The Functional Perspective on Language and Discourse

EDITED BY

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Applications and implications

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Volume 247

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On the relatedness
of functionalism and pragmatics

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1. Preliminary remarks

Over the last forty years, the functionalist approach to linguistic description and explanation has given rise to several major schools of thought that share two crucial assumptions: (i) form is not independent of meaning/function or language use; and (ii) linguistic description and explanation need to take into account the communicative function of language. This volume offers readers interested in functional linguistics a selected sample of studies that prove the efficacy of the analytical tools and procedures broadly accepted within the functionalist tradition in order to investigate language and discourse.

One of the main contributors to the growth of functionalism reflected in the book and its major narrator and exegete has been the dedicatee of this book: Christopher S. Butler, Head of Department of Linguistics at the University of Nottingham (1986–1992), Professor of Linguistics at what is now York St John University (1994–1998) and Dr Honoris Causa of the Universities of Ghent (Belgium) (2009) and La Rioja (Spain) (2013). Accordingly, after Section 2 on the relatedness of functionalism and pragmatics, the focus of the book, Section 3 is devoted to surveying Chris Butler's contributions to these fields. This is followed in Section 4 by an overview of the thirteen studies that compose this volume and jointly prove the suitability of corpus linguistics, statistics and computational linguistics to exploring language and discourse from a functional perspective, paying particular attention to pragmatic issues such as grammaticalisation, reference, politeness, discourse markers, speech acts, and sentiment analysis in texts.

2.   Pragmatics and functionalism

Pragmatics, discourse analysis and functionalism in linguistics, while separate areas of interest, are closely intertwined. The reason for their connectedness lies in their common concern with how language is or can be put to use in context. They also share analytical procedures such as the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyse corpora constructed from contextualised real data. However, they differ in their goals. Pragmatics is concerned with how speakers interact through language and how messages can convey meaning that has not been explicitly communicated. The first concern has been addressed by speech act theory, and the second by inferential pragmatics. Discourse analysis is also interested in the interactional aspects of language, but only insofar as they can be found to contribute to a better understanding of how text is dynamically constructed as the result of principled interaction. In a similar way, such inferential pragmatics phenomena as entailment, presupposition and implicature have also caught the attention of discourse analysts to the extent that they have been found to contribute to the meaning construction/meaning comprehension process that manifests itself through texts.

Functional linguistics is in origin independent of pragmatics. Functional linguistics has its roots in structural linguistics, sociology and semiotics, whereas the origin of pragmatics is to be found in the Austinian and Gricean reactions to positivistic truth-conditional accounts of meaning (Austin 1962; Grice 1975). Because of their different origins, the goals of functional linguistics and pragmatics are, in principle, different. While the former generally seeks to account for how linguistic structure is motivated by factors external to language itself, the latter is focused on the social meaning systems underlying the use of language, to the exclusion of explanations of linguistic structure. However, functional linguistics, like pragmatics, is related to Peircean semiotics to the extent that, following Morris (1938), it focuses on the relationship between signs and their users, which necessarily allows some functionalist accounts, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1994) and Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008), to explicitly deal with pragmatic phenomena.

The origin of discourse analysis is to be found in linguistics, especially in Hallidayan functionalism, which postulated a "textual" metafunction of language, to be added to the traditional ideational and interpersonal functions. But since understanding text requires inferential strategies, discourse analysis draws heavily on pragmatics too.

The picture that arises from this overlap of interests is one of extensive potential cooperation. Within this context, the present volume, *The Functional Perspective on Language: Applications and Implications*, focuses on how pragmatics

and discourse analysis impinge on linguistic description and explanation. It does so in three ways: first, by giving pragmatic and/or discoursal adequacy pride of place within linguistic accounts; second, by discussing the role in grammar of a number of relevant pragmatic/discourse notions such as contextualisation, directness/indirectness, subjective evaluation, and the like; third, by offering specific corpus-based techniques for the objective contextualisation of linguistic data, which is crucial given the central role allotted to context in both functional linguistics and pragmatics/discourse analysis.

Let us briefly address each of the three ways in which pragmatics or discourse studies relate to functionalism in linguistics. First, we have the question of endowing linguistic accounts with the highest degree of explanatory adequacy. In our view, this question is intrinsically bound up with the problem of how linguists view the relationship between linguistic structure and language functions. Functional accounts of language are by definition concerned with how linguistic structure is affected by – and in fact arises from – the use to which it is put (Dik 1986). Form is thus ancillary to function. There is almost universal acceptance among linguists that language serves two essential functions: to represent the world and to interact with other people. Interestingly enough, the first function is *de facto* subservient to the second, since humans describe and reason about the world not for the sake of developing their descriptive and reasoning abilities but for the sake of communicating with other humans in a productive way. This is the first important point where the interests of linguistic functionalism converge with those of pragmatics and discourse analysis, one of whose main postulates is that language is more than simply a way of coming to terms with the nature of the world, i.e. it is one of the crucial ways in which humans relate to other humans. It naturally follows that linguistic explorations need to take account of the way in which linguistic structure arises from how humans relate to one another through language. One of the aims of functional linguists is thus to make their accounts of language sensitive to constraints on human interaction. This aim is quite close to what Dik (1997) referred to as *pragmatic adequacy*: "[…] we want a functional grammar to reveal those properties of linguistic expressions which are relevant to the manner in which they are used, and to do this in such a way that these properties can be related to the rules and principles governing verbal interaction" (Dik 1997, 13). It also comes close to what Butler (2009a, 9), in a more ambitious vein, has termed *discoursal adequacy*:

> […] any truly functional model of language should be concerned with the extent to which the requirements of multi-propositional discourse shape the way in which languages are structured, and with providing an explanatory account in which natural discourse is seen as dynamic, rule-governed, contextually-related activity leading to a structure composed of units with functional relationships between them, and subject to coherence constraints.

Second, since they are central to linguistic description and explanation, we have the problem of how pragmatic and discourse phenomena are to be captured by grammar. A commonly accepted idea in functionalism is that form is motivated by function. The question is to what extent. Let us consider politeness phenomena, which have received an impressive amount of attention in the pragmatics literature. For example, Japanese is a language that makes extensive use of a broad range of honorific suffixes, which are generally required when referring to a person, although they can be dropped on given occasions (Pizziconi 2011). Some of these honorifics have good equivalents in other languages that do not place so much emphasis on them. This is the case of Japanese *-san*, which often works in the same way as the English address forms *Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Miss*, but can also be used with the names of companies, workplace nouns, and even animals and objects. Since respect is central to Japanese culture and honorifics are taken as signs of respect, there are very specific socio-cultural rules about dropping them, for example in cases of high degrees of intimacy between speakers, close friendship, husband-wife interaction or when addressing social inferiors. These are socio-cultural rules but they affect linguistic form in terms of marking. However, politeness is not only achieved through explicit suffixal marking. There are pragmatic strategies, such as indirectness, which are used to avoid imposing on the addressee when this may be considered disrespectful or otherwise socially unacceptable. In time the linguistic expression of some such strategies becomes conventional and supplies speakers with a direct access strategy. A case in point is the use of *would you* interrogatives in English to make requests (*Would you mind taking a picture of us?*) or *If I were you* conditionals to give advice (*If I were you I'd change shoes*). Fine-grained linguistic explanation needs to spell out the conditions for such shifts from pragmatic derivation to conventionalised form. As linguists engage in this delicate task, the obvious difficulty is to set up solid criteria to determine when pragmatic and discourse factors have actually made their way into grammar.

Third, we have the contextualisation issue. Pragmatics, discourse analysis and functional linguistics share a strong interest in studying language in its context. In the case of pragmatics, analysts look for contextual clues in order to find the principles that make utterances appropriate to their context of production and comprehension, with a special focus on speaker-hearer interaction. Discourse analysts find in the study of contextual factors clues to the construction of coherent discourse whether conversational or not. Functional linguists study contexts to seek clues to the understanding of linguistic form through a better understanding of its function. This convergence of interests explains the increasingly extended use that the three fields make of large-scale corpora either to check on hypotheses formulated on the basis of preliminary observations or to make generalisations that arise directly from applying quantificational techniques to the data. It goes without

saying that the development of corpus linguistics will continue to go hand-in-hand with the three areas of interest and strengthen the ties among them as they incorporate empirical evidence from the other fields into their accounts. The prospects for cooperation are ever more promising, which makes the volume *The Functional Perspective on Language and Discourse: Implications and Applications* an indispensable addition to the emerging pool of interdisciplinary studies in functionalism.

3. Chris Butler's contributions to functionalism and pragmatics

As already noted, one prolific contributor to the literature on functional and corpus-based linguistics is the dedicatee of the present book, Chris Butler, who over the past four decades has devoted himself to the investigation of the relationships between form and function in language, very often supported by the detailed corpus-based analysis of authentic textual materials in English, Spanish and occasionally other languages. His earliest work, on the description of technical registers in German, made use of corpus techniques in the days of mainframe computers, punched cards and early concordancing programs. Since those early days, he has published on a wide range of topics in three "structural-functional" theories: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Functional Grammar (also its later offshoot, Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG)), and Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). His two-volume book *Structure and Function: A Guide to Three Major Structural-Functional Theories* (Butler 2003a) offers a detailed critical comparison of these three theories and is widely regarded as a standard reference work. In what follows we highlight that part of Chris Butler's research output which is oriented towards matters which could be seen to fall under the heading of discourse pragmatics.

Among Chris Butler's publications are a number of articles which explore what has been dubbed "formulaic language": the use of multi-word expressions which are fully or partly pre-constructed and which can be stored and retrieved as units. Such units are frequent in our everyday language (particularly in spoken discourse, but also in written texts) and serve important practical functions, acting as an aid to fluency not only among adult native speakers of a language but also first and second language learners. Butler's work has investigated, from a corpus-based perspective, the properties of multi-word expressions in English and Spanish (see Butler 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2003b, 2005a, 2008a, 2010).

A further major interest of Butler's has been the study of interpersonal meaning in language. His PhD dissertation (Butler 1982) examined the directive function of the English modal verbs, in the context of politeness, and this work was followed up by other articles on politeness (Butler 1988a; Butler and Channell

1989). In Butler (1996) he discusses the SFL concept of an interpersonal metafunction in relation to English, while Butler (2008b) is a detailed corpus-based examination of interpersonal meaning in the noun phrase, incorporating ideas from both FDG and SFL. A trio of articles (Butler 2008c, 2008d, 2008e) explore the use of the English interpersonal adverbs *basically*, *essentially* and *fundamentally* and their formal equivalents in Romance languages.

Other publications discuss the relationship between SFL and what in many other models would be regarded as pragmatic phenomena (Butler 1988b), also the role of discourse systems and structures in SFL (Butler 1985a), and information structure in FG, RRG and SFG (Butler 2005b).

4. The contributions in this volume

The book is structured into three sections which cover methodological and analytical issues (Section I), the relations between pragmatics and grammar (Section II), and some current trends in pragmatics and discourse analysis (Section III).

The first two papers of Section I, on methods in the analysis of language and discourse, inspect the core of the functionalist enterprise, namely the relation between linguistic structure, its function and the context in which it is produced, or as Butler (2003b, 477) puts it:

> to understand how the forms of human linguistic communication are related to the functions they serve in exchange of meanings under conditions defined by the social and cognitive contexts of use, and by the structure of the ongoing interaction itself.

Whichever satisfy particular functional model one embraces, the functionalist enterprise requires that this model satisfies a series of criteria for adequacy in order to develop a plausible functional account of the linguistic system. Butler (2003a, b, 2008a, 2009a, b) argues that adequate functional models should reconcile cognitive, socio-cultural, discoursal, acquisitional, typological and diachronic explanations of language, besides accommodating observational evidence from corpora, experiments and intuition. Butler's criteria for functional adequacy add to, but go considerably beyond, a large existing body of research on this issue (e.g. Caron 1992; Dik 1989, 1997; Givón 1995; Gvozdanović 1997; Hengeveld and Pérez Quintero 2001; Peeters 1998, 2001; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997). However, much territory remains to be covered in order to assess the degree of descriptive and explanatory adequacy of functional frameworks or the factors involved in these two adequacy types, as well as to be able to determine what the challenges are that these criteria impose on functional accounts.

One such challenge is addressed by **Alison Wray** in the first contribution to this volume, namely *hybridity*, or the juxtaposition within a language of parts of several systems, which exist in use alongside each other, but which cannot be reduced to a set of common patterns. Wray argues that hybridity creates a tension when trying to reconcile corpus data with typological models, because it is more than simple irregularity. Hybridity is explained as a consequence of cognitive and acquisitional mechanisms. It creates and sustains semantic and structural fuzziness reminiscent of indeterminacy (Halliday 1987/2003), and is characterised by the "bricolage", or "junk" material that is retained in the language after changes in form, meaning and function (Lass 1990) brought about by social and cultural factors (Wray and Grace 2007; Trudgill 2011). Wray concludes that phenomena such as hybridity cannot be adequately explained in only one domain without reference to others, but rather require a network organisation of the domains of linguistic description and explanation, as suggested by Butler.

The second contribution, by **John H. Connolly**, sheds light on the issue of discoursal adequacy. In particular it focuses on *recontextualisation*, that is, the process whereby content that has been given expression in one context is subsequently re-expressed in a different context (Linell 1988, 154–155). Connolly's intention is to achieve a systematic description of the input to and output of the process of recontextualisation so that we can determine (i) whether or not this process has taken place and (ii) in what way(s) the context has changed. The input or source context examined in this chapter is that of an academic paper describing a biological experiment (Wilmut et al. 1997) while the output or destination contexts are those of three textbook accounts of the experiment aimed at different audiences (Kimball 2010; Wikibooks 2010; Does et al. 2010). The framework is provided by Connolly's (2007) elaboration of the contextual and conceptual components of Functional Discourse Grammar (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 6–12) distinguishing between: (i) discoursal and situational context, (ii) socio-cultural and physical context, and (iii) broader and narrower context. In the second part this account of recontextualisation is complemented with an analysis of *resemioticisation* (Scollon 2005, 473), or the recasting of content (as opposed to context) in terms of a tripartite framework encompassing (i) lexical, (ii) grammatical and (iii) discoursal phenomena.

Corpus annotation is the topic of the contribution to this section by **Julia Lavid, Marta Carretero, Jorge Arús, Lara Moratón** and **Juan Rafael Zamorano-Mansilla**. A number of issues and problems are discussed which have arisen during the process of performing a contrastive human-coded corpus annotation (Hovy and Lavid 2010). The discussion centres upon the coding of such semantic and discourse categories as modality and thematisation within the framework of the CONTRANOT project, which is aimed at the creation and validation of contrastive English-Spanish functional descriptions through corpus analysis and annotation.

In the following paper **Antonio Moreno Ortiz** and **Chantal Pérez Hernández** use corpora to identify context valence shifters in a linguistically-motivated sentiment analysis system. First a description of the state of the art is provided, both from a linguistic standpoint (Halliday 1994; "Evaluative orientations" (Lemke 1998); "Stance" (Biber et al. 1999); "Evaluation" (Bednarek 2006, 2008); "Appraisal Theory" (Martin and White 2005)) and from the Natural Language Processing point of view, which deals with the computational treatment of opinion and subjectivity in texts (Pang and Lee 2008). Subsequently, attention is paid to the use of text corpora as a common resource employed by practitioners of both disciplines, albeit with different exploitation strategies, with the overarching conclusion that evaluative language and its applications can only be successfully tackled by studying language in context with the aid of corpora.

To end this section, **Paul Meara** explains what *bibliometrics* (a way of analysing large sets of research outputs (Small 2001; White and McCain 1998) can tell us about Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition. In order to do so, a co-citation analysis is carried out of the entire research output of a single year (over eighty papers) combining the bibliographies for each paper. The data reported are then tested using standard statistical tests in order to identify the main research communities in the field of second language vocabulary acquisition, as well to chart the particularly significant new ideas and their influence in the field.

The second section of the volume targets some of the problems of incorporating pragmatic phenomena into grammar. The first paper in this section, by **Pilar Guerrero Medina**, is concerned with the interface between constructional and verbal semantics as displayed by such English constructions as *I caught my sweater on a nail* and *I broke my arm (when I fell)* (Talmy 2000, 517). In these constructions the Subject is not an agentive participant but a type of "involved recipient" (Ziegeler and Lee 2009). Drawing on corpus data with three change-of-state verbs of the BREAK type (*break, fracture* and *crash*), Guerrero Medina illustrates the particular syntactic contexts where this construction, which looks agentive but is not (Davidse 1992, 124), occurs in English discourse, and analyses how the particular uses of a verb may "interfere" with its prototypical transitive or ergative paradigmatic behaviour thereby achieving particular semantic and pragmatic effects.

Karolien Janssens and **Jan Nuyts** offer a corpus-based analysis of the diachronic evolution (from Old Dutch till the present) of the Dutch mental state predicate *denken* 'think', with special focus on the correlations between the semantic evolutions and the grammatical developments (in particular change in complement type). These understudied phenomena are argued to be situated at the interface between *grammaticalisation* and *subjectification*. Grammaticalisation is the diachronic process leading from lexemes to grammatical formatives involving semantic, syntactic and/or phonological changes over time (Bybee, Perkins and