

## M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL today being extended to Semiotics, SFS)

Discourse for deliberative democracy: Unlocking cryptogrammar      Maureen Ellis

### 1 Structure (form, grammar) versus discourse (daily drama, everyday performance).

A discourse approach to language learning and teaching:

- i. respects context, social relations, genre, use over usage, agency, life;
- ii. acknowledges 'voice', values, ethical, moral, social issues underlying dominant routines;
- iii. skills communication/community: macro top-down, alongside micro bottom-up;
- iv. treats citizens as re-levant, 'live', 'open', multimedia, multimodal signs /semiotics;
- v. satisfies learner-centred pedagogy, myth and motivation.

### 2 Strategies for closer observation, oppositional reading and dialoguing with 'texts':

- i. volume: proportion of attention, repetition, focus, balance; reference (anaphoric importance, cataphoric suspense, exophoric flattering);
- ii. generality or specificity: concrete/abstract; literal/metaphoric; individual/collective; immediate/mediated; present state, event, action, perception/history, background; permanent/temporary; short-/long-term; local/global; subjective/objective; lay/technical; synonyms, gradable antonyms, euphemisms, hybrid genres, intertextuality and discourses?
- iii. prominence: functions and sequencing of propositions, e.g. generalisation, causality, conditionality, contrast, example, ... ;
- iv. relevance/highlights: + modifiers, adverbials, semantic prosody (surrounding words and influences), discourse engineering, lexical collocations, corpus linguistics;
- v. explicit versus implicit: assumptions and presuppositions; given theme/new rheme; apparent denial, empathy, concession; modality; tense;
- vi. inclusion versus exclusion: pronouns may identify collocational 'enemies' and 'friends'; dichotomies; social deixis; intertextual references;
- vii. attribution of agency, responsibility, blame: nominalisation, passives, reifications; politeness and face; speech-act analysis;
- viii. perspective or point of view: schema, values, thoughts, perceptions, deixis;
- ix. fact versus opinion: mapping discourse structure; direct/indirect speech and thought representation; transitivity analysis; identifying attitude, irony, sarcasm, satire; Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, manner;
- x. stakeholder voices: uni- or vari-directional voicing; silences, gaps, obfuscations, contrived congeniality, pluralist relativism or deliberation?

Remember: to practise these skills, your students will need to be provided with challenging, multimodal, multimedia, open-ended 'texts' for discussion and debate.

## Analytical Tools for Systemic functional Linguistics/ Semiotics (page 2)

Dialectical, interactive, three-way political literacy can turn consumers into producers, distinguishing rhetorical from deliberative discourses.

A metafunctional approach separates i. Ideational, ii. Interpersonal, iii. Textual elements in 'text', clarifying understanding and developing analytical skills crucial to democratic citizenship. The table below offers such a framework.

### Ideational

Field, domain (politics, religion ...); clear-cut, distinguishable sector or hybrid/a-cross?

Participants: who or what is being discussed – how specifically are participants identified, or are references remain generalisations, kept at a level of abstraction? If so, why?

Processes: transitivity/intransitivity? Are activities transiting in material (e.g. throw), mental (e.g. believe), verbal (e.g. protest), or relational (e.g. is, has) terms?

Circumstantial information, details provided (time, place, manner, cause, etc.), why/why not?

Lexis (vocabulary) level of technical terminology being re-presented, inclusive or exclusive?

### Interpersonal

Tenor i.e. relationships b/w characters, speaker/writer and receiver of communication or text.

Mood: does the text use declarative, interrogative or imperative forms to persuade?

Modality: degrees of probability, obligation, certainty, e.g. must, should, can, will, need to . . . ;

Polarity: are ideas expressed dialogic (positive vs negative) or dialectic (3-way, open-ended) terms?

Vocation: terms of address, e.g. professionals, Dear Sir, citizens, muses, gods, personifications . . . ;

Person: positioning (author/consumer) via first, second or third person, e.g. you, we, he, I, our, . . . ;

Speech function: statements, invitations, warnings, offers, refusal, denial, complaint . . . ;

Attitude: conveying emotion, affect, stance, e.g. adverbs: unfortunately, luckily; adjectives: bright, . . . .

### Textual

Mode or medium of communication, which links context to co-text, how the message is conveyed;

Foregrounding/ focusing: phonology, font, colour, music, sound, volume, location or placement;

Reference: how the message is held together, linked, or framed, to make its impact with the context in which it is set, deixis, e.g. specific times, places, people;

Theme/Rheme: structural arrangement, e.g. known to unknown, familiar to new indicates assumptions, presumed/shared knowledge, desired emphasis;

Conjunction: links of causality, time, contrasts. When factual statements are categorically delivered they may indicate seemingly justified assumptions.