1. INTRODUCTION

A persistent tendency within the grammatical tradition has been to divide grammatical categories and parts of speech into two superclasses. The distinction appears, for example, in the differentiation made between "grammatical" (or functor) expressions and "contentive" ones (Bolinger, 1975). The former consist of those expressions, words and bound morphemes, that serve a purely grammatical function, whereas the latter provide the principal semantic information of the sentence. In recent years within transformational syntax, the distinction has (re-)surfaced as a contrast between "functional" and "lexical" categories (Chomsky, 1995; Kayne, 1994; Ouhalla, 1991; Stowell, 1981; etc.). This distinction shares properties with that made between grammatical and contentive expressions in that it applies to bound morphs as well as to independent words and reflects a primary semantic distinction between theta-assigning (contentive) categories and nontheta-assigning (functional) ones (Grimshaw, 1990). It also reflects the distinction made in the classical grammatical tradition between "accidence" and "substance." The former refers primarily to the grammatical (morphological) categories exhibited by a language (such as case, tense, etc.) that are the parochial characteristics of word formation of a particular language, whereas the substantives are the linguistically universal classes and properties. Hence, functional elements may be associated with the accidental morphological properties of a
language and so implicated in parametric variation. Lexical expressions, on the other hand, provide the universal substance of the sentence through their semantic content.

The significance of this distinction has apparently received strong psycholinguistic support over recent years, with extensive evidence that the processing of functional expressions differs from that of contentive ones (see below for references). Evidence from aaphasic breakdown, language acquisition, priming experiments, and so on all indicate that a small subset of words are processed differently from the majority of the basic expressions of a language. This difference in processing may be argued to reflect the different syntactic properties exhibited by the two macroclasses of elements and hence provide a sound psychological underpinning to recent developments in linguistic theory.

However, despite the centrality of functional categories within current linguistic theory and the robustness of the psycholinguistic evidence for their significance in processing, there remains considerable vagueness about what exactly the term *functional* picks out from the expressions of a language, what constitutes a functional category, and what is the relationship between functional expressions, broadly construed, and the functional categories identified for a language, either specifically or universally.

Within transformational grammar, the functional categories typically include complementizer, tense, and agreement, and are distinguished from the major categories of noun, verb, adjective, adverb, and (to a certain degree) preposition. In the psycholinguistic literature, however, expressions, such as, *there, here*, and so on, within the major classes, and discourse markers, such as *therefore*, are often included in the set of functional elements, whereas certain expressions often considered to be members of functional classes (like certain quantifiers, e.g., *many, several*, and the numerals) are treated as nonfunctional. The relation between the experimental evidence and the theoretical distinction is thus more problematic than at first appears. In particular, the question arises as to whether the functional distinction is categorial, as has been suggested in certain studies of first language acquisition (see Morgan, Shi, and Alopenna, 1996). If it is, then the nature of this categorial split and the way that it interacts with further categorization becomes an important question. If it is not, then one must ask what is the relation between the set of functional expressions and the functional categories recognized within syntactic theory.

In this chapter, I explore these questions, beginning with a review of the general linguistic properties considered illustrative of the distinction and the psycholinguistic evidence for the nature of the functional–lexical divide. The main problem centers around whether the distinction should be made at the level of the expression or at some more abstract level of categorization. Noting that the evidence for a categorial distinction to be made between functional and lexical expressions comes principally from psycholinguistic studies, I argue that the distinction is best viewed in terms of Chomsky’s (1986) differentiation be-