Chapter 8: System

8.4 SOME IMPORTANT SYSTEMS OF ENGLISH
8.4.1 *Transitivity Systems*

- When we speak or write about anything, usually what we are speaking or writing about will include some kind of *process.* In the examples

Ex. 8.9 *John kicked the ball by accident*
Ex. 8.10 *Theodore saw Mary on Tuesday*
Ex. 8.11 *Beauty is only skin deep*

The processes of 'kicking', 'seeing' and 'being' are referred to. These are different types of process. Here, 'kicking' is a physical process, 'seeing' is a mental process and 'being' is a qualitative process. Processes can have different numbers of participants and circumstances associated with them. The processes of Ex. 8.9 and Ex. 8.10 each have two participants associated with them. The process of Ex. 8.13 *John ran fast* has only one.
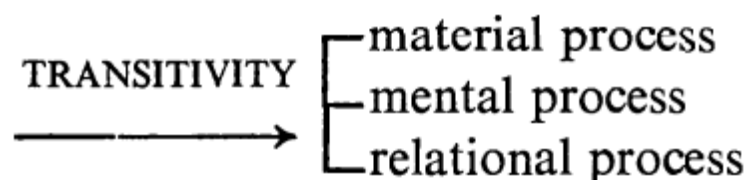
- Usually there will be *participants* in the process; somebody or something will be involved in the process. In Ex. 8.9 'John' and 'the ball' are involved in the process of 'kicking'. In Ex. 8.10 'Theodore' and 'Mary' are involved in the process of 'seeing'. They represent different types of participant. For instance, 'John' is a person, 'the ball' is an object and 'beauty' is an abstraction.

- Often there will be *circumstances* attendant on the process; the process will have happened at some special time or in some special place or for some special reason. In Ex. 8.9 the 'kicking' happened 'by accident' which is a circumstance of reason. In Ex. 8.10 the 'seeing' happened 'on Tuesday' which is a circumstance of time.

- Not only can participants and circumstances themselves be of different types; they can play different *roles* in a process. In each of the examples

Ex. 8.10 *Theodore saw Mary on Tuesday*
Ex. 8.12 *Mary saw Theodore on Tuesday*

the participants are persons. The examples are alike in the type of their participants. But the examples are different in that the participants have switched roles. In Ex. 8.10 'Theodore' is 'the see-er' and 'Mary' is 'the seen', while in Ex. 8.12 the reverse is true.

- In English grammar, we make choices between different types of process, between different types of participant, between different types of circumstance, between different roles for participants and circumstances, between different numbers of participants and circumstances, between different ways of combining processes, participants and circumstances. These choices are known collectively as the *transitivity* choices.

- There is a choice between three main types of process: a physical or *material process*; a *mental* process; and what is usually called a *relational* process. Thus, we have a system containing three terms:

TRANSITIVITY
- material process
- mental process
- relational process

The clauses

Ex. 8.9 *John kicked the ball by accident*
Ex. 8.14 *Peter swam to the island*
Ex. 8.15 *A stream flows through that part of the valley*
have all chosen the term material process.
The clauses
Ex. 8.10 *Theodore saw Mary on Tuesday*
Ex. 8.16 *Children like jelly*
Ex. 8.17 *The vicar said that yesterday*
have all chosen the term mental process.

The clauses
Ex. 8.11 *Beauty is only skin deep*
Ex. 8.18 *Theodore is the vicar's son*
Ex. 8.19 *The family are in the garden*
have all chosen the term relational process.

- Material processes can be subdivided. Material processes can be either *action* processes, or *event* processes. An action process is the type of material process which is usually performed by an animate being; that is, it is the type of material process which usually has an *animate* participant in the role of *actor*. An event process is the type of material process which is usually performed by an inanimate being; that is, it is the type of material process which usually has an *inanimate* participant in the role of actor. Here we have a system with two terms:

$$\text{material process} \longrightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{action process} \\ \text{event process} \end{bmatrix}$$

The clauses
Ex. 8.9 *John kicked the ball by accident*
Ex. 8.14 *Peter swam to the island*
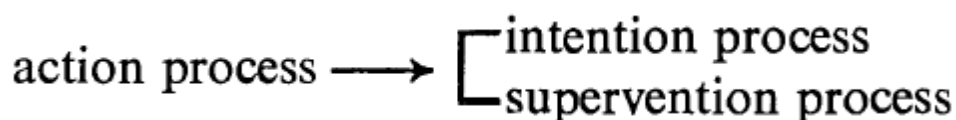have both chosen the term action process.
The clauses
Ex. 8.15 *A stream flows through that part of the valley*
Ex. 8.20 *The car backfired noisily*
have both chosen the term event process.
For clauses which have chosen the term action process, there is a further choice between *intention* process, a process which the participant in the role of actor performs voluntarily, and *supervention* process, a process which just happens. Again, we have a system with two terms:

$$\text{action process} \longrightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{intention process} \\ \text{supervention process} \end{bmatrix}$$

The clauses
Ex. 8.14 *Peter swam to the island*
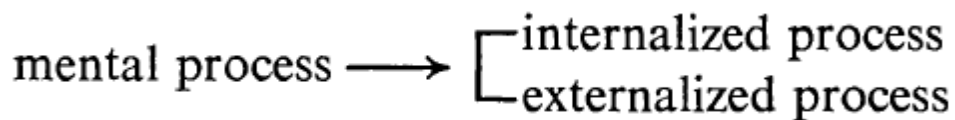Ex. 8.21 *Tiddles chased a mouse*
have chosen the term intention process.
The clauses
Ex. 8.22 *John tripped over a stone*
Ex. 8.23 *Aunt Jemima dropped the teapot*
have chosen the term supervention process.

- Similarly, mental processes can be subdivided. Mental processes can be either *internalized* mental processes, such as 'seeing', 'hearing' or 'thinking', or *externalized* mental processes, such as 'saying'.

mental process $\longrightarrow$ ⎡internalized process
⎣externalized process

The clauses
Ex. 8.10 *Theodore saw Mary on Tuesday*
Ex. 8.16 *Children like jelly*
Ex. 8.24 *John considered the matter gravely*
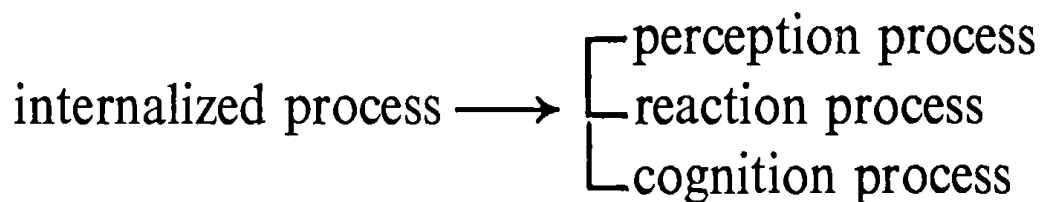have chosen the term internalized process.
The clauses
Ex. 8.17 *The vicar said that yesterday*
Ex. 8.25 *The curate announced the next hymn*
have chosen the term externalized process.
Internalized mental processes can be further subdivided into *perception* processes, such as 'seeing' or 'hearing', *reaction* processes, such as 'liking' or 'hating', and *cognition* processes, such as 'thinking'.

internalized process $\longrightarrow$ ⎡perception process
⎣reaction process
⎣cognition process

The clauses
Ex. 8.10 *Theodore saw Mary on Tuesday*
Ex. 8.26 *The crowd listened intently*
have chosen the term perception process.

The clauses
Ex. 8.16 *Children like jelly*
Ex. 8.27 *Caesar hated lean men*
have chosen the term reaction process.
The clauses
Ex. 8.24 *John considered the matter gravely*
Ex. 8.28 *Theodore thought the explanation unlikely*
have chosen the term cognition process.