

COURSE MODULE

**Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL):
Theory and Practice in Discourse analysis**

Linguistik Terapan S2 FBSB UNY

Dr. Rohali, M.Hum



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**Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): Theory and Practice in Discourse
analysis**

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Discourse analysis**

Rohali



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@ Rohali

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PREFACE



This book, *Course Module: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): Theory and Practice in Discourse Analysis*, is intended as a practical and accessible guide for students, educators, and researchers interested in understanding how language works in social contexts. Based on the work of M.A.K. Halliday, SFL views language as a tool for meaning-making, allowing readers to explore how words and structures serve ideational, interpersonal, and textual purposes.

The course module introduces key concepts such as transitivity, mood, Theme-Rheme structure, and the context of situation and culture. Each chapter combines theoretical explanations with examples, exercises, and discussion prompts, encouraging readers to actively analyze texts and apply SFL principles in real-life communication.

By linking theory with practice, this book also demonstrates the relevance of SFL in language education, curriculum development, and discourse analysis. We hope this module will inspire readers to appreciate language as a functional, social, and meaningful resource, while equipping them with practical tools for analysis and teaching.

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COURSE 1

Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): Theory, History, and Basic Principles

1.1 Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is one of the most influential linguistic theories of the 20th and 21st centuries. Developed by **M.A.K. Halliday** beginning in the 1960s, SFL views language not merely as an abstract system of rules but as a **social semiotic system**—a resource people use to make meaning in social contexts (Halliday, 1978). The term “systemic” emphasizes that language offers speakers **choices** at different levels of grammar, while the term “functional” underlines that these choices serve specific communicative purposes.

Unlike formalist traditions (e.g., Chomsky an generative grammar), which focus primarily on syntax and universal grammar, SFL takes a **meaning-oriented perspective**. It foregrounds how people use language in **real-life contexts**—education, politics, literature, media—to enact relationships, share knowledge, and organize discourse.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the theory, tracing its **historical development**, outlining its **basic principles**, and highlighting **Halliday’s legacy** in contemporary linguistics.

1.2 Historical Background of SFL

SFL's roots can be traced back to **British linguistics** of the mid-20th century, particularly to **J.R. Firth**. Firth (1957) emphasized the study of meaning in context, arguing that linguistic analysis must go beyond the sentence to consider the **situational context** in which utterances occur. His famous dictum, *"You shall know a word by the company it keeps"*, stressed the importance of collocation and contextual meaning.

Building on Firth's ideas, Halliday developed a more comprehensive framework. Halliday was also influenced by European functionalist traditions, particularly the **Prague School**, which emphasized the communicative function of language and concepts like **Theme and Rheme**.

By the 1960s, Halliday had formulated the foundations of SFL, introducing the concept of **metafunctions**—three simultaneous functions of language (a) **Ideational**, (b) **Interpersonal**, (c) **Textual**. His seminal book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985, 1994, 2004, 2014 editions with Christian Matthiessen) systematized SFL into a global framework.

1.3 Theoretical Orientation

At its principle, SFL is built on three **interrelated dimensions** of language:

- a. **Language as Social Semiotic.** Halliday (1978) defined language as "a social semiotic," meaning that it is both a symbolic system and a social resource. Unlike semiotics in general (which studies all signs), language is the most powerful semiotic system because it allows humans to make infinite meanings.
- b. **Stratification.** Language is viewed as a **stratified system** with different levels (a) **Semantics**: the level of meaning, (b) **Lexicogrammar**: the level of wording (syntax and lexis), (c) **Phonology/Graphology**: the level of expression (sound /writing). These levels are connected by the principle of **realization**—meanings are realized through wordings, and wordings are realized through sounds or writing.
- c. **System and Choice.** The term "systemic" refers to the idea that grammar is a **system of choices**, not just a set of rules. For instance, when constructing a sentence, a speaker chooses between **declarative** vs. **interrogative**, **active** vs. **passive**, etc. Each choice enacts a particular meaning in context.

1.4 Basic Principles of SFL

1.4.1 Metafunctions of Language

One of the cornerstones of SFL is that language serves **three metafunctions simultaneously** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014):

- a. **Ideational metafunction:** construes human experience.
- b. **Interpersonal metafunction:** enacts social interactions.
- c. **Textual metafunction:** organizes discourse into coherent texts.

These metafunctions are not separate but work together in every clause. For example:

“Could you pass me the book?”

Ideational: Refers to an action (passing the book).

Interpersonal: Expresses politeness through modality (“could you”).

Textual: Organized as a question with “you” as Theme.

1.4.2 Register: Field, Tenor, and Mode

SFL also emphasizes the concept of **register**, which refers to the variation of language according to context (Halliday, 1985). It is described through three variables:

- a. **Field:** what is happening (subject matter, activity)
- b. **Tenor:** who is involved (roles and relationships)
- c. **Mode:** how communication is carried out (spoken/written, formal/informal)

1.4.3 Genre and Culture

Building on Halliday’s framework, Martin (1992) extended SFL to include **genre theory**, which analyzes how texts are staged according to social purposes. Genres are linked to the **context of culture** and reflect broader social norms.

1.5 Halliday’s Legacy and Influence

Halliday’s contributions transformed applied linguistics and inspired research in multiple fields:

- a. **Education:** Genre-based pedagogy and literacy development (Christie & Derewianka, 2008).

- b. **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** Language and ideology (Fairclough, 1995).
- c. **Translation Studies:** Functional approaches to equivalence (House, 2015).
- d. **Computational Linguistics:** Corpus-based SFL applications.

Halliday's intellectual legacy is preserved through his collaborations, particularly with Christian Matthiessen, and through schools of thought in Australia, the UK, and beyond. His influence remains strong in both theoretical and applied linguistics.

1.6 Conclusion

Systemic Functional Linguistics stands as a powerful framework for understanding language as a **meaning-making resource** in society. By integrating the notions of **system**, **function**, and **context**, SFL offers tools not only for linguistic description but also for applied purposes in education, discourse analysis, translation, and beyond. The subsequent chapters will explore the **metafunctions and systems** of SFL in more depth, leading to their practical applications in pedagogy and discourse studies.

1.7 Interactive Discussion

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday, views language as a **social semiotic system** that creates meaning in context. It emphasizes **function over form**, focusing on **how language choices achieve social, interpersonal, and textual purposes**. The three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—along with **context of situation and culture**, are central to understanding and applying SFL.

1. How does SFL differ from traditional grammar approaches in analyzing language, and why is the functional perspective significant?
2. What are the three metafunctions in SFL, and how do they interact to convey meaning in different texts?
3. Why is understanding the context of situation (field, tenor, mode) important for analyzing language according to SFL?
4. In what ways can the historical development of SFL, especially Halliday's contributions, help us understand its theoretical foundations and applications?
5. How can SFL's principles be applied in real-life settings such as education, media analysis, or professional communication?

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COURSE 2

Ideational Meta function (Representation of Experience and Knowledge)

2.1 Introduction

The **ideational metafunction** is one of the three central metafunctions in **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, alongside interpersonal and textual metafunctions. While the interpersonal metafunction concerns social interaction and the textual metafunction concerns organization of discourse, the **ideational metafunction** is primarily concerned with **how language represents human experience and constructs knowledge** about the world (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In other words, the ideational metafunction enables speakers and writers to construe **what is happening, who is involved, and the circumstances surrounding events**. It allows language users to describe, interpret, and evaluate the world around them, both physical and abstract. This makes it essential not only for everyday communication but also for academic discourse, scientific explanation, and knowledge building.

2.2 The Two Dimensions of Ideational Meaning

According to Halliday (1985, 1994, 2014), the ideational metafunction is realized through **two dimensions**:

- a. **Experiential Meaning.** Represents the content of experience—events, states, processes, and participants. Realized primarily through the **transitivity system**, which identifies:
 - b. **Processes** (types of actions or states, e.g., material, mental, relational).
 - c. **Participants** (people, things, or entities involved).
 - d. **Circumstances** (time, place, manner, cause). For example: “*The student (Actor) reads (Material process) the book (Goal) in the library (Circumstance).*”
- e. **Logical Meaning**
 - (a) Represents logical relations between clauses, such as cause-effect, condition, contrast, or sequence.
 - (b) Realized through **clause complexes** (parataxis and hypotaxis).

Example: “*She studied hard because she wanted to pass the exam.*”

Two clauses linked by a causal relationship. Thus, experiential meaning deals with **what is represented within a clause**, while logical meaning deals with **how clauses are related to each other**.

2.3 Transitivity System: Representing Experience

The **transitivity system** is the core mechanism through which experiential meaning is realized. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) identify six major process types:

- a. **Material Processes (Doing, Happening).** Actions, events, or activities. Example: “*The engineer built the bridge.*”
- b. **Mental Processes (Sensing).** Cognition, perception, emotion. Example: “*She believes in justice.*”
- c. **Relational Processes (Being, Having).** Identification, attribution, or possession. Example: “*The sky is blue.*”
- d. **Behavioral Processes (Behaving).** Psychological or physiological behaviors. Example: “*He yawned.*”
- e. **Verbal Processes (Saying).** Acts of communication. Example: “*The teacher explained the topic.*”
- f. **Existential Processes (Existing).** Expressing existence. Example: “*There is a problem.*”

Each process type constructs a different perspective on reality. Through them, speakers represent **actions, thoughts, relationships, communication, behaviors, and existence**.

2.4 Logical Relations: Clause Complexes

Beyond single clauses, the ideational metafunction extends to how clauses combine to represent logical relations.

- a. **Parataxis:** Clauses linked equally (e.g., “*She studied and she passed.*”).
- b. **Hypotaxis:** Clauses linked unequally, with one dependent on the other (e.g., “*She studied because she wanted to pass.*”).

These relations enable speakers to express **causality, temporality, contrast, and condition**, essential in constructing coherent arguments, narratives, and scientific explanations (Eggins, 2004).

2.5 Ideational Meaning in Different Registers

The role of ideational meaning varies across registers (Halliday, 1978; Martin & Rose, 2008):

- a. **Scientific Discourse:** Heavy use of relational and material processes to describe phenomena (e.g., “*Water evaporates at 100°C.*”).
- b. **Literary Texts:** Frequent use of mental and behavioral processes to depict inner experiences (e.g., “*She felt a chill in her heart.*”).
- c. **Media and Political Discourse:** Strategic use of transitivity to assign responsibility or avoid blame (Fairclough, 1995). For instance, “*Mistakes were made*” (passive voice) obscures the actor.

This demonstrates how ideational choices are not neutral but tied to ideology and knowledge representation.

2.6 Educational Implications

The ideational metafunction has significant implications for **education and literacy development**. Research in the Australian “Sydney School” (Christie & Martin, 2007; Rose & Martin, 2012) highlights that students’ ability to succeed in academic contexts depends on their mastery of how ideational meaning is constructed in disciplinary genres.

- a. **Science classrooms:** Students need to learn how material and relational processes represent cause-effect and classification.
- b. **History classrooms:** Students must use relational and verbal processes to evaluate sources and reconstruct events.
- c. **Language learning:** Learners must understand how to construe meaning across different process types in English and their own languages.

Explicit teaching of transitivity and clause complexes helps learners gain control over disciplinary knowledge construction.

2.7 Example of Ideational Analysis

Consider the sentence: “*The government implemented new policies to address climate change.*”

- a. Process: Material (“implemented”)
- b. Actor: The government
- c. Goal: new policies
- d. Circumstance: to address climate change (purpose)

This analysis shows how ideational meaning structures responsibility (government as Actor), action (implementation), and purpose (addressing climate change). A different wording (e.g., “*New policies were implemented*”) would obscure agency, which has implications in political discourse.

2.9 Conclusion

The **ideational metafunction** is central to how humans use language to **represent experience and knowledge**. Through the transitivity system and logical clause complexes, speakers and writers construct worlds of action, thought, and relation. Its application in discourse analysis, education, and ideology critique demonstrates its significance beyond linguistic theory.

As the first of the metafunctions, the ideational function provides the foundation for understanding how language encodes **what is happening**—which will be complemented in the next chapter by how language encodes **social relationships** through the interpersonal metafunction.

2.10 Interactive Discussion Material:

The ideational metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) focuses on **how language represents experiences, actions, events, and knowledge**. It involves the **transitivity system**, which analyzes (a) **Processes**: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, existential, (b) **Participants**: actors, goals, sensors, phenomena, and (c) **Circumstances**: time, place, manner, cause, etc.

This framework allows learners to understand **how texts encode meaning** and represent reality.

1. What is the ideational metafunction, and why is it important in understanding how language represents experiences and knowledge?
2. How does the transitivity system (processes, participants, circumstances) help in analyzing text meaning?
3. Can you identify differences in how ideational meaning is represented in spoken versus written texts?
4. How can analyzing ideational meaning reveal underlying ideologies or perspectives in a text?
5. In what ways can understanding the ideational metafunction support effective communication, teaching, or text production?

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COURSE 3

Interpersonal Metafunction (Interaction and Social Relationships)

3.1 Introduction

The **interpersonal metafunction** is the second metafunction in **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, complementing the ideational and textual metafunctions. While the ideational metafunction represents experience and knowledge, the **interpersonal metafunction enacts social relationships**, expressing attitudes, judgments, and negotiations of meaning between speakers and listeners or writers and readers (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In simple terms, the interpersonal metafunction is about how language is used to **interact, influence, and position oneself** in relation to others. It answers questions like:

Who is speaking or writing?

What role do they take (authority, equality, solidarity)?

How do they evaluate and persuade?

Thus, this metafunction is crucial for understanding communication as a **social exchange**.

3.2 The System of MOOD

The **MOOD system** is the primary grammatical resource through which interpersonal meaning is realized. It organizes clauses according to their interactive function (Eggins, 2004):

- Declarative** – used to **give information**. Example: “*The meeting starts at 9.*”
- Interrogative** – used to **ask for information**. Example: “*When does the meeting start?*”
- Imperative** – used to **give commands or instructions**. Example: “*Start the meeting now.*”

Each mood type reflects a different **speech role** (giving/asking, information/goods-&-services). According to Halliday (1994), language interaction can be mapped as:

Speech Function Commodity Exchanged Example

Statement	Information	“It is raining.”
Question	Information	“Is it raining?”
Command	Goods/Services	“Close the window.”
Offer	Goods/Services	“Shall I close the window?”

This framework shows how language not only conveys information but also **manages social transactions**.

3.3 Modality: **Expressing Probability, Obligation, and Attitude**

Another essential resource of the interpersonal metafunction is **modality**, which encodes degrees of certainty, obligation, or inclination (Paltridge, 2012).

- Modalization (information exchange):** Probability (*might, must, certainly*). Usuality (*always, sometimes, never*)
- Modulation (goods-&-services exchange):** Obligation (*should, must, have to*). Inclination (*willing to, eager to*). Example:

“*She must be the new teacher.*” (probability, high certainty)

“*You should finish your homework.*” (obligation, medium force)

Modality thus allows speakers to **negotiate stance, authority, and politeness** in interaction.

3.4 Appraisal Theory: Beyond Grammar

To extend the analysis of interpersonal meaning, Martin & White (2005) developed **Appraisal Theory**, which explores how evaluative language is used to express attitudes, judgments, and emotions. Appraisal has three main systems:

- a. **Attitude** – expressing feelings (affect), judgments of behavior (ethics/morality), and appreciation (aesthetics, value). Example: *“She is a brilliant leader”* (judgment + appreciation).
- b. **Engagement** – acknowledging other voices and positions. Example: *“Some argue that...”*, *“It is possible that...”*.
- c. **Graduation** – scaling intensity or focus. Example: *“This is slightly important”* vs. *“This is extremely important.”*

Appraisal analysis helps uncover subtle positioning strategies in media, politics, and literature.

3.5 Interpersonal Meaning in Spoken vs. Written Discourse

The enactment of interpersonal meaning differs across spoken and written contexts:

- a. **Spoken language**: Rich in questions, imperatives, and modal expressions (e.g., classroom interaction, everyday conversation).
- b. **Written language**: More restrained but still negotiates stance, especially in academic writing (e.g., *“It seems that the results suggest a correlation...”*).

In political speeches, interpersonal resources are often used strategically to align audiences, build credibility, and persuade (Fairclough, 1995).

3.6 Example Analysis of Interpersonal Meaning

Consider a sentence from a political speech: Example: *“We must work together to protect our nation.”*

- a. **Mood**: Declarative (statement).
- b. **Modality**: Obligation (“must”).
- c. **Appraisal**: Positive judgment of collective action (“work together”).

The speaker adopts an authoritative stance, using modality to **compel agreement** and solidarity. If the sentence were *“Perhaps we should work together,”* the weaker modality would reduce authority and invite negotiation.

3.7 Pedagogical Implications

Understanding interpersonal meaning is vital in education (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012):

- a. Students must learn how to shift mood choices according to context (formal vs. informal communication).
- b. Awareness of modality helps learners control levels of certainty, politeness, and obligation.
- c. Appraisal resources enable critical reading of texts, especially in media literacy (identifying bias, persuasion).

For instance, teaching students to recognize evaluative language in news reports helps them distinguish fact from opinion.

3.8 Critiques and Developments

Some critiques of the interpersonal metafunction include:

- a. Overemphasis on grammar, potentially neglecting non-verbal aspects of interaction (gestures, intonation).
- b. Ambiguity in categorizing modality (e.g., “should” can express advice or obligation).

Recent developments address these by expanding SFL into **multimodal discourse analysis**, where gestures, visuals, and sound also enact interpersonal relationships (Kress, 2010).

3.9 Conclusion

The **interpersonal metafunction** highlights language as a resource for **enacting roles, relationships, and attitudes**. Through MOOD, modality, and appraisal, speakers and writers negotiate meanings, establish authority, express emotions, and align with or distance themselves from others.

In academic and social life, understanding interpersonal meaning enables us to see how texts persuade, include, exclude, or position readers and listeners. It is a crucial complement to the ideational metafunction, which represents experience.

The next chapter will turn to the **textual metafunction**, which organizes ideational and interpersonal meanings into coherent discourse.

3.10 Interactive Discussion Material:

The interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) examines **how language enacts social relationships, expresses attitudes, and negotiates power**. Key elements include: (a) **Mood**: declarative, interrogative, imperative, (b) **Modality**: possibility, necessity, obligation, probability, (c) **Appraisal and evaluation**: expressing judgments, attitudes, and stance

This metafunction helps learners understand how **language shapes social meaning and interaction**.

1. What is the interpersonal metafunction, and how does it help us understand interaction and social relationships in language?
2. How do declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses convey different interpersonal meanings?
3. In what ways does modality influence the strength of obligation, probability, or certainty in communication?
4. How can the interpersonal metafunction reveal power dynamics, politeness strategies, or social roles in texts?
5. How can understanding the interpersonal metafunction improve communication skills in professional, academic, or social contexts?

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COURSE 4

Textual Metafunction (Text Structure and Organization)

4.1 Introduction

The **textual metafunction** is the third core metafunction in **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, complementing the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. While the ideational metafunction represents experience and the interpersonal metafunction enacts social relationships, the textual metafunction focuses on **how language organizes information into coherent texts**.

Halliday (1978, 1985) describes the textual metafunction as the resource through which speakers and writers **create cohesive and contextually appropriate discourse**, ensuring that their messages are interpretable and connected. In essence, it answers the question: *“How is language organized so that it flows meaningfully?”*

This chapter explores the textual metafunction, emphasizing **theme and rheme, information structure, cohesion**, and the integration of textual meaning across clauses and paragraphs.

4.2 The Concept of Theme and Rheme

One of the central mechanisms of the textual metafunction is the **Theme-Rheme structure** (Halliday, 1994):

- a. **Theme:** the point of departure of a clause; what the clause is “about.”
- b. **Rheme:** the remainder of the clause; what is being said about the Theme.

Example:

“The students (Theme) completed their assignments on time (Rheme).”

The **Theme** provides continuity and guides the reader’s attention, while the **Rheme** delivers new information. Correctly managing theme and rheme ensures **logical flow, coherence, and emphasis** in texts.

4.3 Textual Cohesion

Textual cohesion refers to **linguistic devices that tie sentences and clauses together**, creating a sense of unity (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion operates on multiple levels:

- a. **Reference** – using pronouns, demonstratives, or articles to point to entities: Example: *“Mary went to the library. She borrowed a book.”* (“She” refers back to “Mary”).
- b. **Substitution and Ellipsis** – replacing words or phrases to avoid repetition: Example: *“I like the red dress, but she prefers the blue one.”*
- c. **Conjunction** – linking clauses logically: (a) Additive (*and, also*), (b) Adversative (*but, however*), (c) Causal (*because, therefore*), (d) Temporal (*then, afterwards*)
- d. **Lexical Cohesion** – repetition, synonyms, or hyponyms: Example: *“Dog... animal... pet...”*

Cohesive devices **signal relationships between ideas**, enhancing comprehension and textual integrity.

4.4 Information Structure and Given/New Information

The textual metafunction also manages **information flow**, distinguishing **Given (old) vs. New information** (Halliday, 1985).

- a. **Given information:** already known or inferable by the listener/reader.
- b. **New information:** introduces novelty, advancing the discourse.

Example: *“The teacher (Given) explained a new concept (New).”*

Effective texts maintain a balance, ensuring **readers are oriented** and information is presented in a coherent progression.

4.5 Cohesion Across Paragraphs and Texts

Textual metafunction extends beyond single clauses to **paragraphs and entire texts**. Cohesion is achieved through:

- a. **Lexical chains:** recurring key terms across sentences or paragraphs.
- b. **Thematic progression:** introducing, developing, and concluding topics.
- c. **Anaphoric and cataphoric referencing:** linking pronouns or phrases forward and backward.

For example, in an academic essay, the thesis statement acts as the central theme, with each paragraph developing subthemes (rheme) while maintaining continuity.

4.6 Genre and Textual Metafunction

Martin (1992) emphasizes that textual organization is shaped by **genre**, which structures texts according to social purpose:

- a. **Narrative:** Orientation → Complication → Resolution
- b. **Exposition:** Thesis → Argument → Conclusion
- c. **Report:** Description → Classification → Summary

Textual metafunction ensures that ideational and interpersonal meanings are **arranged to fulfill genre-specific expectations**, enabling readers to recognize and interpret the text effectively.

4.7 Example of Textual Analysis

Consider this paragraph:

“The government announced new environmental policies. Experts praised the initiative. However, critics warned that implementation might be slow.”

Analysis:

- a. **Theme-Rheme:** “The government” (Theme) → “announced new environmental policies” (Rheme)
- b. **Cohesion:** “However” (adversative conjunction), pronoun reference, lexical repetition (“policies”)

- c. **Information flow:** Moves from initial announcement (Given) to expert evaluation (New) to critique (New)

The paragraph exemplifies how textual metafunction organizes **information coherently and logically** for readers.

4.8 Pedagogical Implications

Teaching textual metafunction is essential for **academic literacy and writing skills** (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012):

- a. Students learn to structure sentences using **Theme-Rheme patterns**.
- b. Cohesive devices are explicitly taught to maintain **flow and clarity**.
- c. Recognizing given/new information aids **summarizing, paraphrasing, and argumentation**.

This is particularly valuable in writing essays, research reports, and narratives.

4.9 Critiques and Developments

While textual metafunction provides powerful tools for analyzing cohesion and structure, critiques include:

- a. Focus on **linear textual flow** may underrepresent multimodal texts (images, charts).
- b. Some scholars argue that **theme-rheme analysis** can be subjective, especially in complex sentences.

Recent SFL developments extend textual analysis to **multimodal discourse**, examining how textual cohesion is achieved through **visual, auditory, and digital modalities** (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

4.10 Conclusion

The **textual metafunction** is crucial for understanding how ideational and interpersonal meanings are organized into **coherent, meaningful texts**. Through **Theme-Rheme structuring, cohesion, and information management**, writers and speakers guide readers' attention, maintain logical flow, and fulfill genre-specific purposes.

Mastering textual metafunction supports both **critical reading and effective writing**, bridging language knowledge with practical communication. The next chapter will focus on the **transitivity system**, a fundamental tool for representing ideational meaning at the clause level.

4.11 Interactive Discussion

The textual metafunction in SFL examines **how texts are structured, organized, and made coherent**. Key elements include (a) **Theme-Rheme structure**: organizing clauses to highlight given and new information, (b) **Cohesion**: connecting sentences through reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical ties, (c) **Information flow**: ensuring clarity and readability, (d) **Genre awareness**: structuring texts according to purpose and audience. Understanding these features enables learners to **analyze and produce coherent, well-organized texts**.

1. What is the textual metafunction, and why is it important in organizing and structuring information in texts?
2. How does the Theme-Rheme structure influence the flow and coherence of a text?
3. In what ways do cohesive devices (reference, substitution, conjunction, ellipsis, lexical cohesion) contribute to textual organization?
4. How can understanding textual metafunction improve writing and reading comprehension across different genres?
5. How does awareness of textual metafunction help in interpreting meaning, emphasis, and perspective in a text?

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COURSE 5

Transitivity System (Process, Participant, and Circumstance)

5.1 Introduction

The **transitivity system** is a central component of the **ideational metafunction** in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It provides the **grammatical tools for representing experience**, describing **what happens, who is involved, and under what circumstances** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Transitivity analysis enables linguists, educators, and discourse analysts to examine **how language encodes reality**, including agency, responsibility, and social roles. In academic writing, political discourse, and media communication, choices in transitivity affect how events are framed, who is portrayed as active or passive, and which participants are foregrounded or backgrounded.

This chapter explores the **process types, participant roles, and circumstantial elements** of transitivity, with examples and applications.

5.2 The Concept of Transitivity

Transitivity refers to **how clauses construe experience** by representing:

- a. **Process** – the type of action, event, or state.
- b. **Participant** – the entities involved in the process.

- c. **Circumstance** – the contextual details surrounding the process (e.g., time, place, manner).

Halliday (1985) emphasizes that all three elements must be analyzed together to capture the **full experiential meaning** of a clause.

5.3 Process Types

Halliday (1994, 2014) identifies six major process types:

5.3.1 Material Processes (Doing, Happening)

Material processes represent **actions or events**, often physical or observable.

- a. **Participants:** Actor (doer), Goal (recipient of action)
- b. **Example:** “*The farmer (Actor) planted the seeds (Goal) in the field (Circumstance).*”

Material processes are crucial in **narratives, procedural texts, and reports**, emphasizing **agency and outcomes**.

5.3.2 Mental Processes (Sensing)

Mental processes encode **cognition, perception, emotion, or desire**.

Participants: Senser (experiencer), Phenomenon (object of thought or feeling). **Example:** “*She (Senser) believes (Process) in justice (Phenomenon).*”

They allow texts to express **subjective experience, judgment, and evaluation**, common in personal narratives, literature, and opinion writing.

5.3.3 Relational Processes (Being, Having)

Relational processes express **identification, attribution, or possession**.

Participants: Carrier and Attribute (for identifying) or Token and Value (for equating). **Example:** “*The sky (Carrier) is (Process) blue (Attribute).*”

These processes are prominent in **descriptive texts, scientific discourse, and definitions**, constructing **states, properties, and categories**.

5.3.4 Behavioral Processes (Behaving)

Behavioral processes reflect **physiological or psychological behaviors**, often at the interface of material and mental processes.

Example: “*He sighed.*”, “*She laughed nervously.*”

These processes are typical in **literary narratives** and **dialogue**, expressing **inner experience through external behavior**.

5.3.5 Verbal Processes (Saying)

Verbal processes encode **acts of communication**.

Participants: Sayer, Verbiage, Receiver

Example: “*The teacher (Sayer) explained (Process) the lesson (Verbiage) to the students (Receiver).*”

They are central to **interpersonal interaction**, reporting, and media texts.

5.3.6 Existential Processes (Existing)

Existential processes assert the **existence of something**.

Participant: Existent

Example: “*There is a problem.*”

They are often used in **scientific reporting, policy documents, and observations**, introducing phenomena into discourse.

5.4 Participants and Their Roles

Participants are **entities involved in a process**. Different processes assign different roles:

Process Type	Typical Participants
Material	Actor, Goal, Beneficiary
Mental	Senser, Phenomenon
Relational	Carrier, Attribute / Token, Value
Behavioral	Behaver
Verbal	Sayer, Verbiage, Receiver
Existential	Existent

Accurate identification of participants is critical for **analyzing agency, responsibility, and social positioning**. For example, political texts often manipulate transitivity to foreground or background actors:

Active: “*The company released the report.*” (Agency emphasized)

Passive: “*The report was released.*” (Agency backgrounded)

5.5 Circumstances

Circumstances provide **additional contextual information**, answering questions like: *where, when, how, why, and with what?*

Time: *“She arrived yesterday.”*

Place: *“The meeting occurred in the hall.”*

Manner: *“He spoke softly.”*

Cause/Purpose: *“He left because he was tired.”*

Accompaniment: *“She studied with her friend.”*

Circumstances enrich clauses with **spatial, temporal, causal, and modal context**, crucial for clarity, evaluation, and coherence in both narratives and expository texts.

5.6 Transitivity and Ideology

Transitivity analysis is often applied to **critical discourse studies** to reveal ideology (Fairclough, 1995). Choices in process type, participant role, and circumstance can **encode power, responsibility, and evaluation**.

Example from political reporting: *“The government (Actor) raised taxes (Material process) to fund healthcare (Circumstance).”* The Actor is foregrounded, emphasizing responsibility. A passive version (*“Taxes were raised to fund healthcare”*) obscures agency, affecting interpretation.

5.7 Pedagogical Implications

Teaching transitivity enables students to:

- Analyze texts for **agency, responsibility, and social positioning**.
- Understand how **process types reflect genres and registers** (scientific, narrative, argumentative).
- Develop **writing skills**, selecting appropriate process types to convey desired meaning.

In science education, for instance, students must distinguish **material and relational processes** to describe experiments and findings accurately.

5.8 Example Analysis

Consider the sentence:

“The committee (Actor) approved (Material process) the proposal (Goal) yesterday (Circumstance).”

Process: Material

Actor: The committee

Goal: the proposal

Circumstance: yesterday

Changing to passive: *“The proposal was approved yesterday.”*

Agency is minimized, illustrating how transitivity choices **influence meaning and interpretation**.

5.9 Conclusion

The **transitivity system** provides a **comprehensive tool for analyzing how language construes experience**. By examining process types, participant roles, and circumstances, analysts can uncover **who does what, how, and why**.

Transitivity is not only descriptive but also critical for understanding **power, ideology, and social positioning** in texts. It forms the basis for many applications in education, discourse analysis, and media studies.

The next chapter will focus on the **Mood system and Theme-Rheme system**, which further complement transitivity by encoding interpersonal and textual meanings at the clause level.

5.10 Interactive Discussion Material

The transitivity system in SFL analyzes **how experiences, actions, and events are represented in language**. It focuses on (a) **Processes:** material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, existential, (b) **Participants:** actors, goals, sensors, phenomena, recipients, etc., (c) **Circumstances:** when, where, how, why, and under what conditions the process occurs

Understanding transitivity allows learners to **identify meaning, assign agency, and interpret events** in texts.

1. What is the transitivity system, and why is it important in representing experiences and actions in texts?

2. What are the different process types in transitivity, and how do they affect the interpretation of events?
3. How does analyzing participants in a sentence reveal agency, responsibility, or perspective?
4. In what ways do circumstances contribute to the meaning of a process, and why are they significant?
5. How can understanding the transitivity system enhance text analysis, writing, or comprehension across different genres?

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COURSE 6

Mood System (Clause Mode) and Theme-Rheme System (Information Structure)

6.1 Introduction

In **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, the **Mood system** and the **Theme-Rheme system** are essential resources for expressing **interpersonal and textual meaning**. While the **transitivity system** represents ideational meaning (what is happening and who is involved), Mood and Theme-Rheme govern **how clauses interact socially** and **how information is organized** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This chapter examines how **Mood structure** encodes **speech roles, modality, and clause types**, and how **Theme-Rheme organization** manages **information flow and textual coherence**. Together, these systems allow language users to simultaneously express **interpersonal stances** and **textual organization** within the same clause.

6.2 The Mood System: Clause as Exchange

Halliday (1994) conceptualizes a clause as a **speech exchange**, which can be analyzed in terms of **interpersonal meaning**.

6.2.1 Structure of Mood

A clause has two main components in the Mood system:

- a. **Subject** – the participant taking the role of the speaker's focus.

- b. **Finite** – the verbal element marking tense, modality, or polarity.
Residual: the remainder of the clause, typically the **Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct** (see Eggins, 2004).

6.2.2 Clause Types

Mood structure differentiates clauses according to **speech function**:

- a. **Declarative** – provides information. Wxample: “*She is reading a book.*” Function: statement, information exchange
- b. **Interrogative** – requests information. Example: “*Is she reading a book?*”. Function: question, elicitation
- c. **Imperative** – commands or directs action. Example: “*Read the book!*” Function: directive, goods-and-services exchange

Mood analysis allows us to understand **how speakers and writers take roles** in communication and how **social relationships** are enacted through clauses.

6.3 Modality within Mood

Mood also interacts with **modality**, which encodes **speaker’s attitude toward probability, obligation, or inclination**:

- a. **Modalization**: relates to information (e.g., *may, might, must*).
- b. **Modulation**: relates to goods-and-services (e.g., *should, can, will*).
 Example: “*She must complete the report.*”
 Mood: declarative. Modality: obligation (modulation)
 Example: “*She might complete the report.*”
 Mood: declarative
 Modality: probability (modalization)

Modality choices influence the **interpersonal stance**, conveying certainty, politeness, or authority.

6.4 Theme-Rheme System: Clause as Message

The **Theme-Rheme system** is the grammatical resource for **textual meaning** (Halliday, 1994). While Mood manages interaction, Theme-Rheme organizes **information within the clause**.

- a. **Theme**: the point of departure; “what the clause is about.”
- b. **Rheme**: the remainder; “what is being said about the Theme.”
 Example: “*The committee (Theme) approved the new policy (Rheme).*”

“In the meeting yesterday (Theme), the committee approved the new policy (Rheme).”

Theme-Rheme structuring provides **focus, emphasis, and coherence** in texts.

6.5 Types of Theme

Halliday identifies several types of Theme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014):

- a. **Topical Theme** – participant or process in the clause. Example: *“The students (Theme) completed the assignment.”*
- b. **Interpersonal Theme** – modal adjuncts or vocatives expressing speaker stance. Example: *“Unfortunately (Theme), the project was delayed.”*
- c. **Textual Theme** – conjunctive elements linking clauses in discourse. Example: *“However (Theme), the plan was approved.”*

Clauses can have **multiple Themes**, called **thematic progression**, which guides **information flow and coherence** in texts.

6.6 Theme-Rheme and Information Structure

The Theme-Rheme distinction also encodes **Given/New information**, which is critical for comprehension (Halliday, 1985):

- a. **Given (old) information:** presupposed, connects to previous discourse.
- b. **New information:** introduces novelty, advancing the text.
Example: *“The teacher (Given) explained the new concept (New).”*

Effective textual organization requires balancing **old and new information**, which facilitates **reader comprehension and rhetorical flow**.

6.7 Interaction of Mood and Theme-Rheme

Mood and Theme-Rheme are interdependent:

- a. Mood determines **how the clause functions in exchange** (statement, question, command).
- b. Theme-Rheme determines **how information is packaged and sequenced**.

Example:

“Could you (Finite + Subject) hand me the report (Rheme)?”

Mood: interrogative (interpersonal function)

Theme: “Could you” (initiates exchange)

Rheme: “hand me the report” (focus of action)

This integration allows speakers to **simultaneously manage interaction and information flow**.

6.8 Pedagogical Implications

Understanding Mood and Theme-Rheme has practical implications for **language education**:

- a. **Academic Writing.** Helps students structure essays, paragraphs, and sentences with **clear argumentation and logical flow**.
- b. **Oral Communication.** Supports effective questioning, requesting, and directing in classroom interaction.
- c. **Critical Reading.** Enables learners to identify **stance, emphasis, and coherence** in texts.

Explicit teaching of **Mood and Theme-Rheme** equips learners with tools to control **both social positioning and textual clarity**.

6.9 Example Analysis

Consider the sentence:

“Unfortunately, the meeting (Theme) was canceled (Rheme).”

Theme: “Unfortunately” (interpersonal stance) + “the meeting” (topical)

Rheme: “was canceled” (information focus)

Mood: declarative (statement)

Analysis shows how **interpersonal meaning (attitude)** and **textual meaning (information structure)** are realized in a single clause.

6.10 Conclusion

The **Mood system** and **Theme-Rheme system** are complementary tools for **enacting social roles and organizing information** in language. Mood encodes **speech function and modality**, while Theme-Rheme structures **information flow and coherence**.

Together, they form a bridge between **interpersonal and textual metafunctions**, ensuring that clauses are both **interactionally effective** and **textually coherent**. Understanding these systems is essential for both **discourse analysis** and **language pedagogy**, enabling learners to construct and interpret meaning effectively.

The next chapter will focus on **Text Structure Analysis**, including **genre, schematic structure, and cohesion**, building on the principles of Theme-Rheme and Mood.

6.11 Interactive Discussion

The mood system and Theme-Rheme system in SFL are essential for analyzing both interpersonal meaning (how we interact) and textual meaning (how we organize information).

1. What is the mood system, and how do declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses convey different interpersonal meanings?
2. How does the Theme-Rheme structure help in organizing information and guiding the reader's attention?
3. In what ways do mood and theme choices influence the tone, emphasis, or focus of a text?
4. How can understanding clause mode and information structure improve clarity, coherence, and effectiveness in writing or speaking?
5. How do mood and Theme-Rheme interact to create both interpersonal and textual meaning in different genres?

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COURSE 7

Text Structure Analysis (Genre, Schematic Structure, and Cohesion)

7.1 Introduction

In **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, text is not merely a sequence of sentences but a **cohesive, goal-oriented social product**. Text structure analysis examines **how texts are organized** to achieve specific purposes within social contexts (Martin & Rose, 2008). This chapter focuses on **genre, schematic structure, and cohesion**, key components for understanding **how language enacts meaning in context**.

By analyzing these elements, scholars, educators, and students can **interpret, evaluate, and produce effective texts** across academic, professional, and everyday contexts.

7.2 Genre: Language as Social Action

Halliday (1978) and Martin (1992) define **genre** as a **staged, goal-oriented social process** realized through language. Genres are **socially recognized types of texts** that serve specific purposes and audiences.

Examples include:

Narrative: to entertain or recount events

Exposition/Argument: to persuade or explain

Report: to describe phenomena

Instruction: to guide actions

Genres provide **predictable structures**, enabling readers and listeners to **anticipate content and function**, and writers to achieve communicative goals.

7.3 Schematic Structure: Staging the Genre

Each genre follows a **schematic structure**, which is the **arrangement of stages** within a text (Christie & Martin, 2007). Schematic structure allows texts to achieve **their social purpose** efficiently.

Examples:

- a. **Narrative.** Orientation → Complication → Resolution → Coda
Example: “Once upon a time...” (Orientation), “The dragon attacked...” (Complication), “The hero defeated the dragon” (Resolution).
- b. **Exposition.** Thesis → Argumentation → Conclusion.
Example: “Global warming is a serious issue” (Thesis), “Rising temperatures cause melting ice caps...” (Argumentation), “Therefore, urgent action is needed” (Conclusion).
- c. **Report.** General Classification → Description → Summary
Example: “Mammals are warm-blooded animals” (Classification), “They give live birth and nurse their young” (Description), “Overall, mammals show diverse adaptations” (Summary).

Schematic structure ensures **logical progression**, aligning with **thematic and information structures** discussed in previous chapters.

7.4 Cohesion: Linking the Text

Cohesion refers to **linguistic devices that create unity** within a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion ensures that **individual clauses and stages are interconnected**, allowing readers to follow the text smoothly.

Types of Cohesion

- a. **Reference** – pronouns, demonstratives, and articles link entities across sentences. Example: “*The teacher entered. She greeted the students.*”
- b. **Substitution and Ellipsis** – avoiding repetition through replacement or omission. Example: “*I like the red dress, and she prefers the blue one.*”

- c. **Conjunction** – signaling logical relations between clauses or stages: Additive: *and, furthermore*, Adversative: *but, however*, Causal: *because, therefore*, Temporal: *then, afterwards*
- d. **Lexical Cohesion** – repetition, synonyms, antonyms, and hyponyms. Example: “*River... stream... waterway...*”

Cohesive devices **bind clauses into meaningful sequences**, enhancing comprehension and genre realization.

7.5 Thematic Progression in Texts

Thematic progression is the **flow of Themes and Rhemes** across clauses, contributing to coherence (Eggins, 2004). Common patterns include:

- a. **Simple Linear Progression** – Rheme of one clause becomes Theme of the next. Example: “*The project started last year. Last year, the team faced challenges.*”
- b. **Constant Theme** – Same Theme maintained across clauses, Rhemes develop. Example: “*The teacher explained the topic. The teacher answered questions. The teacher assigned homework.*”
- c. **Derived Theme** – Theme derives from the Rheme of the previous clause through substitution.

Thematic progression is essential for **structuring extended texts** such as essays, reports, and narratives.

7.6 Integrating Genre, Schematic Structure, and Cohesion

Text structure analysis involves **examining the interplay** of:

- a. **Genre**: purpose and social function
- b. **Schematic structure**: stages that realize the genre
- c. **Cohesion**: devices that link stages and clauses

Example: Expository essay

Thesis (Orientation) → cohesive reference to topic

Arguments (Complication/Argumentation) → conjunctive and lexical cohesion

Conclusion (Resolution) → thematic summary, reiteration

This integration allows a **systematic approach to reading, writing, and teaching texts**.

7.7 Pedagogical Implications

Understanding text structure is essential in **education and literacy development** (Christie & Derewianka, 2008):

- a. Teachers can scaffold **writing by stages**, helping students structure essays, reports, and narratives.
- b. Students learn to **identify cohesive devices** and maintain **logical flow**.
- c. Awareness of genre and schematic structure enhances **critical reading and comprehension**, especially in academic contexts.

For instance, in science education, knowing that lab reports follow **Classification → Description → Summary** helps students write precise, coherent texts.

7.8 Example Analysis

Consider the following paragraph (report genre):

“Mammals are warm-blooded animals. They give live birth and nurse their young. They have diverse adaptations to survive in different habitats.”

Analysis:

- a. Genre: Report
- b. Schematic Structure: Classification → Description → Summary
- c. Cohesion: reference (“they”), lexical repetition (“mammals”), thematic progression
- d. Theme-Rheme: “Mammals” (Theme), “are warm-blooded animals” (Rheme)

This paragraph illustrates **how genre conventions, schematic structure, and cohesive devices work together** to produce coherent and meaningful text.

7.9 Conclusion

Text structure analysis provides tools to **interpret and produce coherent texts** by examining **genre, schematic structure, and cohesion**. These elements ensure that ideational and interpersonal meanings are **organized effectively** to fulfill the communicative purpose.

Mastering text structure is essential in **language education, discourse analysis, and professional communication**, enabling learners to navigate and create texts effectively across contexts.

The next chapter will focus on **Text Function Analysis**, exploring **purpose, audience, and context** in communication.

7.10 Interactive Discussion

The **mood system** and **Theme-Rheme system** in SFL are essential for analyzing both **interpersonal meaning** (how we interact) and **textual meaning** (how we organize information). Its include (a) **Mood System** (Declarative: statements , Eg: “*The meeting starts at 9 am.*”, Interrogative: questions eg: “*When does the meeting start?*”, and Imperative: commands eg: “*Start the meeting now,* and (b) **Theme-Rheme System** (Theme: starting point or given information, and Rheme: new, focused, or emphasized information)

1. What is the mood system, and how do declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses convey different
2. How does the Theme-Rheme structure help in organizing information and guiding the reader’s attention?
3. In what ways do mood and theme choices influence the tone, emphasis, or focus of a text?
4. How can understanding clause mode and information structure improve clarity, coherence, and effectiveness in writing or speaking?
5. How do mood and Theme-Rheme interact to create both interpersonal and textual meaning in different genres?

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COURSE 8

Text Function Analysis (Purpose, Audience, and Context)

8.1 Introduction

Text function analysis focuses on **how texts operate within specific social contexts** to achieve communicative purposes. While previous chapters explored **genre, schematic structure, cohesion, and clause-level metafunctions**, this chapter emphasizes the **relationship between text and context**, particularly how **purpose, audience, and situational factors** shape meaning (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Eggins, 2004).

Understanding text function is critical for interpreting, producing, and teaching texts effectively. It bridges **linguistic analysis with sociocultural and pragmatic considerations**, enabling users to adapt language to different contexts and audiences.

8.2 Communicative Purpose

The **purpose of a text** determines its structure, content, and language choices (Martin & Rose, 2008). Texts can serve multiple purposes, including:

- a. **Informative** – conveying knowledge or reporting facts. Example:
“The earth orbits the sun in 365 days.”

- b. **Persuasive** – influencing beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Example: *“We must reduce carbon emissions to save our planet.”*
- c. **Instructional** – guiding actions or procedures. Example: *“Preheat the oven to 180°C before baking.”*
- d. **Narrative** – recounting events or experiences. Example: *“Once upon a time, there was a brave knight.”*

Purpose is closely linked to **genre and schematic structure**, ensuring that textual choices align with social goals.

8.3 Audience Analysis

Texts are designed for specific **audiences**, and awareness of audience shapes **lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical choices** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Key audience-related factors include:

- a. **Knowledge level:** Using technical terms for experts vs. simple language for laypersons
- b. **Expectations:** Structuring information according to conventions (e.g., lab reports, essays)
- c. **Attitudes and values:** Adjusting tone, modality, and interpersonal stance.

Example:

Scientific article: technical vocabulary, precise factual statements

Newspaper article: accessible vocabulary, persuasive or evaluative stance

Audience analysis ensures that texts **communicate effectively and achieve intended impact**.

8.4 Context of Situation

The **context of situation** (Halliday, 1978) refers to the **immediate social and physical environment** in which a text occurs. It includes three dimensions:

- a. **Field** – what is happening; the subject matter or activity. Example: *“A teacher explaining grammar rules.”*
- b. **Tenor** – participants and their relationships. Example: *“Teacher (authority) – students (learners).”*

- c. **Mode** – role of language in the situation, including channel (spoken/written), interaction (dialogic/monologic), and rhetorical function. Example: “*Classroom lecture (spoken, monologic, instructional).*”

Field, tenor, and mode guide **lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices**, ensuring that the text suits its situation.

8.5 Context of Culture

Beyond the immediate situation, texts are shaped by **broader cultural context**, which encompasses **values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies** (Halliday, 1978; Martin, 1992).

- a. **Values:** Ethical and moral principles reflected in texts
- b. **Norms:** Expected social practices and conventions
- c. **Beliefs:** Accepted truths or assumptions influencing meaning

For instance, persuasive texts in different cultures may vary in politeness strategies, rhetorical patterns, and argumentation styles. Cultural context explains why the same message can be interpreted differently across societies.

8.6 Interplay Between Purpose, Audience, and Context

Effective text function analysis considers the **dynamic interaction** among purpose, audience, and context:

- a. **Purpose** shapes content and structure
- b. **Audience** determines tone, style, and complexity
- c. **Context** guides linguistic and rhetorical choices

Example: A climate change report for policymakers (audience) aims to **persuade action** (purpose) in a **formal, professional setting** (context). Lexical precision, modality, and cohesive organization are all aligned with these factors.

8.7 Pedagogical Implications

Teaching text function is crucial for **developing communicative competence**:

- a. **Writing Skills:** Students learn to adjust text according to purpose and audience.
- b. **Critical Reading:** Learners can evaluate texts for bias, effectiveness, and appropriateness

- c. **Cross-Cultural Communication:** Awareness of cultural norms aids comprehension and production in diverse contexts (Christie & Derewianka, 2008)

For example, a lesson on persuasive writing can emphasize **modality choices, argument structuring, and audience engagement strategies**.

8.8 Example Analysis

Consider the persuasive text:

“We must act now to reduce plastic pollution before it irreversibly harms marine life.”

Purpose: Persuasive

Audience: General public/environmental advocates

Field: Environmental conservation

Tenor: Writer (concerned citizen/expert) – readers (public)

Mode: Written, monologic, exhortative

Cultural context: Values sustainability, ethical responsibility

Analysis shows how linguistic choices (modality “must,” evaluative verb “irreversibly harms”) align with **purpose, audience, and context** to achieve communicative effect.

8.9 Conclusion

Text function analysis emphasizes the **practical relationship between language and social context**. By examining **purpose, audience, and context**, analysts and educators can:

- a. Understand why texts are structured in particular ways
- b. Assess effectiveness and appropriateness
- c. Teach learners to produce contextually suitable texts

This approach bridges **linguistic analysis and sociocultural understanding**, enhancing both **text comprehension and production skills**.

The next chapter will explore **Context of Situation in more detail**, extending the discussion to the **micro-level of communication**.

8.10 Interactive Discussion

Text Function Analysis in SFL focuses on why a text is produced, who it is intended for, and the situational and cultural context. This helps learners understand how texts achieve their communicative goals. Key elements of the text function are (a) Purpose: Inform, persuade, entertain, instruct, or request, (b) Audience: Readers or listeners and their expectations, knowledge, and social role, and (c) Context: Situational (field, tenor, mode) and cultural influences

1. What is text function analysis, and why is understanding purpose, audience, and context crucial for effective communication?
2. How does identifying the audience influence the choice of language, tone, and style in a text?
3. In what ways does the purpose of a text determine its structure, content, and language features?
4. How does situational and cultural context affect the interpretation and production of texts?
5. How can understanding text function improve skills in writing, reading comprehension, and discourse analysis?

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COURSE 9

Context of Situation (Communication Situation)

9.1 Introduction

The **context of situation** is a core concept in **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, emphasizing that language **cannot be separated from the social and situational environment** in which it occurs (Halliday, 1978). While previous chapters explored textual structures, genre, and function, this chapter focuses on **how immediate communication situations influence language choice and meaning**.

Understanding context of situation is essential for **discourse analysis, language teaching, and communicative competence**, as it explains why speakers and writers select particular **lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical resources** in given circumstances.

9.2 Defining Context of Situation

Halliday (1978) defines the context of situation as the **set of conditions that surround a communicative event**, influencing **how meaning is constructed and interpreted**. Context operates at three interrelated dimensions:

- a. **Field** – the **subject matter or activity** taking place; what is happening.

- b. **Tenor** – the **participants and their social roles**, including relationships and relative power.
- c. **Mode** – the **role of language**, including the channel (spoken or written), interaction type (dialogic or monologic), and text function (e.g., instructional, informative).

These dimensions collectively determine the **appropriateness of linguistic choices** and the **social meaning** of a text.

9.3 Field: What is Happening

The **field** reflects the **nature of the activity** in which language is being used. It answers the question: “*What is going on?*”

Examples:

Scientific experiment → specialized terminology, procedural verbs
 Classroom instruction → imperative forms, step-by-step guidance
 Political debate → evaluative language, persuasive devices

The field determines **ideational meaning**, shaping which **transitivity choices, processes, and participants** are appropriate in the text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

9.4 Tenor: Who is Involved

Tenor examines the **relationships among participants** in communication, including:

- a. **Roles**: teacher-student, doctor-patient, journalist-audience
- b. **Status/Power**: authority, expertise, hierarchy
- c. **Social distance**: familiarity or formality

Example:

Formal speech: “*Ladies and gentlemen, I present the findings...*” (high-status, distant relationship)

Informal chat: “*Hey, check this out!*” (peer-to-peer, close relationship)

Tenor shapes **interpersonal meaning**, influencing **Mood choices, modality, and politeness strategies**.

9.5 Mode: How Language Functions

Mode refers to the **role of language in the situation**, including:

- a. **Channel:** spoken, written, digital, or multimodal
- b. **Interaction:** monologic (one-way) or dialogic (two-way)
- c. **Purpose:** informative, persuasive, instructive, expressive

Example:

Lecture → spoken, monologic, informative

Online discussion → written, dialogic, persuasive or interactive

Instruction manual → written, monologic, instructional

Mode interacts with **field and tenor** to determine grammatical, lexical, and rhetorical choices.

9.6 Context and Linguistic Choices

Language choices are **directly influenced by context of situation**. Some examples:

- a. **Field** → selection of process types (transitivity), technical terms
- b. **Tenor** → Mood choices, modality, vocatives
- c. **Mode** → clause complexity, punctuation, cohesion devices

Example: Scientific report (field: experiment; tenor: expert-reader; mode: written, monologic)

“The solution was heated to 90°C and stirred for 10 minutes.”

Material processes, passive voice (backgrounding agency), precise temporal and circumstantial details

This illustrates how context guides **grammar, lexis, and overall text structure**.

9.7 Context and Genre Realization

The context of situation is closely linked to **genre**, as **social purpose and audience expectations shape text structure** (Martin & Rose, 2008):

- a. **Narrative** → field: storytelling; tenor: narrator-audience; mode: spoken/written
- b. **Exposition** → field: argumentation; tenor: writer-reader; mode: written, monologic

- c. **Instruction** → field: procedural activity; tenor: expert-learner; mode: written, imperative forms

Understanding context helps **predict linguistic patterns** and ensures **textual appropriateness**.

9.8 Pedagogical Implications

Teaching context of situations equips learners to:

- a. **Adapt language** to field, tenor, and mode
- b. **Interpret meaning** based on situational cues
- c. **Develop communicative competence** across genres and registers

Example classroom application: Role-play exercises for different fields and tenors (e.g., doctor-patient consultation, business negotiation) help students **select appropriate vocabulary, Mood, and modality**.

9.9 Example Analysis

Consider a short text:

“Please submit your assignments by Friday. Late submissions will not be accepted.”

- a. **Field:** academic assignment submission
- b. **Tenor:** teacher (authority) – students (subordinate)
- c. **Mode:** written, directive, instructional
- d. **Linguistic choices:** Imperative Mood, modality (“will not be accepted”), formal register

Analysis shows **how context of situation directly informs linguistic choices** to achieve intended social effect.

9.10 Conclusion

The **context of situation** provides a framework for analyzing **how language functions in real-life communication**. By examining **field, tenor, and mode**, analysts and educators can:

- a. Understand why certain grammatical and lexical choices are made
- b. Predict appropriate language for specific situations
- c. Teach students to adapt language effectively across genres and contexts

This chapter provides the foundation for the next discussion on **Context of Culture**, which situates texts within **broader societal values, norms, and beliefs**.

9.11 Interactive Discussion Material

The context of situation in SFL examines how language functions in specific communicative settings, focusing on (a) Field: what is happening (topic, activity, or subject matter), (b) Tenor: social relationships and roles of participants (who is involved, status, power), and (c) Mode: channel and form of communication (spoken, written, formal, informal). Understanding these elements helps learners analyze meaning, appropriateness, and effectiveness in communication.

1. What is the context of situation, and why is it important for understanding how language works in communication?
2. How does the field of communication affect language choices in different situations?
3. In what ways does tenor (social relationships and roles) shape the formality, tone, and politeness strategies in language?
4. How does mode (spoken, written, or multimodal) influence the structure, vocabulary, and delivery of a message?
5. How can analyzing the context of situation improve communication, text interpretation, and writing effectiveness?

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COURSE 10

Context of Culture (Values, Norms, and Beliefs)

10.1 Introduction

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the **context of culture** extends beyond the immediate situation, encompassing the **broader social, cultural, and ideological environment** in which language is used (Halliday, 1978; Martin & Rose, 2008). While the **context of situation** focuses on field, tenor, and mode, the **context of culture** situates texts within **societal values, norms, and beliefs**, providing insights into why certain language choices are made across communities and cultures.

Understanding the cultural context is crucial for **discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and education**, as it reveals the **ideological assumptions embedded in texts**.

10.2 Defining Context of Culture

Halliday (1978) and Martin (1992) define **context of culture** as the **collective background of knowledge, practices, and expectations** shared by a community. It determines **what counts as acceptable, relevant, and meaningful** in a text.

Key dimensions include:

- a. **Values** – principles or standards considered desirable (e.g., honesty, respect, sustainability)
- b. **Norms** – socially sanctioned ways of behaving and communicating
- c. **Beliefs** – widely held assumptions about the world, knowledge, and social relations

These elements influence **genre conventions, rhetorical strategies, and evaluative choices** in texts.

10.3 Values in Texts

Values are **cultural priorities reflected in language** (Martin, 1992). Writers and speakers encode values through **lexical choices, modality, and evaluative language**.

Examples:

- a. Environmental report: values sustainability and conservation
Example: *“It is imperative to reduce carbon emissions to protect biodiversity.”*
- b. News article: values social justice and equality
Example: *“The policy aims to ensure equal access to education for all children.”*

Recognizing values helps analysts **identify cultural ideologies and social priorities** in discourse.

10.4 Norms in Texts

Norms refer to **expected linguistic and behavioral patterns** in communication. They guide **appropriateness of genre, register, and style**.

Examples:

- a. Academic writing: formal register, passive voice, structured argumentation
- b. Informal chat: casual vocabulary, contractions, idiomatic expressions

Norms reflect **cultural assumptions about what is conventional and acceptable**, influencing both **text production and interpretation**.

10.5 Beliefs in Texts

Beliefs are **shared assumptions about the world**, shaping meaning at the ideational and interpersonal levels.

- a. Scientific community: belief in empirical evidence, objectivity.
Example: *“The experiment demonstrates a correlation between temperature and reaction rate.”*
- b. Religious or cultural discourse: belief in moral or spiritual principles
Example: *“Kindness is a virtue that brings harmony to society.”*

Beliefs influence **content selection, evaluation, and rhetorical strategies**, embedding ideology in text.

10.6 Cultural Context and Genre Realization

The context of culture **shapes genre conventions** and **textual patterns**:

- a. **Narrative:** reflects cultural values of heroism, community, or morality
- b. **Exposition/Argument:** aligns with societal norms for reasoning, evidence, and persuasion
- c. **Instructional texts:** reflect culturally accepted procedures and authority structures

Example:

- a. In a collectivist culture, narratives may emphasize **group achievements** over individual heroism.
- b. In scientific discourse, cross-cultural norms dictate **objectivity and clarity**, influencing choice of passive voice and nominalization.

10.7 Interaction Between Culture and Situation

Cultural context interacts with situational context to determine **appropriate language use**.

- a. **Field:** Certain topics are culturally sensitive or valued differently
- b. **Tenor:** Social hierarchies and respect norms influence formality and politeness
- c. **Mode:** Modes of communication (oral, written, digital) reflect cultural practices

Example:

- a. Business email in a hierarchical culture: formal salutations, indirect requests
- b. Casual social media post in egalitarian culture: informal tone, direct language

Understanding these interactions is essential for **effective communication and intercultural competence**.

10.8 Pedagogical Implications

Teaching the context of culture benefits students in multiple ways:

- a. **Intercultural communication:** Understanding norms, values, and beliefs aids comprehension and avoids misinterpretation

- b. **Critical literacy:** Students can evaluate texts for embedded ideologies and cultural assumptions
- c. **Text production:** Awareness of cultural conventions informs choices in style, tone, and structure

For example, students analyzing media in different countries can compare **how cultural values shape reporting, persuasion, and framing of events.**

10.9 Example Analysis

Consider a public service announcement:

“Recycle your waste to protect our planet for future generations.”

- a. **Values:** sustainability, responsibility to future generations
- b. **Norms:** formal, prescriptive language typical of public campaigns
- c. **Beliefs:** belief in environmental stewardship and individual responsibility
- d. **Genre realization:** instructional/informative text aimed at shaping behavior

Analysis illustrates how **cultural assumptions are embedded in lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical choices**, guiding audience interpretation and response.

10.10 Conclusion

The **context of culture** situates texts within **broader societal frameworks**, influencing values, norms, and beliefs. By analyzing cultural context, linguists, educators, and communicators can:

- a. Understand why texts are constructed in particular ways
- b. Identify ideological and evaluative dimensions
- c. Teach learners to produce culturally appropriate, context-sensitive texts

This understanding complements the **context of situation**, forming a comprehensive framework for **systemic functional analysis**.. The next chapter will discuss **the application of SFL in language education**, linking theoretical concepts to practical teaching and learning strategies.

10.11 Interactive Discussion

The context of culture in SFL examines how values, norms, and beliefs of a society influence language use and communication. Understanding cultural context helps learners interpret meaning, social practices, and communicative expectations in texts. Key elements of this context are (a) Values: what a culture considers important or desirable, (b) Norms: socially accepted rules and behaviors, and (c) Beliefs: shared ideas and convictions about reality, society, and human behavior

1. What is the context of culture, and why is it important for understanding language use and meaning in texts?
2. How do values of a society influence the way language is used in different contexts?
3. In what ways do cultural norms affect discourse patterns, genre conventions, and interaction strategies?
4. How can shared beliefs shape the interpretation of texts, including metaphors, idioms, and references?
5. How can awareness of cultural context improve cross-cultural communication, teaching, and text analysis?

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COURSE 11

Application of SFL in Language Education

11.1 Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a **powerful framework for understanding language as a social and functional resource**. Its application in **language education** emphasizes **teaching students how language works to make meaning** rather than merely focusing on grammar rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

This chapter explores **how SFL principles—ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, Mood, Theme-Rheme, transitivity, and genre—can be applied to language teaching**. It examines **curriculum design, classroom strategies, and assessment practices**, highlighting practical benefits for both first and second language learners.

11.2 Functional Approach to Language Teaching

Traditional language teaching often emphasizes **form-focused grammar instruction**. In contrast, SFL adopts a **function-focused approach**, teaching learners to:

- a. Understand **how language choices express meaning**

- b. Recognize **the relationship between language, context, and purpose**
- c. Produce texts suitable for **different genres, audiences, and situations**

Example: Rather than teaching verb tense as an isolated rule, teachers guide students to understand **why a particular tense is used in narratives, reports, or persuasive texts.**

11.3 Teaching the Ideational Metafunction

The **ideational metafunction** represents **experience, events, and knowledge** (Halliday, 1994). In education, this can be taught through:

- a. **Transitivity analysis:** Identifying **processes, participants, and circumstances** in texts. Example: *“The scientist conducted an experiment in the laboratory.”*

Process: material (*conducted*)

Participant: actor (*the scientist*)

Circumstance: location (*in the laboratory*)

- b. **Activity-based tasks:** Students describe processes, narrate events, or explain phenomena, developing their **conceptual and linguistic understanding.**

This approach helps learners **link language form with meaning**, promoting both comprehension and productive skills.

11.4 Teaching the Interpersonal Metafunction

The **interpersonal metafunction** deals with **interaction, social roles, and attitudes** (Halliday, 1994). Classroom applications include:

- a. **Mood and modality instruction:** teaching declarative, interrogative, imperative clauses and modals. Example: *“Could you submit your assignment by Friday?”* vs. *“Submit your assignment by Friday.”* Emphasizes **politeness, authority, and negotiation**
- b. **Role-play and dialogues:** Students practice **realistic social interactions**, such as interviews, debates, or service encounters

Teaching interpersonal meanings develops **pragmatic competence**, enabling learners to communicate appropriately in different contexts.

11.5 Teaching the Textual Metafunction

The **textual metafunction** focuses on **organization, cohesion, and information flow** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Classroom strategies include:

a. **Theme-Rheme analysis**

Example: “*The research findings (Theme) indicate a significant correlation (Rheme).*”. Helps students organize information **logically and coherently**

b. **Genre-based pedagogy (GBP)**

Explicit teaching of **text types and schematic structures**. Example: Teaching the stages of an expository essay (thesis → argument → conclusion)

c. **Cohesion exercises**

Tasks focusing on pronouns, conjunctions, lexical repetition, and ellipsis. Develops **fluency and coherence in writing**

This approach equips learners with skills to **produce well-structured, contextually appropriate texts**.

11.6 Genre-Based Pedagogy in Practice

Martin and Rose (2008) emphasize **explicit teaching of genres as social actions**. Key classroom applications:

- a. **Stage 1: Modeling** – Teachers demonstrate text features and structures
- b. **Stage 2: Joint Construction** – Students collaborate to produce texts under guidance
- c. **Stage 3: Independent Construction** – Students create texts independently

Example: Teaching a **narrative**

Orientation → introduce characters and setting

Complication → describe problems or event

Resolution → provide outcomes or moral

Students learn to **apply language choices strategically** to fulfill the social purpose of the genre.

11.7 Assessment and SFL

SFL-informed assessment evaluates **functional language use** rather than mere grammatical accuracy. This includes:

- a. **Ideational assessment:** Are experiences and knowledge accurately represented?
- b. **Interpersonal assessment:** Are social roles and attitudes effectively enacted?
- c. **Textual assessment:** Is information logically structured and cohesive?

Example rubric for an expository essay:

- a. Clarity and organization (textual)
- b. Appropriateness of argument and evidence (ideational)
- c. Tone, modality, and audience engagement (interpersonal)

This assessment framework aligns **teaching, learning, and evaluation**, ensuring functional language competence.

11.8 Advantages of SFL in Language Education

- a. **Context-sensitive learning:** Students understand language in **real-life social and cultural contexts**
- b. **Integrated skills development:** Combines reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- c. **Critical literacy:** Learners analyze texts for **ideology, evaluation, and social function**
- d. **Scaffolded progression:** Genre-based pedagogy provides **clear pathways from guided practice to independent production**

SFL empowers students to become **proficient and socially competent language users**.

11.9 Example Classroom Activity

Activity: Writing a persuasive text on environmental conservation

- a. **Analyze model text:** Identify Theme-Rheme, Mood, modality, and cohesive devices
- b. **Joint construction:** Collaboratively draft a paragraph with clear argumentation
- c. **Independent writing:** Students create a full persuasive essay addressing a local audience

- d. **Peer feedback:** Evaluate ideational, interpersonal, and textual aspects

This activity develops **language awareness, genre competence, and functional fluency** simultaneously.

11.10 Conclusion

SFL provides a **holistic framework for language education**, linking **linguistic forms to social functions and contexts**. By teaching ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions alongside **genre and schematic structure**, educators can:

- a. Enhance learner **functional competence**
- b. Foster **critical and reflective literacy**
- c. Support **contextually appropriate text production**

The next chapter will extend these principles to **discourse analysis and curriculum development**, demonstrating how SFL informs broader educational design and research.

11.11 Interactive Discussion

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides tools for analyzing how language functions in social contexts, which can be applied to language teaching and learning. Key applications in education include (a) Functional grammar: teaching grammar as a resource for meaning, (b) Text analysis: examining genre, structure, and coherence, (c) Contextualized learning: incorporating purpose, audience, and situational factors, (d) Meaning-making: enabling students to produce language for real communicative purposes

1. How can SFL be applied to teach functional grammar rather than only prescriptive rules?
2. In what ways can analyzing genre and text structure improve students' reading and writing skills?
3. How does SFL help learners understand the relationship between language, context, and purpose?
4. How can SFL be used to enhance speaking and listening skills in authentic communication situations?
5. What are the challenges and benefits of integrating SFL into language education curricula?

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COURSE 12

Application of SFL in Discourse Analysis and Curriculum Development

12.1 Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a **robust framework for analyzing language as social meaning**, offering insights not only for language education but also for **discourse analysis and curriculum design** (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This chapter explores **how SFL principles can guide the analysis of authentic texts**, identify **patterns of meaning**, and inform the **design of curricula that promote functional literacy and critical thinking**.

SFL's integrative perspective bridges **linguistic, social, and educational domains**, allowing curriculum developers to design learning experiences that are **both contextually grounded and pedagogically effective**.

12.2 SFL in Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines **language beyond the sentence level**, focusing on how texts **construct meaning, represent reality, and enact social relationships** (Eggins, 2004). SFL provides tools to analyze **three metafunctions**:

- a. **Ideational** – what is happening; how experiences and knowledge are represented
- b. **Interpersonal** – how speakers/writers interact with audiences
- c. **Textual** – how information is organized and connected

12.2.1 Analyzing Ideational Meaning

Transitivity analysis identifies **process types, participants, and circumstances** in texts.

Example: Political speech:

“The government will implement new policies to reduce unemployment.”

Process: material (*implement*)

Participant: actor (*the government*)

Circumstance: goal (*to reduce unemployment*)

This reveals **how actions, responsibilities, and goals are framed**, uncovering ideological positions.

12.2.2 Analyzing Interpersonal Meaning

Mood and modality reveal **attitudes, judgments, and social relationships**.

Example:

“Citizens must follow these guidelines for safety.”

Declarative mood, modal (*must*): authority and obligation

Helps analyze **power dynamics and stance** in discourse.

12.2.3 Analyzing Textual Meaning

Theme-Rheme progression, cohesion, and genre reveal **how texts are structured to achieve communicative goals**.

Example: News article: coherent use of references, conjunctions, and thematic development guides **reader interpretation**.

Discourse analysis using SFL can uncover **hidden ideologies, persuasive strategies, and social roles embedded in texts**, providing evidence for **critical literacy and research**.

12.3 SFL in Curriculum Development

SFL informs curriculum development by emphasizing **functional competence, genre awareness, and contextualized language learning** (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Key principles include:

- a. **Function-driven learning objectives.** Focus on **what learners can do with language** rather than only grammatical knowledge. Example: “Students will be able to write persuasive letters addressing local issues.”
- b. **Genre-based curriculum design.** Explicit teaching of **text types and schematic structures**. Sequencing from **simple to complex genres** ensures scaffolded learning
- c. **Integration of metafunctions.** Activities address ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Promotes **holistic language proficiency** across reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- d. **Contextualized assessment.** Evaluation measures **functional performance**: effectiveness in conveying meaning and achieving communicative goals

12.4 Curriculum Design Process Using SFL

A curriculum based on SFL can follow these stages:

- a. **Needs Analysis.** Identify learners’ social, academic, and professional language requirements
- b. **Text Selection.** Authentic texts reflecting relevant **genres and contexts**
- c. **Genre and Metafunction Analysis.** Analyze sample texts for **transitivity, Mood, Theme-Rheme, cohesion, and schematic structure**
- d. **Task Design.** Create **modeling, joint construction, and independent production activities**
Example: Writing expository essays on current events using cohesive devices and evaluative language
- e. **Assessment and Feedback.** Evaluate **functional language use, coherence, and appropriateness**. Provide feedback targeting **ideational clarity, interpersonal stance, and textual cohesion**

This process ensures a **systematic, evidence-based curriculum** grounded in SFL principles.

12.5 Case Study: Applying SFL in Secondary Education

Context: Teaching argumentative writing to high school students

- a. **Modeling Stage.** Teacher presents a persuasive text on environmental conservation. Analysis includes transitivity, Mood, Theme-Rheme, and cohesive devices
- b. **Joint Construction Stage.** Students collaboratively plan and draft an essay on a related topic. Focus on aligning **language choices with purpose, audience, and context**
- c. **Independent Production Stage.** Students write their own argumentative essays. Peer and teacher feedback based on **SFL-informed rubric**
- d. **Outcomes:** Students demonstrate improved **coherence, genre awareness, and persuasive effectiveness**

Curriculum promotes **functional literacy and critical engagement with texts**

12.6 Benefits of SFL in Discourse Analysis and Curriculum Development

- a. **Critical literacy:** Enables learners to **analyze ideology, power, and values** in texts
- b. **Functional competence:** Focuses on **using language effectively in context**
- c. **Scaffolded learning:** Genre-based pedagogy ensures structured progression
- d. **Context-aware curriculum:** Integrates situational and cultural factors in teaching

SFL equips educators to **design curricula that bridge theory and practice**, fostering learners' ability to **interpret, produce, and evaluate texts in diverse contexts**.

12.7 Conclusion

The application of SFL in discourse analysis and curriculum development demonstrates the **practical power of functional grammar and systemic thinking**. By analyzing **ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings**, and integrating **genre-based pedagogy**, curriculum developers can create **contextually relevant, socially meaningful, and functionally oriented language programs**.

SFL thus serves as a **comprehensive framework for bridging linguistic theory, educational practice, and critical literacy**, supporting learners in becoming **competent, reflective, and context-aware language users**.

12.8 Interactive Discussion

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides tools for analyzing how language constructs meaning in context, which can inform both discourse analysis and curriculum development. Key applications of this theory are (a) Discourse Analysis: Examining text structure, cohesion, and ideational/interpersonal/ textual metafunctions to uncover meaning and ideology and (b) Curriculum Development: Designing lesson plans, materials, and assessments based on functional language skills, genre awareness, and context.

1. How can SFL be applied to analyze discourse and uncover underlying meanings, ideologies, or power relations in texts?
2. In what ways can SFL inform curriculum design to integrate functional language learning and genre awareness?
3. How does analyzing text structure and cohesion through SFL enhance students' critical reading and writing skills?
4. What are the benefits and challenges of using SFL in developing language curricula for different educational levels?
5. How can SFL-based discourse analysis support assessment and evaluation in language education?

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COURSE 13

Discourse Analysis

Through the Lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

A. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Discourse Analysis of a Food Advertisement

○

Introduction

Food advertising plays a central role in shaping consumer culture and influencing purchasing decisions. Advertisements do not merely describe products; they construct meanings that appeal to desires, emotions, and identities. A useful framework for analyzing how such meanings are constructed is **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, developed by Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

SFL views language as a **social semiotic system**, in which linguistic choices are functional, serving to represent experiences (ideational meaning), negotiate relationships (interpersonal meaning), and organize information (textual meaning). This paper presents an SFL discourse analysis of a food advertisement for **McDonald's Big Mac**, focusing on how ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings are constructed to persuade consumers.

The chosen advertisement contains the slogan:



“There’s nothing quite like a Big Mac. Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions – on a sesame seed bun.”

Alongside the text is an image of a large, brightly lit Big Mac, with melting cheese and crisp lettuce, placed against a red background with the golden arches logo.

1. Description of the Advertisement

The advertisement combines **visual and linguistic elements** to create a persuasive message. The text foregrounds the **uniqueness** of the product through the phrase “nothing quite like.” The subsequent list of ingredients functions as a sensory description, inviting the reader to imagine the taste and texture. The image reinforces this appeal by presenting the burger as large, fresh, and appetizing.

This combination of verbal and visual resources can be analyzed through the **three metafunctions** of SFL:

Ideational meaning (how experience is represented)

Interpersonal meaning (how relationships are negotiated)

Textual meaning (how the message is organized)

a. Ideational Analysis (Transitivity System)

The **transitivity system** in SFL analyzes how clauses represent experiences through processes, participants, and circumstances (Eggins, 2004).

Clause 1: “There’s nothing quite like a Big Mac.”

Process: relational (existential: “There’s”)

Participant: “nothing quite like a Big Mac”

Meaning: This clause asserts the **uniqueness** of the product, positioning it as unmatched in the food market.

Clause 2: “Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions – on a sesame seed bun.”

Process: implicit relational (description)

Participants: the listed ingredients

Circumstance: location (“on a sesame seed bun”)

Meaning: The list functions as a **catalogue of qualities**, emphasizing abundance, freshness, and variety.

The transitivity choices highlight **food as experience**. Instead of describing consumer actions (e.g., “You eat” or “You enjoy”), the ad constructs the product itself as the **center of experience**. The burger becomes an object of desire, its qualities foregrounded through material and relational processes.

Furthermore, the omission of verbs in the second clause creates a **nominal style** that compresses information into a dense description. This grammatical strategy draws attention to the ingredients and their sensory appeal.

b. Interpersonal Analysis (Mood and Modality)

The **interpersonal metafunction** explores how language enacts relationships between speaker, audience, and subject. It is realized through **mood, modality, and appraisal** resources.

Mood Structure:

The main clause (“There’s nothing quite like a Big Mac”) is a **declarative mood**, presenting the statement as factual rather than persuasive opinion. This positions McDonald’s as an authority, making a confident claim.

Modality:

The phrase “nothing quite like” conveys **high modality**, suggesting absolute uniqueness. By avoiding hedges such as “maybe” or “probably,” the advertisement asserts certainty and leaves little room for doubt.

Appraisal Resources:

The descriptive list uses **positive appreciation** (“special sauce,” “sesame seed bun”), signaling quality and distinctiveness.

The accumulation of sensory words (taste, texture, freshness) appeals to **affect**, encouraging consumers to imagine the pleasure of consumption. Through these interpersonal resources, the advertisement constructs a relationship of **trust and authority** with the audience. McDonald’s speaks directly and confidently, while the consumer is positioned as a recipient of knowledge who is invited to share in the sensory experience.

c. Textual Analysis (Theme and Rheme)

The **textual metafunction** concerns how messages are organized within clauses and across the text.

Clause 1: “There’s nothing quite like a Big Mac.”

Theme: “There’s nothing quite like”

Rheme: “a Big Mac”

Analysis: The theme foregrounds uniqueness, while the rheme delivers the focal message – the product itself.

Clause 2: “Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions – on a sesame seed bun.” Theme: “Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions”

Rheme: “on a sesame seed bun”

Analysis: The theme lists the ingredients, while the rheme provides the unifying element – the bun – which symbolically holds the product together.

The organization of the advertisement creates a **progressive flow**:

First, it emphasizes **uniqueness**.

Then, it enumerates **qualities**.

Finally, the image reinforces the text by showing the **finished product**.

This cohesive structure ensures the consumer receives a clear, memorable message: the Big Mac is unique, abundant, and satisfying.

d. Integration of Visual and Verbal Modes

SFL has been extended to **multimodal discourse analysis** (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In this advertisement, the visual elements work together with the language to reinforce meaning.

Visual Ideational Meaning: The burger is depicted in extreme close-up, with fresh, vibrant ingredients, reinforcing the text's descriptive focus.

Visual Interpersonal Meaning: The direct gaze is absent, but the burger is positioned centrally, inviting viewers to engage with the product as the main participant.

Visual Textual Meaning: The composition follows an information value structure: the burger (center), slogan (top), logo (bottom right). This spatial arrangement directs the viewer's attention from claim → product → brand.

Together, the multimodal resources create a **holistic message** of desire and satisfaction.

e. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates how **SFL tools** reveal the linguistic strategies used in food advertising.

Ideationally, the advertisement constructs the burger as unique and abundant.

Interpersonally, it positions McDonald's as authoritative, while inviting consumers to share an emotional and sensory experience.

Textually, it organizes information in a way that foregrounds uniqueness and sensory appeal.

The visual elements reinforce these meanings, showing the power of multimodal resources in constructing persuasive messages.

Importantly, the absence of direct reference to the consumer (“you”) reflects a strategy of **object-centered persuasion**: the product is so desirable that it seemingly “sells itself.” This differs from other ads that directly command (“Try it today!”). McDonald’s adopts a subtle approach, relying on description and visual appeal to construct desire.

f. Conclusion

Using Systemic Functional Linguistics, this analysis has shown how a McDonald’s Big Mac advertisement constructs meaning through the metafunctions of language. The text employs relational and existential processes to highlight uniqueness, uses high modality and appreciation to build authority, and organizes information cohesively to foreground product qualities.

When combined with visuals, these strategies create a powerful multimodal discourse that persuades consumers not through commands, but through **constructed desire** and **imagined experience**.

This demonstrates the effectiveness of SFL as a tool for analyzing real-world texts, revealing the subtle ways language and visuals work together in shaping consumer culture.

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B. Short Poem Analysis on SFL

*"The sun sets low,
Shadows dance and grow,
A silent night will flow."*

1. Ideational Metafunction (Representation of Experience)

Processes (verbs):

sets → material process (action of the sun)

dance, grow → material processes (actions attributed to shadows)

flow → material process (movement of the night)

Participants:

The sun → Actor (who does the action of setting)

Shadows → Actor (who performs dancing and growing)

A silent night → Actor (who flows)

Circumstances:

low → circumstance of manner (how the sun sets)

The poem represents **natural phenomena** through actions (processes). Human-like qualities are attributed to non-human entities (shadows "dance"), showing **personification** as part of experiential meaning.

2. Interpersonal Metafunction (Interaction and Attitude)

Mood: All clauses are **declarative**, giving information rather than commanding or questioning. This creates a calm, descriptive tone.

Modality: No explicit modality (e.g., must, may), but the certainty of description suggests a **high degree of speaker commitment**.

Appraisal: The adjectives *silent* and *low* create an **affective evaluation** that conveys peace, calmness, and perhaps melancholy.

The interpersonal function shows the poet as an **observer** sharing a tranquil scene with the reader, not imposing interpretation but inviting contemplation.

3. Textual Metafunction (Message Organization)

Theme–Rheme Structure:

“The sun” (Theme) → “sets low” (Rheme)

“Shadows” (Theme) → “dance and grow” (Rheme)

“A silent night” (Theme) → “will flow” (Rheme)

Thematic progression: **Natural sequence of time** (sunset → shadows → night). This gives cohesion and a smooth narrative flow.

Cohesion: Repetition of natural imagery (sun, shadows, night) creates semantic ties. The rhyme (*low-grow-flow*) adds textual harmony.

The textual metafunction organizes the poem into a **temporal progression** that mirrors the movement of the day into night.

4. Conclusion

Using SFL, this short poem can be read as:

Ideationally: a depiction of natural phenomena (sun, shadows, night) through processes of movement and change.

Interpersonally: a calm, descriptive stance that invites the reader to share the speaker’s perception without judgment.

Textually: a cohesive, rhythmic structure that mirrors the transition of time.

Thus, the poem’s meaning arises not only from imagery but also from how **language choices function within context**, as explained by SFL.

C. Discourse Analysis of the Headline Using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

“Presiden Prabowo Peringatkan Koruptor Akan Ditindak Tanpa Pandang Bulu”)

1. Introduction

Language plays a significant role in shaping social reality. News headlines, in particular, are not only neutral reflections of events but also powerful tools for constructing meanings, ideologies, and public perceptions. Headlines compress information into short, concise structures that highlight key actors, processes, and evaluations. They are designed to attract attention, persuade readers, and influence how events or individuals are perceived (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991).

In this paper, the headline “**Presiden Prabowo Peringatkan Koruptor Akan Ditindak Tanpa Pandang Bulu**” will be analyzed using **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, developed by Michael Halliday (1994, 2014). SFL views language as a social semiotic system, where meaning is realized through three metafunctions: **ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual**. These metafunctions help uncover how language simultaneously represents experience, enacts social relationships, and organizes information.

By applying SFL, this analysis aims to show how the headline constructs meanings related to political authority, anti-corruption ideology, and public persuasion.

2. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction concerns how language represents experience and reality through **transitivity structures**: processes, participants, and circumstances.

Processes:

In the headline, there are two main processes:

Peringatkan (“warn”) → a **verbal process**, representing speech acts by an authoritative figure.

Akan ditindak (“will be punished/acted upon”) → a **material process**, representing concrete action directed toward the target.

Participants:

- *Presiden Prabowo* → the **Sayer** (speaker and source of authority).
- *Koruptor* → the **Target** (those who are warned and threatened with punishment).

Circumstances:

- *Tanpa pandang bulu* (“without discrimination”) → a circumstance of manner, emphasizing the severity, impartiality, and universality of the punishment.

Through these transitivity choices, the headline positions President Prabowo as an **active agent of authority and justice**, while corruptors are constructed as **passive objects of action**, stripped of agency. The representation frames corruption as a crime to be eradicated decisively, with no tolerance or compromise.

3. Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal metafunction analyzes how language enacts social relationships, attitudes, and evaluations. It involves mood, modality, and lexical choices.

Mood:

The headline is structured as a **declarative clause**, presenting the message as a fact, not speculation. This grammatical choice increases its authority and credibility in the eyes of the audience.

Modality:

The use of *akan* (“will”) signals high **modality** of certainty. It indicates that the punishment is not conditional or hypothetical, but rather an inevitable future action.

Lexical choices:

Peringatkan (“warn”) → signals authority, seriousness, and potential threat.

Ditindak (“punished”) → a strong verb, connoting law enforcement and coercive power.

Tanpa pandang bulu (“without discrimination”) → reinforces fairness, impartiality, and determination.

Together, these interpersonal choices construct President Prabowo as a **decisive and authoritative leader**, while instilling **fear and deterrence**.

toward corruptors. For the public, the wording builds trust and reassurance that corruption will be dealt with firmly.

4. Textual Metafunction

The textual metafunction concerns how information is organized and how cohesion is created within the text.

Theme and Rheme:

Theme: *Presiden Prabowo* → placed at the beginning, highlighting the actor and legitimizing the source of authority.

Rheme: *peringatkan koruptor akan ditindak tanpa pandang bulu* → provides new, impactful information about his stance and actions.

Cohesion:

The headline achieves cohesion through a **linear progression**: subject (actor) → process (verbal + material) → object (target) → circumstance (manner). This structure builds rhetorical climax, ending with the powerful idiom *tanpa pandang bulu*.

Stylistic features:

The use of idiomatic expression (*tanpa pandang bulu*) adds rhetorical force, appealing not only to logic but also to emotions. It conveys the idea of absolute fairness and strict enforcement.

Thus, the textual organization ensures that the message is **concise, forceful, and memorable**, fitting the communicative purpose of news headlines.

5. Discussion

The three metafunctions together construct a multi-layered meaning.

- From the **ideational perspective**, the headline depicts a power relation where the president is the actor with authority, and corruptors are passive recipients of punishment.
- From the **interpersonal perspective**, it conveys a strong evaluative stance: corruption is intolerable, and the president is positioned as a fearless enforcer of justice.
- From the **textual perspective**, it organizes information to foreground authority and conclude with a strong rhetorical flourish.

Importantly, the headline also carries **ideological implications**. It positions the president as a guardian of justice, implicitly aligning him with the public's anti-corruption sentiment. At the same time, it frames corruption as an enemy of the state and society, reinforcing a binary opposition between the leader (hero) and corruptors (villains).

This analysis shows that the headline is not simply a neutral report but a strategic construction. Media headlines often function as **persuasive discourse** that legitimizes political authority and shapes public opinion (van Dijk, 1998; Martin & White, 2005). By emphasizing “without discrimination,” the headline reinforces an ideology of fairness, while also projecting fear toward corrupt individuals.

6. Conclusion

The headline “**Presiden Prabowo Peringatkan Koruptor Akan Ditindak Tanpa Pandang Bulu**” illustrates how news discourse operates at multiple levels of meaning. Through **ideational metafunction**, it represents the president as an authoritative actor and corruptors as passive targets. Through **interpersonal metafunction**, it establishes a relationship of power, trust, and deterrence between the leader, the corruptors, and the public. Through **textual metafunction**, it organizes information to maximize rhetorical effect and memorability.

Ultimately, the headline serves not only as a factual report but also as an **ideological act of meaning-making**. It legitimizes the president's authority, dramatizes his anti-corruption stance, and aligns public sentiment against corruption. This demonstrates the value of SFL in uncovering how language functions as a tool of social power and persuasion.

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