

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Edited by
J. R. Martin and Y. J. Doran

CRITICAL CONCEPTS IN
LINGUISTICS

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Critical Concepts in Linguistics

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J. R. MARTIN

INTRODUCTION

In this volume we introduce foundational papers dealing with Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL) modelling of social context – in relation to both uses and users of language. Central here is an orientation to context as a level of meaning in linguistic analysis, following on from Firth's conception of meaning as function in context.

16 Register

We begin with Firth's 1957 'A synopsis of linguistic theory, 1930–1955', which draws on several earlier publications to provide an overview of his conception of linguistics – critical for this volume is his conception of context of situation as a level of linguistic analysis. The paper opens with reiterations of his 'monistic' approach, including his rejection of the duality of language and thought. This he replaces with an orientation to meaning as function in context, proposing that statements of meaning need to deal with various levels, including context of situation, vocabulary (including collocation), syntax (including colligation), phonology and phonetics. The third section reviews Firth's outline of the abstract categories comprising his view of the level context of situation (first presented in his landmark 1950 paper 'Personality and language in society'):

- A The relevant features of the participants: persons, personalities.
 - i The verbal action of the participants.
 - ii The non-verbal action of the participants.
- B The relevant objects.
- C The effect of the verbal action.

Firth moves on to note the importance of classifying contexts of situation 'as wholes' in relation to one another, and completes the third section by informally reviewing various bases on which this might be done. For Firth's perspective on the influence of Malinowski on his thinking see his 1957 paper 'Ethnographic analysis and language with reference to Malinowski's views'.

Gregory's 1967 paper 'Aspects of varieties differentiation' was first presented at the spring meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain in 1966. It proposes a framework distinguishing dialectal variation (according to users of language) from diatypic variation (according to uses of language). As far as diatypic variation is concerned it splits Firth's context of situation categories into situational ones (extra-textual features) and contextual ones (correlations of linguistic features with situational ones) – with context seen as a level of language. Gregory then develops categories for modelling context, namely field of discourse, mode of discourse and tenor of discourse (with tenor further divided into personal and functional tenor). Section V of his paper presents a more delicate analysis of mode. Section VI reviews terminological variation as far as diatypic variation is concerned, including Halliday *et al.*'s (1964) use of the term register for Gregory's diatypic variety, and style for his tenor (Halliday would later adopt Gregory's term). For very useful elaboration and exemplification of this paper see Gregory and Carroll 1978.

Ellis and Ure's 1969 'Language varieties: register' also canvasses a range of terminological variation as far as uses of language are concerned, as befits its publication as an encyclopaedia entry. For their own model of context they refer to situational categories (where Gregory refers to contextual ones), and to registers (instead of diatypic varieties). Note that in this tradition register refers to the co-patterning of linguistic categories realising situational ones. As situational categories Ellis and Ure propose field, mode, role and formality. Rather than provoking further controversy and/or confusion here, we'll leave it to readers to compare and contrast this categorisation with Gregory's (and Halliday's below). The paper then develops an insightful discussion of the implications of register analysis for literary studies, language teaching, register shifting along various dimensions of time and contrastive register analysis across languages.

Halliday's 1978 'An interpretation of the functional relationship between language and social structure' offers a succinct presentation of the model of language and social context best known from his 1978 *Language as Social Semiotic* anthology. Critical to his proposal are the assumptions (i) that context can be represented as a system of meanings and (ii) that language can be understood as standing in a realisational relationship to social context. Halliday further suggests that the metafunctional organisation of language can be related to social context in proportions whereby experiential meaning is to field, as interpersonal meaning is to tenor, as textual meaning is to mode – with this relation understood as one of 'typical realisation'. In a model of this kind the term register refers to the co-patterning of linguistic resources realising a particular selection of field, tenor and mode variables. And as Halliday stresses in section 1.3 of the paper, the realisation relationship between social context and language is one of 'mutual creativity': 'language has the property of not only transmitting the social order but also the potential of maintaining and potentially modifying it'. For elaboration and extension of this position see Halliday's 2007 *Language and Society* (Volume 10 of his *Collected Works*); the most accessible introduction to

his model is Chapter 3 of Halliday and Hasan's 1985/1989 *Language, Context and Text*.

Our final paper in this Register part is sections 1–3 of Matthiessen's 'Register in the round: diversity in a unified theory of register analysis', from Ghadessy's 1993 *Register Analysis: Theory and Practice* volume. Matthiessen provides a valuable theoretical overview of many of the perspectives on register introduced thus far and carefully positions Halliday's modelling in relation to this work. The basic 'fractal' dimensions of SFL theory (axis, stratification, rank and metafunction) are reviewed and provide the basis for clarifying Halliday's use of the term register to characterise the realisation of field, tenor and mode in language, and also Martin's use of the term to refer collectively to field, tenor and mode systems – which in terms of Hjelmslev's modelling function as the content plane of language and the expression plane for genre (SFL interpretations of genre are further explored in Part 17 below). Matthiessen follows on with a discussion of register variation in relation to person and personalities, and then considers three possible models of register variation in the linguistic system: (i) one general system with register specific probabilities of feature selection, (ii) common core systems but with mutually inconsistent subsystems or (iii) distinctive systems for each register (this being Firth's preferred 'polysystemic' perspective). The first model has been the one generally preferred in SFL, as exemplified in Nesbitt and Plum 1988 (for clause complexing); the third model was illustrated in Caffarel's 1992 register specific descriptions of French TENSE systems as presented in Volume II.

17 Genre

By way of bridging between register and genre analysis, we have selected Mitchell's 1957 'The language of buying and selling in Cyrenaica: a situational statement'. Not only is it the classic exemplar of Firthian context of situation analysis, but it includes as well an analysis of the distinctive staging of three related service encounters in the Libyan market place: market transactions (excluding auctions), market auctions and shop transactions – a dimension of context of situation analysis that was not made explicit by Firth but which would become a prominent feature of SFL genre studies (alongside those in the EAP tradition of John Swales, who was for a time, at Leeds, a student of Mitchell's). Market auctions for example feature the stages (i) auctioneer's opening, (ii) investigation of the object of sale, (iii) bidding and (iv) conclusion. Alongside staging, Mitchell explores the locale, the object of sale, and the personalities and persons involved; as far as linguistic analysis is concerned Mitchell concentrates on collocation, which following Firth (1951) he treats as relations of mutual expectancy among words and phrases. As Mitchell comments 'mutual expectancy between textual elements is cumulative, and looks forward and back'; and he likens a text to a snowball, building meaning and rolling this way, now that as it unfolds.

The next paper, Hasan's 1979 'On the notion of text' exemplifies her development of text/context analysis. As far as text analysis is concerned she elaborates Halliday and Hasan's 1976 cohesion framework towards a richer interpretation of texture, focusing here on identity and similarity chains and chain interaction (as detailed in her cohesive harmony article in Volume III). For Hasan, the texture of a text is complemented by its structure (staging in Mitchell's terms); and both texture and structure realise a text's contextual configuration – which she specifies using Halliday's field, tenor and mode categorisation. Using service encounters as an example, Hasan models the structure potential of such texts in terms of multivariate function structures. Elements of structure are sequenced and ordered, with recursion of elements and the possibility of variations in sequence specified; the structure potential also distinguishes between obligatory and optional elements. Critically Hasan argues that specific text structures arise from a text's contextual configuration – that is the specific field, tenor and mode variables that they obtain. For further work exemplifying this rich model of text/context relations see Hasan 1977, 1984, 2014, Chapter 5 of Halliday and Hasan 1985/1989, and Volumes 4 and 6 of Hasan's *Collected Papers*, *Context in the System and Process of Language* (in press a) and *Unity in discourse: texture and structure* (in press b).

Martin's 1999 'Modelling context: a crooked path of progress in contextual linguistics' paper contextualises his proposals for a stratified model of context, involving the levels of genre and register – with register comprising field, tenor and mode, and realising genre. The basic idea here is to use axis (system–structure cycles) to model relations among genres, and among fields, tenors and modes. Section 5 illustrates the way in which genre agnation might be explored both typologically (in system networks) and topologically (using Cartesian planes). From Martin's perspective the key extension to SFL theory at stake here has to do with opening up theoretical space for exploring relations among the text structures Hasan models as generic structure potentials and doing so above and beyond metafunctions – in a model which thereby strengthens the possibility of empirical confirmation of Halliday's association of metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal and textual) with register variables (field, tenor and mode). Note one important shift in terminology here, with Martin using register as a cover term for the contextual categories field, tenor and mode where Halliday uses the term for the realisation of these contextual categories in language. For further contextualisation of Martin's stratified model of context see Martin 1992, 2001, Volumes 3 (*Genre Studies*) and 4 (*Register Studies*) of his *Collected Papers* (2012a, b), and Martin and Rose 2008. For a searching critique of this model see Hasan 1995.

The next paper, Martin's 1994 'Macro-genres: the ecology of the page', suggests that the multivariate approach to genre structure illustrated in the preceding papers by Mitchell, Hasan and Martin needs to be extended in order to interpret the organising principles of longer texts. The extension proposed is based on SFL's rich model of types of structure (i.e. particulate, prosodic and periodic),

introduced in Halliday's 'Modes of meaning and modes of expression' paper in Volume I. Martin illustrates some of the ways in which a multifunctional approach to text structure can be used to analyse longer texts, including multimodal ones. For particulate meaning he draws in particular on SFL's analysis of logico-semantic relations to show how many texts can be interpreted as macro-generic expansions (elaborating, extending or enhancing) of elemental genres, just as a clause complex can be interpreted as an indefinitely extendable serial expansion and/or projection of a clause. For further discussion of genres and macro-genres see Martin 1995, 2001, 2002, Martin and Rose 2008, 2012.

18 Users in uses of language

The papers in Part 18 focus more explicitly on users of language as far as contextual variation is concerned. Martin's 1983 'The development of register' reports on the results of his PhD research into story-telling by children in primary school. Sections 1 and 2 of the paper recontextualise this research in relation to discussions among sociolinguists and functional linguists at the University of Sydney in the early 1980s with respect to modelling linguistic variation. Martin attempts here to clarify the concept of coding orientation, as explored by Bernstein (e.g. 1973) – arguing that in what is ostensibly the same context users of language can be shown to systematically vary their use of language (according to a range of factors, including social class, gender, sanity and in this paper, age). Using the quantitative analysis of REFERENCE and CONJUNCTION pioneered in Rochester and Martin 1979, Martin shows that children adjust their language in ways that are sensitive to both the story-telling task they are assigned (contextual variation) and their age (coding orientation) – by way of establishing that semantic variation has to be considered from the interacting perspectives of both uses and users of language.

Hasan's 1989 'Semantic variation and sociolinguistics' draws on her groundbreaking research at Macquarie University focusing on the coding orientations of pre-school children and their mothers. Hasan is particularly concerned in this paper to argue the case for the study of semantic variation, contra to Labov's insistence on limiting the study of linguistic variation to a concern with different ways of saying the same thing (e.g. Weiner and Labov 1983). A fragment of the semantic network used to code Hasan's data is presented, along with explicit statements of the lexicogrammatical realisation of its features. Subsequently Hasan presents a principal components analysis of the types of questions and answers used by mothers and children. This statistical procedure reveals that social class influences the kinds of question and answer used by both mothers and children. For further discussion of the linguistic significance of this research, see Hasan's 2009 *Semantic Variation*, Volume 2 of her Collected Papers; for elaboration of the social significance of this project in relation to Bernstein's code theory, see Hasan 2005 *Language Society and Consciousness*, Volume 1 of the same series.

Martin's 2012 'Semantic variation: modelling realisation, instantiation and individuation in social semiosis' paper takes up the question of modelling users in uses of language in SFL, based on research undertaken with his PhD students and post-doctoral fellows at the University of Sydney in the noughts. He reviews the overwhelming concentration of theory and description along SFL's realisation hierarchy (with respect to axis, strata, rank and metafunction), and then introduces the complementary hierarchy of instantiation, whereby the systems positioned in terms of realisation are instantiated in uses of language as text. A number of degrees of generalisation are suggested along this cline (reading, text, text type, genre/register and system), alongside concepts which might one day play a role in a fuller articulation of this hierarchy (coupling, commitment and iconisation). Martin then introduces a third hierarchy, individuation, whereby systems positioned by realisation are allocated in communities at the same time as these allocations are used to negotiate affiliation. The notion of bonds as a key resource in these negotiations is presented, where bonds are characterised as shared couplings of ideation and attitude. Seen in these terms, a culture is a community of fellowships whose membership is individuated as bond complexes (i.e. shared values). For work exploring aspects of this modelling see Bednarek and Martin 2010 and the papers by Almutairi, Knight and Martin *et al.* in the special issue of *Text & Talk* (33.4/5, 2013) edited by Geoff Thompson in honour of Michael Halliday.

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Part 16

REGISTER

