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## A Functional and Social-Semiotic Perspective on Language, Context and Text

### 1. Introduction

This article is an introduction to an approach to language and context that has been taken by Michael Halliday and other linguists working within the framework of what is generally referred to as systemic-functional linguistics.<sup>1</sup> In a systemic-functional approach to language and context, one cannot ignore the question of text — spoken or written text — and, thus, the word "text" appears in the title of this article. As used here, the term "text" does not refer to a piece of paper with written or typed symbols on it or to a recording or a transcription of a conversation. It refers to language in context: language as a meaningful mode of social action in a particular community.

The article is meant simply as an expository outline: it is aimed at showing how a systemic-functional grammar is related to text, and how grammatical analysis can be applied to the analysis of text. For more in-depth analyses, argumentation and comparison with other approaches, the reader is referred to the references cited throughout. The issue of theory *per se* is also beyond the scope of this article, as well as the related issue of the relationship between theory and description. These are issues that I have addressed elsewhere (Shore 1992: 9–12; see also Matthiessen (forthcoming)).

The approach is illustrated by the analysis of a fragment of spoken text. This analysis is intended to illustrate the kinds of assumptions that systemic-functional linguists make in the grammatical analysis of text. These assumptions include, for example, the units of analysis, the simultaneous, 'polyphonic' patterning that is assumed to underlie the systematicity of language use, and

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<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a paper presented at the SKY seminar *Language and Context* in November, 1992. I am grateful to Pirjo Karvonen for comments on an earlier version of this article.

the various levels at which there is assumed to be systematicity in language.

The focus is on the systematicity in a major clause, i.e. a clause with a finite verb. An attempt is made to show how a systemic-functional approach to grammatical organization differs from a form-based approach — an approach whose starting point is a particular form, a particular set of forms, or a particular construction, for example, a particular morpheme, conjunction or discourse particle or a set of these.

At the end of the article, I attempt to show how the grammatical and cohesive analysis that I present is incorporated into a wider text-semantic theory by systemic-functional linguists working on the analysis of spoken or written text. This wider perspective encompasses such notions as genre, intertextuality and heteroglossia, and addresses such issues as the social and ideological positions, the values, beliefs, attitudes etc. of the interactants in a speech situation.

## 2. Functions of Language

The title of this article contains the term *functional*. There are many linguistic theories that are labelled "functional". It seems to me that what these functional approaches have in common is that they assume that we cannot understand the forms or structures in a language independently of their function. This can be illustrated by the following analogy.

Imagine that you are a missionary who has lived in the highlands of New Guinea for the past twenty years and have learnt the local language. The village in which you live is built in a clearing in a rain forest, and the only means of getting from one village to the next is to go by foot, since the rain forest is dense and the slopes are precipitous. There is practically no contact with the outside world. One day a helicopter airdrops a crate that was sent by a charity organization. The crate was meant for China, but by mistake it ended up in New Guinea. The crate is full of bicycle seats of various shapes and sizes. How could you go about explaining the contents of this crate to the people

of the village? Assuming that there is a word in the language of the villagers that could be used to translate the word "seat", then how could you explain that there things called seats that look like bicycle seats? Not only would you have to explain the relation of the seat to the rest of the bicycle and to the human anatomy, but you would also have to explain the function of the bicycle and the various functions of different kinds of bicycles. You would also need to explain the transportation system and the kind of terrain in which bicycles are used. In other words, you would need to explain the kind of material and social context in which bicycles and bicycle seats are used.

This analogy may appear to be rather far-fetched, but language is such an integral part of our existence, that it is easy to take it for granted. Language, however, it is far more complex and far more multifaceted than a bicycle or a bicycle seat. What then can we say about the functions of language?

There are a number of functional models of language that have been done by scholars from outside linguistics (e.g. Malinowski 1923, Bühler 1990 [1934], Britton 1970, Morris 1967). As Halliday points out (Halliday & Hasan 1989: 16–17), these have been concerned with the different ways in which people use language: to talk about the world around us, to express attitudes, to influence others, to get things done, to maintain and establish social contacts, and so on. These uses of language have been seen at different levels of abstraction by these scholars. Bühler's (1990 [1934]: 34 ff.) is, perhaps, the most abstract: language is used to express the speaker (expression), to appeal to the addressee (appeal) and to represent objects and states of affairs (representation).

In these models, the term function is, thus, applied to the (abstract or generalized) functions of language as **text or utterance**. For example, when Jakobson (1960) extended and developed Bühler's model, he introduced a metalingual function. By this he meant the use of speech to focus on the code itself, for example, if A is unfamiliar with a word that B has used, A might ask *What's "tenure"?*, to which A might reply *It means that*

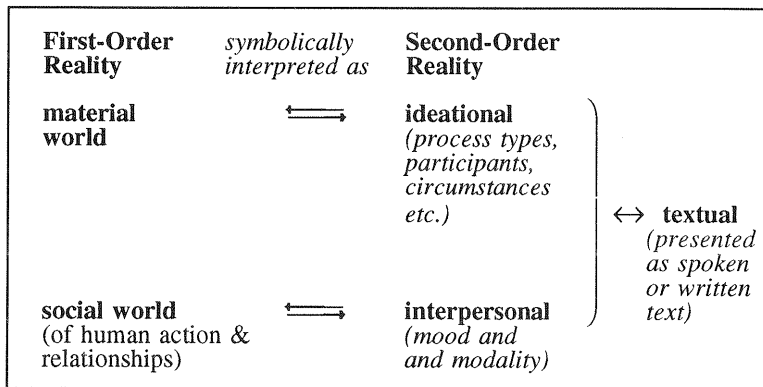
*you've got the job until you retire.* Both these examples would, according to Jakobson, have a metalingual function.

Jakobson's notion of function is essentially different from the way in which function is understood in systemic-functional theory, where function is not only seen as a characterization of a text or an utterance, but also — and more importantly — as an intrinsic and fundamental organizing principle in the code itself, in the lexico-grammatical patterning of linguistic structures and forms. Halliday assumes that there are three generalized functions or "metafunctions" that are reflected in the morphosyntactical patterning in language (e.g. 1973, 1978, 1985, 1992, forthcoming). These metafunctions can be further subdivided: in systemic-functional terms, the degree of "delicacy" can be increased (Gregory 1987).

The three basic (meta)functions that are generally recognized in systemic-functional theory are the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational metafunction of language is concerned with the way in which language serves as a model of reality, as a model of the physical and social world in which we live and of the world of our consciousness. It is generally subdivided into an experiential and a logical metafunction. The experiential metafunction is concerned with the representation and construction of the things that we talk about; it is primarily construed in grammar through the coding of processes (actions, states, or relationships) and their concomitant participants and circumstances. The logical metafunction is concerned with the way in which language is used to construe dependency and interdependency relationships between the things that we talk about. The interpersonal metafunction reflects the way in which language functions as a means of social participation, with the way in which we use language to express our own attitudes and judgments and attempt to influence the attitudes and behaviour of others. This is primarily construed in the grammar of a language through its mood and modality resources.

The ideational and interpersonal metafunctions are oriented towards the extra-linguistic: the material world and the social world of human relationships. They are oriented to a first-order

reality, a reality that, in some sense, can be said to exist independently of language. The third metafunction, the textual metafunction, is fundamentally different from the others, since it is intrinsic to language itself. The textual metafunction is concerned with the way in which language is used to make links with itself — with other bits of language — and with the contexts in which it is used. Thus, the textual metafunction is oriented, in the first place, to a second-order, symbolic reality that is construed by language. This can be diagrammatically illustrated (following Matthiessen & Halliday (forthcoming)) as follows:

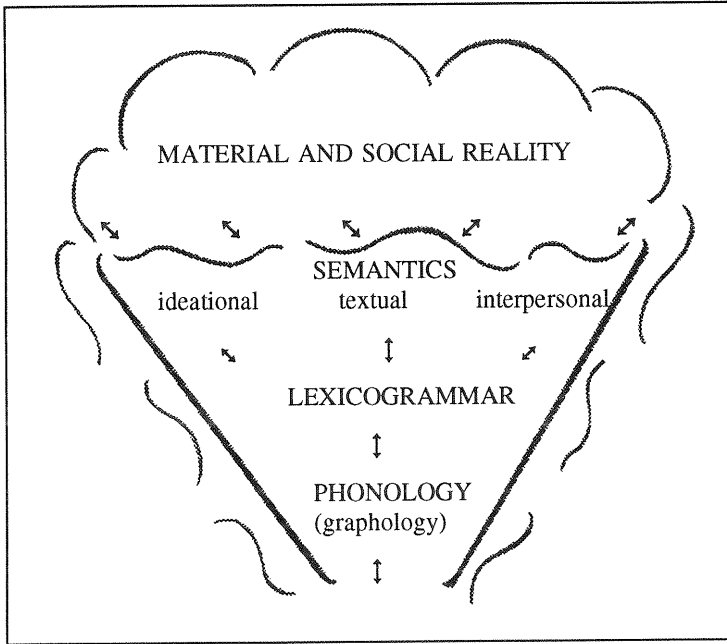


**Figure 1:** Metafunctions of Language and Orders of Reality

These functions or metafunctions are seen as being crucial to the semantic organization of a language, and consequently, to its grammatical organization, since systemic-functional theory assumes that there is a realizational relationship between semantics and lexicogrammar. The notion of realization should not be misunderstood in terms of the folk linguistic notion of "expression". For many, a relation of expression implies that a meaning *X* exists prior to its expression as *Y*. For example, in many studies of Given and New information, it seems to be implied that Givenness and Newness are prelinguistic or extralinguistic notions that are independent of the semiotic system in which they are realized (see Shore 1992: 308 ff.). In a systemic-functional

view of realization, X does not exist without Y and Y does not exist without X, and semantics and lexicogrammar are not related to each other in causal terms, but in terms of a dialectic.

The following diagram shows how levels or planes in language are related to each other in systemic-functional theory.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 2:** Planes in Language

Realization is symbolized by the double-headed arrow: there is a realization relationship between semantics and lexicogrammar and between lexicogrammar and phonology. Semantics can be seen as an interface between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic (cf. Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> As it seems to me that diagrams like this — while helpful — are absurd reifications of a vastly complex and multifaceted phenomenon, I have deliberately made the diagram resemble an icecream cone.

### 3. A Multifunctional Approach

In systemic-functional theory, the notion of function is thus seen as being fundamental to the grammatical organization of a language. A clause **simultaneously** realizes a number of different functions; it simultaneously realizes a number of different generalized types of meaning. This functional hypothesis — or meta-functional hypothesis — works like a prism, to use a metaphor used by Firth (1957: 19; in Palmer (ed.) 1968: 108, 200). The prism disperses the meanings that are conflated in the linguistic patterning in a clause. This approach to grammatical analysis can be compared to Firth's approach to phonological analysis (see Firth 1957, Ch. 9) and to recent trends in autosegmental phonology:

The major insight lying at the base of autosegmental phonology is that the phonological representation is composed not of a single sequence of entities roughly corresponding to a line of type, but rather that the phonological representation is made up of several parallel sequences of entities, resembling thus more a score for a musical ensemble, than a single line of type. (Halle and Vergnaud 1982: 65.)

The musical analogy that is used here echoes a similar analogy that has long been made by Halliday (e.g. 1978: 56), who compares grammatical structure to polyphonic music.

To give a very concrete and somewhat oversimplified illustration of what this involves, I shall use the following fragment of Finnish text. The fragment is at the end of a turn in a conversation involving a number of people. It is about a ring, which was introduced by the speaker in the first part of the turn. I have divided the fragment into clauses. The first clause is unfinished; the speaker immediately changes tack and the rest of the turn comprises a syntactic and prosodic entirety, which is spoken quickly and without hesitation.

- |     |                                  |          |             |          |       |            |
|-----|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------|------------|
| (1) | se                               | sormus   | ei          | millään— |       |            |
|     | it/that                          | ring+NOM | NEG/3SG     | in any   |       |            |
|     | 'that ring won't in any-'        |          |             |          |       |            |
|     |                                  |          |             |          |       |            |
| (2) | nyt                              | kun      | sen         | pane     | mun   | sormeen    |
|     | now                              | when     | it/that+GEN | put+3SG  | I+GEN | finger+ILL |
|     | 'now when it's put on my finger' |          |             |          |       |            |

- (3) ni se ku on hetken siellä  
 so it/that-NOM when be-3SG moment there-ADE  
 'and then when it's there for a moment'
- (4) ni nousee tämmönen patti  
 so rise-3SG this kind of swelling  
 'then a kind of swelling occurs'
- (5) et se ei lähe pois  
 that it/that-NOM NEG/3SG come off  
 'so it won't come off'

To illustrate a multi-tiered, polyphonic approach to grammatical analysis, I shall concentrate on the second clause *nyt ku sen panee mun sormeen* 'now when it's put on my finger'. This particular kind of clause is referred to as a "major clause" in systemic-functional theory (see Shore 1992, Ch. 2, 4).

#### 4. Meanings in the Clause

From an experiential perspective, we could say that some kind of material process is construed. By "material", I mean some kind of material change or transition in the world — a 'doing' or a 'happening'. This process of 'putting' is realized by the verb and it also involves a Goal and a number of circumstances.

- |      |              |              |                     |                 |                 |
|------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (2a) | nyt          | kun          | sen                 | panee           | mun sormeen     |
|      | now          | when         | it+GEN <sup>3</sup> | puts            | my finger + to  |
|      | <i>Circ:</i> | <i>Circ:</i> | <i>Goal</i>         | <i>Process:</i> | <i>Circ:</i>    |
|      | <i>time</i>  | <i>time</i>  |                     | <i>material</i> | <i>location</i> |

The finite verb is in the indicative form — the third person singular — but there is no Actor realized in the linguistic structure. Neither is it presupposed by ellipsis, i.e. referring back to something earlier in the text. In Finnish, this is the conventionalized way of referring to a hypothetical Actor — roughly corresponding to the English 'one' or 'you'.

Material processes are grammatically construed by a number of morphosyntactic properties that distinguish them from the other major process types in Finnish: relational processes and mental processes. The term "mental process" is used here as a

<sup>3</sup> This is traditionally referred to as "a genitive-like accusative" in Finnish.



cover term for processes of human consciousness, including both internal consciousness (e.g. thinking, believing, loving etc.) and external, verbalized consciousness (e.g. saying).

The notion of a process type is not simply based on meaning in systemic-functional theory, but on a number of — prototypical — lexicogrammatical properties. Material processes in Finnish can be distinguished *inter alia* by the fact that distinctions in temporal and spatial boundedness can be made, as grammatically reflected in the case-marking options available in the element realizing the Goal (i.e. partitive vs. accusative/nominative/genitive). These choices are not available to the same extent in mental processes (Shore 1992, Ch. 6; forthcoming). Furthermore, material processes can be defined negatively with respect to the other process types. For example, a prototypical feature of a mental process is the fact that it can project another clause. Instead of being a direct representation (or construction) of non-linguistic reality, the projected clause is at a further remove from this reality. The notion of projection is, thus, roughly equivalent to the notion of direct, indirect and free indirect speech (and thought), if these traditional notions are not simplistically understood as reporting something that was said (or thought) in another situation.

From a textual point of view, the topical Theme of the clause is realized by the same element that realizes the Goal, i.e. *sen* 'it', which anaphorically refers back to the ring in the previous, unfinished clause. I assume that — in the majority of instances — the topical Theme in Finnish is realized by the experiential element that immediately precedes the verb (see further Shore 1992, Ch. 7). Thus, I am assuming that the topical Theme is a grammatical function and that a text is also organized textually at the rank of clause. A further layer of patterning can be added to the score of the musical ensemble:

(2b) nyt	kun	sen	pane	mun sorme
<i>Circ</i>	<i>Circ</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Circ</i>
		<i>topical Theme</i>	<i>Rheme</i>	

When we look at the clause from an interpersonal viewpoint, we look at the mood and modality choices in the clause. The mood choices of declarative, interrogative, and imperative are

traditionally seen as referring to 'statements', 'questions', and 'commands'. These semantic notions can be understood in simplistic terms, e.g. a statement can be understood in terms of stating something and a command in terms of commanding someone to do something. While these traditional terms are generally retained by systemic-functional linguists, they do not refer to these traditional semantic labels but to highly abstract speech functions underlying interactive events. Halliday (1984, 1985: Ch: 3) defines these speech functions in terms of two parameters: 1) the "commodity exchanged" can either be (a) language, i.e. something essentially symbolic in nature, or (b) goods-&-services or action and 2) the role of the initiator can either be that of a) giver or b) demander.

In the example being analysed, the finite verb is in the declarative form, and, thus, the clause can be seen as grammatically construing a relationship in which the speaker is giving something that is essentially symbolic in nature, i.e. "information" (see Shore 1991a, 1992). The giving of information (in this kind of information science sense of the word) can be seen as a 'baseline' meaning of a declarative: it is what is referred to as its "congruent" meaning in systemic-functional theory. However, a clause in the declarative can function in a similar way to an interrogative, i.e. as asking for information, or as an imperative, i.e. as something oriented to a non-linguistic or action response. In these instances, a declarative is said to be used metaphorically and Halliday (1985: Ch. 4) refers to these as grammatical metaphors. Other kinds of grammatical metaphor include metaphors of modality and ideational metaphors. The notion of metaphor is, thus, not only applied to lexical but also to grammatical phenomena in systemic-functional theory (see Halliday 1985, Ch. 10, Karvonen 1991, Puurtinen, forthcoming). Metaphor is regarded as a pervasive semiotic — meaning-making — resource in language.

The example being analysed does not involve metaphor and what is said is not tempered by choices in modality — modalization or modulation — such as *varmast* 'surely' or *aina* 'always'. Thus the interpersonal melodic line can be added as follows:

(2c)	nyt kun	sen	panee	mun sormeen
	<i>Circ Circ</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Circ</i>
	<i>R e s i —</i>	<i>topical Theme</i>	<i>Rheme</i>	<i>— d u e</i>
			<i>Finite</i>	
			<i>(declarative)</i>	

The experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings that are illustrated here are the kinds of meanings that are assumed to be realized in the clause — or, at least, in a major clause.<sup>4</sup> The analysis presented here is meant as a concrete illustration of the fact that function is seen as being fundamental to the grammatical organization of language in systemic-functional theory. This can be compared to Bühler's and Jakobson's notion of function mentioned earlier: Jakobson's (1960: 355) example *Drink!* (from a play by Eugene O'Neill) has a conative function, it is oriented towards the addressee, and the examples cited earlier (*What's "tenure"?*, *It means that you've got the job until you retire*) have a metalingual function, they are oriented to the code. From a systemic-functional viewpoint, in each of these examples there is a conflation of the experiential, interpersonal and textual meta-functions of language in their lexicogrammatical organization.

## 5. Beyond and Alongside the Clause

Thus far, I have only looked at the patterns in the clause, but the clause I have analysed is clearly part of a larger, structural unit. The conjunction *kun* 'when' indicates that it is dependent on something else.

(2d)		DEPENDENT CLAUSE			
	nyt	kun	sen	panee	mun sormeen

The clause is part of a larger clause complex: *nyt ku sen panee mun sormeen ni se ku on hetken siellä ni nousee tämmönen patti et se ei lähe pois* 'Now when it's put on my finger, when it's there for a moment, a kind of swelling occurs, so it won't come

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<sup>4</sup> The same kinds of options are not available to the same extent in what are referred to as "minor clauses" in systemic-functional theory — i.e. complete (unelliptical) syntagmas without a finite verb (e.g. those discussed by Hakulinen, this volume).

off'. It is clear from the Finnish, at least, that the speaker is representing something as "a complex phenomenon or as a set of interrelated phenomena". This, as Halliday (1989: 82) points out, is the function of the clause complex.

When we examine complexes, we are looking at the clause from the perspective of the logical metafunction, i.e. we are looking at the way in which **language** is used by speakers or writers to construe dependency and inter-dependency relationships (see Halliday 1985: Ch. 7, Shore 1992: Ch. 4). The analysis of clause complexes takes us into an area of linguistic analysis that straddles the area between grammatical — structural — organization and the organization of a text. This means that we can either approach a complex structurally and look at the resources that a language has for combining clause, or we can look at clauses and clause complexes from a textual perspective: for example, we can look at the sequential and dynamic semantic relationships that are set up between clauses and clause complexes in a text.

In the setting up of logical relationships between clauses and phrases in complexes, an important part is played by intonation (see Halliday 1985: 285). When we start to look at intonation, we move to the tone group. A tone group is not the same thing as a clause, but we can see them as different kinds of organization that come together in significant ways. As I have not studied the interaction of grammatical and prosodic units in Finnish, I shall have to ignore the role of intonation in complexes. However, I would like to briefly mention two other kinds of meaning that are realized prosodically.

The first kind of prosodically realized meaning that needs to be discussed is clearly interpersonal and interacts with mood options in the clause. This is what Halliday refers to as the system of Key (Finnish: *sävy*), the meaning associated with intonational contours (see Halliday 1967, 1970, 1985: 284 ff., Kress ed. 1976, Ch. 14, Tench 1991). For example, an imperative such as *ota kakkua* 'have some cake' would typically be said with high-clause initial pitch in Finnish, whereas the imperative *painu helvettiin* 'go to hell' would typically be said with low-clause initial pitch in Finnish. These options are available in the same



The following is a transcription of the turn in which the analysed clause occurs:

<i>viime,</i> last	<i>viime</i> last	<i>kesänä</i> [pause]	<i>lähettiin</i> went	<i>kesälomalle</i> summer+holiday+to				
<i>ja</i> &	<i>välttämättä</i> & necessarily	<i>kaveri</i> partner	<i>halus</i> wanted	<i>et</i> that	<i>täytyy</i> must	<i>olla</i> be		
<i>sormus</i> ring	( <i>no sitte se on</i> ) (‘well then it is’)		<i>[barely audible]</i>		<i>mie</i> I	<i>olin</i> was	<i>sillon</i> then	
<i>hiukan</i> slightly	<i>laihempi,</i> slimmer	<i>ehkä</i> perhaps	<i>kymmenen</i> ten	<i>killoo</i> kilo	<i>laihempi</i> slimmer			
<i>se</i> the/that	<i>etu</i> advantage	<i>on</i> has	<i>ollut</i> been	<i>avioliitosta</i> from marriage	<i>että</i> that	<i>mie</i> I		
<i>oon saanu</i> have got	<i>kunnolla</i> properly	<i>syyäkseni,</i> to eat	(( <i>laughingly</i> ))	<i>lihoakseni</i> to get fat	<i>nii</i> yeah			
<i>se</i> that	<i>sormus</i> ring	<i>ei</i> not	<i>millään—</i> in any	<i>nyt</i> now	<i>ku</i> when	<i>sen</i> it	<i>pane</i> puts	<i>mun</i> my
<i>sorme</i> finger+to	<i>ni</i> so	<i>se</i> it	<i>ku</i> when	<i>on</i> is	<i>hetken</i> a moment	<i>siellä</i> there	<i>ni</i> so	<i>nousee</i> rises
<i>tämmö</i> this kind of	<i>patti</i> swelling	<i>et</i> that	<i>se</i> it	<i>ei</i> won’t	<i>lähe</i> come	<i>pois</i> off		

‘Last, last summer we went on our summer holiday and my partner insisted that a ring is necessary (that I must have a ring). I was slightly slimmer then, ten or so kilos lighter. The advantage of marriage is that I get to eat properly, and get to put on weight. That ring won’t in any— Now when it’s put on my finger, when it’s there for a moment, a kind of swelling occurs, so it won’t come off.’

Cohesive resources have been grouped under a number of headings by Halliday & Hasan (1976). The first is referred to by them as conjunction: they make a distinction between "conjunction" as a cohesive relation and conjunction as a grammatical phenomenon. The conjunction *kun* in the clause being analysed is a grammatical resource: it creates a structural relation between clauses in a complex. Some conjunctions, however, can be used to link what the person is about to say with the preceding text, rather than to set up a relation between the clauses in the complex. The conjunction *and*, for example, is typically used cohesively at the beginning of a clause complex in unselfconscious conversation. An example of conjunction as a cohesive relation is found at the beginning of the clause being analysed:

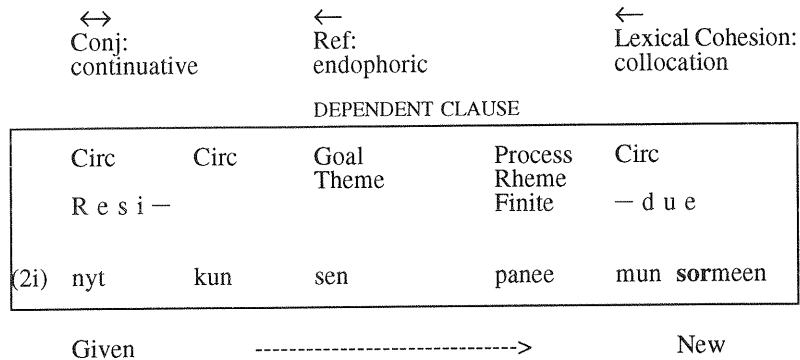


- (6) A: oot sä hiihtänyt jo?  
 'have you been skiing yet?'  
 B: en  
 NEG+1SG  
 'no I haven't'

The negative finite form in B's turn can only be interpreted by reference to the previous turn in the exchange.

## 7. Simultaneous, Polyphonic Patterning

The grammatical analysis has now been supplemented by an analysis of the cohesive relationships in the text. Thus, we have a number of simultaneous, polyphonic patterns that are conflated (i.e. come together) in the clause:



The patterning within the rectangle displays the grammatical patterning in the clause. Below the rectangle is the patterning in the tone group, which conflates with the grammatical patterning in the clause. The cohesive resources indicated in the initial line of patterning above the rectangle are not grammatical resources: although they are realized in the clause they are not restricted by the boundaries of the clause. We could also add extra layers to this polyphonic analysis by looking, for example, at the role of laughter or gesture.

Thus, in a systemic-functional approach, one does not isolate a particular constituent or segment and say that it has just one function (or even two functions).



The meanings are woven together in a very dense fabric in such a way that, in order to understand them, we do not look separately at its different parts; rather, we look at the whole thing simultaneously from a number of different angles, each perspective contributing to the total interpretation. That is the essential nature of a functional approach. (Halliday 1989: 23.)

Hjelmslev (1953: 5) said that "for every process there is a corresponding system". In this polyphonic approach, one could say that for every process there are a number of levels of systematicity and, at each level, there are a number of simultaneous systems, which can be conflated in various ways. This polyphonic approach to systematicity in language could be seen as corresponding to recent developments to systematicity in complex, dynamic systems in the physical sciences (cf. Shore, forthcoming). The mechanistic view of reality that dominated classical science as developed by Galileo, Newton, and others saw the world as a vast automaton. With the emergence of the science of chaos, the world is now seen as one that is multiple, temporal and complex. This polyphonic multilayered approach in systemic-functional theory is an attempt to come to terms with the systematicity in something as complex as language.

## **8. Beyond Grammar and Cohesion**

From the perspective of the kinds of meanings that are made and can be made in a language, however, we need to go further. We need to go beyond the lexicogrammatical resources of a language and beyond its cohesive text-making resources. We need to move "upwards and outwards", and look at the kinds of meanings that are repeatedly meant in a community. This takes us into the realm of what Lemke (1989) has referred to as "discourse formations". Discourse formations include the text in its context that is recognizable as a meaningful mode of action in society — an exchange between a waitress and a customer in a restaurant, as opposed to an exchange between a client and a customer in a clinic for alcoholics, an editorial in a newspaper, an article in a linguistic journal, an exchange between doctor and patient,

interpersonal conversation, a scientific symposium, a legal contract, making an appointment, and so on.

From a linguistic viewpoint, contexts of situation can be described and distinguished in terms of three fairly broad and abstract variables: field, tenor and mode (see e.g. Halliday 1978, Halliday & Hasan 1989, Poynton 1989, Martin 1992: Ch. 7). Field (Finnish: *ala*) refers to the social activity that is taking place, e.g. a political interview as opposed to an interview between a social worker and an alcoholic. A further distinction needs to be made between first-order and second-order fields. In a discussion about a game of ice hockey, for example, the discussion itself constitutes the social activity that is taking place, it is the first-order field, but the game that is being talked about is the second-order field.

Tenor (Finnish: *rooli*) refers to the relationship between the participants. This includes such factors as the relative status of the participants, their frequency of contact, whether the relationship is institutionalized, whether the relationship is indirect, as between a writer and his or her audience etc. etc. Here again, one needs to make at least one further distinction between primary and secondary tenor: any text that is a public text involves not only role relationships between the interactants 'in the text', but also the role relationship between the text and the reader, listener or viewer. Thus, while a public, political interview and an interview between a social worker and an alcoholic, who is a 'regular customer' at a social security office, are both based on a relationship that is, to some extent, institutionalized, they, nevertheless, involve very different tenor relationships.

Mode (Finnish: *tapa*) refers to the role of language played by language. Very broadly, this refers to the difference between spoken and written language. However, as Halliday (1989: 32) points out:

'Written' and 'spoken' do not form a simple dichotomy; there are all sorts of writing and all sorts of speech, many of which display features characteristic of the other medium.

Mode includes, first of all, such variables as whether or not the text conforms to the conventions of the spoken or written code

and whether the text is produced graphically or phonically. A new broadcast, for example, while conforming to the conventions of the written code is produced phonically. The text that was analysed in this article conforms to the conventions of the spoken code, but it is a graphic representation of it.

Mode also includes such factors as whether or not there is visual contact between the participants (telephone vs. face-to-face interpersonal conversation) and whether language is constitutive or ancillary. A text that is constitutive is one in which most of the social action is realized linguistically, e.g. an article in this volume. The term 'ancillary', on the other hand, is used to refer to a text in which most of the social action is realized non-verbally, e.g. an exchange between two people who are trying to put together a piece of do-it-yourself furniture. It is interesting to note that — from this perspective — interpersonal conversation, which is sometimes thought of as the paradigm instance of spoken language, is more like written language in that it is situated at the constitutive end of the scale; as Malinowski (1923: 325) said of what he referred to as phatic communication "the whole situation consists in what happens linguistically". While this not entirely true, it nevertheless points to a characteristic of interpersonal conversation that aligns it with the written mode. Further distinctions within mode include, for example, degrees of turn-taking, reply expectation and self-consciousness.

One need only think of the complexity of telecommunication nowadays to realize that these variables need to be further refined and further distinctions needs to be made. Nevertheless, these basic variables — field, tenor and mode — provide a viable base through which the linguist can approach variation in texts and distinguish between the different contexts of situation in which language functions.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Variation in text can be characterized as variation according to use. In systemic-functional theory, it is referred to as "diatypic variation", as opposed to "dialectal variation", which is variation according to the user. Dialectal variation includes not only regional variation, but also variation according to age, sex, generation (parent/child) etc. (See Gregory 1967; Halliday & Hasan 1989: 43, cf. Holmes 1992.)

Looking at contexts in terms of field, tenor and mode does not preclude the notion of context as a dynamic concept. However, it does attempt to get at the more or less stable aspects of language and context — while a situation is reshaped by its speakers, an exchange between a therapist and a client in an alcohol clinic is unlikely to be transformed into an exchange between two alcoholics hitting the bottle or into a political interview.

Another aspect of the kinds of meanings that are repeatedly meant in a community has to do with the dialogical semantics of a text. The notion of dialogical semantics derives from the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) who introduced an essentially dialogical view of text (both spoken and written). A text is dialogical in that it does not exist in a vacuum: it is related to other texts — and, in particular, to certain kinds of texts. Thus, an essential part of the meaning of a text is the way in which a text is read (or heard) in relation to other texts — its intertextuality.

The dialogical semantics of a text has another, related aspect: the heteroglossic relations whereby the voice of a text establishes its stance towards other voices. The notion of heteroglossia ('manylinguageness'), also from Bakhtin, foregrounds the social diversity of any speech community. This diversity cannot be forgotten even in the analysis of a particular text.

Both of these notions — intertextuality and heteroglossia — can be illustrated — albeit in a fairly superficial way — with the text that was analysed in this article. In discussing it, I made no reference to the gender of the speaker and there is no lexicogrammatical indication of gender in the text. To any Finn — and indeed to any English-speaking person — it would come as no surprise that the speaker was male. The text is from a recording of a group of men talking in a restaurant. The text is, in fact, over thirty years old:<sup>7</sup> it was recorded in the late fifties, but the way that marriage is discussed places it within a certain discourse

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<sup>7</sup> The conversation was originally recorded for a sociological study conducted by Kettil Bruun. My transcription is based on a transcription done by Eeva-Leena Seppänen for an ethnomethodological conversation analysis project. The recording and transcription (Vapaa keskustelu 1b, ryhmä 5) are kept in the Finnish Department at the University of Helsinki.

that is recognizable today. The text is, thus, intertextually linked with other texts about marriage and with sexist texts.

As for the heteroglossic relations, the text can be interpreted in different ways depending on the position of the interpreter: the actual men involved in the conversation would not have the same interpretation as a feminist analysing the text. Here, we move into the realm of the realm of social and ideological positions, values, beliefs, attitudes and so on<sup>8</sup> (see, e.g. Kress 1989, Lemke 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, Shore 1991b, Hodge & Kress 1993; and Thibault 1991, for a controversial critique of ideology in linguistics, in particular, in cognitive linguistics).

Analysing what is repeatedly meant in a community, thus, takes us into the conflicts and contradictions that exist in any society and the subcultures within that society.

Discourse is a multidimensional process; a 'text' which is the product of that process not only embodies the same kind of polyphonic structuring as is found in the grammar ... but also since it is functioning at a higher level of the code, as the realization of semiotic orders 'above' the language, may contain in itself all the inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts that can exist within and between such higher-order semiotic systems. Because it has this potential, a text is not a mere reflection of what lies beyond; it is an active partner in the reality-making and reality-changing process. (Halliday 1985: 318.)

If a text can contain "all the inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts that can exist within and between such higher-order semiotic systems", then the analysis of text that is not grounded on a theory-based grammar remains a question of personal inclination and individual interpretation. In order to claim that a text is racist or sexist, for example, one needs a principled way of demonstrating the grammatical and semantic properties of the text that can be said to give it a racist or sexist reading. And a

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<sup>8</sup> I informally tested this particular fragment with a class of approx. 50 first-year students in the Finnish Department at the University of Helsinki. (The vast majority of students in the department are female). Contrary to my own expectations, opinion was divided: about half the students thought the speaker was female and the other half thought the speaker was male. The students' impressions may have been influenced *inter alia* by the fact that I myself read the transcription, although age is, of course, a significant factor in the analysis of (constantly changing) social values and beliefs.

principled approach to a text, as opposed to an ad hoc personal and individual interpretation or an approach based on taking (undefined) traditional grammatical or semantic notions to suit one's purposes, means that we need to explicate not only the theoretical assumptions on which the analysis is based but also the theoretical notions that are used and the relationships between them. (See Shore (1992: 9–12) and Matthiessen (forthcoming) on the issue of theory in linguistic description).

This wider text-semantic perspective takes us into an area that begins to be beyond our expertise as linguists. However, if we want to say something that is socially relevant and is also relevant to the role of language in everyday living of life, we need to take this step. If we, as linguists, are concerned with language and context and if we regard linguistics as a humanistic discipline, then surely the ultimate context for language and the study of language is the living of life.

Renewal of connection with the processes and patterns of life in the instances of experience is the final justification of abstract linguistics. (Firth 1957: 24.)

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