Grounding in English and Arabic News Discourse
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Chapter 6

Discussion

The following discussion looks at the foregoing theoretical framework and empirical investigation in the light of some main issues within a number of areas that engage current linguistic research.

THEORY

Taking *grounding*, or the organization of meaning in terms of a FG-BG structure, as the main discourse notion, the study outlined a theory that accounts for the data and predicts the nature of any other data that might be gathered from similar sources. The theory, in a nutshell, suggests that, based on information having greater or lesser importance (in a cognitive sense) and relevance (in a pragmatic sense), a grounding-scale of text meanings indicates higher or lower grounding-values (in a semantic sense) that are prominently or less prominently realized (in a syntactic, surface structure organizational sense).

Explaining the FG-BG structure in terms of semantic representations has distinguished it from several other textual as well as non-textual structures and levels. From the semantic level downward, we distinguished the FG-BG structure from the non-textual, cognitive level of information and knowledge in mental models. Upward, we distinguished it from the level of schemata that subsume the propositional content, and the surface structure level. Both structures are in the meantime text-level manifestations of the FG-BG structure. Basic concepts that pertain to the different structures and levels have been examined in terms of constraints on grounding and/or its various manifestations. A brief description of the major concepts—including a distinction among several types of importance—is presented in the end.

At the semantic level, distinction has been made between the FG-BG structure and the macro-micro structure. *Foreground* is not necessarily the summary or the macro-topic that is derived from lower level propositions in the text. Although a macroproposition is usually semantically important and may sometimes be used as one of the ways *foreground* is coded in text, semantic importance is neither necessary nor sufficient to characterize
foreground meaning. For cognitive and pragmatic reasons, macrostructures (topics) may be backgrounded (viz. assigned a lower degree of pragmatic importance) in order to foreground some low-level details because of a high(er) degree of information-relevance in the underlying context model. It may even occur that a lower level detail occupies the foreground position on the FG-BG continuum. It is to be noted in this regard that we distinguish terminology that has shown confusion in use, namely that foreground and background describe a different phenomenon from foregrounding and backgrounding. It should be noted that the phenomenon of foregrounding/backgrounding is of course apparent in surface structure, when some background propositions are foregrounded and expressed early in text as instances of news upstage, and some other propositions are backgrounded and expressed late in text as instances of news downstage, manifesting respectively greater and lesser prominence.

The theoretical description that accounts for schematic and syntactic manifestations of grounding in news texts demonstrates that linguistic phenomena such as sentence-initial markers in Arabic news texts can hardly be sufficiently explained by recourse to either sentence-level approach or one level of analysis. This is also in line with approaches that emphasize the importance of the cognitive level in expression. Alternatively, by accounting for the phenomenon of sentence-initial markers and confirming our theory about it, we are in the meantime hoping that the study contributes to broadening the empirical basis of this topic.

THE FG-BG STRUCTURE
The study demonstrated the need for the FG-BG structure— which exhibits a gradual distinction among grounding-values— as a distinct structure on the semantic level. It is part of writers' strategy to realize the intended meaning in text. It may be mapped onto the semantic (i.e. hierarchical meaning) structure, for example when foreground meaning is selected as the main topic, and background as detail. It may be manifest in the schematic structure such as when foreground propositions are assigned to the Main Event category and background propositions are assigned to a Previous Event or a History category. In the surface structure, the FG-BG distinction determines inter alia the choice of sentence-initial markers, as Arabic news texts demonstrate.

The multi-level approach allowed better conceptual distinctions between grounding and the criteria in terms of which it is defined. The scalar
FG-BG structure is defined in terms of the cognitive information that is selected in event models (in terms of importance criteria/assignment) and in context models (in terms of relevance criteria/assignment). The criteria for the FG-BG distinction are therefore syntax-independent, that is, in terms of knowledge, communicative goals, and pragmatic relevance. Put differently, the FG-BG structure captures the grounding-values of propositions independent of their surface structure realization anywhere in text.

In the typical FG-BG structure of news discourse, foreground follows midground and it is followed by background—reflecting a gradual decrease in propositional importance that coincides usually with the underlying information importance. Text surface structure reflects this typical structure when for example background meaning is expressed towards the end of the text.

MANIFESTATIONS OF GROUNDING: INITIAL MARKERS AND PROMINENCE

Examining schematic manifestations of grounding has shown that news categories may be (non)saliently organized and hence make the functions of meanings or propositions more or less 'important'. For example, the occurrence of an Association category in the end of the text means that it is less 'important' than for example a Main Event category, and provides a clue to the way it is intended to be 'received'.

Turning to syntactic manifestations of grounding, and before examining the special markers that appear sentence-initially in Arabic news texts (see below), we examined entities that appear in that position in English news texts. We distinguished between what we consider to be weak signals of grounding (e.g. an initial noun phrase) and strong ones (e.g. an initial adverbial) that express text-level background in English—a language which 'seems to lack the specific morphosyntactic marking of foreground identified in other languages' (Dry 1985: 492). It is significant to note that strong signals of grounding—whether in English or in Arabic news texts—provided empirical evidence for the existence of news schemata.

As surface structure manifestation of the FG-BG distinction, sentence-initial markers are manipulated in surface structure as part of determining the position of constituents and sentences. Both of markers and prominence may be determined by the perspective of writers on the (presentation of the) subject matter. They may be considered as writers' means to make explicit communicative intentions in regard to how the FG-BG structure should be interpreted in text. However, the analysis suggested that signal-
ing the relative grounding-value by means of sentence-initial markers is different from showing how the grounding-value is realized in surface structure prominence. Certain background meanings may be expressed in an initial marker prior to expressing midground meanings. They may denote a global setting or state, and hence they are placed earlier in the text as part of news upstage.

INITIAL MARKERS IN ARABIC NEWS TEXTS
The analysis of sentence-initial markers in Arabic news texts illustrated the need to approach linguistic phenomena in terms of discourse function. It showed that the markers pertain to high-level discourse properties, that they are the linguistic correlates of (distinctions in) grounding-values, and that they perform text grounding-signaling functions. These functions have to do with constraints that lie beyond the sentence-boundaries and with the requirement that writers cope with the occurrence of shifts in grounding-values and hence with expressing meaning in subsequent sentences. Accounting for this surface structure linguistic phenomenon showed its contribution to the organization of meaning in terms of grounding. It also answered the question of how do Arabic news texts distinguish and signal grounding-values at sentence-initial position.

That the markers pertain to high-level discourse properties means that the requirement to use them is not a sentence-syntactic/grammatical one. The texts in which they appear—translated or originally written in Arabic—are grammatically well-formed and semantically meaningful: they have coherent underlying semantic structures. The initial markers are neither a mere manifestation of underlying semantic relations (that is, coherence-signaling) nor of a segmenting function. In fact the segmenting function may be considered a prerequisite for the distinct grounding-signaling function that has to do with communicative intentions to maximize the signaling of grounding at sentence-initial position. In this respect, the markers keep track of the grounding-strategy that writers apply and help signal the integration of the meaning expressed in the (incoming) sentence within the FG-BG structure of the text, and hence signal the coherence of that structure (see later). In this regard, the study takes a grounding-based approach to text coherence. The use of sentence-initial markers is conceived of as being part of the writer's attempt to realize the coherence of the communicative situation, i.e. his/her interaction with what is communicated in a certain situation.
Sentence-initial markers manifest the influence of perspective taking. They reveal/express the cognitive processes and mental models that writers have. Therefore, the role that several of these markers play in texts is to be sought in the underlying cognitive level of information and its importance as well as relevance to language users. Some initial markers may be regarded as textual devices that express importance and relevance of the information (see van Dijk 1995). The choice of the appropriate marker is determined by the intended grounding-value. It may be said that the foreground proposition is always present throughout the text in the minds of writers (and readers). Knowledge that writers have and assumptions about the knowledge of readers play an important role in the selection of several of these markers. Some markers signal that knowledge, for example that the writer takes it for granted that readers are already familiar with the underlying information.

The markers, in addition, may help readers derive the semantic representations of writers in terms of grounding. The markers may also influence the hierarchical structure of mental models that readers build about events referred to by textual propositions and eventually help in constructing their mental representation of the text. In other words, the markers may expand the interpretation of context models within which readers (should) interpret certain information, and determine or modify the interpretation of the underlying FG-BG articulation. (For a view of connectives as model building in narratives, see Segal and Duchan 1997.) This is part of the writer's influence on readers' perception of the events that are referred to. It should be added that readers may not share the writer's interpretation of grounding-relations or assumptions about certain information (e.g. that it is known).

Contrasting pairs of markers has extended our exploration of grounding-signaling functions and manifested constraints on the interchangeability of markers. It also showed that the markers modify the semantic representation of information that is expressed in the sentence. There is, then, a reciprocal influence: The influence of grounding-values on surface structure exemplified by (the choice of) markers, and of markers on grounding-values. Contrasting pairs of markers provided evidence that they are important for the process of interpretation that pertains to assigning or establishing grounding-values. In addition, it showed how crucial context is to the understanding of the behaviour of markers in text.
Chapter 6

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY OF ARABIC INITIAL MARKERS

The study of sentence-initial markers in Arabic has highlighted the issue of how rhetorical patterns of languages diverge. Given empirically-based observations about differences between English and Arabic in patterns of connectedness and ways of signaling grounding-relations at sentence-initial position, it is assumed that Arabic news texts are more explicit than their English counterpart in marking at that position the relative grounding-value of text meaning.

Explicitness has another implication, namely for the distinction in terminology that we made between foreground/background and foregrounding/backgrounding. While we examined in chapter 3 manifestations of grounding in terms of sentence-initial markers we could only assume—on the basis of prominent or non-prominent realization—that some propositions have been foregrounded or backgrounded. In contradistinction to manifestations in English, our exploration of initial markers in Arabic texts has made it clear that the markers may modify the grounding-value of the propositions. Looking at markers' interchangeability showed that what may transpire is not only a question of foregrounding or backgrounding (i.e. pragmatic assignment of higher or lower grounding-values) but in fact a change in the location of the proposition (i.e. semantic assignment of higher or lower grounding-values). This, of course, is independent of how the proposition is (non)prominently expressed in surface structure.

Apart from that, sentence-initial markers in Arabic news texts seem to fulfil a more crucial role than markers in English news texts do, namely text-type identification. Accordingly, they are a crucial means by which news writers distinguish their role as news (story) tellers and remind readers that they are engaged with different phases of a news text. This feature demonstrates that meaning constrains form and that form determines the interpretation of meaning. It may therefore be said that the study identified an interpretive function (i.e. involved reporting) for the absence of these markers. Their absence where they should be present creates a problem of recasting—as well as interpreting—the appropriate grounding structure that is typical of news. Thus, the way propositions are formulated may show the writer's attitude towards them (see e.g. Fowler et al. 1979; Halliday 1978). (The phenomenon of the speaker's attitude to the propositional content and the emotional modality of utterances has also been investigated by Czechoslovak and East German linguists (Prucha 1983).)
By accounting for this linguistic phenomenon, we brought to the front one crucial mechanism for signaling the distinction in grounding-values in Arabic news discourse. It is, of course, among the numerous mechanisms that languages have 'for tagging both the more relevant and the less relevant information' (Grimes 1982: 399), or, more specifically, 'for tagging certain clauses ('sentences', 'propositions')' as old, presupposed, or shared background (Givón 1984b: 251).

Though not dealing with coherence, which, as we explained, is a different notion/dimension of text-structure, the study showed that Arabic news texts are coherent only if and when news writers distinguish in surface structure appropriate grounding-values and mark shifts among them as typical of news. That is to say, the texts are coherent when they realize grounding-coherence and hence realize the goals of writers in signaling (i.e. communicating) the intended grounding-values.

Within standard Arabic, the linguistic phenomenon studied here has as yet not been accounted for within the framework of a theory of grounding (i.e. the discourse grounding function of initial markers) and the strategy to express text meanings along a FG-BG graded continuum. It is a relatively untapped area of investigation that underscores the importance of a hitherto unrecognized feature in Arabic linguistics.

It is perhaps relevant to note that sentence-initial markers that we examined may be conceived of as discourse markers, which is a cover term for a wide range of devices that languages possess. There is, however, little agreement on the term discourse marker and the concept is fuzzy (see Jucker and Ziv 1998). Though many markers in Arabic are hardly explained from a discourse perspective, a begin has recently been made to consider some entities in contemporary written Arabic such as wa-qad and fa-qad as discourse markers (see Sarig 1995). A begin has also been made to examine grounding-signaling or what has been referred to as 'syntactic foregrounding devices' (Fareh 1995), which have been discussed sporadically in grammar books as syntactic processes (ibid.: 124). Among these devices are using a VOS structure instead of a VSO; topicalization; and preposing adverbials of time, place, and manner such as (ibid.: 128):

\[
mubakkiran kharajtu ila 'amali
\]
early went-I to my work

Entities in sentence-initial position are also identified with three levels of
narration (see Hatim 1997): The first is introduced by the simple past and it indicates that the narrative is progressing; the second and third are introduced respectively by qad and kāna qad. Qad introduces the sequences as one aspect of the same set and 'at the same time pushes the narration back slightly from the basic level...' (op.cit.: 70). Kāna qad 'pushes the narration even further back' (op.cit.: 71). This is consonant with our earlier analysis (Khalil 1985) of the functional differences between these two discourse markers.

DISCOURSE AND GRAMMAR
The traditional concern of Arab linguists was with the (behaviour of the) single word or the constituent part of the sentence rather than with the sentence as a whole. Rhetoricians, on the other hand, focussed on certain features of the sentence such as its structure, inter alia inversion, ellipsis, junction and disjunction (see Tarzi 1969). Their concern however was with isolated sentences and lexical features therein (Eid 1974: 234), rather than with the text as a unit. Consequently, the Arabic sentence in connected discourse has received little attention in linguistic as well as rhetorical thought. Relations holding between sentences and the role certain entities play in text have been hardly studied. Arabic, of course, is not unique in this. Many languages, indeed, possess a large number of adverbs, adverbials and interjections 'whose status as pragmatic connectives is completely obliterated by traditional descriptions' (Roulet 1984: 46).

It may however be argued that 'all systems for signaling relations are rooted in the grammar of the clause' (Hoey 1983: 18) and that several studies have dealt with grammatical phenomena in written texts (e.g. Fox 1987; Halliday 1985; Thompson 1985; Matthiessen and Thompson 1988). But while the present study also dealt with grammatical phenomena, it examined functions that are different from those described in traditional sentence grammars. It has perhaps demonstrated the need 'to create text-level structures from sentence-level resources' (Downing 1995: 9) and provided evidence that 'grammar creates and reflects the higher-level organization of text in several ways' (Cumming and Ono 1997: 122). As such, the study belongs to a field that investigates the relation between discourse and grammar or what has been called 'discourse functional approach' (see Cumming and Ono 1997), where the use of grammar is manifest.

The discourse approach to grammar was particularly evident in the
treatment of the particle *qad* that serves several functions among which is a grounding-signaling function at text-level. This is similar to the use of the particle *dé*— traditionally a connective particle in Ancient Greek— for various functions (semantic, cognitive and local switch-reference function as well as a global text-organization function (see Bakker 1993). This is also consistent with the claim that pragmatic particles (see Östman 1995)— or rather pragmatic markers— serve a wide range of functions among which is the grounding-signaling function (see Foolen 1996, also for various definitions, terminology, and survey of literature on particles).

The discourse approach to grammar was also evident in the treatment of other sentence-initial markers such as the aspectual *kāna qad*, which provides evidence that in VSO languages, entities that are placed in PI position include tense and aspect markers (Dik 1980: 155).

Apart from that, the discourse approach to grammar was evident in the expression of text-functional distinctions between VS/SV word-order variants. The study showed that they are used subject to discourse conditions. Examining factors that influence word-order in discourse answers part of the inquiry about the extent to which word-order is determined by text context, situational context, text type, and style (Enkvist 1985). We have seen that VS syntax, or the main clause verb, is inadmissible in sentence-initial position in Arabic news texts in other than addition and temporal sequence. Similarly, SV syntax does not occupy initial position in news texts. (News texts show very low percentage of SV sentences (Bubenik 1979).) What shows an invariably SV syntax in news is the headline. (The study of Ennaji (1995) shows that 95 percent of headlines display that pattern.) Among significant findings is that while SV syntax (which encodes discontinuous topics) typically signals or contributes to signaling *background* meaning (for a discussion of SV syntax and *background* in Hebrew, see e.g. Givón 1976a), VS syntax (which encodes continuous topics) is not restricted to *foreground* meaning. In this respect, the study complements other recent studies (e.g. Longacre 1995; Payne 1995) that dealt with the use of non-verb initial clauses/structures in basically verb-initial languages.

Furthermore, the study made apparent the influence of the phenomenon of sentence-initial markers on the pragmatics of word-order variation. An essential trait of these markers is that they influence the syntax of the main clause they precede. The study provided an answer to the question of 'when to place the circumstance first, and when to place the main proposi-
tion first' (Fries 1995: 55). (See the study of Geluykens (1992) on left dislocation in English spontaneous conversation.) In this regard, sentence-initial markers are part of what is referred to as intersentential syntactic choices (see Kaplan 1983).

TEXT-TYPOLOGY: NEWS AND VIEWS

While focusing on news discourse, the study shed some light on the issue of rhetorical or persuasive Arabic discourse and provided some evidence that Arabic is a language that makes a very clear distinction between news and views types of text. An analysis of a sample of editorials showed that editorials differ considerably from news texts in entities that appear in sentence-initial position. That position may be a potential locus for commentary such as in the case of zero initial markers. (Most devices marking commentary sentences in Japanese newspaper columns appear in sentence-final position (Maynard 1996).) The absence of markers creates in news texts syntactic structures that are typical of/appropriate for editorials or involved communication, and represents an example of what is referred to as rhetorics that 'contaminates' information (see Roeh 1982). Therefore, employing the markers in news texts satisfies the requirement to avoid deviant rhetorical patterns that may cause communication failure or, at best, misunderstanding (viz. text-type shift).

This supports the claim that the syntactic choices that are made convey the writer's attitude (Maynard 1996.: 397). And, if 'form follows function' (Nystrand 1982: 8), the use of sentence-initial markers in Arabic news texts is intended to realize a certain form that conforms with a certain function: a detached, factual or plain news reporting. The rhetoric of news should then be constrained by the intended functions of news discourse (van Dijk 1984). Readers would then interpret in a similar fashion the (meaning or function of the) message form. In this regard, the study made clear that the failure to signal appropriate grounding-values (by the appropriate markers) is associated with the failure to deliver the appropriate type of text. Put differently, surface structure signaling of grounding is part of the strategy to realize the intended function of the text at issue. A by-product of maintaining the news-type of text is the establishment of what is called 'the institutional voice' (Lerman 1983) by which the speaker distanciates himself/herself from personal responsibility for a given topic.

The news and views discussion is reminiscent of the 'récit'-'discours' dichotomy (following Benveniste) discussed by Moutaouakil (1998): A
'récit' text is an objective report that, unlike 'discours', does not contain certain types of subjective epistemic modality (see also Jadir 1998).

In fact, the markers in short news items do not establish contact between writers and readers such as certain markers in radio news do (for this, see Al-Shabbab and Swales 1986). Nor do they include modal terms such as 'certainly' or 'surely', which give explicit comment. This leads us to another feature of these texts namely that, unlike editorials, they do not tolerate emphasis. In this respect, the study showed a rather subtle manifestation of emphasis, not by repetition, juxtaposition, or reinforcers but by deleting sentence-initial markers.

While the study put emphasis on the influence of markers' deletion or absence, it also made clear that the presence of certain markers—such as those that the English news text customarily employs (e.g. locative adverbials)—may be avoided in initial position in Arabic news texts. For one thing, they are potential text type switchers and may create an explicit comment. Besides, they may signal a more radical shift in grounding than the writer of the Arabic news text considers warranted. We examined this feature when we looked into the circumstances under which Arabic texts may neutralize certain initial adverbials in English by recourse either to a zero initial marker (e.g. a speech verb or a verb of addition) or to a special marker (e.g. about things being known or worthy of mentioning).

In fact, underlying writing news or views is the mastery of genre, where '[T]he creativity which is permitted to the individual exists in deciding in which type of sentence or genre to encode the idea or the larger worldview' (Kress 1982: 99). Mastery of genre, then, presupposes knowledge of text-type specific features such as different text-structures including the FG-BG structure, and the ability to produce coherent texts that accommodate these features or rather cast them in the appropriate text-form.

CROSS LINGUISTIC/CULTURAL DISCOURSE STUDIES

The study contributes to cross linguistic/cultural discourse comparison where news texts are at issue (see e.g. Duszak 1995). It fits within the broader framework of intercultural or interlingual communication and the imperative for an adequate understanding of it. Such an understanding would consider not only the context of situation but also the context of culture (see Leckie-Tarry 1995).

A comparison of English news texts and their translations into Arabic has revealed that Arabic and English vary in ways of communicating
news: in expressing interpropositional relations and in interpreting the meaning of these relations. Different values are assigned to the same formal realization in English and Arabic news texts. And in order to realize functional equivalence and map on the sentence the same pragmatic force or grounding-value of the English sentence, initial markers would be required in the Arabic text. They are an essential property of these texts for signaling the FG-BG structure, since they reconstruct the way meaning (viz. the grounding function) in the English news discourse has been expressed and controls—eventually—the way it is to be retrieved and interpreted by receivers of the Arabic discourse. Their use follows some definite rules, just like the uses of utterances are rule-governed, constraining what may be said and when it may be said (see Kress 1982).

It should be noted that Arabic is a language that largely manifests connection, and that in that system it is particularly the absence of sentence-initial markers that would be remarkable. In the news type of text, their absence represents a violation of receivers' expectations regarding the way meaning is to be expressed, in accordance with text-type conventions. As a consequence of marker-omission, readers of the Arabic text receive what is referred to as 'a zero signal when they are expecting an overt one' (Callow 1992: 359). Creating discourse-deficient Arabic sentences that fail to communicate a coherent news text in terms of the FG-BG structure may lead to problems in interpretation and in text-type acceptability as we saw earlier. This raises the question of what languages may omit at the discourse level. (For a collection of papers dealing with pragmatic issues involved in interlanguage studies, second language acquisition and cross-cultural studies, see Oleksy, ed. 1989.)

TRANSLATION AND CONTRASTIVE RHETORIC

The study has underlined textual problems in the process of translation and showed that, indeed, problems of translation 'are, to a large extent, genuine linguistic problems' (Doherty 1996: 441). Underlying these linguistic problems are different strategies of recasting for English and Arabic news texts in order to communicate the (different perspectives on the) FG-BG structure. The study uncovered what 'the mediating translator does to bring about communication' (Hartmann 1980: 52). While coping with textual and contextual constraints, the translator is left with the most difficult task which is 'to think of the message in terms of the receptor-language frame of interpretation based on the presuppositions and values of the culture.'
(Nida and Reyburn 1981: 21). (For a collection of papers on translation and intercultural studies, see e.g. Tirkkonen-Condit, ed. 1991.) Translation thus involves 'a reformulation of a text under pragmatic constraints determined by the target culture, target language included' (Enkvist 1995: 50).

It is important to note that, strategically, writers or translators of the news text are assumed to have a similar intent to the intent of the writer of the source language text, and to perform translation acts that would conform to this sort of universal strategy. On the other hand, tactically, they may introduce whatever changes deemed necessary in the process of pragmatic reconstruction of the way meanings have been expressed in the source language text. So they would respond to syntactic, semantic, and cognitive constraints on translating beyond the sentence. Tactical steps, then, assume that writers or translators are engaged in a language or text-type specific communicative strategy.

The study drew attention to the need in comparative studies of translation to consider the macrostructure of the text (see Van den Broeck 1986) that may be altered and hence violates the global function of the text as a news text. (In her discussion of argumentative texts, Tirkkonen-Condit (1986) drew attention to the global structural features of text types which might be altered in translation.) There may also be violations of text-type production pattern in terms of shifts in cohesion (see Blum Kulka 1986), that is, types of cohesive ties, as a result of the process of translation. These shifts may lead to shifts in levels of explicitness and/or shifts in text meaning(s): for example, a move which is a simple request for clarification would imply wonder or doubt. The present study explained parallel consequences for text-type meaning.

Comparative studies of translation have much in common with contrastive rhetoric, which is an area of research in second language acquisition (see Connor 1996). In this regard, the present study made several claims about one type of discourse in two languages in which rhetorical patterns diverge. Moreover, it is relevant to an area of investigation in contrastive student writing that examines 'metadiscourse strategies' (Connor 1996: 94): linguistic material in text that does not add anything to the propositional content but helps the reader to organize, interpret, and evaluate the information. In contrastive rhetoric or contrastive discourse analysis there are, of course, several aspects of communication that vary from culture to culture: cohesion and coherence, when to talk, what to say, pacing and pausing, listenership, intonation, formulaicity, and indirectness.
REMAINING ISSUES AND FUTURE AVENUES
The study leaves some questions unanswered or without a conclusive answer. They pertain to important theoretical as well as analytical difficulty in the approach to grounding in discourse. Further theoretical characterization and empirical verification are therefore required. We identify below some of the issues and point a few useful avenues for future research.

1- The characterization of grounding in terms of a continuum: foreground, midground, and background is cogent as well as practical. It accounts for the FG-BG structure of the short news items analyzed. The analysis however suggests that more distinctions in grounding-values, particularly within background, might be made and accounted for in terms of a more rigorous characterization. This may be combined with a comparison of the FG-BG structure in these texts with that in longer news texts.

2- We distinguished between foreground/background and foregrounding/backgrounding as denoting two different phenomena. This distinction however raises a theoretical problem. We know that a proposition is assigned a midground interpretation from the presence of a foreground proposition that is usually expressed before it in a lead sentence. But when a midground proposition (referring to a sub-event) is expressed in the lead sentence, that is, in the place usually occupied by the foreground proposition that refers to a main event, it might be difficult to talk about it as midground or to refer to it as being foregrounded. The proposition could be assigned foreground interpretation and the subsequent sentence that expresses the proposition that refers to a main event could in this case serve a background function, for example because it provides a wider context and frames the foreground proposition that is expressed in the lead sentence.

3- The study has indicated the influence on the FG-BG structure of functional relations— the main source of coherence in news stories (see van Dijk 1986)— that are created as a result of the organization of local and global text meanings. So grounding may make use of functional relations in order to organize or distribute grounding-values in text meaning. The relationship, interplay, and mutual influence between the two semantic properties may deserve a separate, thorough and extensive study.
Discussion

4- A separate study may examine the relationship between shifts in grounding-values and shifts in topic in the macrostructural sense to sub-topics or side topics. Both may, though not necessarily, coincide. The present study has implied that there might be a parallelism between grounding-values—as well as their signaling—and the distinction that has been made between discourse units: main, sub and side structures (see van Kuppevelt 1995a,b): sub-structures are part of the main structure, that is, continue the main topic, and side structures shift from or discontinue the main structure, that is, digress. On the grounding-gradient, midground may coincide with a sub-structure, and the background end of the continuum may coincide with a side structure.

5- The relationships between the use of markers in production and their role in comprehension is assumed to be one of the most difficult questions to envisage (Costermans and Fayol 1997: ix). The present study made an attempt in that direction. Also relations between surface structure expression and event and context models as well as meaning (semantic representations) could be explored in depth.

6- The study has been exclusively concerned with a special set of sentence-initial markers. Examination of other markers, including those in non-initial position, for their contribution to the grounding-signaling function would be a fruitful endeavour.

7- It is to be seen how far markers in other types of text that manifest all or some of the markers examined in this study have the same, similar, or dissimilar grounding-signaling functions. Other types of text, English or Arabic, are assumed to have different FG-BG structures, and hence the (required) markers may vary. We have obtained an idea about the occurrence as well as the frequency of sentence-initial markers in another type of text, namely the editorial. But markers in other types of text may be different and function still differently.

8- The study of sentence-initial markers raises the issue of the criteria for the identification of textual boundaries in genre studies (for this, see Paltridge 1994). The suggestion (op.cit.) is that there are non-linguistic, rather than linguistic, reasons for generic structure in texts; that structural boundaries are defined in terms of semantic properties (or content) rather
than in terms of linguistic expression. We have examined the level of schematic organization of propositional content in typical categories. In surface structure expression, sentence-initial markers could be strong linguistic means of signaling or perhaps determining textual boundaries.

9- The contribution of tense and aspect, which express point of view or perspective, to signaling (shift in) grounding-values needs to be examined in detail. We have identified and illustrated one manifestation of aspect shift namely from past to pluperfect by means of kāna qad. It is assumed that signaling grounding in Arabic news, as well as in other types of text, is possibly realized by several other tenses or tense-aspect combinations such as the past progressive.