Lexicogrammar: II. The Linguistic Framework (The Systemic Functional Framework)

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The systemic functional framework

- Whenever language is involved, we are dealing with 'verbal behaviour'.

- However, irrespective of whenever and wherever language is used or encountered, systemic grammar holds that it is a social activity which always takes place in a context.

- The **context of situation** handles the dimensions of the situation which have a bearing on the language used and is studied under **register.**

- Related to the contextual dimensions, language is interpreted as fulfilling a number of different **functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual, in that it enables** people to express different types of meanings.

- The ideational function provides for the expression of our experiences of the world as the 'factual' or 'content' element of what we say.

- The interpersonal function enables us to develop social relationships, to interact with others and to get things done.

- The textual function allows us to organize what we say or write into a coherent and cohesive piece of text which will both relate to what has already been said and take account of relevant aspects of the context.

- In SFL, language is seen comprising three levels or strata: the semantic stratum, the lexicogrammatical stratum and the phonological (or graphological) stratum.

- The **semantics account for the structure and patterning** of the different components of linguistic meaning of a text and, reflecting the different functions which language fulfils, are normally seen as constituting the grammar's generative base.

- The **lexicogrammar accounts through syntax,** morphology and lexis for the wording structure and patterning of a text, and

- the **phonology accounts for its sound structure and** patterning (or the **graphology accounts for the** written/printed form structure and patterning).

Three strata in language

- Together the lexicogrammatical and phonological/graphological strata realize the output from the semantic stratum,

- A text thus involves the fusion of several different layers of structure, in which the lexicogrammar and phonology/graphology give linguistic form to the semantic output.

- In turn this linguistic form is given sound (or written) expression through phonetics (or graphetics).

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Basic relationship of the strata of the linguistic
system to context and phonetic

	Situational context	register
Language system	Meaning structure Wording structure Sound structure	Semantics Lexicogrammar phonology
	Spoken expression	phonetics

	Situational context	**register**
Language system	Meaning structure Wording ----- sound structure structure	Semantics Grammar---- phonology
	Spoken expression	phonetics

The linguistic system

- The semantic generative orientation of systemic grammar thus stands in sharp contrast to that found in versions of the standard theory of transformational grammar.

- There it is the syntactic component, with its phrase structure rules, lexicon and transformation rules, which is the generative source of the grammar and the semantic and phonological components fulfill, rather, an interpretative role.

Context of situation

- The situational context surrounding acts of verbal behaviour is studied through the parameters of register.
- Originally based on the thesis that 'language varies with situation' and therefore that 'a certain kind of language is appropriate to a certain use', register was defined as the variety of language used in a particular situational context.
- In this early interpretation, register was seen as merely providing a framework for describing the background setting for a text.

Register
Field

- Register is, traditionally in systemic grammar, studied in terms of three parameters: field of discourse, tenor of discourse and mode of discourse.
- The field of discourse is concerned with the subject matter of the text, what the text is about, e.g. mountaineering, choral music, gardening, car maintenance, interior decorating, meteorology.
- In addition to specifying the general nature of the subject matter or topic area, however, field is concerned with what is happening, who is doing what, and how, why, when and where they are doing it.
- It thus seeks to identify the participants or things involved, the actions and events taking place, and any relevant surrounding circumstances such as the time, location, manner, purpose, etc

Example

- The text *Whip the cream until it is thick relates to* the field of food preparation and concerns the processing *(whip) of a food (cream) for a given* period of time *(until thick).*

- The text *Staccato at bar forty-nine, please* relates to the field of music and involves the speaker indicating the manner *(staccato) of the* singing or instrumental playing required at a given point *(at bar forty-nine).*

Tenor

- The tenor of discourse is concerned with the social status and role of the various participants and the relationship between them in the situation.
- This will be reflected in the degree of formality or familiarity in the wording of the text.
- It takes account, therefore, of the fact that during the course of a day a person may operate in very different capacities both in respect of their status relative to that of other interlocutors and in respect of their actual role.

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Example

- The same person may be a manager giving advice to an employee, someone seeking approval for action from a senior manager, a patient describing his/her symptoms to a doctor, a parent discussing the progress of his/her child with a teacher, a parent discussing a problem with his/her spouse, a parent discussing a school matter with his/her child, a student at a language evening class, a potential customer talking to a car salesman, or one of a group of guests chatting to each other at a party, etc.

- Together with the question of interpersonal relationships is that of what the language is doing, the purpose of the discourse – its speech function.

For example,

1. Could we stop for a minute, please? is a request,

2. Follow the path along the ridge for a mile past the summit cairn
    is a direction,

3. Would you like a sweet? is an offer,

4. Don't let go of the rope, whatever you do is a warning
    command,

5. Well done is a congratulation,

6. Hello, ???, pleased to meet you is a greeting.

- Any text, of course, involves a continuous sequence of speech functions, and even a single sentence may contain more than one, e.g. *Could you make a pot of tea, please, and I'll mow the lawn.*

Mode

- The mode of discourse is concerned with the language medium through which the text is expressed.
- The two primary contrasts are 'spoken', which people might initially associate with 'spoken to be heard' as in ordinary conversation, and 'written' which might be most readily connected with 'written to be read' as with a book, newspaper, letter, e-mail or fax.
- Thus, within spoken language there is a distinction between 'spontaneous' and 'non-spontaneous' language.
- Written texts, in addition to being 'written to be read', may be 'written to be read as if spoken', as is the case with dialogue elements in a novel. Or they may have been written specifically 'to be spoken', as for example with the script for a radio or television news bulletin

Register mode: type of medium

spoken   written

Spontaneous non-spontaneous   to be spoken   to be read

Dialogue   monologue   as it not written ...   as if spoken   ......
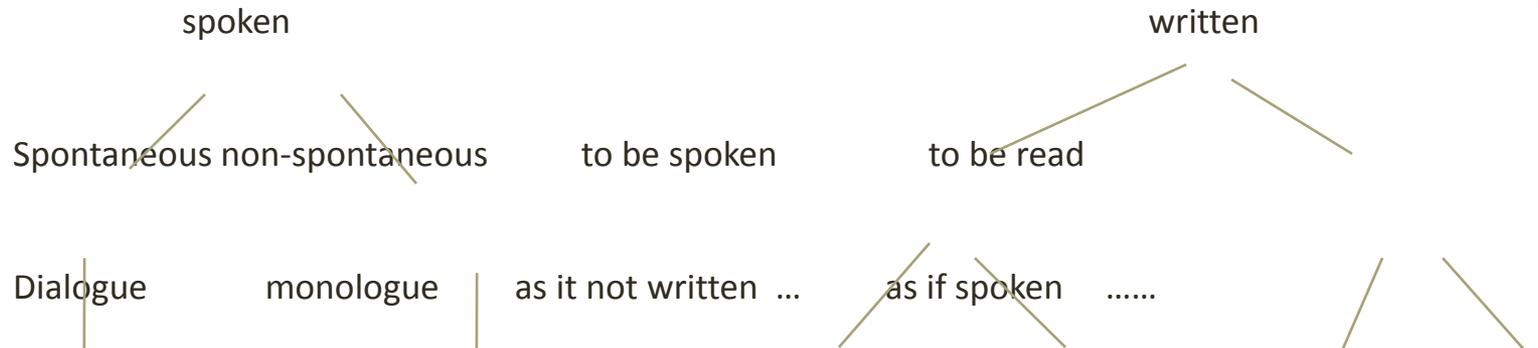
- Together with these discrete types of medium, account must be taken of the possible interplay between spoken and written language.
- For example, when someone reads aloud a story to a child, it is an instance of 'speaking what is written to be read'. A radio or TV news bulletin as heard by the listener illustrates the 'speaking of what is written to be spoken'.

Context of culture

- In addition to the study of context of situation, there has been increasing interest in what is termed the context of culture.
- This reflects the social and cultural background in which the language is set and the participants' understanding of the prevailing social meanings and cultural values.
- In systemic linguistics it is studied under genre, which is concerned with the classification of types of social behaviour within a given cultural environment and, using that framework, with the assignment of the function of any given interaction.

Example

- In determining the purpose of a discourse or text in this way and hence the genre to which it belongs, the linguist is concerned to identify the socio behavioural activity - through its various component stages - which the participants engage in, as evidenced in the language text.

- For example, a transactional visit to a bank to withdraw money might include the following stages:

  A: Next, please. (offer of service)

  B: Can I take out £50, please? (request)

  A: How would you like it? (question)

  B: Four tens and two fives, please. (response)

  B: Thank you. (thanks)

- A strong exponent of the study of genre, Ventola (1988) sets out an overview of the linguistic system which identifies three planes: genre, register and language, and she describes these as representing a 'systemiotic analysis'.

- The plane of genre handles systems of social behavior and it is this plane which controls the choices in register, the semiotic plane. The components of register - field, tenor and mode -are then realized by the plane of language.

Language functions and the semantic stratum

- Systemic grammar views language as a social activity taking place within a situational context and fulfilling a number of different functions.

- Halliday posits the view that there are essentially three main linguistic functions which adult language fulfils: ideational, interpersonal and textual

Ideational function

- The ideational function of language is concerned with the communication and interlinking of ideas and may itself be broken down into the experiential and logical functions.

- The experiential function is the one whereby a speaker expresses the prepositional content elements of his/her utterance, in other words communicates his/her ideas. In operating this function the speaker refers to people, objects and abstractions, actions, events and states, features and qualities, and relationships of location, time, manner, reason, etc.

Ideational Function

- Within the experiential component of the grammar these are grouped and accounted for under the headings of participant / participating entity (relating to people, objects and abstractions - typically nominal), process (actions, events and states – typically verbal), attribute (features and qualities – typically adjectival), and circumstance (relationshipsof location, time, manner, reason, etc. – typically adverbial).
- This sort of data is handled in the grammar through the systems of transitivity and voice

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Ideational Function

- The logical function relates the prepositional ideas and elements of these ideas to each other on an equal or subordinate basis.

- It thus encompasses relationships of coordination, subordination, apposition and modification.

Example (experential function)

- the experiential content in the sentence "John planted a vine in the greenhouse" can be said to be:

  person = *John,*

  + action, past = planted,

  + object = a vine,

  + location = in the greenhouse,

  and could be handled in the grammar as follows: (participant) (process) (participant) (circumstance)

agent	**action**	**goal**	**location**
John	*planted*	*a vine*	*in the greenhouse.*

- *More examples see p. 12.*

Example (logical function)

- **coordination:**
  Jack and Jill went up the hill.
  This tune has a good melody line but the harmony is weak.
- **subordination:**
  When she comes home, she always makes a cup of tea.
  Out here we burn peat on our fires, which you can't do in London.
- **apposition:**
  The president, a pilot, is giving a talk on the history of aviation.
  Their latest rule, that all members must wear a tie, won't last long.
- **modification:**
  The news of the party's victory came as quite a surprise.
  The talk that she gave last time was absolutely fascinating.

Interaction of the experiential and logical subcomponent

- The interaction of the experiential and logical subcomponents by reference to the above example
- *When she comes home, she always makes a cup of tea:*

  time   agent frequency action goal

time agent action location

- *When she comes home, she always makes a cup of tea.*

Interpersonal function

- The interpersonal function mirrors the tenor parameter of register and is evidenced in two main ways: through verbal interaction and exchanges with others and through personal mediation/ modulation of the main idea/content.

- In terms of **social interaction, language serves to** establish and maintain social relations, as is found in greetings and various forms of phatic communion. Thus, in everyday conversation 'Good morning' and 'Hello', 'How are you?' and 'Nice to meet you' are typical examples of greetings, serving to open or further social contact.

Interpersonal Function

- With respect to **instrumental interaction,** language may be used to seek to influence the behaviour of others in order to get things done. It accounts for the fact that through the use of their chosen 'illocutionary force' people issue commands, make requests and put forward suggestions to direct people's actions/behaviour; they offer goods to the addressee, offer to perform a service for him or her; and they express their will/wishes

Example

- command: *Keep out.*
  Turn left at the lights.
- request: *Will you pass me the teapot, please?*
  Could you lend me a pound?
  May I borrow the map, please?
- suggestion: *How about making pancakes for tea?*
  What about trying a different brand?
- offer: *Would you like a cup of tea?*
  Can I give you a hand?
- will/wish: *Let this be a lesson to you!*
  May you never do this again!
  Long live the king!

Interpersonal Function

- With **informational interaction** people give or seek(content/factual) information. They make statements to impart information and ask questions to seek information; they utter exclamations (incorporating some content element) by way of reactive comment.

- statement: *The Chancellor has abolished income tax.*

  Today only one train was late.

- question: *How much will it cost?*

  What's the time?

  Was it expensive?

  Will you go by car or take the train?

- exclamation: *What a good idea!*

  How stupid!

Interpersonal Function

- Closely linked to the idea of reactive comment through exclamation, through **expressive interaction** people can, again through exclamations, give vent to their emotions, but here without a content element, e.g.

  Heavens above!

  Good gracious!

Interpersonal Function

- Through **personal mediation/modulation the speaker** can also express his/her own **personal attitudes** towards the ideational content of what is being said (and his/her **personal assessment** of it).

  Frank has <u>probably</u> got it.

  <u>Maybe</u> the letter didn 't reach her.

  She <u>may</u> never have received it.

  She <u>must</u> have received it.

  You 've <u>surely</u> finished with it by now.

  <u>Unfortunately</u> the parcel never arrived.

  <u>Astonishingly</u> Max came back after only two days.

  <u>Thankfully</u> she didn't stay long.

  <u>Wisely</u> they didn't wait around

Interpersonal Function

- Also the speaker can set out the **terms of reference in which he/she is speaking:**

  To be frank it's not worth the trouble.

  Honestly it was great!

  Essentially all you need is extra RAM.

  From an economic point of view the situation

  is improving.

  Environmentally it could be a disaster.

  Travelwise we 've got three possibilities

Textual function

- The textual (or discoursal) function is described by Halliday as the one whereby language serves as a means to create texts as opposed to merely isolated and disconnected sentences.

- It is the function which organizes the language in a textual corpus in such a way as to give it narrative coherence (in which the ideas are presented in an acceptably logical sequence) and message cohesion (in which the wording of a sentence in a discourse takes account of and is linked to that of previous sentences), to arrange it as units of information, and to avoid unwanted redundancy.

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Textual Function

- Through the textual function the speaker is, firstly, able to give a **thematic structure to the elements of the** clause content, thereby highlighting one or other element in first position and giving it thematic prominence.
- Compare, for example, the following:

  They bought the computer yesterday. (Agent they as theme)

  The computer they bought yesterday. (Goal the computer as theme)

- *Yesterday they bought the computer. (Time yesterday as theme)*

- Secondly, the speaker organizes the clause content in terms of **information units.** Each of these contains an element which is being presented as **new information** in respect of previous discourse and may also contain an element of **given information,** which is being presented as being recoverable from previous discourse.

   They bought the computer yesterday.
      (Normal, unmarked interpretation. Job done.)
   They bought the computer yesterday.
      (i.e. but not the printer or the scanner.)
   They bought the computer yesterday.
      (i.e. they didn't hire or steal it.)
   They bought the computer yesterday.
      (i.e. it wasn't me or you who bought it.)

The semantic stratum

- The meaning structure associated with each of the different language functions above is technically accounted for by the semantic components of the grammar.

- The ideational component reflects the field of discourse from the situational context and is concerned with content meaning input and patterning. It deals with systems such as transitivity and voice.

- The interpersonal component mirrors the tenor of discourse and handles all aspects of the speaker's interpersonal meaning input and patterning

- It includes the interactional meaning of the language used, i.e. the meaning of what the language is doing, in terms of its illocutionary force. (This is distinct from the contextual/speech function of the language - the purpose to which the speaker is putting it.)

- The interpersonal component also deals with the speaker's personal attitudes, comments and terms of reference, together with interpersonal aspects such as attention-getting frames, modes of personal address, greetings and politeness expressions.

- This component thus embraces those elements which have either a 'modulatory' impact on the ideational content or a mediating role in respect of other participants in the situation.

- The textual component deals with the message organization and cohesion in the text, e.g. conjunction, thematic and information structure, reference and ellipsis.
- An important feature regarding the organization of this semantic stratum is that although each of the components is discrete and distinct in its own right, they all contribute to the overall meaning and structure of the text. They are, further, seen as doing so simultaneously, without any sense of priority being accorded to one or other of the components.

- The standard Hallidayan arrangement of the components of the semantic stratum and their relationship to the components of the register context can be represented as follows:

Context	field	tenor	mode
semantics	ideational	interpersonal	textual

The systemic orientation

- The name 'systemic grammar' is derived from the fact that a language is seen as being a huge, integrated series of systems networks of meaning potential.

- This represents the generative potential of the language, and it is the task of the grammar to specify this total grid of options available to a speaker.

- The situational context provides the semiotic parameters and constraints, including the interactional purpose of what the speaker 'is doing' behaviorally in using the language.

- The semantics accounts for what the language 'can mean' and, within that, what the speaker 'is meaning'.
- The lexicogrammar then specifies the word form which the meaning can take, what the speaker 'can say' and, in any one instance, what he/she 'is saying'. What he/she does actually say on any occasion therefore reflects the way that he/she operates or actualizes the language's potential.

- However, unlike the notions of competence and performance in transformational grammar, systemic grammar draws no distinction of principle between the meaning potential and its actualization or use in a given context.
- Meaning potential is thus not seen as some sort of abstract deep structure requiring transformations to form the concrete surface structures that we in fact employ.
- Actualization of the potential is rather a matter of the speaker making a selection from the range of options which the language has to offer; it is a grammar of use.