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**Systemic Functional Linguistics (brief introduction)**

In the early 20th century, linguistics has witnessed a considerable number of theories and each one has its distinct orientations, trends, and subjects of study. However, most of these theories, such as Halliday and Chomsky's traditions, have been initiated by a number of followers or independently. In addition, each theory has been successful in accounting for aspects of language from a certain perspective. One of the most substantial theories is Halliday's SFL that has attracted the most attention and has been frequently employed in the literature on linguistics and applied linguistics.

Systemic functional linguistics has been a well- known term due to the influence in the process of analyzing texts. It known as SFL, systemic functional grammar, Hallidayan linguistics, and systemic linguistics.It developed by M.A.K. Halliday in 1960s.

It is the study of the relationship between [language](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-language-1691218) and its functions in social settings. According to Eggins (1994: 2) systemic functional linguistics is an approach to language which is centered on how people use language with each other in accomplishing everyday social life.

In this approach there are four main claims about language: that language is functional, semantic, contextual, and semiotic, and we can summarized these four points by describing the systemic functional linguistics as a functional-semantic approach to language.

Whereas in SFL language considered as primarily functional. The structure or form of language is important only to serve the function. Without function, structure would be completely pointless. Halliday (in Fontaine, 2013) posits that “a theory of linguistics must incorporate the functions of language in use.” Unlike the traditionalists who tend to see grammar as an entity separate from meaning and context of use, the systemic functionalists perceive language as a social semiotic system–that is to say, a system in which its meaning and form are always driven by its context and speaker’s communicative goals.

According to Malinowski (as cited in Martin, 1984), “you cannot understand the meaning of what someone says or writes unless you know something about the context in which it is embedded” (p.14). This assumption is very important since it highlights relevant issues regarding teachers’ roles in the learning process. It is necessary to involve students in the analysis of language in contexts so that they learn how language achieves communicative objectives by seeing it playing useful roles in situations where culture and context are key issues. Additionally, it is fundamental to teach students that each situation requires variety and different language choices according to the purpose of the conversation and the context provided.

**The Key Elements of SFL**

In SFL, a text is analyzed in four ways. They are as follows: Context, Semantics, Lexico-grammar, and Phonology. To begin with:

**1- the context**, context is classified as one of the central concerns, because it is integral to the overall process of making meaning. In fact, when language occurs in a context, it will relate to or is linked to a number of contexts (Matthiessen & Halliday 1997). They are:

1**- The Context of Culture [genres].**

**2- The Context of Situation, the [Register].**

According to Eggins (1994: 9) the concept of genre is used to describe the impact of the context of culture on language, by exploring the staged, step-by-step structure cultures institutionalize as ways of achieving goals. In other words, genre can be thought of as the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types, adaptable to the many specific context of situation that they get used in. Genre lays down the way to go about achieving the aim of an interaction. Gerot and Wignell (1995: 10) state that context of culture determines what we can mean through: being ‘who we are’, doing ‘what we do’, and saying ‘what we say’.

Context of culture should be considered in using language because this context determines whether a linguistically-achieved activity type is meaningful (i.e. appropriate) or not in a particular culture. If it is meaningful or appropriate, it means that we can use language to do the activity in the culture. For example, we are able to work out the purpose of Buying and Selling because we have (however unconsciously) an idea of what a Buying and Selling encounter should look like in our culture, the stages such an encounter involves, and the type of language used to achieve these stages. Eggins (1994: 34) gives an example of the general stages involving in a Buying and Selling activity: there are two people talking together, beginning with one offering (Yes please) then the other demanding (Can I have ...); followed by one providing (yes – how many would you like?) and the other accepting (thank you); followed by one asking for money (that’s $1.70 thank you) and the other handing it over (here we are). This example states that in order to accomplish a transaction in our culture it is necessary to go through a number of steps or stages. Social convention has established that we go through a series of steps or stages. These stages are called the schematic structure of a genre. The term schematic structure simply refers to the staged, step-by-step organization of the genre (Eggins, 1994: 36). Martin, as cited by Eggins (1994: 36), points out that the reason that genres have stages is simply that we usually cannot make all the meanings we want to at once. Each stage in the genre contributes a part of the overall meanings that must be made for the genre to be accomplished successfully.

Halliday models the context of situation or register , where the aspects of the context relate intimately to the language used to create text, in terms of three important strands (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997) (see figure 3): They are:

**A- Field**: gives us an indication of the topic or what is being talked about. In other words, field refers to the subject matter of discussion at any situation. It answers questions such as “what is going on in the text,” and “what are people doing”. According to Martin (1984), “examples of fields are activities such as tennis, opera, linguistics, cooking, building constructions, farming, and so on” (p. 16).

**B- Tenor**: gives us an indication of who is/are involved in the communication, the relationships between them, and roles of people in social status. It is concerned with the study of people positions in the world in terms of knowledge, studies, professions, and so on. As Halliday and Hasan (1989) pointed out, tenor “refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants” (p.13).

**C- Mode:** gives us an indication of what part the language is playing in the interaction and what form it takes (written or spoken). Nowadays, we have a variety of channels such as Facebook, blogs, Skype, email, telephone, cell-phone, videos, films, etc. Following Halliday and Hasan’s definition: “Mode of discourse refers to what part language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in the situation: the symbolic organization of the text” (p.4)

children's procedure in in-depth literary texts reading. Meaning through mode can be determined by two kinds of distance;

1-Choice of the theme.

2-Choice of the rhyme of the sentence.

The most common approach to identifying Theme in a clause is based on Halliday (1994), who states that “Theme extends from the beginning of the clause and up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity” (Halliday, 1994:53). Thus, according to Halliday (1994), the Theme of a clause “ends with the first constituent that is either participant, circumstance, or process” (Halliday, 1994:52) and Rhyme is “the remainder of the message” (Halliday, 1994:67), i.e. everything which is not Theme.

These three Register variables are used to explain people's intuitive understanding that individuals use different resources, different kinds and different parts from the system of language (Matthiessen & Halliday 1997).

**2-Semantics** According to Halliday (1994: xiii) language is structured to make three kinds of meaning, or metafunctions, simultaneously: ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Eggins (1994: 12) defines ideational or experiential meanings as ones about how we represent experience in language. Whatever use we put language to, we are always talking about something or someone doing something. For example, utterance I suggest we attack the reds makes meaning about “bottles of wine” and what we should do with them. It makes meanings that focus on the actions we, as human agents, should carry out, and the entities our actions will effect (the reds). Simultaneously, we use language to make interpersonal meanings: meanings about our role relationships with other people and our attitudes to each other. Whatever use we put language to we are always expressing an attitude and taking up a role. For example, utterance I suggest we attack the reds makes a meaning of friendly suggestion, non-coercive, open to negotiation; the kind of meaning we might make with friends, whose opinions we are interested in and whose behavior we do not seek to dominate.

Finally, in any linguistic event we are always making textual meanings: meanings about how what we are saying hangs together and relates to what was said before and to the context around us. Whatever use we put language to we are always organizing our information. For example, the sentence I suggest we attack the reds takes as its point of departure the speaker’s intention (only to suggest, not to impose) and the interactants (we). It is a possible answer to What should we do now?

**3- Lexico-grammar** includes both grammar and vocabulary in one stratum and represents the view of language in both lexis and grammar.

**4-Phonology, orthography (or graphology)** which refers to the sound system, the writing system, and the wording system (Eggins 2004, p.19).

**SFL as an Applicable Tradition**

SFL can be characterized as an "applicable" linguistics theory, which means it is designed to have the potential to be applied to solve problems that arise in communities around the world (Matthiessen & Halliday 1997). Halliday (2008, p.189) states that his aim is to make a coherent tradition of language which is 'applicable,' in the sense that it can be beneficial to large numbers of people who are somehow engaging with language in the course of their work. SFL is well-known for its application in different fields such as healthcare, computational linguistics, translation, multimodal studies, education, and scholars are always discovering new areas of application (Matthiessen 2010). Additionally, it is renowned especially for the work on genre, cohesion, discourse analysis, register, appraisal, and so on, which have been taken up by scholars working in the humanities and social sciences.

In the recent years, SFL has been useful and helpful in fields such as linguistics language education (Christie & Martin 1997), child language development (painter 1999), media discourse (Iedema 2003), history (Iedema 2003), educational linguistics (Christie & Martin 1997), critical discourse analysis (Bloor & Bloor 2007), and administrative language (Iedema 2003). Furthermore, SFL has also been applied to interpret the grammar of other semiotic modes, such as art (Ballantyre 1996) and visuals (Kress & Leeuwen 2001). Consequently, SFL tradition is considered as a sensational international one, since it can be seen by the number of publications and conferences in SFL around the world. Briefly, it is clear that SFL can be applicable in unlimited fields.

**Examples of the Value of Applying SFL**

SFL has been applied as a valuable tool for a number of fields such as language education (Schleppegrell & Colombi 2002). As an example, Gray and his colleagues (1999) worked with a sizeable number of learners who experienced difficulty with reading. They implemented a number of steps to improve the students' reading skills in their schools. SFL has also been a useful tool for child language development (Painter 1999). According to Knowles and Malmkjær (1996), SFL wielded a great influence on the manner of studying the language form of literary texts for children. SFL can also be used in the development of children's procedure in in-depth literary texts reading.