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30.1 Introduction

The notion of functional linguistics is associated in many linguists’ minds with a dichotomy between formal and functional approaches. The rivalry between the two ways of doing linguistics loomed over the field until fairly recently, with functionalism being seen by formalists as a wrong-headed negation of the principles they held dear, just as functionalists saw formalists as fundamentally misguided. Towards the end of the last century departments of linguistics, especially but not exclusively in the United States, tended to align themselves with one or the other orientation, and it is significant that Newmeyer (1998), a work that contrasts the two approaches from a primarily formalist perspective, begins with a ‘not totally imaginary’ (p. 1) dialogue that pits a formalist professorship interviewee against a functionalist one. In more recent years, however, it has become much less usual to qualify functional linguistics in negative terms, that is, simply as a rejection of formalist positions. The old antagonism has yielded to a more peaceful coexistence as publication after publication has recognized functional linguistics as having validity in its own right and as being anchored in a long and valuable tradition. This is the position to be taken in this chapter.

There are many streams within functional linguistics, but there is one set of assumptions that is shared by all functionalists, one that justifies the word ‘functional’: languages have a primordial function in the human societies in which they are used, namely that of permitting sophisticated communication of ideas and feelings between human beings, and this function impacts on both the current use of languages and how they have developed historically. As a result, a large number of language phenomena, certainly many from the area of morphosyntax, are interpreted as being motivated, that is, capable of having an explanation. In functionalism, explanations are sought primarily outside of language proper (Newmeyer 1998: Ch. 3), for example in such cognitive domains as memory, attention, processing and prediction, in such social domains as gender, esteem and politeness, or in the spatio-temporal and socio-cultural contexts in which language is used by speakers in their daily lives. Needless to say, this in principle creates a sharp distinction between functionalists and formalists, who tend to abstract away from the uses of language, seeing grammar as autonomous and *sui generis* and allowing only explanations from within the language system.
Although functionalists have reached a considerable degree of consensus about the assumptions that fundamentally orient their work, there are nevertheless significant differences among the various groups of functional linguists at work today. These reflect a variety of standpoints on such matters as the exact object of inquiry (discourse; texts; grammatical structures), the type of data admissible (corpus data; experimental data; intuitive judgements; examples from grammars), the degree to which language is seen as a system, and the amount of overlap and/or cooperation envisaged with other subdisciplines of linguistics (notably Cognitive Linguistics, Construction Grammar and Language Typology) or with such other disciplines as sociology, psychology, anthropology and pedagogy. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a rounded picture of functional linguistics as currently practised, emphasizing both the unity and the diversity to be found.

§30.2 discusses the origins of functional linguistics, concentrating on the role of the Prague School. §30.3 portrays the state of the art today, situating functional linguistics with regard to formal, usage-based and cognitive schools of thought. §30.4 explores connections between functional linguistics and three adjacent areas of inquiry: pragmatics and discourse analysis, language typology, and psycholinguistics. §30.5 presents four major groupings within contemporary functional linguistics: West Coast functionalism, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Functional Discourse Grammar, and Role and Reference Grammar. §30.6 concludes the chapter by considering ways in which formal and functional linguistics have now become complementary rather than inimical.

30.2 Origins

Although it is notoriously difficult to determine a starting point for any intellectual tradition, there is some acceptance that it is the appearance in 1929 of the Theses of the Prague School1 (Theses 1983) and specifically of various writings by the Czech scholar Vilém Mathesius around the same time that marks the beginning of what is currently understood to be functional linguistics.2 On the very first page, the Theses proclaim something today’s functionalists will generally still assent to:

Wether [sic] one analyses language as expression or communication, it is the intention of the speaker which can explain it in a most evident and a most natural manner. For this reason, linguistic analysis should respect the functionalist standpoint. Seen from the functionalist viewpoint, language is a system of purposeful means of expression. No fact of language can be understood without regard to the system to which it pertains.

(Theses 1983: 77, emphasis in original)

The founders of the Prague School focused on the clause and specifically on how it functioned for the speaker of that clause. What they attempted to elucidate was how the speaker dynamically constructs the clause in an attempt to achieve his/her communicative goals. The clause was seen as commencing with a starting point (or ‘theme’) and climaxing in a communicative highpoint, in later Prague School writings to be called the ‘rheme’. A fundamental point, one that has had important repercussions for some branches of functional linguistics, is that the theme may, or may not, correspond with the subject; and similarly for the rheme and the predicate. These slippages are currently understood as involving ‘competing motivations’ (see §30.3). In later years a related but non-dichotomous approach arose in Czech linguistics under the heading of ‘communicative dynamism’, with the clause being seen as gradually growing more and more ‘dynamic’ as it advances step by step.
from starting point to conclusion. While the Prague School took a dynamic view of
clause construction, the forms resulting from the use of language were regarded as
constituting a system (cf. the quotation from the Theses above), one that has arisen
through the myriad applications of the principles of dynamic construction. The founders of
linguistic functionalism were thus in no way opposed to the study of the language system as
a structure, but this should always go hand in hand with an examination of the functions that
its elements served.

Here was born one of the fundamental tenets of many functionalists, the belief that the
purpose of linguistic work is to forge a link between structure and function; Butler (2003),
in a monumental examination of this area of linguistics, accordingly identifies the three
approaches he compares as ‘structural-functional theories’, an expression created by Robert
Van Valin, Jr (for whom see §30.5.4). Structure is identified with lexico-grammatical
organization as an entrenched cognitive capacity that permits us to formulate and encode
our communicative intentions. Givón (2009: 26–9) points to the functional advantages of
having such a grammatical system, drawing a sharp contrast between pidgin communication,
where interlocutors do not share a system, and grammatical communication, where they do,
showing that the two types of communication differ radically with regard to both structure
and function. In a pidgin situation, as for example during encounters between foreign
tourists and monolingual inhabitants of the country being visited, morphology will be
heavily reduced, constructions simple and word order directly dictated by communicative
needs; processing will be slow, laborious and conscious, with high context-dependence. In
grammatical communication, by contrast, morphology is rich, constructions are varied and
hierarchical, and word order is often dependent on syntactic relations (such as subject and
object), while processing is quick, effortless, unconscious and much less context-dependent.

It should be noted, however, that other functionalists have questioned or even denied the
Praguean conclusion that the result of language use is a structure. One position that has been
espoused is that grammatical organization is emergent, with all structure being seen ‘as in a
continual process of becoming, as epiphenomenal’ (Hopper 1992: 366). On this view, the
focus is exclusively on the dynamics of discourse, in which processes of grammaticalization
take place that allow a gradual transition of lexical units to a more supportive role, without
ever gelling into anything permanent. Notions like ‘noun’ and ‘verb’ or ‘transitive’ and
‘intransitive’ are not pre-existent but rather come into being in discourse use and evaporate
again. Scepticism about ‘structure’ is also apparent in Givón (2013), who does not mention
the Prague School but rather emphasizes the opposition that he sees between functionalism
and structuralism. In general, it can be said that American functionalism is much less
beholden to Prague than its European counterpart(s), seeking its roots in the US
anthropological heritage and more recently in various movements that grew up in opposition
to Chomskyan formalism.

For phonology, the aftermath of the 1929 Theses was somewhat more complex. While
Mathesius saw the phoneme as having the function of distinguishing meanings for the
speaker, Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson stressed how it functions within the
phonological system of the language (see Chapter 6). In the latter reading of ‘function’, a
word notorious for its polyinterpretability, the language user disappears from view; the
phoneme’s function is defined by its place in the system. It was the latter view, also strongly
defended by the arch-structuralist Louis Hjelmslev, that came to dominate the brand of
functionalism championed by André Martinet. In Francophone cultures, la linguistique
fonctionnelle is still strongly associated with Martinet, but this stream has had relatively
little impact on or interaction with the rest of functional linguistics, which has tended to
perpetuate Mathesius’s primary interpretation of ‘function’, highlighting the study of how linguistic forms function for the language user.

30.3 Commitments

As the Prague School developed, so its practitioners placed an ever greater emphasis on formalization in the sense of the representation of hypotheses and findings in a formal, mathematical language. There is a group of American and American-trained linguists who have not just been influenced by the School but have interacted with its more recent members. This group (prominent among whom are Susumo Kuno, Ellen Prince, Jacqueline Guéron and Tanya Reinhardt) have been referred to by the apparent oxymoron ‘formal functionalists’, since they generally accept the formalist premises of generative grammar and concentrate on providing formalized and theoretically compatible accounts of aspects of language structure that fall outside the purview of generative grammar, which tends to privilege certain ‘core’ phenomena. These linguists’ theoretical commitments qualify them as ‘formalists’, although the matters they deal with and their interpretation of data align them more with functionalism.

There are functionalists, including Robert Van Valin Jr, Simon C. Dik and Kees Hengeveld, who follow the Praguean lead in utilizing formal representations in their work but without adopting the presuppositions and particularities of generative formalism. The advantage of formalization, as they see it, is that it becomes possible to derive explicit, functionally informed hypotheses about language structure. Each has developed his own formalism, to be outlined in §30.5. Yet others have sought to forge a link between functionalism and the formal apparatus of Optimality Theory (OT). OT holds that linguistic forms derive from the interaction of independent constraints. Languages differ in how these constraints are weighted; this is represented formally in tableaux, which list all the candidate constructions and identify as optimal the one that violates fewest constraints. Although OT has principally been associated with generative grammar, proposing constraints that are supposedly universal and innate, others have used the theory to formalize functional-typological findings, i.e. generalizations derived from observations of language use. Thus Aissen (2003) considers differential object marking, the fact that languages can differ in how they mark objects depending on their semantic and pragmatic characteristics, chiefly animacy and definiteness respectively. Her conclusions are formulated in OT.

A characteristic commitment of many functionalists is to the explanation of variation within and across languages in terms of the interaction of violable principles rather than the operation of exceptionless rules (this creates a point of contact with OT). Dik (1986: 21), the intellectual father of Functional Grammar (see §30.5.3), defined a functional explanation as follows: ‘A functional explanation of a (synchronic or diachronic) linguistic phenomenon is a statement in which that phenomenon is shown to follow from one or more principles which crucially refer to any of the functional prerequisites imposed on natural languages’. Where more than one such principle is in play, with different orientations and effects, we can speak of ‘competing motivations’ (cf. Butler 2003: Part I, 14). In this view, alternatives within the language system arise from the attachment of different priorities to the same principles. In English, for example, adverbial clauses (AdvC) may be situated before or after the main clause (MC) they modify. Diessel (2005) finds, on the basis of extensive corpus analysis, that three competing forces, each with its own motivation, account for the distribution found in data: (a) utterance planning for high parsability, favouring MC-AdvC order; (b) discourse grounding, which favours AdvC-MC order; (c) semantic type,
which favours AdvC-MC order for conditional and temporally anterior relations and MC-AdvC order for temporally posterior and causal relations. As will be clear, the three motivations are quite different in nature, and their interaction is never fully predictable for any individual instance.

Haspelmath (2014) draws attention to the fact that a functionally motivated principle may compete with the systematicity of a grammar: specifically, the ‘economy’ principle stating that more frequent forms tend to be shorter than rarer ones can come into conflict with ‘system pressure’, the observation that grammatical rules affect large classes of items. A simple example is the generalization that singular forms in English are never longer than plural forms (boy–boys; sheep–sheep) while for some lexemes the plural form is more frequent: as Haspelmath shows, feathers is more frequent than feather, yet is longer; however, in Welsh, in which plurals also tend to be longer than singulars, the forms are pluen ‘feather’ and plu ‘feathers’. On the assumption that in Welsh, too, it is commoner to speak of feathers than of a single feather, the economy principle here has won out over system pressure. The realization that the system has its own properties that are in themselves functional does not warrant the conclusion that it is fully autonomous; rather, the fact that it involves rules that operate blindly is adaptive in enabling effortless communication (Givón 2009: 36).

A notion that is increasingly prominent in functionalist circles is ‘usage-based’. The use of this term tends to go hand in hand with an increasing commitment to an inductive methodology, both for the learner who generalizes over his/her experiences of language and for the analyst who derives conclusions from the inspection of a corpus. The core methodological assumption here is that distributions in corpora correlate sufficiently with the language user’s exposure to patterns and tendencies; in the above-mentioned case of Diessel (2005), for example, the assumption is that the patterns found in his data reflect speakers’ preferences, as constrained by the rivaling forces he identifies. Although the methodology is inductive, it is also steered top-down by the expectation that the factors constraining and explaining distributions will be ‘domain-general cognitive processes’ (Bybee 2010: 6–8), i.e. processes not specific to language. The most fundamental of these is categorization, again involving prototypes; among various other relevant processes are chunking, pattern detection, rich memory, analogy, sequential and statistical learning as well as cross-modal association. Since all of these are independently well justified in the cognitive sciences, the view is taken that language is an extension of already existent domains of cognition.

This usage-based position has led its exponents to relativize the notion of a language system as a monolithic structure. For Bybee (2010: 194–221), the emergence of language (and grammar) from other domains entails that the object of linguistic inquiry is a ‘complex adaptive system’ in which independent mechanisms create the illusion of structure. She compares languages to dunes (2010: 2, 201), which arise through myriad interactions of wind and sand but are fundamentally gradient and variable. What has appeared to some (especially in formal linguistics) as an autonomous structure is in this view a body of procedural knowledge that has built up through the routinization of tasks and their grouping into ‘chunks’. In morphosyntax, these chunks take on the form of constructions, which are conventional sequences of morphemes, words or phrases that may contain gaps for individual items and in the usage-based approach are the major units of form–meaning correspondence. Consider the example V the N away, as in dream the day away, while the hours away, dance the night away; notice that the V(erb) is intransitive (despite appearances), that the use of the definite article is the norm (dance a night away is infrequent), that away is not substitutable
(*dance the night off*) and that the N(oun) names a stretch of time; that the verb while only occurs in this construction; and that the construction, like the verb-particle construction, allows the alternative word order V away the N.

The question arises whether the emphasis in usage-based work on the determining role of cognitive factors does not dilute the principles of functionalism. Nuyts (2005) represents an attempt to determine whether functional can be distinguished from cognitive linguistics (see Chapter 29). He observes that there are real differences in what the functionalist and the cognitivist focus on, the former concentrating on grammatical structure and the latter on conceptualization and construal. There are major differences, too, in the type of analysis offered, with images playing a large part in cognitive-linguistic representations. Nevertheless, his major finding is that there is ultimately no possibility of an ironclad distinction and even talks of himself and others as ‘cognitive-functional linguists’. Rather than watering down functionalism, ‘an explicit and structural concern with the conceptual level and its interactions with the linguistic systems’ (2005: 96) would in Nuyts’s view strengthen functionalism’s perspective on the complexities of language.

In face of the fluidity of the distinctions between functional and cognitive linguistics, Gonzálvez-García and Butler (2006) have characterized the entire field as a multidimensional space. They take eleven approaches (or ‘models’) that have advertised themselves as functional, cognitive or constructionist and rate them, on the basis of published pronouncements, against a list of thirty-six features, formulated as statements. For each feature, the eleven models line up differently, yet the overall picture that emerges confirms that functionalists and cognitivists do group together and that there is a very strong overlap between functionalists and cognitivists, with nineteen of the thirty-six features being shared by both camps. See Butler and Gonzálvez-García (2014) for a much fuller and more up-to-date treatment.

### 30.4 Connections

As will have become clear, functional linguists are primarily focused on grammatical structures and on explaining them in terms of extralinguistic factors that predispose the language user to employ one structure rather than another. This brings functional linguistics into close contact or even overlap with the discipline of pragmatics (see Chapter 13), and specifically those subdomains of pragmatics which are concerned with the contextually determined interpretation of individual utterances. Among the realms of pragmatics implicated in these interdisciplinary connections are those that deal with presupposition, reference, deixis, anaphora, definiteness and indefiniteness, implicature and speech acts. Functional linguists invoke these notions when explaining differences in acceptability or in interpretation between sentences that are, in terms of representational meaning, identical. In the architecture of functional models, this is often reflected in the presence of separate modules or levels of analysis for semantic (or ideational) and pragmatic (or interpersonal) organization (cf. §§30.5.2–30.5.4).

It is against this background that functional-linguistic work attempts to understand alternative formulations in terms of distinct speaker intentions. Rather than being content to understand pairs like active versus passive, raising versus its absence or finite versus non-finite forms of adverbial clauses merely in terms of their formal relations, functionalists seek to track down the motivations behind the choices that are made for one or the other form in specific contexts. For example, one of the contexts in which a definite object can be placed in clause-initial position in English is where its presence in the shared knowledge of speaker and addressee can be assumed, as in (1):
(1) Mary has inherited a house and an apartment. The house she has decided to rent out, while the apartment she herself is going to occupy.

The definiteness of the noun phrases (NPs) *the house* and *the apartment* and their marked position at the beginning of their respective clauses in the second sentence are only possible if the appropriate context has been created, however that has been achieved – the same form could occur in a question that presupposes the information in the first sentence of (1), *Do you know what Mary is going to do with the house and the apartment she inherited?*

Similarly, from the functional perspective, anaphora is not treated as simply a relation between forms, between an anaphor and an antecedent, but as involving continuity of reference. An interesting example is discussed by Cornish (2010: 226):

(2) President Bush nominated Henry Paulson, the chief executive of Goldman Sachs, as US treasury secretary in place of John Snow. The 60-year-old investment banker is a China expert and keen environmentalist.

As Cornish points out, the NP *the 60-year-old investment banker*, with its definite reference, is presented as though it offered presupposed information. Although the content of the NP is new to the reader, the interplay of textual and contextual factors ensures that the discourse maintains its flow. In order to understand *the 60-year-old investment banker* as being coreferential with one of the three preceding names and specifically with *Henry Paulson* and not with *John Snow* or *President Bush*, the reader of (2) has recourse to inferential strategies. Such strategies have been thoroughly studied in pragmatics, notably in the work of Paul H. Grice and of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson. Their Maxim of Relation or Principle of Relevance respectively leads readers to expect a relation of relevance to hold between the content of the two sentences. This predisposes them to seek clues to determine which of the possible antecedents is the most likely one: by drawing on knowledge that Goldman Sachs is a major investment bank, the reader can identify Paulson as the man meant by the writer; s/he can also exclude Bush and Snow, since they have different professions. The information that Paulson is sixty years old is likely to be new to readers but it has been ‘smuggled’ into what is otherwise an NP with presupposed information; the reader may subconsciously recognize this as a typical procedure in journalistic prose.

As will have been apparent in examples (1) and (2), each of which constitutes a mini-discourse, the functionalist approach borrows insights not only from pragmatics but also from the discipline of discourse analysis (see Chapter 15). A characteristic tendency among functional linguists has been to look beyond the individual clause that was central to the initial preoccupations of the Prague School, not only bringing the co-text into play but also encompassing the grammatical properties of discourses. The functionalist emphasis on communication makes this a natural move, since human beings communicate in discourses rather than in individual clauses. Butler (2009: 9) has proposed that 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.
This programmatic statement clearly aims to bring functional linguistics very close to those forms of discourse analysis that prioritize the description of textual structures.

A rather different connection is that with typological linguistics (see Chapter 25). The functional view of language has been adopted by many prominent researchers in this area. Although the primary activity of typologists involves the classification of languages into structural types, for example in terms of their inventories of phonemes or their constituent order and thus may seem to be primarily formal in orientation, there has been a clear tendency for typologists to look for explanations for the patterns and trends they have discovered in terms of their function. Nichols (2007: 234), in a provocative article on typology, finds this claim to be ‘startling’, yet, as she admits, explanations in typology come from ‘all quarters – function, processing, cognition, acquisition, neuroanatomy, sociolinguistics, history, and language evolution’, but these are all areas that are functional in the broad sense of invoking the physical and psychological properties of the language user in his/her social and historico-cultural context.

The results of typological work frequently take the form of implicational hierarchies, statements of the form $A > B > C$, to be understood as meaning that if a language has property $C$, it will also have $A$ and $B$; if it lacks $C$ but has $B$, then it will also have $A$; having $A$ allows no predictions about the presence or absence of $B$ and $C$. This way of formulating things originated with Joseph Greenberg, the founding father of typological linguistics. A well-known example is the hierarchy subject $>$ object $>$ oblique $>$ adnominal possessor (simplified from Keenan and Comrie 1977), which pertains to the possibilities of forming relative clauses (which are extremely common across the languages of the world). Languages in which an adnominal possessor can appear in relative clauses, as in (3a), can also accept relativization on all higher positions (i.e. those to its left in the hierarchy), as can be seen for English in (3b) to (3d).

(3)  
\[\begin{array}{ll}
\text{a. the man } & \text{whose car broke down} \\
\text{b. the man } & \text{to whom I sold my car} \\
\text{c. the man } & \text{who(m) I saw driving past} \\
\text{d. the man } & \text{who was selling his car.}
\end{array}\]

The explanation for this hierarchy is sought in processing terms: possessors involve the embedding of one NP inside another (in (3a) whose inside the NP whose car); the oblique in (3b) is a single NP, but one marked by a preposition; and object NPs (as in (3c)) are usually more marked than subject NPs (as in (3d)), cf. the possibility of the objective form whom in (3c) but not (3d). As the hierarchy progresses from left to right, there is thus greater complexity of processing. Since languages will, according to the functionalist hypothesis, tend to favour solutions that increase ease of production for the speaker and ease of comprehension for the hearer, the effect is to promote language structures that do not progress far down the hierarchy, for example (in the most extreme case) by requiring all relativization to be on subjects only. Malagasy relativizes only on subjects; Kinyarwanda on subjects and objects; Tamil on subjects, objects and obliques; English and German on subjects, objects, obliques and possessors. Note that English, but not German, also permits relativization on standards of comparison: *A man than whom no one has better taste*/*ein Mann als wer niemand einen besseren Geschmack hat.

Language typology draws heavily upon documentary linguistics, since the major source of its data is the information encapsulated in grammars. That information has now to some extent been transferred to databases such as, notably, that underlying the World Atlas of
Documentary linguistics, as its name suggests, concerns itself with documentation of previously undescribed or poorly described languages. The dominant framework for the description of languages is nowadays ‘basic linguistic theory’, which can roughly be defined as traditional grammar, shorn of its errors and enriched by concepts developed in structuralism, early generative grammar and typology; the main aim is to describe languages in their own terms, without theoretical preconceptions. It is this kind of work that feeds most directly into functionalist typology. However, it is clear to functional typologists that the best descriptions are those that are both true to the language under description and informed by a cross-linguistic and functional analysis. Haspelmath (1999) gives the example of the ungrammaticality of English *the Joan’s book, often explained as being due to a ban on double filling of the determiner slot; but he shows that there is a functional explanation, one based on economy, which covers this example and also accounts for the existence of other languages, e.g. Hebrew, in which determiner and possessor are incompatible without vying for the same position, cf. ha-sefer ‘the book’ but sefer David (*ha-sefer David) ‘David’s book’.

Finally, mention should be made of certain strands of psycholinguistics (see Chapter 18) that have labelled themselves functionalist and have had an impact upon functional linguistics proper, notably in the extent to which functional models in linguistics have taken psycholinguistic evidence into account. The work of Dan Slobin has shared with functional-typological linguistics a strong interest in bringing in data from a wide range of languages and explaining findings in terms of the interaction of a variety of general principles of processing. One area he has developed is the study of the typology of motion events (Slobin 2004), elaborating earlier work on verb-framed and satellite-framed languages, those in which motion events are cardinally expressed in the form They entered the room dancing or They danced into the room respectively. Slobin broadens the description to include serializing languages, in which neither the manner nor the motion is dominant (Pseudo-English They dance enter room), which leads him to propose a third class of equipollently-framed languages.

Another expressly functionalist approach within psycholinguistics is that especially associated with Brian MacWhinney and Elizabeth Bates. Like Slobin’s work, theirs is strongly cross-linguistic, being concerned with child language acquisition, adult language processing and aphasia in various languages. They see linguistic form as involving morphosyntactic and suprasegmental channels of limited length, with a range of factors vying for position in those sequences. Their Competition Model (Bates and MacWhinney 1989) stresses how speakers seek to find a compromise between, on the one hand, the competing demands of mapping from semantic and pragmatic information to linguistic form and, on the other, constraints on information processing such as limitations on memory or the need to plan ahead. Linguistic forms are seen as containing clues which the addressee uses to compute the most likely interpretation: languages differ in how the various cues are weighted and interpreted, for example with respect to the ‘cue validity’ of clause-initial...
position, which in one language may be a vital cue to identifying the subject, the topic, or the verb, but in another may have no particular function for the interpreter. The Competition Model aligns strongly with the emergentist approaches to functionalism outlined in §30.2. A leading researcher in first-language acquisition who takes a functional-emergentist approach is Michael Tomasello; see the further reading.

30.5 Major groupings in current functionalism

The depiction of functionalism in the preceding sections has exemplified its diversity, while also insisting on its unity in its commitment to seeking explanations for the formal variety within and across languages in the realm of interpersonal communication. Although many functional linguists operate rather independently, there are a number of groupings that have come to particular international prominence in recent decades and which deserve mention here.

30.5.1 West Coast functionalism

Pride of place goes to what is worldwide the most salient but also the loosest of the groupings, originally associated with a number of universities on the West Coast of the United States, hence the (possibly obsolescent) name it has acquired. Joan Bybee, William Croft, Paul J. Hopper and Sandra A. Thompson are among the best-known members of this grouping, which now has increasingly settled around the heading ‘usage-based theory’, with strong links to a range of Construction Grammars. One eminent figure here is Talmy Givón. His adaptive approach to grammar has been a powerful force within linguistic functionalism. As its name suggests, the adaptive approach emphasizes the evolution of language, particularly the emergence of increasingly complex coding mechanisms, both in the individual and in the species. Grammar is seen as having evolved in lockstep with the phylogenetic development of a ‘theory of mind’ in the human being, which entails an ever-present concern with the ‘constantly shifting epistemic and deontic states’ (Givón 2010: 36) of dialogue partners. The different perspectives of the interlocutors, coupled with degrees of certainty, lead to scenarios for the emergence of such grammatical categories as illocution, propositional modality, negation and the like. A major emphasis in the adaptive approach has been on determining how to understand the efficiency and automaticity of grammar as rooted in independently justified principles of cognition and neurobiology.

30.5.2 Systemic functional linguistics (SFL)

The primary figure in SFL is M.A.K. Halliday, around whom a large, international school of followers has formed. Halliday, originally from the United Kingdom, moved to Australia in mid-career and it is there that the main dynamic of this academic community is now located. The core concept of SFL is ‘meaning’. For Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2013) the language system represents potential meaning and is layered into at least four strata – context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology – where each stratum is said to realize the preceding one. This potential meaning is instantiated in individual texts, as filtered through registers (i.e. a typology of text types). Methodologically, SFL work concentrates on texts from various registers in order to derive conclusions about the system of choices available to the language user. This system is structured as a set of ‘system networks’, representing these choices in accordance with three metafunctions. The
ideational metafunction includes choices concerned with experience and is reflected above all in the semantic structure of clauses; the interpersonal metafunction relates to choices relating to speech roles (speaker, hearer), mood (declarative, interrogative, …) and relevant lexical choices; and the textual metafunction is a matter of managing the flow of discourse, covering given/new information, clause-initial position (Theme) as well as grammatical and lexical cohesion. SFL understands itself as a functional theory of language, in which the (lexico)grammar (SFG) has an essential place, one that is closely integrated into the whole model, taking in context, register and genre. A distinctive feature of SFL is that one of the main criteria for judging its success is held to be the extent to which it contributes to social intervention in various applied areas, areas that have seemed rather peripheral to many linguists of other persuasions, such as language pedagogy, literary analysis, multimodality, identity studies and semiotics. SFL work on genres as recurrent configurations of culturally inscribed practices has impacted school syllabi in Australia. A particular focus in recent years has been on appraisal, or the language of evaluation. Robin Fawcett (2000) has developed a version of SFG that combines great explicitness with an orientation to cognition and interaction.

30.5.3 Functional discourse grammar (FDG)

FDG arose in the first decade of the twenty-first century as a continuation of Functional Grammar (FG, Dik 1997) as developed by Simon C. Dik and his followers in the Netherlands and elsewhere. FG was primarily oriented to the individual clause, analysing it by means of postulating an underlying semantic representation which motivated the grammatical properties of the clause under analysis. For example, the representation of a noun phrase was as a ‘term’ with such pragmatic, semantic and syntactic functions as Topic, Agent and Subject respectively. The model gave a central place to the lexicon as a store of predicates from which the underlying semantic representation was built up. A major orientation of FG was to ‘typological adequacy’, which entailed an attempt to develop a set of categories and functions from which an analyst could draw in comparing the languages of the world. FG also aimed to achieve ‘pragmatic adequacy’ and ‘psychological adequacy’; the former had become the principal focus of most FG researchers around the time of Dik’s tragically early death in 1995. It was FG’s inability to deal satisfactorily with the impact of discourse factors on morphosyntactic structure that stimulated Kees Hengeveld to develop Functional Discourse Grammar. FDG (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008) offers a major enrichment and rethink of FG, with four modular levels of analysis, each of which is hierarchically structured: there are two formulation levels for representational semantics and interpersonal pragmatics/rhetoric and two encoding levels for morphosyntax and phonology. Whereas FG constructed its representations bottom-up, the dynamics of FDG are top-down, taking the interpersonal level as its starting point. FDG has preserved FG’s strong orientation to typology, for example providing a classification of languages in terms of their alignment properties: thus, Tagalog has pragmatic alignment, Acheh representational alignment, and Basque morphosyntactic alignment. As its name suggests, FDG also has focused on the wholesale integration of discoursal (subjective) factors into grammar, for example distinguishing interpersonal from representational evidentiality. Unlike SFL, FDG aims primarily to contribute to theoretical linguistics rather than aiming for practical applications.
30.5.4 Role and reference grammar (RRG)

RRG (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997) is so called because of its concern with semantic roles and with reference tracking in discourse, but in fact deals with much more, presenting a fully-fledged theory of the morphosyntactic and semantic structure of natural languages. It shares several presuppositions with FG and FDG, not least the aim of achieving typological neutrality. Rejecting the dominance of thinking based on the categories of English, Van Valin seeks to develop an approach that is, as he puts it, equally valid for Lakhota, Tagalog or Dyirbal. RRG’s syntactic analysis is consequently free of many elements that are not universal, such as the Verb Phrase; instead it is characterized by notions that are more semantically inspired such as Core, Nucleus, Predicate, Argument, etc. This syntactic analysis is mapped by means of an explicit algorithm onto a semantic analysis, which is a development of the work of Zeno Vendler on Aktionsart and of David Dowty on decomposition. RRG work is known for its precise and detailed semantic analyses, which are also reflected in its highly developed lexicon, which encompasses a number of processes taken in other theories to be syntactic, such as causativization and noun incorporation. RRG offers a detailed typology of interclausal relations, which form a continuum, leading from sentential coordination, the loosest linkage where the components are distinct events, to nuclear co-subordination, the tightest, where the two components are facets of a single event. RRG recognizes a further overlay of discourse-pragmatics on the mapping between syntax and semantics, known as Focus Structure Projection: the distinction between actual and potential focus domain has allowed RRG to provide persuasive analyses of the positioning of content interrogatives (wh-words) and the constraints on their occurrence. RRG has found applications in psycho- and neurolinguistics, where its combination of formal rigour and a semantically informed syntax have been integrated into studies of child language acquisition and adult language processing; there has also been close cooperation with Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez and Ricardo Mairal Usón’s Lexical-Constructional Model under development in Spain.

30.6 Convergence

As suggested in the introduction, the old opposition between formal and functional linguistics has generally yielded to at least an atmosphere of live-and-let-live and on occasions to budding convergence. At the prominent Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication, for example, both formal and functional approaches coexist, engendering interesting discussions and even co-authorship of papers. The functionalist Haspelmath (2000: 235), in a review article on Newmeyer (1998), had already called for just such a ‘dialog across the gulf of mutual incomprehension that separates the two orientations’. Haspelmath’s valuable point is that the two do not differ so much in their basic assumptions as in their goals (pp. 236, 238); if this is true, then the two approaches can come to be seen as complementary rather than inimical. If one’s goal is to characterize the language system per se, then contextual factors influencing that system must be ignored; if one’s goal is to explain the language system, then they cannot, and this difference is a possible basis for a division of labour (pp. 239, 241).

This point has been picked up by Peter Harder (2013), who observes how the two camps have disputed over shared concepts like ‘subject’ or ‘gender’, the one minimizing, the other maximizing motivation, while the matter could (and by implication, should) be solved by disinterested empirical research. On the assumption that it is the task of linguistics to
characterize both what Harder calls the ‘infrastructure’ that underlies our capacity to use language and the sentences that a particular language community produces in verbal interaction, then it is merely a matter of which end one starts at.

As has been seen in this chapter, there is variation among functionalists in the extent to which they recognize structures of language as objects of description: those of a more emergentist or usage-based persuasion will tend to see structure as evanescent or illusory while others point to the fact that the speaker, in adopting a particular language to communicate in, submits to the conventions of that language. If the language requires all clauses to have subjects, the speaker has no option, even where the subject has no meaning, as in English *It is snowing*; if the language assigns gender to all nouns, the speaker again cannot ignore this brute fact, even in cases where gender has no semantic import or conflicts with semantic expectations. Yet neither subject nor gender is without function within the structure as a whole (what these functions are is still a matter of disagreement); but both have come about through the functionally justified process of conventionalization. What is more, without function, structure would not be necessary (Harder 2013): utterances have the complex structure that they do because they fulfil an organized network of communicative functions, and aspects of that structure (obligatory subject, obligatory gender assignment) can simply be conventionalized requirements that contribute to the regularity and predictability of structures.

It is a functionalism of this latter type, one that emphasizes the interpenetration of function and structure, seeking to maximize the functional account of linguistic structure while recognizing the existence and communicative advantages of conventionalized aspects of that structure, which is best positioned to achieve convergence within linguistics as a whole. The convergence may also be coming from the formalist side: Golumbia (2010), for example, has argued that the Chomskyan Minimalist Programme, with its maximally pared down grammatical component, is functionalist in its conceptual foundations. In any case, the current picture is one in which the functionalist tradition has been fully integrated into the discipline.

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**Notes**

1 Although this is the most familiar appellation, the correct name is the Prague Linguistic Circle.
3 Tellingly, the main organ of the Prague School has been the *Prague Studies in* (later: *Bulletin of*) *Mathematical Linguistics*.
4 As Chris Butler has reminded me, functionalism is a ‘broad church’ and also embraces views, for example in the emergentist and usage-based groups, where questions of structure, acceptability and the distinction between interpersonal and representational meaning are of much less interest.
Further reading

Bischoff and Jany (2013); Butler (2003); Butler and Gonzálvez-Garcia (2014); Croft (1995); Givón (1995); Harder (2010); Nichols (1984); Sornicola (2011); Tomasello (1998).

References


