PRAGMATICS, DISCOURSE AND TEXT

Some Systemically-inspired Approaches

Edited by

Erich H. Steiner
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Foreword

When, in 1973, I organized a small workshop for those working in systemic linguistics, I had no idea that this single meeting of a score or so of invited scholars would grow to become the annual international conference that it now is, often attracting approaching two hundred participants. I had no idea, indeed, that there would be a second workshop at all. But steadily the numbers have grown, and steadily the international nature of the meetings has become established. First we added the word 'International' so that the meetings were, for example, the 'Seventh International Systemic Workshop', and this has been reflected in the places in which the meetings have been held. Three, including that of the present year, have been held in North America, and one in Australia. One interesting aspect of this internationalism is that, with the costs of travel as they are, most of the participants in each workshop come from the local continent—so that if we put together all of those who attend when they can the total number is something of the order of five hundred.

Another change is that, with some regrets, the meetings have become less workshop-like and more formal—though we still try to include workshop activities within the overall programme. And at the Fourteenth Workshop in Sydney it was decided that since the annual meetings had in effect become international congresses, this is what they should be called. So the 1988 meeting is the Fifteenth International Systemic Congress.

One advantage that this growth has brought with it is that more of the talks are presented as full papers. It has therefore become natural to think in terms of publishing selected papers from the workshops. The two people who have done most to encourage this trend are Jim Benson and Bill Greaves, of York University, Toronto, who have jointly edited papers from the ninth and twelfth workshops. The present volume, however, is the first to emerge from a workshop on the Eastern side of the Atlantic, and it is all the more welcome for that.

This volume represents another development in the workshops; they are no longer attended only by fully committed, 'insider' systemic linguists, but also by many others who are interested in applying systemic ideas or in relating

their thinking to the broad framework that Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics makes available to those who work with language. For it is pre-eminently a usable theory, and an adaptable theory; indeed, it is doubtful whether, if there were no applications for linguistics, the theory would exist at all.

This volume, then, includes some contributions that reflect current central concerns within systemic theory, and some that illustrate the way that scholars who are not committed to the full theory nonetheless find it a useful framework to which to relate their thinking. Hence the title.

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Radyr, July 1988

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Introduction

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This volume brings together a number of essays on three interwoven themes of PRAGMATICS, DISCOURSE and TEXT.

There was a time when editing such a volume would elicit an introductory statement of a defensive nature. Now, thankfully, such apologies are no longer offered. The prevailing climate recognizes that language has many LEVELS of organization and is applied to the service of a vast variety of FUNCTIONS, which theoretically increase in number with each new utterance. Whether 'levels of organization' is the appropriate term or not is a question which will be treated presently, but it is the insight of SYSTEMIC-FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS that the multilevelled and multifunctional aspects of languages are intimately related.

The notion of linguistic organization according to 'levels' or 'strata' or even 'components' is, probably, not more than a useful fiction, heuristically applied in order to create an illusion of hierarchy and order, not a little encouraged by the ancient but insidious concept of 'priority'. Firstly, the elements known as 'levels' operate interactively, but as the recent history of linguistics tells us, inter-level interaction is not a necessary inference that can be drawn from the notion of levels alone, when their only significant point of contact is the so-called 'trading relation' between the components of a generative grammar. Secondly, there is probably no fundamental evidence for or general value in the unidirectional character of level interaction, as embodied in stratally organized models, restricted to reflection of real-time, speaker-only communicative activity.

How, then, is it possible to portray language holistically, as a working phenomenon but sufficiently generalized to account for phenomena other than speech production? To accomplish this it is necessary to disentangle and reclassify vital elements of description, as was done, for instance, in the critique by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Coulthard and Brazil (1979) of ethnomethodological treatments of conversation by applying Halliday's SCALE and CATEGORY methodology (Halliday 1961). The vital ingredients of holistic description are, as might be expected here, PRAGMATICS, DISCOURSE and TEXT. Whereas elsewhere these three have been treated as sorts of 'linguistic levels' or 'components of grammar', we wish to consider them as

different but complementary aspects of dimensions of description with an ultimately identical focus. The dimensions concerned are PERSPECTIVE, PROCESS and PRODUCT.

PRAGMATICS is more a 'perspective' than a genuine level or component, as is commonly assumed, where it is contrasted usually with semantics (Leech 1983: 5–7), or grammar (Chomsky 1980: 59), or even language itself (Radford 1981: 8, 1988: 10–11). A recent review of the semantics–pragmatics relation (Lyons 1987) suggests that it suffers from ingrained inconsistency and vacuousness, with the concepts continuing to be so starkly opposed. It is therefore time that these two fundamental constructs are disassociated and allowed to breathe independently. Pragmatics is the means by which students of language come to terms with language as a PROCESS as well as language as a PRODUCT, and thus links discourse to text, for pragmatics is the perspective that is determined by language as synthesis, as a global act, rather than by analysis, which accounts for the more classical components of linguistic description. Indeed, Levinson (1979) forecasts the development of an 'analysis by synthesis' approach as a natural consequence of investigations of communication within Artificial Intelligence. Furthermore, phenomena arising in all these components—semantic, syntactic, lexical, morphological, phonological—can be accounted for pragmatically.

Take, for instance, the following text from a BBC broadcast: 'This point is reinforced by Chinua Achebe, *a Nigerian novelist*, who writes—I feel that the English language will be unable to carry the weight of my African experience'. In logic, the definite and indefinite articles in English are said not to be synonymous (Fodor *et al.* 1975), but in this context of apposition they may be, in that 'the Nigerian novelist' does not mean that Chinua Achebe is the only Nigerian novelist. On the other hand, the indefinite article carries a deprecatory sense compared with the definite article. Are the two competing phrases synonymous or not? An account of grammatical meaning from the pragmatic perspective will detail and explain all the above observations, which involve consideration of 'syntax' (apposition), 'grammar' (article system), 'semantics' (definiteness and indefiniteness) and 'lexis' (*novelist* versus *capital*, as in 'Lagos, the Nigerian capital'), as well as features traditionally characteristic of 'pragmatics' (eulogistic versus deprecatory). It may seem, then, that it is possible to treat meaning in language from one or other of two perspectives: the LOGICAL and the PRAGMATIC. However, since Grice (1975), 'logic' in language has become distinctly pragmatic in sense. Moreover, the choices made between what speakers take to be logical or literal and affective or non-literal meanings (to mention only two sets of the many relevant distinctions made) are PRAGMATIC choices. And where pragmatic choice resides, FUNCTIONAL choice does too (see Butler; Davies: this volume).

DISCOURSE comes closest of our three elements of description to what is known as a 'level': it apparently arises through a breakdown at the upper end of the RANK SCALE, where a different, non-grammatical mode of organization is called for. But it is wrong to infer that a higher organizational stratum is required simply because a HIGH-ranked UNIT cannot cope. If discourse is a

'level', then it is the level at which texts are PRODUCED and which accounts for the internal organization of texts. Since, however, we have suggested that the notion of 'level' is inappropriate for the holistic treatment of the language act, let us say what descriptive dimension discourse is associated with—discourse is language as PROCESS—and as such is associated with the classical notion of RHETORIC.

TEXT is the PRODUCT of language activity encoded in words and delivered into the world in the substance of speech, writing or signing. Spoken texts have a certain privilege in discourse studies, a view promoted within systemic-functional linguistics, since they, it is claimed, make greater demands on the resources of the grammar and the human unconscious (Halliday 1985a: xxiv). This is a compelling argument, owing much to Labov (1972), and it is of vital significance too, since it explains linguistic competence in performance, and hence in pragmatic terms, thereby liberating students of language from the paradox of the Saussurean and Chomskyan dichotomies. However, the understanding of the relationship between language and consciousness remains to be fully investigated; and, as insights into the nature of written texts increase in number and vigour, they may also prove to make extremely varied and specific demands on the system of language at all levels (see Halliday 1985a, b; Ravelli: this volume), and on important interactional mechanisms (Widdowson 1979, Sanford and Garrod 1981).

Thus from the point of view of PERSPECTIVE, PROCESS and PRODUCT, pragmatics, discourse and text, the system respectively associated with these dimensions of description, together comprise the leading edge of language, and it is to the integration of these notions that this volume is devoted. The chapters in this collection, whose individual contents were first sketched at the XIII International Systemic Workshop at the University of Kent at Canterbury in July 1986, are roughly organized according to our three guiding notions.

Having characterized the context of the major themes of this volume, some details are required of the motivations for addressing the issues raised herein. We have identified a number of significant fields of social activity and research which these motivations emerge from: rhetoric, computational linguistics and artificial intelligence, language teaching, literary stylistics and linguistics itself.

The source of interest in discourse and text studies has classically been in the field of RHETORIC, both as an academic discipline and as a profession. Current rhetoric is rediscovering linguistics as a provider of more explicit tools and explanations than are otherwise available (cf. Chilton (ed.) 1984 as one good example). We are witnessing the re-emergence of a union between rhetoric on the one hand, and grammar and philosophy on the other, in the explicit recognition of language as the prime medium of the processes which are studied by these disciplines. This merging of domains is illustrated in this volume in contributions inspired by both advances in linguistic pragmatics and functional language theory, the latter having, arguably, as its core a SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR. Needless to say, the formal and informal methods advocated in the contributions to this volume have to be justified in a

context of rhetoric, and for such a justification it is necessary to show that the application of such methods actually yields new insights in rhetorical investigations. Although a number of appropriate and far-reaching devices for such investigations have already been developed within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar, such as register theory, cohesion and grammatical metaphor, and elsewhere, for instance, implicature (Grice 1975), relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986) and primal versus actual content (Wilensky 1987), there is a pressing need to clarify, interrelate and apply theories and methods, as the expositions in this volume attempt to do.

Recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in CLINICAL APPLICA-TIONS of ideas and techniques of linguistics. Practitioners in such areas as diagnosis and therapy of schizophrenia, aphasia and disturbances in language development have been drawn into linguistic theories, and more particularly to theories of discourse and text structure (cf. Rochester and Martin 1979; Fine: this volume). In order for applications in such fields to succeed, linguistic models would be expected to come meaningfully close to reflecting the psychological reality of human language processes, or at least to model aspects of language in such a way that these models can be related successfully to processes of language and cognition. Interestingly enough, it has turned out that the Systemic model of language, which originally was not meant to be an approximation of human cognition or psychology—a 'sociological' orientation was Halliday's view of the explanatory goal of the model (Halliday 1973, 1978)—has something to offer these areas. This might also reflect back on theoretical debates within Systemic linguistics, as to how 'psychological' the model is meant to be: the chapters on pragmatics in this volume point to a possible disintegration of the barriers between these two conventionally distinct orientations—the 'psychological' and the 'sociological'. It is hoped, then, that confirmation is provided here that systemic approaches to discourse and text are a fruitful source for the clinicians' own models of language and language processes.

While it might come as something of a surprise that Systemic linguistics is of value to the clinical context, the same can hardly be said for the field of LANGUAGE TEACHING and LEARNING, which, since 'Categories of the Theory of Grammar' (Halliday 1961), has drawn heavily on the model and the descriptions that emerged from it to form the outlook and methodology of a whole generation of language teachers, particularly where English and the English speaking are concerned, but increasingly in respect of other languages and other speech communities. If Halliday (1961) marks the beginning of systemically inspired pedagogical descriptions (e.g. Scott *et al.* 1968; Muir 1972), it is from Halliday *et al.* (1964) that the more methodologically and learner-oriented impact on the language teaching procession is derived, a tradition upheld in numerous publications (e.g. Halliday 1969, 1975) and gatherings, such as the AILA World Congress in Sydney 1987. Just as Systemic theory has progressed from a primary focus on the clause to one on discourse and text, so the requirements of language teaching have become broader and more comprehensive, to the point where models of discourse and text have become an essential ingredient thereof. We hope that this volume

can speak meaningfully and inspirationally to language-teaching and language-textbook-writing professions, particularly in this latter respect.

Another area in which, as in clinical therapy and treatment, Systemic theory has had a surprising and recent impact, is COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTICS and ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE. After all, it lacked extensive formalisation until only a few years ago (cf. Kasper 1987). However, any absence of mathematical rigour and foundation was, as far as the disciplines of application were concerned, compensated for by the HOLISTIC view of language inherent in the model, functionally inspired as it is (cf. Veltman 1985), which this volume as already stated wishes to emphasize. Thus research such as Winograd's SHRDLU program (Winograd 1972), the 'Nigel' project (cf. Mann's and Mathiessen's chapters in Benson and Greaves (eds) 1985, Kasper 1987 and Kempen (ed.) 1987) has developed alongside non-systemic work in the area (cf. Danlos 1987: 101 ff.; Grishman 1986: 140 ff.; Nirenburg (ed.) 1987). Most of the earlier systems were sentence-based, which is probably still true nowadays, but the needs for solving problems like pronominal reference, definiteness, focus, scope, theme–rheme structures, etc., is leading more and more investigators even in sentence-based systems to examine discourse and text theories. It is certainly not accidental that the full force of such problems was fully recognized not so much in analysis, but in generation. In addition, the more Computational Linguistics and Artificial Intelligence systems interact with non-linguistic knowledge bases, the more natural a text-based strategy becomes, because, essentially, in many ways the highest unit of organizing knowledge is the text, rather than the sentence. Also, and quite naturally, a realistic attempt at modelling anything even remotely resembling natural interaction between some user of a system and the system itself in the form of some discourse requires well-structured theories of human discourse in all its aspects. So there is an increasing demand from the fields of Computational Linguistics and Artificial Intelligence for text and discourse theories and we hope to indicate in this volume that Systemic Functional Grammar is a valid and fruitful source of relevant theory and methodology.

For many the study of discourse and text is synonymous with LITERARY CRITICISM, which in the absence of any cogent linguistic theory has over the decades developed its own methodology. For a considerable time now, there have been interactions between linguistics studying 'style' and literary critics (cf. Leech and Short 1981; Birch and O'Toole 1988). Generalizing very broadly, it might be claimed that whereas traditional rhetoric is an ancestor of discourse analysis, traditional literary analysis is the progenitor of text-linguistics. However, a certain amount of circumspection is worthwhile in considering the relation between linguistics and literary studies in the light of claims to the effect that linguistics has substantial insights to offer literary criticism. If it has, then it must be a linguistics with a far-reaching interest in text structures. Several contributions to this volume should be able to meet this demand (see chapters by Kies, Williams, Aziz, Bowers and Lemke in this volume).

Thus far, we have tried to map out the range of interest in text and

discourse studies from outside linguistics. We now turn to 'core' linguistics itself with the aim of locating the main sources of interest there.

It is possible to divide present-day schools of linguistics into two broad categories: those which have a more philosophical background and those with a more rhetorical background (cf. Halliday 1985c). Those schools which owe more to the philosophical tradition have, in practice, not shown major interest in units 'larger' than the sentence, and this is still largely true of currently familiar, syntax-based theories, such as Government and Binding (Chomsky 1981), Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan (ed.) 1982) and Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar *et al.* 1985). But even within those theories, certain phenomena which residually resist a strict sentence-based treatment have, as it were, forced the 'philosophical' tradition in linguistics to adumbrate at least the beginnings of theories of suprasentential structures (cf. Rochemont 1986). Apart from this particular family of schools of linguistics, truth-value-oriented semantics has begun to recognize the need for theories of text and discourse (Seuren 1985), and so has speech-act-based pragmatics (cf. Butler, Davies in this volume). Those schools of linguistics whose number includes Systemic Linguistics, which have antecedents in the more rhetorical tradition, have for a considerable time worked on theories of text and discourse (cf. Brown and Yule 1983; Halliday and Hasan 1976), and it is in terms of this perspective that there will be very obvious interest in the issues addressed in the present volume.

An enumeration of the connections which we are attempting to make with the existing research tradition in Systemic Linguistics would become impossible if exhaustiveness were our goal (see Butler 1985 for a pioneering survey of this interdisciplinary potential). Systemic Linguistics, as has been indicated, enjoys a privileged position in the field of text and discourse, which has by now yielded a very complex picture of research activities, a complete survey of which lies beyond this introduction. Let us, therefore, outline some of the principal strands of investigation with which contact is made in this volume.

Halliday (1985c) shows convincingly how a FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR inevitably impinges on a text/discourse grammar at several crucial points. It is in this area that work on issues of THEMATIC STRUCTURE (Kies, Williams, Bowers in this volume) are most directly concerned, in the same way that work on COHESION (cf. Aziz in this volume) has a bearing on the issues raised by Halliday and Hasan (1976).

Fawcett *et al.* (forthcoming) successfully extend system network methodology to the area of discourse structure, a direction reflected in Tucker's chapter on SERVICE ENCOUNTER discourse, a continuation of a fruitful line of research inspired by Ventola's studies (Ventola 1982). While much is owed in discourse analysis to the Labovian and ethnomethodological tradition, the novel departures undertaken from the critical perspective of Systemic Linguistics, as in Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Coulthard and Brazil (1979), and, more recently, Berry (1987) have a decisive influence on this significant field, which has special appeal beyond linguistics.

Mann and Thompson (1987) and Mathiessen and Thompson (1987) have recently begun to develop 'Rhetorical Structure Theory', which in many ways

links up directly with Halliday's (1985a) accounts of the CLAUSE COMPLEX, and with ongoing work in text generation outside Systemic Linguistics. Although this particular strand of research is not represented in the present volume, it is hoped that some of the ideas generated here will be of interest to future developments in Rhetorical Structure Theory as well.

In an obvious way many of the contributions to this volume will merge with the direction within Systemic Functional Grammar which treats language as a special form of activity, whether by positing realizational relationships of language to 'activity structures' (Lemke in this volume), or to models of human goal-directed action (Steiner 1984, 1988; Mohan 1986, 1987). The interface between such models and language, quite clearly, will in the end never be the sentence or the clause, but rather text and discourse, viewed from a pragmatic perspective. The same, it should be said, applies to models of genre structure developed in the work of Hasan, Martin and others.

We have now arrived at a point at which the chapters in this volume fit very directly into currently existing research traditions. We have, as it were, gradually focused in on our present work from discussion of leading themes of pragmatics, discourse and text, to the significance of these factors for the worlds within and beyond language, with special regard to their interaction with Systemic Linguistics, and Systemic Semantics in particular. At first sight, this might have the sole function of outlining something like the intended readership of the book. However, our intention in preparing the reader in this way is a more fundamental one. It seems to be important, at certain points in the development of lines of research as well as in the development in the work of an individual, to become aware of the external and internal motivations for the activities one is engaged in. This is partly necessary to provide means of critical evaluation. Yet it seems to be even more necessary in order to determine one's decisions as to how and in what directions future research is to go—and this is part of the function that we would like such a volume as the present one to have. Taking stock of what we have, let us critically assess the intrinsic interest it has for people with a legitimate interest in the field, and let us, against the background of these assessments, determine the future directions of work in that field. If this book is able to make a contribution to these processes, it would, in our view, have served a useful purpose.

Before closing this introductory section, an outline of the contributions to this volume is offered.

Systemic Linguistics nowadays has a considerable scope: from phonology through grammar, lexis, the semantics of the clause, to the form and the semantics of text and discourse. It is perhaps fair to say that while many people continue to work in the former 'core' areas of the grammar and semantics of the clause, more and more emphasis is given to developing models of discourse and text structure. It is in this context that the present selection of papers from the XIII International Systemic Workshop should be seen.

Part 1 illustrates how Systemic Linguistics and Pragmatics are influencing each other. While Butler discusses the question of the mutual influence of these two fields on a theoretical level, Davies illustrates in detail how the

formalization of certain aspects of a 'Systemic Pragmatics' leads to the well-constrained generation of research hypothesis. Both chapters indicate avenues of future research which will certainly be followed within Systemic Linguistics.

Part 2 explores Systemic concepts in the areas of thematic structure and information structure of the clause. It is shown how these aspects of clause structure contribute to the semantic structure of text and discourse.

Kies illustrates in his corpus study how precisely certain types of Marked Theme are dependent on the speaker's decisions on text level, rather than on sentence level alone. He also provides a valuable comparison of Systemic and other approaches to the particular types of marked theme which he is investigating.

Williams in his chapter confronts the Systemic notions of thematic structure and information structure with more recent developments in the Prague school approach, as well as with Sperber and Wilson's widely discussed ideas on 'relevance' in sentences and texts. This, one may feel, is something which has been due for some time in Systemic Linguistics, and it is to be hoped that other Systemicists may follow the general line of investigation advocated by Williams.

Bowers takes Systemic ideas on thematic structures, showing how the linguistic properties covered by these ideas were recognized long ago as being highly relevant to understanding in the realm of legislative language. He thus creates for us one of these very important moments in which we as linguists realize that linguistics is not something which should be done as 'arts for art's sake', yet as something which has relevance and responsibility towards the people using language.

Part 3 explores discourse analysis dimensions of texts. Akindele highlights certain crucial aspects of the structure of family conversation in Yoruba English. He explores the relationship between socio-semantic notions like 'control' and 'dominance' and their manifestations in the structure of discourse. In doing so, he makes some very valuable contributions to the problem of the theoretical relationship between the levels of socio-semantics and discourse, a line of research which is very active currently within Systemic Linguistics and elsewhere.

Tucker takes us one step further in his chapter: while Akindele investigates patterns of social dominance as independent variables, taking discourse patterns as dependent variables—i.e. he studies the linguistic realization of socio-semantic patterns on the linguistic level of Discourse—Tucker takes discourse structures as given and studies their realization in syntax and intonation. As far as the type of phenomena investigated is concerned, Tucker, on a general level, also links up with Davies's chapter; only his orientation is more towards Discourse Analysis, while Davies's is more towards Pragmatics—both tendencies are, in fact, well documented in current Systemic Work. Both chapters illustrate the growing awareness of Systemic Linguists that models and concepts of the 'higher' levels of the theory have to be related to the realizational statements in order to become fully meaningful within the theory.

Part 4 illustrates how the apparent opposition between 'interaction' and 'cognition' in the general orientation of Systemicists towards 'Semantics' is beginning to break down in the light of the task of accounting for the structure of text and discourse in a fuller way than before. Ravelli explores certain types of grammatical metaphor which are receiving more and more attention from Systemicists, at least since Halliday's (1985a) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

Aziz illustrates how language-specific means of cohesion have to be seen as encoding the same functions across texts in relatively unrelated languages. Lemke represents the 'interaction'-oriented side, developing certain aspects of a theory of social semiotics to the point where the opposition between 'interaction' and 'cognition' becomes almost meaningless, thus illustrating one possible way of uniting these dialectical opposites. In his account of structural vs. thematic meaning, he reflects the difference between a functional and a representational orientation in semantics. He demonstrates that both only appear as radically different, whereas in reality they are merely two aspects of one phenomenon, 'text meaning'.

Fine's chapter fits in very well with that of Lemke, even if he is looking at cognition and some of its neurophysiological correlates. If Lemke sets out to represent the 'interaction' pole of the opposition, Fine represents the 'cognition' pole. Being Systemicists, though, they both use their different starting points to pursue a path that leads to the eventual breaking down of the original opposition.

The XIIIth. International Systemic Workshop commemorated by chance the passing of 25 years since Halliday's 'Categories of the theory of grammar' was first published. As we have already indicated in respect of language teaching and learning, Halliday's original statement has been far-reaching and influential, to say the least. One reason for its robustness is its proven ability to serve as a 'core' of adapting knowledge of language and its relation to its environment, whether or not the paper itself or the notions therein are explicitly referred to in these developments. Evidence of this ever-lengthening temporal and intellectual link is, we hope, to be found in these discussions of pragmatics, discourse and text.

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