CHAPTER THREE  An overview of Functional Grammar

ANSWERS

1  Simple systems
Here is a possible system (based on Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 384, Figure 6-4). The system highlights the fact that English does not distinguish between singular and plural for you; and we may be inclusive (+ listener(s)) or exclusive (+ other(s) but not including listener(s)). Also, conscious vs. non-conscious and male vs. female are relevant distinctions in the singular (he vs. she vs. it) but not in the plural (they).

Note that the system does not attempt to capture less prototypical uses of the pronouns, such as the fairly frequent generalized you (e.g. ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’), or the more specialized use of we to refer to the listener associated with doctors addressing patients, teachers addressing pupils, etc. (e.g. ‘how are we today?’).

2  Choices in text
You may have found that it is not always easy to decide whether you is referring to the listeners or generalized and whether we is inclusive or exclusive. One test for you is whether it sounds relatively natural if it is replaced by one: if it does, it is best taken as generalized (e.g. ‘so you get this kind of zig-zag appearance here’). Here are the raw frequencies of the interactant pronouns in the two extracts in my analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>you (listeners)</th>
<th>you (generalized)</th>
<th>we (+ listeners)</th>
<th>we (- listeners)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td></td>
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The most obvious difference between the extracts is that, while they are almost identical in word count (285 words in the presentation, 286 in the chapter), there are 14 interactant pronouns in the presentation, compared with none at all in the book chapter (in the whole chapter, which runs to 3,050 words, there are three instances of exclusive *we*, and no other interactant pronouns).

Where there could be reference to the interactants in the chapter, the writers use passive forms (e.g. ‘It has been found that’ rather than ‘We have found that’) and non-finite forms (e.g. ‘By looking’ rather than ‘When we looked’). This is a reflection of the preference in specialized scientific writing for impersonality. Writers largely (though not entirely) avoid explicit reference to themselves, in order to make the information in the text less tied to the individual researchers and to represent the focus as being almost exclusively on the experiment and findings. *You* is virtually never found in this kind of text: if writers wish to include the reader, the only conventional option is inclusive *we* (*you* can be found in textbooks, where it sets up a distinction between the knowledgeable author and the less knowledgeable reader).

In the presentation on the other hand, the speaker uses the full range of interactant pronouns. This is mainly a reflection of the fact that the situation is face-to-face. However, it is important to bear in mind that the speaker still chooses to reflect this fact by his use of language: it would be possible for him to ignore this, although – especially given that he knows most of the audience personally – this could appear ‘unsociable’ and would project the situation as closer to a formal read-aloud lecture. Some instances of *you* are to do with practical issues, such as when the speaker asks the audience at the beginning to raise their hands if they are familiar with the picture. Other instances are probably generalized, although it is not always easy to be certain: compare ‘where you don’t see the zig-zag like there and there and there’, which seems to refer directly to the audience as the speaker points to the slide, with ‘so you get a change in the orientation of the bonds’ which is ambiguous between ‘you the audience get’ and ‘one gets’. Similarly, it is not always easy to decide whether *we* refers exclusively to the research team, or is intended to include the audience: even a case such as ‘that’s the sort of surface we started with’, which is likely to refer to the researchers, could mean ‘we (= you and I) started with this sort of surface at the beginning of my talk’. In a sense, though, the important feature is simply that the speaker uses interactant pronouns fairly frequently: even a generalized *you* includes the audience in a way that could easily be avoided (e.g. ‘a change in the orientation of the bonds occurs’).