

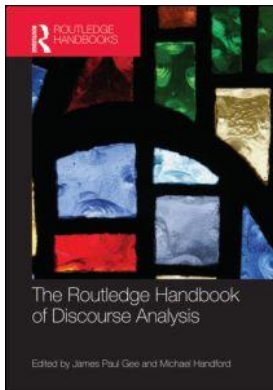
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### Systemic functional linguistics

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# Systemic functional linguistics

Mary J. Schleppegrell

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Discourse analysis seeks patterns in linguistic data. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) offers a means of exploring meaning in language and of relating language use to social contexts so as to contribute to our understanding of language in social life. This chapter provides an overview of SFL theory and its constructs and describes studies that have used SFL to explore meaning in discourse in a variety of contexts.

## What is systemic functional linguistics?

SFL is the linguistic theory developed by Michael Halliday (Halliday, 1978, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). SFL recognizes the powerful role language plays in our lives and sees meaning-making as a process through which language shapes, and is shaped by, the contexts in which it is used. Every language offers its speakers/writers a wealth of options for construing meaning. SFL facilitates exploration of meaning in context through a comprehensive text-based grammar that enables analysts to recognize the choices speakers and writers make from linguistic *systems* and to explore how those choices are *functional* for construing meanings of different kinds. SFL describes three abstract functions (*metafunctions*) that are simultaneously realized in every clause we speak or write, and relates our linguistic choices to the contexts that the language participates in. The three metafunctions are the *ideational*, *interpersonal*, and *textual*, as in every clause our language simultaneously construes some kind of experience (ideational metafunction), enacts a role relationship with a listener or reader (interpersonal metafunction), and relates our messages to the prior and following text and context (textual metafunction). SFL provides constructs and tools for exploring these three kinds of meanings and their interaction in discourse.

For example, in the first sentence of this chapter, *Discourse analysis seeks patterns in linguistic data*, I simultaneously used linguistic resources that present information, construct a particular relationship with the reader, and move the text along. Ideationally, this clause construes *discourse analysis* as an *actor* in the process of *seeking*; what is sought are *patterns in linguistic data*. Interpersonally, this is stated assertively, with no indeterminacy and no negotiation or interaction with the reader (compare, for example, beginning with *What are the goals of discourse analysis?*). Textually, the clause takes *discourse analysis* as its point of departure, connecting this chapter with the topic of the handbook as a whole, and makes *seeks patterns in linguistic data* the point of the clause—the “new” information that the sentence presents. Different choices might have been made in any of these areas of meaning, and SFL offers a comprehensive framework for exploring variation and for relating it to the discourse context.

SFL describes linguistic systems and the functions they enable, revealing the ways social actors construe their experiences and enact relationships.<sup>1</sup> From the *systemic* perspective, language is seen as a network of dynamic and open systems from which speakers and writers are constantly selecting as they use language, thereby maintaining or changing the systems over time through their choices. The system of *transitivity*, for example, offers a range of options for ideational (content) meaning that is comprehensive of the ways language varies in presenting experience: as *doing*, *sensing*, *saying*, or *being*.<sup>2</sup> SFL analysis of transitivity describes the grammatical differences between, for example, a clause with an *actor* in a *doing* process (*Discourse analysis seeks patterns in linguistic data*) and a clause with a *senser* in a *sensing* process (*We can think of discourse analysis as a process of seeking patterns in linguistic data*). This enables the analyst to consider how the choices a speaker/writer has made from the transitivity system construe the experience presented in the text. (For example, analysis of transitivity patterns in literary texts often reveals that authors represent characters' feelings in their actions.)

SFL uses the abstract categories *field*, *tenor*, and *mode* to refer to the relationship between language and context. Ideational resources point to the topic/content (*field*); interpersonal resources enact relationships and convey attitudes (*tenor*); and textual resources indicate the role language plays in the context (*mode*), for example, whether the language constitutes or accompanies activity. Field, tenor, and mode vary as the speaker/writer's lexical and grammatical choices respond to, and at the same time help construct, the context in which language is used. Selections from the transitivity system are one element of *field*. Every clause also has grammatical features that contribute to the construal of *tenor*—for example through selection from the *mood* system (each clause is declarative, interrogative, or imperative) and from other resources for interpersonal meaning. *Mode* is also simultaneously construed in each clause through, among other systems, selections from the *theme/rheme* system, as the speaker/writer makes choices about the point of departure of each clause and the new information that it will present. The SFL grammar describes the choices available to speakers/writers in these and other systems of English and other languages, and the analysis can also be extended to other modalities, to enable the discourse analyst to describe the different constellations of meanings that emerge from different choices within each system (*choice* here means *selection*, not entailing conscious/deliberate choice). From this perspective, SFL discourse analysis can answer the question: *How does this text mean what it does?*

Variation in linguistic choices with respect to context is captured in SFL in the notion of *register*. Drawing on different systems of language in different combinations realizes different registers, because the particular language choices, and so the meanings we make, vary according to social and cultural context. Language is a vast resource for meaning-making, and speakers/writers draw on this resource in different ways, depending on what is going on, whom we are interacting with, and the role language is playing. Analyzing language choices can reveal important differences in how content, role relationships, and information flow are constructed in different contexts, as these differences realize and reveal different registers. This suggests the second question that SFL analysis can help answer, namely: *How does this text contribute to shaping the social context?*

Differences in the configurations of meaning that emerge from different choices in the grammar can be compared to recognize differences in register, as the grammatical choices evoke for listeners/readers the social meanings that the language helps instantiate. Each of the linguistic systems described in SFL grammar enables comprehensive analysis of an area of meaning in the language, and analyzing the linguistic choices that realize different meanings tells us something about how the text means what it does and how it participates in social life.

## Reasoning with patterns of grammar and meaning

One of Halliday's contributions to SFL discourse analysis has been a description of the evolution of scientific English (Halliday, 1993a). Analyzing texts written by fourteenth through to twentieth century scientists, Halliday shows how science discourse evolved in its grammatical choices, drawing increasingly on nominalization (his *grammatical metaphor*: see below) as new kinds of knowledge and interpersonal relationships developed in science over time. The focus he takes and the insights he presents are a good example of what SFL discourse analysis can illuminate.

Halliday illustrates how, over time, scientists adapted the grammatical resources available in English to create discourse that develops an argument through logical steps—the kind of argumentation needed to share the results of experiments in physical science. He describes how the ideational and textual resources used by scientists changed as they began developing technical taxonomies and theorizing in new ways. At the same time, the tenor of scientific discourse also evolved into the impersonal stance typical of science today. Halliday reports how Newton, for example, wrote in very direct ways about the experiments he conducted, telling what he did, observed, and thought about it: “I held the prism ... observed the length of its refracted Image ... it appears that ...”. This is quite different from the discourse of today's experimental report, and Halliday describes how scientists began to exploit the potential of the nominal group (noun phrase) to distill and repackage the processes scientists were writing about so that they could be related to each other. For example:

The rate of crack growth depends not only on the chemical environment but also on the magnitude of the applied stress. The development of a complete model for the kinetics of fracture requires an understanding of how stress accelerates the bond-rupture reaction.

*(Michalske and Bunker 1987, p. 81 cited in Halliday, 1993a)*

Here the nominal group *The rate of crack growth* distills the process of *cracking slowly/quickly*. The nominal group *the magnitude of the applied stress* repackages information from the process of *applying much/little stress*. These are the experimental processes that the scientist has engaged in, but the process is not reported in the way Newton did (e.g., *how quickly the [glass] cracks depends on how much stress [I] apply*).

It is not only the physical processes, but also the scientists' thinking processes that can be presented in these nominal group structures. *The development of a complete model for the kinetics of fracture* is a nominal group that repackages the process *We want to develop a model*. The nominal group *an understanding of how stress accelerates the bond-rupture reaction* repackages the process *We need to understand how*. ... These are “internal” processes: processes that the scientists engage in through their thinking (*If we want to develop a model ... , we need to understand how ...*).

Through analyses of the nominal groups used by scientists over time and of the role the nominal groups play in experimental discourse, Halliday shows how the ideational resources of the grammar have developed to enable a kind of texture in which, as we see in this text, a process (*glass cracking*) is presented as a thing (*the rate of crack growth*) that can then participate further in the discourse. Halliday points out that using the nominalization *the rate of crack growth* at the beginning of the passage is only possible because the text has already talked about the speed at which glass cracks. Halliday calls nominalizations like these *grammatical metaphors*. He points out that, in the registers of everyday life, we typically express meanings in structures that relate *congruently* to those meanings. We present meanings about *things* in nouns; meanings about *processes* in verbs; meanings about *connections* in conjunctions, meanings about *qualities* in adjectives. Grammatical metaphor enables the presentation of meaning in a structure that is not congruent with the grammatical form, and this is one of the ways in which technical and academic discourses have evolved.

Grammatical metaphor enables meanings to be distilled and compacted. Presenting processes as things enabled scientists to create chains of reasoning and argumentation that facilitated the development and presentation of theories, enabling science discourse to evolve in ways that facilitated the presentation of new knowledge.<sup>3</sup> For example, a whole argument can be summed up in a few words, which make it possible to examine the argument in relation to other arguments or perspectives; or a new scientific process can be distilled into a few words, so that it can be used as a participant in yet another process. Grammatical metaphor is a key feature of scientific discourse today, but it was not always so, and Halliday shows how this linguistic technology changed the *tenor* and *mode* of science discourse as scientists increasingly drew on interpersonal and textual options that construe more distanced interpersonal relationships, but that enable the text to be organized to efficiently present an explanation or build an argument.

As this discussion exemplifies, the functional grammar is the basis for SFL discourse analysis, and understanding how every clause can be analyzed from the three metafunctional perspectives to reveal the complexity of meanings always construed in each use of language is the foundation of analyzing a text from an SFL perspective.

### Approaches to SFL discourse analysis

Halliday and Hasan's (1976) seminal work on cohesion describes non-syntactic relations that make a text hang together (*reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion*) and enable a text to evolve from clause to clause. The description of cohesion in text was an important foundation for further work on the semantics of texts and the development of SFL discourse analysis tools. Today there are two major branches of SFL discourse analysis, generated from the work of Ruqaiya Hasan and J. R. Martin. Each of them has proposed a set of tools and approaches to discourse that have been taken up by analysts in different contexts. "Text" is the unit of SFL discourse analysis; it refers to "any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that forms a unified whole" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 1). Texts are approached with different analytic tools, depending on the goals of the analysis.

Hasan has developed SFL discourse analysis through the constructs *generic structure potential* (Hasan, 1996a), *cohesive harmony analysis* (Hasan, 1984), and *semantic networks* (Hasan, 1996b). SFL is often associated with an interest in *genre*, and Hasan's *generic structure potential* and *cohesive harmony analysis* are tools for recognizing the moves that may occur within a genre (e.g., Hasan, 1996a). In analyzing *generic structure potential*, multiple examples of a genre are reviewed in order to identify elements that are obligatory and optional and the ordering possibilities for those elements. Togher *et al.* (2004), for example, use analysis of generic structure potential to compare "typical" encounters with police with encounters the police have with people with traumatic brain injury, who often do not engage in the genre of this encounter in the same ways as people who are not injured. They show how the structure of the encounters with brain-injured people departs from what police typically expect, and their analysis is contributing to a more effective interaction with brain-injured people. *Cohesive harmony analysis* (Hasan, 1984) is another approach to recognizing how a discourse evolves, helping an analyst describe connections across a text by "identifying the lexical and referential chains formed in a text and then examining the ways in which these chains interact" (Cloran *et al.*, 2007: 651). Cloran *et al.* show how analysis of cohesive chains helps identify boundaries within texts, as the appearance and disappearance of chains reveals the text's structure. This is illustrated in Cloran (1999), where she uses an analysis of cohesion to identify how particular moves are embedded in larger discourse units.

Ruqaiya Hasan has also initiated a productive strand of SFL discourse analysis in her study of the discursive practices of mothers interacting with young children in contexts of everyday life

(see Hasan *et al.*, 2007 for a history of this work). Drawing on SFL's notion of *system networks*, Hasan developed the construct *semantic network*, to show at a very detailed level differences in the meanings speakers construe in what might otherwise be seen as the “same” context; for example in bathing a child (Hasan, 1996b; Hasan *et al.*, 2007). In analyzing semantic networks, transcripts are divided into *messages* (similar to a clause), and the messages are compared to identify different linguistic realizations. For example, Hasan (1996b) discusses how some utterances from mother to child incorporate the semantic option *assumptive*. Selecting the option *assumptive* presents the implication that the speaker has a view of what the situation should have been. This is realized through negation, in clauses such as: *Didn't you see me? Why don't you love Rosemary? Or: You didn't eat it?* (the child *ought to have seen her; should love Rosemary, should have eaten it*). A *semantic network* is an attempt to account for “systematic variation in the meanings people select in similar contexts as a function of their social positioning” (Williams, 2005: 457).

Hasan (2009) reports on how this analysis has enabled exploration of variation in the ways mothers who are positioned in different ways in the social structure ask and answer their children's questions, in the ways they reason with their children, and in the ways gender and class ideologies are construed in everyday talk between parent and child (see also Cloran, 2000). Williams (2005) also analyzes this corpus by using the statistical techniques of principal components and cluster analysis. He shows that mothers vary in the frequency with which they select different options as they read aloud to their children – for example, in how frequently they foreground the expression of individual points of view vs. taking for granted that they know the child's experience or state of knowledge.

J. R. Martin has also developed an approach to the analysis of discourse that builds on the notion of cohesion as discourse structure, analysis of discourse semantics and genre being his point of departure. He has developed analytic tools that provide a framework for “tackling a text” (Martin, 1992; Martin and Rose, 2003), offering those unfamiliar with SFL grammar a set of tools for engaging in analysis through exploration of six discourse-level systems: *appraisal*, *ideation*, *identification*, *conjunction*, *periodicity*, and *negotiation* (Martin and Rose, 2003). The analysis of each system affords different possibilities for exploring meaning in text, the basis for analysis being an understanding that language participates in social life through *genres*.

Martin's approach sees genre as a level of context above and beyond field, tenor, and mode, and makes genre central to describing the role of culture in language use (Martin, 1999a). He defines genre as a staged, goal-directed social process, and his early work in educational contexts developed a description of a range of genres that are typical of and expected in different disciplinary pedagogies (Martin, 1993, 1999b). Martin and his colleagues analyzed more than 2,000 texts in different school subjects, as described in Rothery (1996), developing descriptions of linguistic pathways into disciplinary literacies—descriptions that have been highly influential (see Christie and Martin (1997); Martin (2002) offers an example from history). For more on SFL and genre, see Martin and Rose (2008); Rose (this volume). For a recent application of this approach, see Macken-Horarik *et al.*'s (2006) analysis of the linguistic demands of a pre-service teacher education program.

Two of the discourse semantic systems developed in Martin and Rose (2003) will be described here: *ideation* and *appraisal*. *Ideation* analysis explores the linguistic resources that construe experience and construct the field of discourse. Similar to the analysis of cohesive harmony described above, ideation analysis focuses on the semantics of each clause and tracks meaning across a text to reveal sequences of activities, the people and things involved in them, and their associated places and qualities. This analysis can show how texts of different types, in different contexts, unfold in different ways. For example, Martin (2006: 292) uses ideation analysis to show how agency is construed in a text aimed at reconciling Australian and Japanese war experiences, where he argues

that representing Australians as more agentive “can perhaps be read as balancing the more commonly promulgated (in Australia) ‘Japan as aggressor, Australia as victim’ motif.” Through analysis of lexical relations within the clause and chains of relationships between lexical elements, ideation analysis can reveal the sequences of activity that make up different stages of a genre (see also Martin, 2001).

*Appraisal* analysis explores how interpersonal meaning permeates a text, enabling exploration of resources for evaluative meaning, “the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned” (Martin and Rose, 2003: 25). A related development in SFL discourse analysis is the elaboration of the *engagement* system, a sub-system of appraisal, to identify the sources of attitudes and evaluative meaning (Martin and White, 2005). The appraisal tools are currently informing SFL discourse analyses across a range of contexts (e.g. White, 2003a; Martin, 2004; Arkoudis, 2005; Hood, 2006; and the special issue of *Text* (2003, Vol. 23 n. 2)). Hood, for example, uses appraisal analysis of research paper introductions to illustrate how different configurations of attitudinal meanings are relevant to accomplishing different purposes: for instance for presenting a rationale, arguing for new knowledge, or presenting one’s own work as valuable. Arkoudis (2005) uses appraisal analysis to reveal tensions and power relationships around teachers’ collaboration.

Martin’s recent work explores how texts about the same event draw on different linguistic systems to instantiate different perspectives (e.g. Martin, 2008a). In analyzing three accounts of events in a novel, he shows how authors present and combine meanings in different ways, the different instantiations of the story affording different readings. Martin draws implications from this for understanding the affordances of translation, the use of different modalities, and summarizing. In a related chapter, Martin (2008b) explores the same texts to show how differences in the dialogism of the texts construct the speakers as more or less authoritative. This and other features of the discourse construe the characters’ identities and position them in ways that different readers may align with. These chapters provide detailed examples of how analyses of genre, periodicity, appraisal, conjunction, and ideation offer insights for discourse analysis.

Tools for meaning-based discourse analysis, based on close attention to linguistic realization, have proliferated within SFL. The approaches offer ways to track a range of meanings across texts, as analysts recognize elements of text structure, identify and track participants in the text, recognize and explore the kinds of processes they are engaged in, look at the attitudes and judgments that are infused, and explore differences in the ways texts move from clause to clause. The close focus on the choices speakers and writers make reveals the contexts they are participating in and the ways language contributes to construing those contexts.

### Contexts that SFL analysts have explored

SFL analyses have described features of the registers and genres of different disciplines (e.g. Halliday and Martin (1993) on science; O’Halloran (2005) on mathematics; Coffin (2006) on history; Christie (1999) on subject English; Wignell (2007) on social science; see Christie (2007) for analysis of the role of disciplinary differences in the recontextualization of knowledge for education). Education has been an especially important and fruitful area of SFL discourse analysis (Christie and Unsworth (2005) provide a history), and Frances Christie has been an important contributor, informing educational theory and practice in significant ways. Christie (2002) provides a methodology for the analysis of classroom discourse that shows how instructional content and regulation of students are simultaneously managed by teachers. She illustrates how to distinguish the *content* or *instructional register* from the *regulative* or *pedagogical register* that projects the content, and analyzes these registers in interaction with each other to explore the knowledge

being made available to students through classroom discourse as well as the ways students are positioned as learners. Christie shows how, in the early grades, the regulative register is foregrounded, but, as students move into the higher grades, it becomes more implicit. For example, teachers use fewer direct imperatives and more modality in directing behavior (e.g., “*So you’re probably best to sit next to somebody that you will work with*” (p. 165)), and abstractions take the place of overt expressions of authority (e.g., “*The main requirement is...*” (p. 166)). The regulative register in this sense “appropriates” the instructional register, which is projected through it. Christie also illustrates how learning occurs at different phases of a lesson and how students’ language develops as they work with new ideas and technical language. She shows that, where teaching is successful, students are enabled to reason in particular ways that reflect the values of the disciplines they are studying.

In recent work, Christie and Derewianka (2008) draw on a database of 2,000 texts from studies over the past 20 years to offer extensive and detailed descriptions of the developmental trajectories through which children gain control of written language in English, history, and science. This discourse analysis of children’s written development across the school years in different subject areas shows the importance of grammatical metaphor to academic achievement and describes the linguistic resources through which abstraction, generalization, value judgment and opinion come to be expressed as students’ writing matures.

Schleppegrell (2004) offers an analysis of the register features of the texts encountered in schooling in order to highlight the linguistic challenges of different genres and disciplines, describing the “language of schooling” as a register that enables students to display knowledge authoritatively in texts that have certain expectations for their structuring. Oteiza and Pinto (2008) use analyses of transitivity and appraisal to show how the dictatorships and subsequent transitions to democracy are portrayed in pedagogical texts used in Chile and Spain, illustrating how the authors silence some social actors while giving prominence to others as they present historical explanations to students. Achugar and Schleppegrell (2005) analyze very different ways in which causality is construed in history textbooks, showing how implicit causality puts in the background information important for critical reading of history texts. In an investigation of expository school history writing and teachers’ expectations for this type of writing, de Oliveira (2010) explores thematic development, evaluation, and elaboration in secondary students’ writing. Morgan’s (2005) analysis of mathematics texts uses an analysis of transitivity to reveal how they represent the nature of mathematics and how they construe power and authority in particular ways. She shows, for example, that pedagogical texts obscure agency in mathematics far more than professional mathematicians do. Macken-Horarik (2006) analyzes exemplars of students’ performance on high-stakes examinations to show what really matters to evaluators, highlighting linguistic aspects of high-scoring essays that are seldom acknowledged or explicitly taught.

Other SFL analyses have explored spoken discourse in science (Lemke, 1990) and mathematics (Chapman, 1995) classrooms, to show how teachers and students are often construing knowledge in different ways, revealing that students may not understand certain concepts. O’Halloran (2004) demonstrates how analysis of mood and modality can shed light on interpersonal relationships in the mathematics classroom and reveal how students are positioned as learners. Gibbons (2006) analyzes spoken interaction and students’ written texts to illustrate how teachers can support the development of language and content learning in classrooms with diverse students, including some who are learning English as a second language. She argues that teachers need to understand language from a functional perspective in order to move students along a “mode continuum,” from everyday into more specialized ways of construing knowledge. Zolkower and Shreyer (2007) use analysis of mood and speech function, supplemented by comments on modality, to analyze the ways a teacher “commands” her students in a sixth grade algebra lesson to “think



verbally,” showing how “thinking” is constructed in language as the teacher organizes and scaffolds instruction.

SFL has enabled advanced second and foreign language instruction to develop pathways into the kinds of discourse and language use that is needed for engagement in academic and professional contexts (see special issue of *Linguistics and Education* (Byrnes, 2009, Vol. 20 n. 1)). Byrnes (2009), for example, analyzes the writing development of 14 students of German as a foreign language over three curricular levels, providing quantitative and qualitative measures of the development of grammatical metaphor in second language writing, and suggests how such analyses can contribute to a deeper understanding of contrastive rhetoric and of the relationship between first and second language writing development (see also Ryshina-Pankova, 2010). Hood (2010) analyzes how published researchers and second language writers draw on the resources of English to introduce their own research and to critique the research of others, and provides an elaboration of the networks within the appraisal system to account for differences in the evaluation strategies of writers along several dimensions. Lee (2010) analyzes what she calls the “commanding strategies of ‘shouldness’” in undergraduate second language writers’ texts, focusing on metaphors of mood and modulation. SFL analysis has also been extended to languages other than English (e.g. Colombi, 2002; Oteiza, 2006; see Martin, 2009, for other references), and is used by researchers around the world. Children’s language development has been a foundational area of focus in SFL discourse analysis, with important work presented in Halliday (1975, 1993b) and Painter (1999).

Clinical contexts have also been frequent sites for SFL discourse analysis, which is used in studying and treating language disorders such as aphasia, traumatic brain injury, dementia, and developmental disorders (Armstrong, 2005; Armstrong *et al.*, 2005). Bartlett *et al.* (2005) describe studies that have used cohesion analysis to understand autism, where this kind of analysis enables consideration of interpersonal resources for meaning-making and “allows the researcher to develop a linguistic theory linking the linguistic resources to the social roles and identity of the individuals” (p. 211). Mortensen (2005) analyzes the genre structure and semantics of personal letters written by writers with brain impairment and discusses the variation in this corpus, as well as the challenges of comparing patterns of variation. Thompson (2001) illustrates how cohesive harmony analysis helps track the progress of a patient with schizophrenia. Togher (2001) provides a case study illustrating how SFL analysis helps the clinician/researcher explore relationships between discourse context and the language realized in that context, pointing to the power relations underlying therapeutic interactions and treatment goals focused on assisting the client in achieving autonomy and choice. She suggests that SFL analysis “can unveil some of the mystery of why people with communication difficulties and their communication partners find everyday interactions awkward or unrewarding. It allows the clinician to tease out how the words being used, the way information is exchanged, and the structure of interactions are linked to context” (pp. 145–146). (See also Fine, 2006; and the 2005 special issue of *Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics*, 9 (3)). Körner (2010) uses appraisal categories to describe how patients and physicians adopt different intersubjective stances in discussing challenging treatments for hepatitis C.

SFL has been a popular tool for critical discourse analysis (see e.g. Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2004; Rogers *et al.*, 2005), with ongoing dialogue (e.g. Billig, 2008, and responses; Martin and Veel, 1998; Martin, 2000; Martin and Wodak, 2003). Achugar (2008) uses genre and register analysis as well as analysis of intertextuality and appraisal resources to show how the actions of the Uruguayan military were construed in various discourses at the time they occurred and afterward, legitimating and then transforming the official memory while constructing a positive institutional identity. Oteiza Silva (2006) offers a multimodal analysis of the ways the overthrow

of Allende and the resulting Pinochet regime are represented in Chilean history textbooks. Bonnin (2009) explores nominalization and grammatical metaphor in an analysis of the historical relationship between religious and political discourse in Argentina. Butt *et al.* (2004) analyze speeches given in Iraq prior to the war, in order to uncover the various ideologies at play in discourse at that time. Young and Harrison (2004) show how SFL analysis can raise awareness of the power of language to naturalize certain ways of thinking and can help us recognize how different positions are constructed in language, so that those positions might be challenged or queried.

Media analyses have also drawn on SFL (e.g. White, 2003b). Moore (2006), for example, analyzes how articles in the *Economist* magazine use similar genre structures and semantic relations in their reporting on Cambodia, and relates these findings to the cultural and situational context. Literary texts have also been a frequent focus of SFL discourse analysis – one that illustrates how the grammatical choices of an author redound with the themes and motifs of a text, enabling that author to create particular effects (Halliday, 2002; see Lukin and Webster, 2005 for a history and exemplification of SFL in literary analysis). Lukin (2008) offers a comprehensive SFL treatment of a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, illustrating how a linguistic analysis can afford insights that enable students to engage in critique rather than just rely on personal response.

Recent developments in SFL discourse analysis include tools for creating corpora coded for SFL grammar and discourse features that allow large-scale semantic analyses, and multimodal and multi-semiotic analyses that draw on SFL theory to explore how other modalities and semiotic systems interact with language in making meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Royce and Bowcher, 2007; O’Halloran, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008; see Martin, 2009 for other references.)

### Contributions of SFL to discourse analysis

As this review indicates, the tools of SFL can be drawn on in a variety of ways to explore the linguistic systems through which social actors instantiate meaning. This makes SFL a valuable resource for research across fields. Deciding how to approach authentic language in context, in spoken or written form, is often a challenging task. SFL offers a “way in” by providing concrete tools for exploring language comprehensively and for making sense of discourse data. Its flexible set of tools can be adapted to working with multimodal texts, and the results of SFL analyses can be presented in qualitative discussions as well as used in quantitative studies. In fields where discourse data are collected and analyzed, the functional grammar of SFL offers grounded ways to explore meaning in such data.

Christie (2002: 16) notes that “language does not just passively reflect a pre-existing social reality. It is an active agent in constructing that reality.” SFL discourse analysis recognizes the dialectical nature of the relationship between language and context. By enabling the analyst to reveal how every text shapes and is shaped by social situations, SFL offers powerful tools for comprehensively exploring meaning in language at the levels of genre, register, and clause and for accounting for differences between speakers, differences over time, or differences in context. The variety of contexts to which SFL discourse analysis contributes testifies to its flexibility and utility in meeting the needs of analysts from different disciplines and settings. Furthermore, as the most elaborated meaning-based grammar available to discourse analysts, SFL can be used by socio-linguists and discourse analysts in conjunction with other analytic tools, providing a means of attending closely to the linguistic realization of meanings in spoken and written discourse, to supplement exploration of other aspects of interaction in context.

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## Further reading

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Second Edition. London: Edward Arnold. A good introduction to SFL grammar.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Third Edition. London: Arnold.

Expands the grammatical description with more detail and examples.

Martin, J. R. and Rose, D. (2003) *Working with Discourse: Meaning Beyond the Clause*. First and Second Editions. London: Continuum.

Introduces SFL discourse analysis tools, illustrated with analysis of a range of genres.<sup>4</sup>

Eggs, S. and Slade, D. (1997) *Analysing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell.

Illustrates spoken discourse analysis of casual conversation with SFL.

Martin, J. R. (1999c) 'Grace: the logogenesis of freedom', *Discourse Studies*, 1 (1): 29–56.

Uses many of the tools and constructs described here to analyze an excerpt from Nelson Mandela's autobiography that illustrates how Mandela uses his life story to develop a deep understanding of the meaning of freedom and to inspire the reader. This is a good introduction to what the SFL tools afford the analyst.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter focuses on the grammatical and discourse semantic systems, but SFL analysts have also worked with phonological/graphological systems and systems from different modalities, such as visual display and gesture (see Martin (2009) for references).
- 2 Different SFL analysts carve up the meaning spaces in different systems in different ways. Martin and Rose (2003) use these four categories of processes, while Halliday (1994) describes six: *material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential*. This variation reflects the fact that language is a complex system and categories are ineffable (Halliday, 1984); but, whichever set of categories an analyst uses, the categories are meant to cover the entire meaning space of the system.
- 3 Grammatical metaphor has become an important construct in the analysis of language development in the individual as well (see e.g. Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Halliday, 1993b).
- 4 There are significant differences between the two editions, as a chapter on negotiation and analysis of spoken language was added and the chapter on ideation was revised so as to take an ergative rather than a transitive perspective on the clause.

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