

Introduction

Throughout the years Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has proved to be an illuminating theory to analyse a wide range of texts, and its development into new fields of research and applicability demonstrates its capacity for action (M.A.K. Halliday: xxix-xxxii). It has adopted the challenge both of attempting to crack the semantic code of a language through a comprehensive account (for example, in M.A.K. Halliday and C. Matthiessen) and of applying its findings to interpret and influence on social contexts (see Martin's discussion in James R. Martin: 573-588, and Paul J. Thibault: 3-28). This has only been possible through a multidimensional view of language in terms of its plurifunctional (ideational, interpersonal, textual) and multilevel (rank, stratum, plane) organization as a resource of meaning.

In this monograph, organised into eleven articles and three interviews, we see systemic theory's important tenets applied at the level of the clause, systemic strategies applied to the exploration of different genres and how a variety of microsystems of analysis —within or beyond Systemics— has enriched SFL's powerful perspective on text in context, as in the papers by J. Munday, L. Pérez / A. Sánchez, Mick O'Donnell, C. Coffin, C. Barnard and L. Mortensen. The transcription of the oral interviews with M.A.K. Halliday, Christian Matthiessen and James R. Martin with which we close the monograph seeks to provide readers with personal accounts of leading thinkers in the theory.

Kristin Davidse —one of the outstanding theoretical researchers within the systemic functional model — examines the dialectic between grammar and grammatics through her exploration and deep analysis of the semantic models construed by relational clauses. While applying important notions to existential and intensive attributive clauses, and to possessive clauses, she points out the relevant role of the system networks of systemic functional grammar in modelling not only enation (identity of structure), but also agnation (structure relatedness).

The following three articles take up the contrastive analyses between Spanish and English as their focus of attention. Munday applies a methodology to an electronic corpus of mainly journalistic texts, J. Romero concentrates on interjections and McCabe-Alonso explores the notion of Theme in both languages. Jeremy Munday

adopts a multidisciplinary approach bringing together SFL, translation studies and Corpus Linguistics and discussing some of the main systemic differences between the two languages concentrating on the thematic structure of both languages. He analyses examples to illustrate the potential of the methodology proposed using an electronic corpus of mainly journalistic texts. Through a description of carefully chosen corpora, J. Romero inquires into the nature of spoken discourse from a new perspective, introducing the concept of “discourse appropriacy” to study the use of English and Spanish continuative elements within register as the normalising factor. He also tries to establish crosslinguistic differences and to assess the difficulties of non-native speakers in their process of learning a second language. Anne McCabe and Isabel Alonso argue against those who analyse Theme solely as a kind of organizational principle outside a cognitive perspective. The discourse characterization of Theme that they adopt in line with most recent research leads them to the consideration of thematization strategies as cognitively and communicatively motivated. Their article concludes with very valuable results for contrastive studies. Ultimately, texts are constrained by contextual configurations which present differences and similarities in different languages and are related to differences in genre.

From a systemic functional point of view and incorporating recent advances in the field of Corpus Linguistics, Luis Pérez and Antonia Sánchez aptly examine patterns of contiguous words in the syntagmatic axis, providing a well founded illustration of the dynamic relationships between lexis and grammar. Phenomena of collocation and colligation are under examination through a computer aided corpus. They defend the view that by exploring co-occurrence patterns we can gain a deeper insight into the mechanism of processing texts and of learning and teaching processes.

Mick O’Donnell addresses the question of how we compose texts, applying automatic text composition for producing descriptions of museum exhibits via the web. Diverse approaches are integrated into the ILEX project, at the University of Edinburgh but he argues that while different approaches within a single theory — Systemics on this occasion— such as Generic Structure Potential, Conjunctive Relations, Rhetorical Structure Theory or Focal Progression cannot explain much about how we compose texts, the application of multiple discourse strategies —derived from Enkvist’s notion of text production— can be usefully applied. An interesting conclusion is that applying linguistic theories to computational problems also throws light on which theories are useful and which are not.

Within the educational context C. Coffin’s and C. Barnard’s papers explore school history books in different ways but they both choose to stressing ideological pressure. C. Coffin foregrounds the role that argument texts play in the students’ learning of history, drawing on a large scale Australian literacy research project. She explains that although students more often choose the “for” and “against” type of arguing genre in their expositions, history books privilege argumentations that offer explanations which are more truthful than others as ideological forms of constraint in the preparation for society’s future bureaucrats, lawyers and politicians. Insights from disciplines such as Rhetorical studies, Philosophy of History and Historiography are provided. but it is the overall framework of SFL that makes it possible to draw finer distinctions between the categories because of its emphasis on the cultural and social context of language and with serious implications for the teaching and learning of argument in particular.

C. Barnard uses discourse strategies, a systemic functional model of grammar and U. Eco's notion of open and closed texts to report his findings based on an examination of all 88 high school Japanese history textbooks that were approved for use in 1995. One of the most important conclusions is that discourse strategies used to report the Rape of Nanking, which took place between December 1937 and January 1938, play down or obfuscate the nature of the atrocity by sleight of hand and leaves students without any critical basis to respond to denials that the atrocity ever took place.

M.J. Schleppegrell explores the academic register also within an educational context. From a database of 140 expository essays written by new entry university students, she chooses one example essay by a Vietnamese American second language student and through a deep analysis of textual, interpersonal and ideational elements she shows the value of grammar and discourse organisational skills as resources for constructing text. She provides a valuable list of questions particularly for second language learners to improve the writing of expository essays and foregrounds the SFL role in the learning-teaching process of writing.

V. López analyses Spanish and English newspaper excerpts about the Chechnya war from the perspective of the Hallidayan notion of projection. Quoting and reporting are only meaningful inside more general criteria concerning not only what language literally says but what it really does in human interaction.

L. Mortensen describes how the systemic functional model of language can be efficiently applied to the examination and treatment of language disorders. After giving an outline of the description and classification of language disorders from a psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic perspective, she specifies clinical and research applications of SFL and concludes that this theory gives the appropriate framework because it offers an integrated approach of specific and overall meanings within context and because it focuses on "all the meanings and all the ways" in which clients may realise their meaning choices.

The papers in this monograph show how to integrate linguistic analysis and contextual factors in the exploration of a variety of genres using systemic tools. They show the potential, the constraints and the applicability of SFL to a wide range of genres, from the school context to the computational field. The essays collected here by researchers from several countries contribute to enriching the perspectives on language from their different cultural and educational backgrounds. Let me end by expressing to writers my sincere gratitude for accepting my invitation to contribute, for their willingness and promptness during the editorial process and for the high quality of the research that they offer the readers.

Manuel A. Hernández Hernández

Works Cited

- Halliday, M.A.K. *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: E. Arnold, 1985.
 Martin, J. *English Text: System and Structure*. Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 1992.
 Matthiessen, C. *Lexicogrammatical Cartography: English Systems*. Tokyo: International Language Sciences Publishers, 1995.
 Thibault, Paul J. *Social Semiotics as Praxis*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991.