Systemic Functional Grammar
A Theory about the Nature and Structure of Language

22. July 2008
Verena Stein
Systemic Functional Grammar

Part I motivation for a systemic functional understanding of language

Part II systemic functional theory of grammar

Part III systemic functional grammar in contrast to construction grammar
Systemic Functional Grammar

Part I motivation for a systemic functional understanding of language

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two views of language

as a set of rules

as a resource
# Two views of language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Unit</th>
<th>Sentence Studied in...</th>
<th>Linguistic Disciplines* Studied...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a set of rules</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Separately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>As a resource</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Its discourse environment</td>
<td>In a holistic model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*i.e. grammar, semantics, pragmatics, phonetics, phonology*
four basic assumptions

(i) Language use is functional.

(ii) The function of language is to create meaning.

(iii) These meanings are determined by the context in which they are exchanged.

(iv) Language use is a semiotic process that is based on choices.
system = point of choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>systemic option (term)</th>
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<td>allows deletion of the agent, focuses attention on patient</td>
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there is a **choice** even though the active and the passive voice have the same propositional meaning and only differ in syntactic ordering

this **availability of choices** indicates that different choices are associated with different viewpoints and unlikely to be chosen arbitrarily
**System = Point of Choice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>entry condition</th>
<th>system name</th>
<th>terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clause</td>
<td>VOICE</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

- **Active**
- **Passive**
Can you think of a basic system that would include the following two sentences?

1. Who came in from the cold?
2. You come in from the cold!
### Systemic Option (Term) - Example Sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example Sentence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indicative</td>
<td><em>Who came in from the cold?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td><em>You come in from the cold!</em></td>
</tr>
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system = point of choice

clause → MOOD
TYPE

indicative

imperative
a system with associated realisation statement
Systemic Functional Grammar

Part I  motivation for a systemic functional understanding of language

Part II  systemic functional **theory** of grammar

Part III  systemic functional grammar in **contrast** to construction grammar
systemic functional theory of grammar

the clause

below, above, around, beyond the clause
systemic functional theory of grammar

the clause

**metafunctions**: different modes of meaning construed by the grammar

below, above, around, beyond the clause

**below**: groups and phrases  
**above**: the clause complex  
**around**: cohesion and discourse  
**beyond**: metaphors
systemic functional theory of grammar

the clause

metafunctions: different modes of meaning construed by the grammar

below, above, around, beyond the clause

below: groups and phrases
above: the clause complex
around: cohesion and discourse
beyond: metaphors
three metafunctions

(i) **ideational**: represent the world

(ii) **interpersonal**: social relationships

(iii) **textual**: binding linguistic elements together
**metafunctions: an example**

Simultaneous metafunctions in the structure of the clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metafunction</th>
<th>system</th>
<th><em>In the open glade</em></th>
<th>the wild rabbits</th>
<th>danced</th>
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<td>location</td>
<td>actor</td>
<td>process</td>
<td>accompaniment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Metafunctions: An Example

Simultaneous metafunctions in the structure of the clause

| Metafunction   | System   | Phrase                  | Actor     | Process   | Accompaniment |
|----------------|----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------
| Ideational     | Transitivity | In the open glade        | The wild rabbits | Danced | With their shadows. |
| Interpersonal  | Mood     | Adjunct                 | Subject   | Finite/predicator | Adjunct         |
**metafunctions: an example**

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<td><strong>interpersonal</strong></td>
<td>MOOD</td>
<td>adjunct</td>
<td>subject</td>
<td>finite/predicator</td>
<td>adjunct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>textual</strong></td>
<td>THEME</td>
<td>theme</td>
<td>rheme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dimensions of lexicogrammatical space

**metafunctions:** different modes of meaning construed by the grammar

**rank:** different sizes of the grammatical units (layers of constituency)

**delicacy:** ordering of the systems from the most general to the most specific ones
rank-based constituency

clause

group

word

morpheme

new+born  calves  are  easy  prey
general principle for organising lexicogrammar

• ordering of systemic options and their realisation statements

• relates the two parts of lexicogrammar, lexis and grammar
towards lexical delicacy

- mental
- relational
  - ascriptive
    - equative
  - intensive
    - possessive
    - circumstantial
  - phase
  - time
  - nonphase
    - inceptive (become, turn, go, fall, ..)
    - durative (remain, stay)
  - realised (prove)

(in intensive ascriptive relational clauses)
systemic functional theory of grammar

the clause

metafunctions: different modes of meaning construed by the grammar

below, above, around, beyond the clause

below: groups and phrases
above: the clause complex
around: cohesion and discourse
beyond: metaphors
systemic functional theory of grammar

the clause

metafunctions: different modes of meaning construed by the grammar

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English clause: combination of three different structures deriving from three distinct components (i.e. the three metafunctions)

group: combination of words built up on the basis of a particular logical relation

example: nominal groups serve as subject or complement

Describing a sentence as a construction of words is like describing a house as a construction of bricks. Groups allow to recognise the walls and the rooms as intermediate units.
## below the clause: groups and phrases

### groups and phrase classes in relation to clause function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>groups</th>
<th>nominal</th>
<th>modal structure</th>
<th>experiential structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subject, Complement</td>
<td>participant role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finite + Predicator</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverbial</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjunct (circumstantial)</td>
<td>circumstance role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjunct (modal)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjunct (textual)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phrases</td>
<td>prepositional</td>
<td>Adjunct (circumstantial)</td>
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above the clause: the clause complex

clause complexes: how clauses are linked to one another by means of some logico-semantic relation

clause complex representing a sequence in a narrative episode:

In pain, Kukul pulled out the arrow

and [∅: he] headed for the river

[∅: in order for him] to wash his wound

clauses are related structurally by the grammar
above the clause: the clause complex

clause complexes: how clauses are linked to one another by means of some logico-semantic relation

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clauses are related structurally by the grammar

first link: structural conjunction and

second link: the perfective to wash
The *organisation of text* is semantic rather than formal. We want to think of text dynamically, as an ongoing process of meaning. We want to characterise text by reference to the system as the selection of systemic options unfolding through time.

Selections are made clause by clause or group/phrase by group/phrase. *Cohesion and Discourse* allows to analyse patterns of these selections as the text unfolds.
A text is a unit of meaning.

How does this semantic unit relate to the units and unit complexes of grammar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>non-metaphorical</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>something wonderful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participant: senser</td>
<td>process: mental: perceptive</td>
<td>participant: phenomenon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>metaphorical</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A wonderful sight</td>
<td>met</td>
<td>Mary's eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participant: actor</td>
<td>process: material</td>
<td>participant: actor</td>
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motivation for a systemic functional understanding of language

systemic functional theory of grammar

systemic functional grammar in contrast to construction grammar
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>name</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>form</th>
<th>example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ditransitive</td>
<td>X causes Y to receive Z</td>
<td>Subj V Obj1 Obj2</td>
<td>He gave Mary a pencil. I faxed you a letter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ditransitive [agt, rec, theme]**

**ditransitive CAUSE-RECEIVE**

argument structure

prototype (center)
constructions

- meaning is derived from a combination of argument structure and verb
- each argument structure has a specific form and meaning
- any linguistic pattern iff some aspect of form or function is not predictable from component parts or other constructions
- vary in size and complexity
all grammatical knowledge is represented as a form/meaning pair

SYMBOLIC CORRESPONDENCE LINK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syntactic/ morphological/ phonological properties</td>
<td>semantic/ pragmatic/ discourse properties</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
componential vs. construcion grammar

1. componential (generative)
   form and meaning
   \[\rightarrow\] independent components

2. constructionist (cognitive)
   form and meaning
   \[\rightarrow\] symbolic unit
systemic functional vs. construction grammar

- both theories are usage-based models that account for language as a whole
- they both assume that form and meaning cannot be considered separate phenomena
- they both significantly differ from componential grammar theories because of that
**systemic functional vs. construction grammar**

**Construction Grammar** looks at language entirely in terms of form/meaning pairs. As soon as a linguistic pattern has a different meaning it is considered a form/meaning pair regardless of its linguistic level. Constituency is thus largely ignored.

**Systemic Functional Grammar** also looks at language in terms of form and meaning but pays very close attention to the linguistic level at which the analysis takes place. It then integrates sub-analyses into a semiotic system.