sub-event. S3 describes the context of the macroproposition about the visit: its nature and duration. In contradistinction to (2a), the headline in the 'story' in (2b) focuses on the sub-event. The information about the event of exchanging jokes, though micro, is assumed to be more important. Importance may be based on an interpretation of the political significance of the event such as the political importance of good personal relations between Clinton and Chirac, and the political consequences thereof. The textual proposition that maps this information is assigned foreground interpretation and is expressed in the headline. As will become apparent later (see 1.4.2), the example illustrates the manipulation of the macro-micro structure under constraints of perspective in event models or relevance in context models.
Notwithstanding the functional differences we pointed out between coherence and grounding, there are, of course, links between the two semantic notions: main or high-level topics in the macro-micro hierarchy represent general information that is often more important than information about details, and cognitively important information is semantically represented as (a macroproposition and) foreground. In surface structure, foreground is expressed more prominently (that is, in first position as a headline) than background, as is indeed usually the case in news discourse.

This suggests that two importance hierarchies, in models and text meaning, may coincide or conflict with each other:

1- Hierarchically-based information importance in models
It pertains to the organization of information in event models according to its importance in a macro-micro hierarchy. For example, information about an earthquake could be considered by language users as high-level information and assigned greater importance than for example details about rescue operations.

2- Hierarchically-based propositional importance in text meaning
Semantic representations may map the hierarchy of information importance in models as a macro-micro propositional structure. In this case, propositions coincide with the organization of information in models. Propositional importance says something about the event or fact as represented. Example (2a) above suggests that top macro-information in a model may be mapped as a macroproposition in the semantic representation of the text and may become propositionally important and foreground. However, (2b) suggests some conflict between propositional importance and the hierarchy of information importance in event models. It shows that foreground meaning may not coincide with a macro-micro structure, since a detail proposition referring to a minor event has been assigned the highest grounding-value.

1.3.2.1 Information Importance Rules
Since distributing meaning in terms of discourse grounding is based on (a hierarchy of) information importance in a model, we will first look at the default rules that are assumed to account for the assignment of greater or lesser importance, then we explain the more specific criteria. The rules are
independent of discourse and are based on specific knowledge about facts or events and their properties, or general political, social, and cultural knowledge. For example, the assumption that causes would be perceived as Ground in relation to which results would be perceived as Figure (see Shen 1990) is based on the relative importance of the underlying information or knowledge in models of language users, all things being equal.

The general rules for information importance are basically the following ones:

- Information about wholes is more important than information about (constituent) parts and attributes.
- Information about an event is more important than information about specifics or details of the event.
- Information about specifics or details of an event is more important than information about the spatio-temporal context, occasion, circumstance, and the social, political, or historical context of the event.
- Information about specifics of an event is more important than information about the necessary or sufficient causes or conditions of the event.

1.4 The FG-BG Gradation

We describe the phenomenon of grounding as one principle or dimension of the organization of meaning on a three-level scale (see Figure 3): foreground (FG), midground (MG), and background (BG).

![Figure 3 The three-level grounding scale](image-url)
Figure 3 represents the typical FG-BG structure of the news text. It manifests a gradual departure from foreground, which maps the most important information, to background, which maps the least important information. Meanings assigned in the vicinity of midground would evidently be neither foreground nor background. Realization may sometimes show that grounding-values occupy variable places on the scale. This is the case in what we refer to as foregrounding and backgrounding operations (see below). Before we explain these operations, we describe briefly the general features of the three grounding-values on the scale.

**Foreground** is all meaning that is high on the scale and in terms of which most or all other meanings are interpreted. The underlying information that is mapped as a foreground proposition is often unknown, unpredictable, or inaccessible to readers. A foreground proposition may imply or refer to concepts that are referred to in propositions that have other grounding-values. It is usually expressed in the first sentence of the text.

**Midground** is all meaning that is lower on the scale than foreground meaning but in the meantime is not background. Midground may be generally characterized as providing explanation. It is usually expressed after expressing foreground.

**Background** is all meaning that is lower on the scale than midground. It may put foreground (and midground) meaning in perspective. Therefore, it may be generally characterized as providing orientation. A background proposition is usually expressed towards the end of the text and it may map information that is:
- old, known, or accessible (e.g. common knowledge) to readers and writers as members of a speech community.
- recalled, and hence it is a reminder of other information.

**FOREGROUNDING AND BACKGROUNDING**

The (default) FG-BG structure, or part of it, may be subject to certain constraints such as contextual or pragmatic relevance. Relevance constraints may override other constraints such as the relative importance of information about certain facts and properties of events in models of language users. In this case, writers may opt to emphasize— and hence foreground— one feature of an event not so much because it is an important
piece of information, but because they interpret it as being more relevant for them and the lives (and the interests) of readers (for political, sociocultural, (inter)national or human factors) than (more) important information. As a consequence, the propositions—that have certain grounding-values—may undergo some foregrounding and backgrounding operations on the grounding-scale.

By foregrounding and backgrounding we mean a pragmatic interpretation of the distribution of meanings in text in terms of grounding-values. While propositions become more or less informative in a given context, they retain their grounding-values. Thus, foregrounded or backgrounded propositions are not assigned foreground or background interpretation. In expression, these propositions may co-exist with the foreground or the background proposition. For example, a background proposition may be expressed as part of the lead sentence that expresses foreground meaning, and some component parts of midground meaning may be expressed in the vicinity of background later in the text. This means that early or late expression in text may be an index of foregrounding or backgrounding in semantic representations.

The distinction that we made between foreground and foregrounded meaning and between background and backgrounded meaning underscores the distinction between importance and relevance. It shows that there might be different sources for—or constraints on—the assignment of grounding-values, namely event model importance of information and context model relevance of information.

1.4.1 Criteria for Grounding-Value Assignment in News Texts

Apart from the general information importance rules that we outlined earlier, the assignment of grounding-values is subject to more concrete defining criteria in terms of specific functions that textual propositions typically serve in news texts. Since news texts are primarily engaged with events, the criteria are described in terms of events and their properties.

Foreground
* Meaning that denotes the main (speech) event that may be:
  * the most recent, current or ongoing.
  * the last phase in a process or in a series of happenings.
  * the consequence or result.
**Midground**

* Meaning that denotes specifics of one property or more properties of the same/main (speech) event. This includes:
  * sub-event
  * specification, explanation of—or addition to—the main (speech) event by the same or different participants referred to in the foreground proposition.
  * reformulation of the foreground proposition in somewhat different words; more specifics of concepts may be added.
  * Constituent parts, qualities, quantities, amounts, volumes, sizes, weights, substances or other attributes of the main event.
  * an initiated speech event that gives the specifics (viz. quotation) of a general characterization of the event referred to in the foreground proposition.
  * exemplification: an event that serves as an instance of the main event.
  * identification of the source of the information (e.g. a newspaper) underlying the report referred to in the foreground proposition.
  * identification of participants in the main (speech) event referred to in the foreground proposition.
  * implications: degree of seriousness (e.g. damage).
  * further development (e.g. effect of the main event).
  * (verbal) reaction to the main (speech) event referred to in the foreground proposition.

**Background**

* Meaning that denotes:
  * the way the event happened.
  * the temporal setting of the event.
  * the spatial setting of the event.
  * the circumstance of the event.
  * the occasion of the event (e.g. a national day; a TV interview) on which a participant did something.
  * the political, social, or historical context of the event.
  * a remote past historical fact or event and the historical survey of it.
  * how things are (e.g. general or familiar facts/truths and states of affairs in the world (that are timeless)).
  * details about participants.
  * details about another background proposition that denotes an event.
  * a comment statement (e.g. about the significance of what happened).
  * details of a comment statement.
  * conclusion or a claim.
  * (external) evidence that supports or consolidates a claim.
  * a preceding/anterior event (or a series of happenings). It may serve as cause or reason. It may also provide the necessary or sufficient conditions for the current event.
* details of the preceding/anterior event.
* the spatio-temporal setting and/or the circumstance of the anterior event.
* a forthcoming event that includes concepts referred to before.

The background end of the continuum
* Meaning that denotes:
  * an event that is unrelated to what has been referred to in other preceding textual propositions. The proposition that refers to that event cannot be subsumed under other preceding propositions. It represents a digression.
  * details or specifics of this event.
  * the context of this event.

1.4.2 Constraints on Grounding

Semantic representations in terms of the FG-BG structure are subject to several constraints among which two are crucial, namely perspective and relevance. The two belong to two different domains and hence they differ in the nature as well as the extent of influence on grounding or its manifestations that will be examined in subsequent chapters. Perspective is cognitively-based and is part of event models, which have a primarily semantic role. Relevance is contextually-based and is part of context models, which have a primarily pragmatic role. While relevance governs the selection (inclusion or exclusion) of textual propositions, perspective defines the angle from which (facts and) events referred to in selected propositions are seen and presented. The two constraints are presented in Figure 4.
The Foreground-Background Structure

Figure 4 Constraints of perspective and relevance

Figure 4 shows an earlier phase to semantic representations, namely the organization of information in both event and context models. In event models, information is organized by importance in terms of hierarchy or level (generality-specificity) and other importance rules. It is also mapped on semantic structures of texts in terms of macro-micro and FG-BG structures. The Figure suggests that importance usually controls or at least influences also the mapping of semantic representations in terms of macro-micro hierarchical structures. It also suggests that both types of semantic structures, that is, macro-micro and FG-BG, may influence each other. The exact interaction or mutual influence is beyond the scope of the present study.

Perspective, being part of event models, constrains the organization and
description of events referred to in textual propositions in terms of grounding. Since perspective constrains the way events are described, it also governs surface structure expression (see below).

Figure 4 also shows that in context models, information is organized by relevance and that there are possible contextual or pragmatic relevance constraints on:

1- macro-micro structures: or rather the mapping of information importance in model macrostructures on textual macrostructures. For instance, the high-level information about a presidential visit may or may not become a high-level topic in a text; and vice versa, some detail of an event may become a discourse topic if it is considered contextually relevant to readers.

2- grounding: or rather the mapping of information importance in models on the FG-BG structure. For example, less important information mapped as background meaning may be assigned more relevance and consequently foregrounded in the semantic representation.

It should be noted that the influence of context models is of course already active before—or in the formation of—semantic representations: depending on the context, writers find it relevant or not to include specific information in semantic representations.

We present now a brief explanation of the two notions of perspective and relevance.

1.4.2.1 Perspective and Grounding Manifestations

Perspective—alternatively referred to by other terms such as point of view or vantage point that describe more or less the same phenomenon—manifests itself in a typical pattern such as the one exemplified by the following two sentences, which express the same distribution of roles within the message (see Levelt 1989):

a. John bought a house from Harald.
b. Harald sold a house to John.

Though denoting the same event, (a) and (b) differ in perspective: In the first sentence, the 'story' or 'scene' has been reported or described from the
point of view of what John (the recipient of the house) did. In the second sentence, it is what Harald (the seller of the house) did that is at issue. So perspective is part of event models because event models represent the different ways writers 'see' these events. Differences in perspective, then, are not differences of facts or possible worlds (see van Dijk 1981), but are basically differences in 'camera angles' (Kuno and Kaburaki 1977: 627) from which language users observe and organize (the same) events and states of affairs.

Because of differences in camera angles, perspective has been defined as 'the introduction of a subjective point of view that restricts the validity of the presented information to a particular subject (person) in the discourse' (Sanders and Redeker 1996: 293). It should be added that perspective need not necessarily be equated with a subjective viewpoint. In fiction, for example, point of view pertains to the degree of distance from or involvement with the events referred to. However, the speaker— and in our case the writer of the news text— may place himself or herself at a distance from the participants and still give an objective, detached description (Kuno 1987). Besides, perspective is not always a question of individualizing the point of view that is reflected. A certain perspective (= presentation) may not necessarily be ascribed to a single individual versus others. Writing news may at times be a collective effort, and in this respect it differs from writing a novel. This is a pragmatic type of perspective that is part of context models. It pertains to the viewpoint of the narrator or sometimes a protagonist as regards the events that are referred to such as in personal storytelling.

It is apparent then that the type of perspective we examine is semantic, since it manifests the influence of event models on the mapping of information on semantic representations as a FG-BG articulation. As such, perspective is a property of knowledge that writers have about events. Writers may place the camera at a greater or smaller distance from particular events and present for example a broad scene or a close up that focusses on details. In other words, the distance is related to a macro-micro distinction in what is described and to selective capturing of certain global or local properties of events, such as reasons, causes, consequences, or circumstances.

TEXT-LEVEL CONSTRAINTS OF PERSPECTIVE ON GROUNDING(SIGNALING)
Our use of perspective is restricted to its text-level constraints, namely on
the grounding of propositions and the way they signal the FG-BG structure. Propositional-level grounding manifests the perspective of writers— their 'conceptualization of reality' or their primary domain (de Regt 1996). Example (2) examined earlier shows differences in angles from which the same events are described, i.e. broad or narrow scope. More importantly, it shows that selective capturing of certain properties of these events leads to different FG-BG structures. So camera acts determine which events are referred to in propositions that are assigned certain grounding-values. As we will see in subsequent chapters, they also determine foregrounding and backgrounding operations.

Perspective taking— investigated primarily in narrative discourse— is involved in several textual phenomena (see e.g. Sanders and Redeker 1996) among which is the signaling of grounding. We refer briefly to the possible influence of perspective on schematic and syntactic manifestations of grounding. Although the assignment of propositions to schematic categories (see chapter 2) is the result of canonical functions, perspective may govern the organization and the distribution of these categories and hence the way they are expressed. Perspective may also influence the way grounding is expressed in sentences. Since we deal with text-level syntactic structures, we do not examine perspective constraints in terms of single lexical items such as changes in roles that participants play (e.g. buy, sell) or the use of active or passive structures. We focus on certain constituents that are marginal to the clause proper and that occur in sentence-initial position (see chapter 3). These constituents are assumed to be strongly influenced by perspective and to signal grounding-angles. This will be apparent when we examine in chapters 4 and 5 the grounding-signaling functions of a particular class of sentence-initial markers in Arabic news texts.

PERSPECTIVE AND SENTENCE-ORDER
Apart from its influence on grounding and on manifestations of grounding in terms of sentence-initial markers, perspective may also govern sentence-order. As will become apparent in other chapters, sentence-order is indicative of whether grounding-values are prominently or non-prominently expressed. The following two sentences illustrate this feature.

(1) There has been an onslaught on the city. Therefore the garrison surrendered.
(2) The garrison surrendered. There has been an onslaught on the
The Foreground-Background Structure

The propositional content in (1) is expressed in two sentences that denote a consequence (i.e. *therefore*) relation. In (2), which has the opposite sequence of (1), there is no explicit marker of the relation with the cause event referred to in the second sentence. In FG-BG terms, one may assume that the proposition about the cause, respectively the consequence, of an event has been assigned *foreground* interpretation and prominently expressed in the sequential presentation of the sentences. The choice of perspective, then, determines the order of sentences. Depending on text-type, of course, other interpretations of the significance of sentence-order might be possible.

1.4.2.2 Communicative Situation and Relevance

Relevance is a key pragmatic notion of discourse in the communicative situation. Since the communicative situation is crucial for grounding, we examine it briefly before examining relevance.

THE COMMUNICATIVE SITUATION

In the communicative situation, the relation between the writer and readers is crucial inter alia for determining pragmatic relevance. One aspect of the relation and indeed pragmatic relevance is the writer's knowledge of events and states of affairs. In news communication, writers include some information from their event model in the semantic representation of the text. They perform certain global and local informative acts, assuming that they are an authority on the subject matter and that they have evidence for the factual information. They include the information on basis of its relevance in the context model. Writers may also include other information that they want readers to be reminded of (see Searle 1969), for example about earlier news events. Enriching the knowledge of readers may be a response to an imaginary request from them for information about what happened. Readers usually believe that news writers have something newsworthy to communicate and that they are sincere in their intention to communicate it.

The success of writers in performing informative acts and in communicating what they want to communicate depends partly on the way propositions are organized in schematic categories and expressed in sentences.
These organization features provide several kinds of signals that could be crucial for the communication process. The signals could be also crucial for the FG-BG structure. For example, when writers take in consideration the (lack of) knowledge of readers as to the subject matter or earlier events, they use certain signals to make this clear. Thus, they may change the position of schematic categories and use certain sentence-initial markers. Readers—who interact with the text as they read it (Coulthard 1977)—may capture these signals and successfully interpret the intent of writers in performing linguistic acts (see Green 1989).

**CONTEXTUAL/PRAGMATIC RELEVANCE**

As part of the theory of speech acts (see e.g. Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Grice 1975) that has been applied mainly to spoken discourse or to dialogue situations and short face-to-face communication where a direct context is available, the interest in relevance—the maxim 'Be relevant' (Grice 1975: 46)—has focussed on showing how certain replies may (not) contribute to some conversational goal (see e.g. Leech 1983). The analysis of this notion has been limited to the sentence or utterance level (see e.g. Allwood 1985). Although relevance has not been investigated thoroughly in extended written discourse, some extensions have been made to written communication. One example is the discussion of relevance in news discourse (see van Dijk 1984, 1985b: 79) as a notion that pertains to the relation between text and the language user. The news writer may signal different relevance values by means of a headline, a lead, or the linear order of the text.

The notion of relevance has been interpreted differently and conflated with several other discourse notions such as coherence (see below). We use relevance to denote contextual or pragmatic factors such as the knowledge, interests, and expectations of readers, as well as the assumptions of writers about what they consider significant or newsworthy in the given communicative situation. Relevance also includes the usefulness of information for all or some recipients, and what is known about their current information needs (see van Dijk 1995). It fulfils a pragmatic function of informing (some) readers about certain properties of events and states of affairs. This approach to relevance, then, pertains to the subjective interpretation of context by participants. It is also communication-dependent, and hence it is distinct from what writers find relevant for themselves, which is communication-independent. According to our
definition, contextually or pragmatically relevant information is different from, and may be independent of, both the importance of information in event models and inherent importance of facts, or relevance somewhere in the world, that is, in absolute, context-free terms (e.g. a war is considered more important than the occurrence of a minor border incident).

RELEVANCE AND GROUNDING(-SIGNALING)
Contextual or pragmatic relevance influences primarily the selection of information from models for mapping as textual propositions. We mention two specific manifestations of its constraints on grounding:

1- foregrounding and backgrounding.
2- the inclusion of propositions that do not belong to the current topic.

Foregrounding operations suggest that in a particular context, any macro or micro meaning may be included in the semantic representation as more relevant (i.e. pragmatically important) than other perhaps more important information, and hence it is foregrounded. This suggests that news relevance may take precedence over semantic hierarchies (van Dijk 1988b). A newspaper may foreground one feature of an event not so much because it knows or thinks that it is an important piece of information, but because it considers it relevant at a certain point in text, given the present context or communicative situation. This also suggests that model macrostructures and textual macrostructures may not be identical.

The second manifestation of pragmatic relevance constraints on grounding is the inclusion sometimes in semantic representations of propositions that do not belong to the current topic. These propositions map information that the writer considers relevant for contextual reasons. The information fulfils a pragmatic function of enriching the knowledge of readers about certain properties of events and states of affairs. These propositions are usually included as part of background meanings (i.e. the background end of the continuum) and expressed towards the end of the text as a signal of their lesser relevance and background interpretation. We will explore this feature in chapters 3 and 5. It should be noted that relevance may also determine the choice of schematic categories, namely the inclusion of contextually relevant categories from the canonically available ones (see chapter 2).

This provides evidence that what is presented or communicated 'comes
with a guarantee of relevance' (Sperber and Wilson 1987: 697), and that it deserves or gets the hearer's attention (see Sperber and Wilson 1986). The underlying information is made relevant by connecting it with the context (see Leech 1983; Sperber and Wilson 1986). It should be added that relevance to the context is established in a continuous process of mental context construction. In that process, expanding the context may sometimes be necessary in order to establish— and comprehend— the relevance of certain information (e.g. about unrelated properties of a certain situation) to the present context.

OTHER APPROACHES TO RELEVANCE
One approach considers relevance in terms of interpretation. Interpreting an utterance involves 'working out the consequences of adding it to the hearer's existing assumptions, or, in other words, working out its relevance' (Blakemore 1987: 112); see also Blakemore 1995).

In addition, contextual relevance has been conflated with the notion of coherence, or rather 'speaking topically' (Brown and Yule 1983: 84) when writers make their contribution relevant in terms of the existing discourse topic framework. It has been suggested that 'coherence can be regarded as the hearer's search for optimal relevance' (Blakemore 1996: 328). It should be noted that the two notions are different: a perfectly coherent text may be pragmatically irrelevant. They are also defined differently: Pragmatic relevance is defined in terms of context models and coherence in terms of event models. On the other hand, if readers search for relevance, this is pragmatic relevance of information, for example in relation to the knowledge that they have.

Furthermore, a relevance based approach has been suggested for surface structure expression in terms of (the role of) discourse markers (see Blakemore 1996). A relevance theoretic account is able to explain the occurrence of markers 'in constructions which cannot be straightforwardly accommodated in a framework which assumes that discourse markers encode sequential coherence relations' (Blakemore 1996: 328).

1.5 Earlier Work and the Contribution of the Study

The FG-BG structure in discourse has been the subject of numerous studies with divergent approaches. Under a few rubrics, we present in the re-
mainder of this chapter a short survey of the main work done in that field and point out a number of shortcomings. We also highlight the contribution of the present study and look at a number of linguistically-oriented news discourse studies.

FIGURE-GROUND
An early linguistic characterization of the gestalt notions of 'figure' and 'ground'—which are linked to the discourse notions of foreground and background—has been provided by Longacre (1968). He uses the notions in a rather limited sense, reminiscent of the topic-comment division of the sentence: figure refers to the novel material of the sentence, and ground refers to repeated material in each sentence of a narrative. In this way the figure of each sentence becomes the ground of the succeeding one. In another study on figure and ground, Talmy (1978) focusses on subordinate and main clauses and correlates figure with asserted events and ground with presupposed events. (On the figure-ground perception, see e.g. Rock 1975.)

EVENT-NON-EVENT
The type of activity (i.e. event or state) has received much attention in the literature. In their early study on story telling, Labov and Waletzky (1967) characterize background as information that describes states and is off the event-line. Similarly, Grimes (1975)—taking as a starting point the idea that 'different parts of a discourse communicate different kinds of information' (op.cit.: 33)—distinguishes information in oral narrative discourse along the lines of events and non-events. The latter characterizes setting, background, evaluation, and collateral. He identifies background information in narratives as information that is not part of the event sequence (Grimes 1978). Similarly, Omanson (1982) considers events to be focal and to constitute the narrative proper, while descriptions of characters, setting, and previously depicted events and states that do not advance the plot as characterizing: 'They describe what exists' (op.cit.: 198).

SEQUENTIALITY AND TEMPORAL RELATIONS
Several studies have focussed on the contrast between 'sequenced events' and 'non-sequenced states and actions'. Hopper (1983) illustrates this contrast with examples from traditional Malay narrative texts. Within this framework, Thompson (1987) also discusses the correlation between sub-
ordinate clauses in English written narratives and temporal sequencing: that most subordinate clause predicates are not on the time line. In the same vein, Thelin (1984: 229)— in his discussion of Slavonic narrative discourse— identifies foreground material as 'material which supplies the main points of the discourse', or 'plot-advancing events vs. background conditions', and maintains that background information 'can be understood as either abstracted or totally removed from the time axis' (op.cit.: 227). Also Flashner (1987: 155) uses foreground to refer to 'the event clauses that move a story's action forward'. And Fox (1983: 29) defines background discourse as 'that portion which contains NONSEQUENTIALLY ORDERED events'. Similarly, Thompson (1983: 44) proposes that background information is 'material that serves to further explicate, amplify, or elaborate what is in the main clause, or that represents an event occurring simultaneously with or providing a comment on or motivation for the event in the main clause'. (See also Longacre and Levinsohn (1978); Fleischman (1985); Carlson (1987).)

The distinction between foreground and background in terms of temporal relations in narrative discourse has figured also in the study of Couper-Kuhlen (1989). For her, the temporal foreground in narratives answers the question: And then what happened? The temporal background has an adverbial function and answers the question: And when did this happen? She shows that sometimes background events also advance the story. In this regard, Fleischman (1990) points out that the FG-BG contrast is not necessarily synonymous with the distinction between events and description, and that not all temporally ordered events in narrative are of equal importance. Reinhart (1984) also examines narrative texts and suggests that the temporal sequences of the events form the foreground of the text. These temporally ordered events on the time axis acquire significance or interpretation as foreground only if we know the background such as preceding events or circumstances. According to her (op.cit.: 785), temporally ordered events within the background meet the conditions for foreground information, but these events are subsidiary foreground because they are outside the time axis of the main narrative.

BACKBONE-SUPPORT AND LAYERS OF FG-BG

According to Hopper and Thompson (1980), who correlate foreground with high transitivity and background with low transitivity, the most important characteristics of foreground clauses are that they comprise the
The Foreground-Background Structure backbone of the text and that they are ordered in a temporal sequence. Background material is material which 'does not immediately and crucially contribute to the speaker's goal, but which merely assists, amplifies, or comments on it' (op.cit.: 280). Similarly, Jones and Jones (1984: 33) maintain that the crucial events together 'form the content of a highly abstract, terse summary' of the narrative, while the crucial background material is 'the highly relevant background on which the main events of a narrative hinge'.

The idea of layers of foreground and background recurs in a number of studies. Thus Longacre (1981) likens the backbone of a narrative to a spectrum of elements, some of which are foregrounded and others have graded relevance to the main line of development. He also considers narrative material to possess a spectrum that ranges from the most dynamic information to the most static (depictive) information. And Jones and Jones (1979) present their 'multiple-levels hypothesis'. The languages they examined marked three levels of information: background, events, and peak. The authors point out that background information 'is essentially elaboration or extra information, such as description of scene or characters, or minor events concurrent with major events' (op.cit.: 9). Also, Neeley (1987), in her discourse analysis of the New Testament book of Hebrews, discusses inter alia information structure in terms of the distinction between 'backbone' and 'support' information. She refers to, though did not develop, a 'prominence hierarchy' of information in the discourse. She suggests three levels of prominence:
1- backbone sentences.
2- subordinate or other supportive material within backbone sentences.
3- support material.

Likewise, the approach of Fleischman (1985; 1990) is that foreground and background are patterned along a continuum and that they are not a dichotomous or binary distinction. Similarly, Tomlin (1985) divides a foreground-background continuum in narratives into three discrete levels:
1- pivotal information: propositions which describe the most important events in the narrative.
2- foreground information: propositions which describe successive events in the narrative.
3- background information: propositions which elaborate pivotal or foreground propositions, or which perform any other function in the narrative.

The content of narratives has also been classified by Omanson (1982) as
Central (describing the gist of a narrative), Supportive (adding detail that elaborates), and Distracting (adding detail that disrupts). And Reinhart (1984) considers narrative texts to have layers of foreground and background where background may also have foreground and background.

**EXPRESSION OF FG-BG DISTINCTION**

Several studies have taken the different forms of tense and aspect as a distinguishing feature between foreground and background information. The main thrust of these studies has been the discourse function of these two grammatical categories, that is, as discourse-pragmatic notions, rather than semantic, sentence-level phenomena (see Hopper, ed. 1982). Accordingly, verbs encode distinctions in information (e.g. Hopper 1979, Hopper and Thompson 1980): perfective verbs express foreground events ('the actual story line'), and imperfective verbs express background information ('supportive material'). In this respect, Jones and Jones (1979) point out that in various languages, multiple levels of information might be marked by certain grammatical devices such as shift in tense and/or aspect as well as extra words. In another study (Jones and Jones 1984), they examine some features of the verbal morphology of various Mesoamerican languages in relation to their discourse context (their role in the semantics and structure of discourse), and suggest that one important function of tense-aspect in some Mesoamerican languages is to distinguish foreground from background information.

Longacre (1981) also discusses the correlation between information and verb forms: simple past tenses in English correlate with the foregrounded event-line; the past progressive pictures background activities that follow the event-line in importance; and stative come lower in information relevance. He adds (Longacre 1983: 16) that the English past tense not only characterizes the event-line but some of the supportive material as well.

Among studies on tense in narration and its implications for information structure is the study of Fleischman (1985). She argues that tense switching in Old French functions as a strategy for 'narrative subordination' or 'grounding' in a story. Fleischman (1990) discusses the linguistic structure of narrative discourse and examines the pragmatic functions of tense and aspect, particularly the use of tense-aspect contrasts to mark levels of information salience, viz. grounding. She discusses (in part 1 of chapter 6) textual functions: i.e. the use of tense-aspect morphology for discourse-pragmatic purposes relating to the structure of a text. She adopts a contex-
tual approach to grounding: there is subjectivity in determining what is foreground and/or background.

Investigating the linguistic correlates of the foreground-background distinction in literary texts, Ehrlich (1987) shows that the English past progressive (imperfective aspect) assumes different discourse functions on the basis of its meaning in the local discourse context. Her point is: 'Because local discourse context is crucial to the interpretation of aspect, global discourse functions like foregrounding and backgrounding do not adequately account for aspectual alternations in these texts' (op.cit.: 363).

Wallace (1982) discusses how linguistic categories (tense, aspect, mode, voice) function with regard to the distinction between foreground and background. And Hopper (1983) examines grounding in Malay, with regard to the presentation of participants and events. He discusses the discourse role of the passive to background: 'It tends to denote states, customary actions, descriptions, and the like, and is used less often to denote actions which happen once or which provide a story line' (ibid: 71).

In her study of grounding in classical Greek, Fox (1983) examines the interaction of participles with aspect and voice categories. She concludes that the participle in Ancient Greek is one backgrounding device; it introduces background information and describes a stable or durative event. Similarly, Polanyi (1982) discusses inter alia types of information in stories (Event, Durative-Descriptive, and Evaluation), as well as their linguistic encoding. According to her, speakers mark explicitly exceptions to the time line in narrative discourse inter alia by 'specific flashback terms' (Polanyi 1982: 510) in order to make clear that certain sentences or segments are to be semantically interpreted as 'off the main time line'.

Particles also have been examined for their role in the structure of information. Thus, in his study of 'mystery' particles in the Cubeo language of Colombia, Longacre (1976) describes one particle which marks the main event line of discourse as opposed to subsidiary developments. And Neeley (1987) takes the use of particles as a criterion of backbone versus support material.

The role of syntax or word-order in marking the foreground-background distinction has also featured in the studies mentioned above. Thus, Hopper (1979) describes VSO or SOV as being characteristic of event line in Anglo-Saxon, with SVO used for supportive material. He shows (Hopper 1983) that in Old Icelandic Sagas, verb-initial syntax characterizes rapid successive events, while subject-verb clauses slow down the tempo and
report background information. Similarly, VSO clauses in Biblical Hebrew (Longacre 1979a) mark the event line, while SVO clauses are reserved for supportive material. Material on the backbone of the Genesis Flood Narrative—as well as of other narratives in Biblical Hebrew—consists of verb-initial clauses; clauses off the backbone have verbs preceded by a noun or are verbless (see also Longacre 1983). In that language, tense, aspect and word-order are among the mechanisms used to distinguish main line from supportive material (Longacre 1982).

Birner (1994) discusses inversion, defined as the appearance of the logical subject in postverbal position in a sentence, while some other, canonically postverbal constituent appears in clause-initial position. She argues that inversion serves an information-packaging function, 'allowing the presentation of relatively familiar information before a comparatively unfamiliar logical subject (op.cit.: 234). She points the following information statuses (op.cit.: 242):
1- Hearer-old, Discourse-old-information which has already been evoked in the current discourse.
2- Hearer-old, Discourse-new-information which has not been evoked in the current discourse, but of which the speaker believes the hearer is aware.
3- Hearer-new, Discourse-new-information which has not been evoked in the current discourse, and of which the speaker believes the hearer is unaware.

Fox (1985) examines two continuity parameters (action continuity and participant continuity) in Tagalog—a verb-initial language of the Philippines—in order to see if inversion clauses are different from other clauses in the circumstances under which they are used. She talks about shift in narrated action and change in participants. She has been primarily interested in the discourse conditions of using word-inversion in that language, and found that the marked (inverted) word-order is associated with features of discontinuity in the text.

In an early study, Labov and Waletzky (1967) propose that subordinate clause predicates—or syntactically dependent clauses—are background narrative clauses. Similarly, Tomlin (1985) tests the hypothesis that independent and dependent clauses are used respectively to code foreground and background information in English discourse. The detached participle has also been examined as one manifestation of grounding in English. Thus, Thompson (1983) shows that it allows the writer to present certain
material as background.

In a study on information structure of paragraphs, Giora (1983) shows that segment-final position correlates with foreground information. Jones (1977) analyzes surface structure manifestations of thematic prominence. She uses the term 'prominence' as a cover term for foreground, figure, theme, focus and emphasis. She follows others (e.g. Grimes 1975) in considering the theme (thematic ideas) as representing the 'backbone'. She discusses the thematic function of conjunctions (e.g. 'moreover'), and considers them as road signs to thematicity that 'tell the interlocutor what he/she is to interpret as significant, and what is relatively less-important' (op.cit.: 215).

Bäcklund (1988) deals with how prominence in English expository texts is achieved. She demonstrates that what marks prominence in these texts is a combination of hierarchical organization, information dynamics, and grounding signals. She uses the term 'grounding signals' to refer to signals of hierarchical structure and the foreground-background distinction. Her findings include a distinction between three main categories of grounding signals in expository text:

1- connectives: the coordinator but and the class of conjunctions (e.g. finally, furthermore, of course, on the other hand).

2- syntactic devices: fronted adverbials that may serve the function of clarifying the structural organization of the text (besides a linking function). Fronting is regarded mainly as a foregrounding device.

3- lexical items: not functioning as connectives: E.g. 'problem', 'solution'.

Bäcklund suggests that information dynamics might be also part of the creation of relative prominence: if the information contained in a sentence is new and interesting, this may override the hierarchical organization of the text as far as grounding is concerned. According to her: 'New and important information may be contained in a background part of the text; this in turn may make the reader interpret that part as prominent along with the foregrounded material' (op.cit.: 57).

Virtanen (1992a,b) discusses the information structure of clause-initial adverbials of time and place, using Prince's (1981) taxonomy of given-new information: given/evoked information, inferrable information, (brand) new, unused information. She uses the term information structure to refer to notions such as topic-comment, given-new that operate within the clause/sentence, and the term information dynamics to refer to the overall distribution of given and new—or thematic and rhematic—information in
text. Virtanen notes that some temporal adverbials (e.g. of frequency or duration) begin backgrounded passages such as embedded descriptions, and that such adverbials 'may signal, or add to, the backgoundedness of the textual unit that they initiate' (op. cit.: 321).

Information structure has been seen as a component of sentence grammar and a determining factor in the formal structuring of sentences (Lambrecht 1994). It is 'the formal expression of the pragmatic structuring of a proposition in a discourse' (op.cit.: 5). According to the author, information structure is not concerned with the organization of discourse but with the sentence within a discourse. Lambrecht explores the relationship between sentence structure and the linguistic and extra linguistic context in which it is used. He suggests that the relationship between speaker assumptions and formal sentence structure is governed by rules and conventions of grammar, in a grammatical component he calls information structure. According to Lambrecht, the most important categories of information structure are: (i) presupposition and assertion, (ii) identifiability and activation, and (iii) topic and focus (op.cit.: .6).

In her study of grounding in English narratives, Wårvik (1990) compares grounding distinctions in Old and Modern English narratives and concludes that in the Modern English system, backgrounding marking is preferred to explicit foreground markers. Similarly, Brinton (1996, chapter 2) examines the notion of narrative foregrounding and backgrounding and its linguistic expression. She discusses grounding as one aspect of textual organization in narratives which may be denoted by pragmatic markers.

Linguistic mechanisms that are employed by second language learners (of Italian) and that signal the FG-BG distinction have been identified in oral narration (Orletti 1994). Among the findings is that: 'The most common kind of background information is the one designed to provide a temporal framework for foreground events' (op.cit.: 183). Temporal background is expressed inter alia by aspectual and temporal values of verbs, lexical expressions such as one day, and temporal subordination markers such as when (op.cit.).

CRITERIA FOR FG-BG DISTINCTION
A few authors have dealt in some detail with criteria for distinguishing foreground from background. Reinhart (1984) presents a number of 'content criteria'. They are:

1- Temporal criteria: foreground events show temporal continuity, punc-
The Foreground-Background Structure

The Foreground-Background Structure

tuality, and completeness.

2- Functional-dependency criteria: Material which explains temporal events is background, such as 'irrealis' statements of alternative modes of development. Also, the cause event functions as the background.

3- Culture-dependent criteria: A given culture foregrounds events that are considered more important than others.

Fleischman (1985: 857ff) mentions four identifying criteria:

1- The sequentiability criterion: the foreground of a narrative consists of a sequence of temporally ordered clauses. Thus, narrative clauses—which form the narrative foreground—have an iconic sequence. Most studies in the literature have followed this criterion (e.g. Hopper and Thompson (1980), Reinhart (1984), Thompson (1987)).

2- The importance criterion: foreground information is important information, such as about events or processes.

3- The causality criterion: foreground information is the element that serves to advance the plot, i.e. causality or importance for plot development (Kalmár 1982).

4- The unpredictability criterion: foreground information depends on the degree to which an element is unpredictable or unexpected in a given context. An element in a discourse can be foreground through what the Russian Formalists have referred to as 'defamiliarization'.

CRITIQUE OF THE STUDIES

Having presented a general review of relevant studies on the discourse notions of foreground and background, we will now discuss the main trends of these studies and show a number of inadequacies that pose problems in analysis.

In general, these studies are inadequate on one or more of the following accounts:

1- The lack of explicit and independent criteria for grounding.
2- Restriction of the scope of grounding to the concept-level or single lexical items.
3- Conflating the phenomenon with other discourse notions (e.g. coherence) and structures (e.g. the macro-micro structure).
4- Conflating the phenomenon with its surface structure expression.
5- Restriction of the field of investigation to narrative discourse and to lin-
guistic markers of that discourse.

Studies on grounding have been more interested in a general description of the FG-BG phenomenon and how it is (temporally) marked, than in providing a solid basis in terms of explicit, systematic and objective criteria for distinction. Indeed, there have been divergent approaches to, and definitions of, foreground and background notions. The term 'foregrounding' has become diffuse in its application: it has been studied by means of at least three different methodologies (linguistic, literary, and psycholinguistic) that differ in their assumptions (Dry 1992). Thus, 'foregrounding is used ambiguously for both the cognitive process and for the textual phenomena that trigger or express that process. In addition, the word is applied to three different levels of analysis. FOREGROUND can thus refer to a prior conception of narrative prominence (such as SALIENCE), to the phenomena identified as prominent in texts in general (e.g. temporally successive clauses), or to specific instances in a given text' (ibid.: 438).

Evidently, the main features that the linguistic studies depend on as a basis for the correlation and distinction between foreground and background are:

1- Tense/aspect: past tense/perfective verb is used to encode foreground, and present tense/imperfective verb and future, habitual or anterior past encode background.

2- Sequentiality: foreground is in-sequence: it consists of sequences of (time-line) events that move the story forward in time and form eventually a summary of it, and background is out-of-sequence.

3- Event/State: foreground consists usually of events or event clauses, and background consists of states or non-event clauses that are scene-setting.

The discourse features that have been taken as a basis for the distinction between the two notions are a mere expression of an already existing distinction, hence most of the preceding studies talk about foregroundedness of clauses (e.g. Wårvik 1990). They fail to establish the distinction on the basis of semantic criteria. Wald (1987) draws attention to the difficulty encountered in explicating the semantic distinction between foreground and background in precise terms. To propose grammatical encoding as a criterion for the FG-BG distinction is to neglect the fact that grammatical en-
coding is not a defining criterion but an expression of an earlier decision—on another (cognitive) level—about the importance of the information in question and subsequent mapping on a semantic level.

Tense in itself is no fixed marker of either FG or BG—even for narrative: in past tense narrative, imperfect is an index of BG; in present tense narrative, imperfect expresses both FG and BG (Chvany 1985). Besides, a feature such as the punctuality of verbs is not typical of FG. The semantic representation underlying a sentence such as: *He arrived yesterday,* may be assigned a BG value or interpretation. Thus, tense does not have a definite position on the FG-BG continuum. Therefore, if the same linguistic structure, i.e. verb-tense, may signal two different functions, one as FG and the other as BG, then this feature does not provide a solid criterion for the distinction. It fails to distinguish grounding in texts where the same tense is maintained. Tense-maintaining, then, does not imply maintaining either foreground or background meaning. On the other hand, it is of course true that tense-switching may signal the FG-BG distinction, as in stories.

Since much of the work done on the grounding phenomenon has depended mainly on oral narrative and conversational discourse as sources of data, generalizations about the discourse notions of foreground and background have been made on the basis of these (oral) types of discourse. Other types, which may have different characteristics, have remained largely unexplored. Inevitably, this has led to a restricted view of grounding, and to problems when other types of discourse, such as news, are analyzed. For example, the present tense may be encoded in a sentence whose underlying proposition has a background or a foreground function, depending on other factors. This means that a background proposition does not refer only to past events or states encoded by flashback tenses. In our approach, a background proposition may denote events or states that are simultaneous with those of a foreground proposition. So perfective and imperfective verb forms cannot be associated with, respectively, foreground and background meanings. Accordingly, a foreground proposition may be expressed in a sentence that denotes (recent) past, i.e. perfective, events as well as present (impending), or even future (still to come) ones.

Furthermore, contrary to what has been proposed, temporal sequentiality or main event-line is not an identifying criterion of foreground. In fact, sequentiality is not always correlated with foregrounding, and temporally sequenced clauses do not comprise all crucial events (Kalmár 1982).
(Information encoded in a temporal subordinate clause in the Past Perfect can move us forward in narrative time (Couper-Kuhlen 1989).) Even if temporal succession works as a criterion for narrative discourse, and foreground propositions describe successive events (e.g. Tomlin 1985), it is apparent that it does not apply to other types such as news discourse, since that discourse does not manifest a sequentially organized summary or gist. So features such as a summary, viz. 'backbone', or iconic order do not form a solid basis for identifying foreground in news texts. There is then a difference between narrative foreground and news foreground. On the other hand, a background function in news discourse is assigned relative to other grounding-values and not relative to the macrostructure. In addition, background may be also about an event and not a state.

Apart from that, news foreground and news background are not organized in terms of (a mapping of) new-old information. A background proposition may map new information. Besides, main participants are not the exclusive 'property' of foreground. There are background propositions that denote events involving main participants too.

That the criteria for the FG-BG distinction have been applied primarily and almost exclusively to narrative texts led perhaps to the proposal that the FG-BG opposition should not be used for non-narrative texts. Reasons given for that are the absence of a clear criterion and the lack of FG-BG structuring in other types of text (Vetters 1992). We have shown that the criteria— even for narrative discourse— are neither explicit nor solid. Furthermore, we do not share the restrictive view that the FG-BG structure is absent in other types of text. We have seen that news texts— even those whose propositions are all subsumed under one macroproposition— do not consist of foreground only. Therefore, we cannot lump together 'main line' events as representing foreground only. The texts analyzed here demonstrate that a foreground proposition refers to the main event and that the rest of what is traditionally called 'event-line' manifests other grounding-values such as midground. Although high-level information (topics) is one criterion for establishing foreground, the macrostructure is not necessarily equivalent to foreground. Not all propositions organized in a macrostructure are assigned foreground interpretation. In this respect, our approach differs from other approaches that consider constituent propositions of a macrostructure as serving a foreground function.

Among studies that support our approach to grounding as a gradual scale are those of Reinhart (1984), Jones and Jones (1979), Longacre
The assumption of a gradual scale (that each type of text encodes 'progressive degrees of departure from the main line' (Longacre 1989: 414)) makes it possible to distinguish between textual propositions where reference is made to events that are both sequentially arranged and tense-maintaining.

Our theory proposes a clear distinction on the one hand between information structure in cognition and on the other hand the FG-BG propositional structure in semantic representations and the various production processes. The cognitive foundation of the model allows distinctions between importance of information about facts and events, and relevance to language users that may lead to foregrounding and backgrounding of meanings in the communicative situation. Background meaning may map more relevant information than higher grounding-values that may map more important information. It may then be expressed more prominently. It is to be noted that our study highlights the relationship between the hierarchical structure of discourse constituents and information relevance—a relatively unexplored area (Longacre 1983).

Since differential importance is assigned to information that is mapped on propositions, our approach to grounding is in terms of whole propositions and not single concepts that are part of propositions. Besides, our theoretical analysis of the grounding phenomenon is syntax-independent. The need for syntax-independent criteria for identifying foreground and background has been emphasized by Tomlin (1986), who tried to establish a connection between foreground and the significance of events 'where significance is related to visual attention and where such attention can be determined independently of any text' (op.cit.: 468).

Conceptually, the study is close to a few other studies. The closest approach is that of van Dijk (1984, 1988b): that information structure is a separate structural dimension. We extended this approach by examining the relation—similarity and difference—between the FG-BG articulation and other textual and non-textual levels.

In conclusion, the main emphasis of the studies on the grounding phenomenon has been on foreground or its marking. Interest in background has been limited to showing that it is not foreground, that it is off the event-line, and that it is supportive or causal. One important feature of the present study is its concern with background and backgrounding of meanings. We have shown that background is an essential global organizational dimension of text semantics based on information and knowledge.
in context models. Another important feature of the study is its concern with how background is signaled in surface structure. By establishing a relation between grounding and linguistic markers that occur in Arabic news discourse, the study highlights or 'foregrounds' the phenomenon of background.

LINGUISTICS, NEWS DISCOURSE, AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Language has not occupied a central place in the bulk of mass communication studies that have been engaged with the broad social, cultural, and political issues of the process of information flow. Interest in (the analysis of) news discourse has been primarily non-linguistic— for example, to learn something about the newspapers themselves, to describe the climate of news gathering and selection, to know about the social aspects of news production (e.g. Golding and Elliott 1979), to examine constraints of the manufacture of news (e.g. Fishman 1980), and to describe values, power struggle or relationships within various social institutions (e.g. Cohen and Young, eds. 1973).

Similarly, media language— with its various directions of research— has until recently remained almost totally beyond the range of interest for linguistics. A recent example of linguistic analysis of media language (e.g. news, documentary) is the study of Fairclough (1995), and a state-of-the-art statement on media discourse is Bell and Garrett (eds. 1998). Among the few early studies on media language in general and news discourse in particular, the study of Fowler et al. (1979) is prominent. Its predominantly linguistic approach explains how the use of language— such as syntactic changes in the sentences of news texts— may express or conceal agents of certain acts. The study of Roeh (1982) concentrates on rules that govern presentational processes involved in writing news broadcasts. News items of the B.B.C. have been examined by Noel (1986) in order to show some of their linguistic characteristics. The author shows that informative texts typically make use of elaboration, background, and addition relations.

Pointing out one difference between the general structure of the narrative and the news story, Togeby (1982) suggests that events in the news story are neither in succession nor temporally or causally related, 'but one central event is paraphrased and made more specific again and again' (op.cit. 238). In a relevant study, Jucker (1986) describes several linguistic aspects of news interviews broadcast by B.B.C. Radio 4 as part of their daily news programmes. The study also examines a number of 'discourse
particles' such as well and so.

An analytic framework for news structure in the press has been proposed by van Dijk (1985b). His study concentrates on the global organization of the news and ignores syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions that have to do with coherence of the news text. In another work (van Dijk 1988a), he presents a novel theoretical framework for the study of news as a distinct type of discourse. The study draws attention to the importance of structural analysis of news reports at various levels of description, where account is also given of notions such as topic and news schema. In a separate work, van Dijk (1988b) applies the theoretical framework to an analysis of the structures of international news, based on several case studies.

Among linguistically-oriented German studies of news discourse is the study of Kniffka (1980) about headlines and leads of American newspapers. Lüger (1983) focusses on the language of the press. Also Geis (1987), in his study of the language of politics, deals with a number of aspects of journalistic language such as press reports of political speech and the linguistic devices the press employs in reporting on the context. His study deals with television news broadcasts and the issue of bias in the news. In this regard, Sanders and Redeker (1993) examine the question of (limitations of) perspective in news texts/stories as well as tense-shift which may shift responsibility for reported information from the writer to a participant.

Still, very little is known about the textual structure of news discourse (see Bell 1991), and particularly about the (linguistic properties of the) short news item which has hardly been studied from a discourse perspective as a form of written communication. The analysis provided in this study represents a much needed 'micro-level approach' (van Dijk 1985a: 8) to this type of media language or discourse. It differs substantially from other studies on 'the language of news'— which have been primarily engaged with entities such as lexical choices and grammatical (viz. passive) structures— in transcending the boundaries of sentences into the syntax, the semantics, and the pragmatics of discourse, and in providing a linguistic account of expressions that function at text-level. Thus, apart from providing an important meeting point between mass communication and linguistics, the present study on news discourse may be conceived of as a contribution to a theory of journalistic communication, which should have its own distinctive features (see Košir 1988).