# Studies in Functional Grammar

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# Preface

This volume consists of studies in which the theory of Functional Grammar (FG) as developed in Dik (1978a) is applied to a number of problems in various languages. In these applications, different aspects of the theory of FG are elaborated. Some modifications are proposed in the light of new evidence.

The theory of FG is summarized in Chapter 1. I have tried to include sufficient information in this summary for this book to stand on its own, but many points only briefly touched upon here are treated at greater length in the earlier monograph (1978a), to which the reader is referred for more detailed information.

I should like to express my gratitude to those colleagues and students who, by their critical comments on various aspects of FG, have contributed to the further development of this theory. I am especially grateful to the members of the Discussion Group on Functional Grammar in our university, for the stimulus derived from our brainstorming sessions, and for the enlightening effect of their combined knowledge of languages.

*Holysloot, The Netherlands*
*March 1980*

SIMON C. DIK

# List of abbreviations and symbols

FG = Functional Grammar
TG = Transformational Grammar
RG = Relational Grammar
*FG* = Dik (1978a) "Functional grammar"

*Semantic functions*
Ag = Agent
Go = Goal
Rec = Recipient
Ben = Beneficiary
Instr = Instrument
Loc = Location
Temp = Time
Dir = Direction
Proc = Processed
Fo = Force
Po = Positioner
So = Source
Comp = Company
Exp = Experiencer
Poss = Possessor
∅ = Zero function

*Syntactic functions*
Subj = Subject
Obj = Object

*Pragmatic functions*
Top = Topic
Foc = Focus

*Categories*
A = Adjectival
N = Nominal
V = Verbal
Vf = Finite verb
Vi = Infinite verb
CL = Clitic
PRO = Pronoun
NP = Noun phrase
PX = Prepositional phrase
XP = Postpositional phrase
SUB = Subordinate clause
Sub = Subordinator

*Term operators*
d = definite
i = indefinite
1 = singular
m = plural
Q = interrogative

*Positions*
S = Subject position
O = Object position
V = Verb position
P1 = Clause-initial position
X = Other position

*Cases*
nom = nominative
acc = accusative
erg = ergative
abs = absolutive
ag = agentive

*General*
X, Y = arbitrary category or function
$x_1, \ldots, x_n$ = term variables
$\phi$ = arbitrary predicate
$\omega$ = arbitrary term operator
LIPOC = Language-Independent Preferred Order of Constituents

# Contents

# 1 Summary of Functional Grammar

## 1.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a brief summary of the theory of Functional Grammar as developed so far, with some extra emphasis here and there on points which are of special importance for a correct appreciation of the chapters that follow. At the end of this summary I give some bibliographical data on further sources of information concerning this approach. For ease of reference I will use the abbreviations FG when referring to the theory of Functional Grammar, and *FG* when referring to my earlier book (Dik 1978a).

## 1.1 Methodological principles

Functional Grammar is based on a functional view of the nature of natural language. A view, that is, in which a natural language is first and foremost regarded as an instrument of social interaction by means of which human beings can communicate with each other and thus influence each other's mental and practical activities. The ability which enables human beings to carry on social interaction with each other can be called their *communicative competence* (Hymes 1972). From the functional point of view linguistic theory is concerned with the role language plays in communicative competence and in the actual implementation of this competence in social interaction. From this it is immediately clear that, though a functional theory of language can distinguish between the *system* of language and the *use* of language, it would avoid studying the one in abstraction from the other. In fact, such a theory is especially interested in the relationship between the system and its possible uses in the sense that it attempts to describe the system determining the construction of linguistic

expressions in the light of the uses made of such expressions in social interaction.

In terms of the well-known distinction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, the functional approach to language regards pragmatics as the all-encompassing framework within which semantics and syntax must be studied. It regards semantics as subservient to pragmatics, and syntax as subservient to semantics. Syntax is there in order to allow for the construction of formal structures by means of which complex meanings can be expressed; and complex meanings are there for people to be able to communicate with each other in subtle and differentiated ways.

Functional Grammar is a theory of syntax and semantics conceived of within the framework of this functional paradigm. This explains why this theory will try, wherever possible, to explain syntactic and semantic principles in terms of the pragmatic purposes and requirements of verbal interaction. In other words, *pragmatic adequacy* will be one of the standards in terms of which a linguistic theory or a linguistic description will be evaluated. From this it follows that *psychological adequacy* will be another such standard. That is, linguistic theory and description should be compatible with what we know about human beings' psychological capacities.

A third criterion for evaluating a linguistic theory is *typological adequacy*: such a theory should be capable of providing adequate grammars for typologically quite different languages, while at the same time accounting for the similarities and differences between these languages in a systematic fashion.

## 1.2 Constraints on the descriptive apparatus

For methodological and empirical reasons the theory of Functional Grammar has been constrained rather heavily with respect to the power of the descriptive apparatus allowed for. This is brought about by the following three principles:

(i) FG does not allow transformational operations in the sense of structure-changing rules. This means that the structures in terms of which linguistic expressions are described are built up through gradual expansion, and that there are no possibilities for deleting, permuting or substituting specified elements of such structures.[1]

(ii) FG aims at defining construction rules which directly generate the target set of well-formed expressions, and avoids the use of filtering devices wherever possible.

(iii) FG avoids the decomposition of lexical items in terms of any sort

of meta-language. Even at the deepest level of description, constructions in FG are built up from predicates which occur as lexical items of the object language.

Together, these three constraints have the effect of tying a FG description rather firmly onto the language described: they restrict the possible "abstractness" of the description considerably. One of the tasks of FG is, in fact, to show that even with these constraints a reasonable level of typological adequacy can be reached.

## 1.3 Three levels of function

Functional Grammar is called "functional" not only because it is based on a functional view of the nature of language, but also because functional or relational notions, as opposed to categorial notions, are given a central role in the description of linguistic expressions.

FG specifies functional relations at three different levels:

(i) Semantic functions: Agent, Goal, Recipient, etc.;
(ii) Syntactic functions: Subject and Object;
(iii) Pragmatic functions: Theme and Tail, Topic and Focus.

Semantic functions specify the roles which the referents of the terms involved play within the "state of affairs" designated by the predication in which they occur.

Syntactic functions specify the perspective from which that state of affairs is presented in the linguistic expression.

Pragmatic functions specify the informational status of the constituents within the wider communicative setting in which they are used.

The array of functions distinguished at each level can be thought of as defining a system of prominence relations over the constituents of a predication. For example, an Agent constituent is more prominent than a non-Agent constituent at the semantic level; a Subject is more prominent than an Object at the syntactic level; and a Topic or Focus is more prominent than a non-Topic or non-Focus at the pragmatic level.

In many cases these three sorts of prominence will coincide, as when, for instance, some Agent term is also Subject and Topic. In other cases, however, prominence at one level will not coincide with prominence at some other level (indeed, this is the main argument for distinguishing the three levels): Subject function may be assigned to some non-Agent term, Topic may be assigned to some non-Subject term, etc. The latter sort of situation demonstrates that the assignments of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions to the constituents of a predication are at least in part independent

of each other. This partial independence is captured in the way in which these assignments are integrated into the fabric of FG.

## 1.4 Outline of FG

### *1.4.1 Overall layout*

The overall layout of FG can be globally represented as in Fig. 1, which is explained as follows: the *fund* consists of a set of *predicates* (= expressions designating properties or relations) and a set of *terms* (= expressions which can be used to refer to entities in some world). By combining predicates and terms we can construct *predications*, where a predication is defined as the application of some predicate to an appropriate number of terms. Predications are abstract objects taken to define the

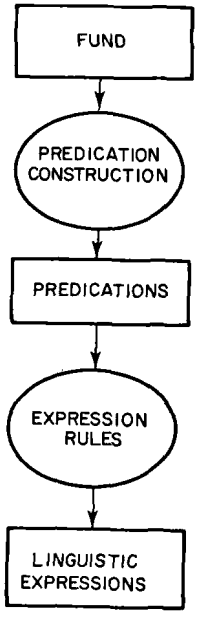


*Fig. 1* The overall layout of a Functional Grammar.

fundamental structural and functional properties relevant to the interpretation of linguistic expressions. Predications are mapped onto linguistic expressions by means of *expression rules* which determine the form and the order of the constituents, given their structural and functional properties within the predication.

A Functional Grammar is thus a system for constructing linguistic expressions out of the predicates and terms contained in the fund, via the intermediate level of underlying predications.

### *1.4.2 The fund and the lexicon*

Each of the components indicated in Fig. 1 is in fact rather more complex, of course. The internal structure of the fund can be represented as in Fig. 2. As indicated in Fig. 2, the fund consists of a central core, called the

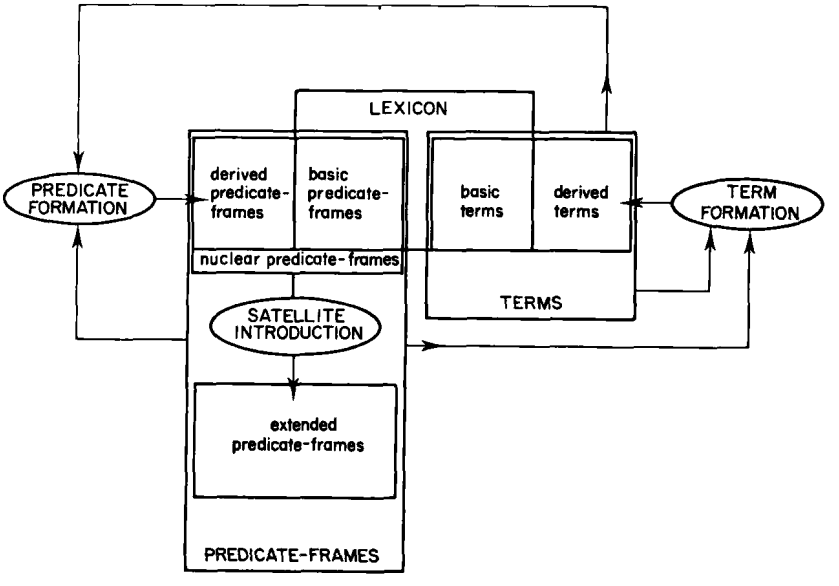


*Fig. 2* The internal structure of the fund.

*lexicon*, which contains basic predicates and basic terms. These are predicates and terms which cannot be formed according to synchronically productive rules, and must thus be assumed to be "given", both in a linguistic sense (i.e. they must be listed and cannot be generated by means of rules) and in a psychological sense (i.e. they must be known as such, and cannot be creatively constructed by the language user when he needs them).

Essential to FG is the fact that each predicate is treated as part of a *predicate-frame*, which defines its most important semantic and syntactic properties. Thus, predicates are not regarded as isolated items to be inserted into some independently generated structure, but they are them-

selves from the very start part of the structures defined by their predicate-frames. These predicate-frames are regarded as the basic building blocks out of which underlying predications are constructed. Each predicate-frame specifies: (i) the form of the predicate; (ii) its syntactic category (verbal, nominal and adjectival contentives are all treated as predicates); (iii) the number of arguments which it takes; (iv) the semantic functions of these arguments; (v) the selection restrictions imposed on the argument positions.

The English verbal predicate *give*, for instance, would be coded in the lexicon in the form of the following predicate-frame:

(1) $\text{give}_{V}\ (x_1\text{: animate}(x_1))_{Ag}\ (x_2)_{Go}\ (x_3\text{: animate}(x_3))_{Rec}$

Thus, *give* is coded as a verbal (V) predicate, taking three arguments indicated by the argument variables $x_1$, $x_2$, $x_3$, with the semantic functions of Agent (Ag), Goal (Go), and Recipient (Rec), where the Agent and the Recipient argument are restricted to animate terms.

Each predicate-frame is provided with a *meaning definition*, specifying a first-order paraphrase of its semantic aspect. For discussion of these meaning definitions, see Dik (1978b) and *FG*: Section 3.6.

### *1.4.3 Predicate formation*

Most languages possess a productive system of *predicate formation rules* by means of which the set of basic predicate-frames can be extended with a set of derived predicate-frames. One can here think of productive rules of derivation and composition, and of such operations as causative verb formation, transitivization and intransitivization, comparative and superlative formation, etc. Various problems concerning different types of predicate formation will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the present monograph. Chapter 2 discusses two rather commonly occurring types of predicate formation, involving *semantic function shift* and *incorporation*. Chapter 3 argues that the Dutch causative construction formed with the causative verb *laten* "to let" can be interpreted in terms of a productive rule of predicate formation.

As indicated by the arrows in Fig. 2, predicate formation rules take predicate-frames (basic and derived) as input and deliver derived predicate-frames as output. Predicate formation rules can also form derived predicate-frames from terms. This type of predicate formation is discussed in Chapter 4 below.

Basic and derived predicate-frames are together referred to as *nuclear*

*predicate-frames*. Nuclear predicate-frames can be semantically interpreted as designating sets of states of affairs. Thus, (1) above designates any state of affairs in which the relation of "giving" obtains between appropriate triples corresponding to $x_1$, $x_2$ and $x_3$.

### *1.4.4 Types of states of affairs*

The states of affairs designated by nuclear predicate-frames can be divided into different types according to the values they have for different parameters. Two parameters are thought to be especially important: ±Dynamic (i.e. whether or not the state of affairs involves any change) and ±Control (i.e. whether or not one of the entities involved has the power to determine whether or not that state of affairs will obtain). These two cross-cutting parameters give us the following four-fold distinction of types of states of affairs:

(2)

| | +Dynamic | −Dynamic |
|---|---|---|
| +Control | *Action*<br>John kissed Jane | *Position*<br>John held Jane in his arms |
| −Control | *Process*<br>John fell in love with Jane | *State*<br>John is in love with Jane |

For further details about this typology of states of affairs, see *FG*: 32 ff.

The problem of which semantic functions must be distinguished for the arguments of nuclear predicate-frames is discussed in *FG*: 36 ff. In part, these semantic functions are thought to correlate with the basic types of state of affairs distinguished above. Tentatively, the following main combinations of semantic functions were distinguished for these different types:[2]

ACTIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Agent | : $\text{John}_{Ag}$ ran away |
| Agent Goal | : $\text{John}_{Ag}$ read a $\text{book}_{Go}$ |
| Agent Goal Recipient | : $\text{John}_{Ag}$ gave a $\text{book}_{Go}$ to Peter $_{Rec}$ |
| Agent Goal Direction | : $\text{John}_{Ag}$ sent a $\text{book}_{Go}$ to $\text{London}_{Dir}$ |
| Agent Goal Source | : $\text{John}_{Ag}$ took a $\text{book}_{Go}$ from the $\text{shelf}_{So}$ |