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Language as Evolving: Introductory Notes to Some Aspects of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics[1]

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to give a brief introduction of Systemic Functional Linguistics to people new to this theory of linguistic description by shedding light on some of its aspects, chief among these the insights that this theory gives on language learning and its contribution to the field of education in general and pedagogy in particular. Written in an accessible style, this paper tries, to the utmost, to simplify when possible, the theory by avoiding the use of all the metalanguage and technical jargons that theorists display in their writings. It thus requires no prior knowledge or readings, as it uses no indexical references to other theories of linguistic descriptions or other sources but the ones that they inform this paper.
Keywords: Language evolving, SFL theory, metafunctions, context of situation, register, transitivity, theme/rheme, mood, ontogenesis, education

1. Introduction

One alternative way of dealing with language description would be from a functionalist perspective. The concern herein is on how language is organised to achieve the social functions it is meant to serve (Widdowson, 1996). The focus is thus on language as a social phenomenon. MAK Halliday talks about 'language as social semiotics', i.e. as a system of set signs (meanings) socially motivated that are used to express our beliefs, cultures and communion needs. Language, in systemic functional perspective, is regarded as a semiotic tool/resource that interacts with the eco-social environment for making and exchanging meaning.

Halliday's systemic functional description is meant to answer the question of how language works. Halliday views language as a meaning –making resource i.e., language as 'meaning-potential'. To learn a language is to learn how to mean (Halliday, 1975). Indeed, we are creatures who mean. Linguistics is then seen as the study of meaning in society. But what is meant, first, by the expression: systemic functional description of language?

Functional is used in opposition to formal so far as it considers language as 'a practical means of expressing meaning rather than as an abstract set of relations' (Flowerdew, 2013:11). Grammar, in Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL), and lexis are two poles of the same continuum that combine together so that to construe meaning. This combination is referred to as ' lexicogrammar'. In other words, SFL is concerned with how language is used. This functionality, according to Halliday (1985) lies on 'three distinct aspects of its interpretation of: text, system and structure' (ibid: xiii). Language has evolved through time with the evolution of the human species so that to cope with its needs. It is, hence, organized as such. What is of interest is the way language has been fashioned to meet our social needs. The Systemic Functional model of linguistic description should, hence, reflect the essential social nature of language. Its design has to represent the social purposes/ functions language has evolved to fulfil. To serve these functions language is organised around two kinds of meanings: the ideational and the interpersonal. A third metafunctional component, the textual, is said to bestow relevance on the first two. All elements of language are then explained by reference to these functions. I will return to this issue later. This tripartite structure, as Widdowson (2004:26) refers to, and around which the model is built, accounts for how language is intrinsically fashioned so that to mean.

Systemic contrasts with systematic and refers to the range of multiple options that the language producer has at his disposal so that to realise meanings. This range of choices is set paradigmatically and concerns the elements that can be substituted for each other in a particular context.

> A systemic grammar differs from other functional grammars (and from all formal grammars) in that it is paradigmatic: a *system* is a paradigmatic set of alternative features, of which one must be chosen if the entry condition is satisfied. ((Emphasis in the original)
>
> (Halliday, 2003 [1992]: 209)

Therefore, choice -from within the semantic system networks - is the primary organizing element of the linguistic resources of the language system. This 'system network formalizes the idea that language is a *potential* from which *choices* can be made in particular *environments* (Taverniers, 2002:30) (Emphasis in the original). A

[1] The account given in this paper focuses on MAK Halliday's model. It does not, as such, make reference to the alternative Robin P. Fawcett's Cardiff model.

description of a grammar of language requires first the description of the systems of the choices that we inherit from our community and likewise, the understanding of a meaning of a text needs not only an understanding of the choices made at the level of theme (the point of departure for the message of the clause), mood (and hence the speech function taken up) and transitivity (the type of process, associated participants and any circumstances), but also the explanation of why they are ended at this instance of time (Lukin, 2012).

Language is thus viewed in terms of choice potential. Therefore, SFL is a theory of meaning concerned with how choice is made rather than how the clause is structured at the syntagmatic level to realise meaning. The 'focus is' then 'on language as resource, never as set of rules' (Christie, 2002:13). Even though, structure is also important in the description, yet it is regarded as the outer form that the systemic choice takes and not its defining characteristic.

2. Language Functions

Halliday's SFL theory is grounded on how language is used to construe reality and enact social relations. Its focus is on the functions around which language has evolved to serve. While linguists claim that language fulfils a variety of functions, they stress out two main ones, three actually Halliday says. These are the topic of my current discussion:

2.1 The Ideational Metafunction:

Bennett (1976:5) points out that 'it seems likely that communication is a matter of speaker's seeking either to inform a hearer or to enjoin some action upon him.' Language allows us to talk about the world outside, to inform people about things, events that they do ignore or seek to know about. Thus, when a asks his classmate about what happened in the amphitheatre, while he was away, what he is doing, in fact is to ask his addressee (informant) to be both clear and precise in his answer. His speech is 'message oriented'. This has to do with the outside reality and the way we act on it to adapt it according to our needs and purposes. This is called the ideational metafunction where language is seen as reflection, i.e., a means that enables me as a language user to reflect/ dwell about the outer reality (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). This metafunction consists of two components: the 'experiential' and the 'logical'. The former displays 'features of the real world as it is apprehended in our experience' (Halliday and Hasan, 1989: 19), the latter is concerned with the organization of the semantic system, namely the realization of the logical connectedness between the meanings of clauses.

2.2 The Interpersonal Metafunction:

Language allows us to express opinions and engage with others. It allows the first person speaker to cope, deal and build up/maintain social relations and commune with the second person hearer. Saying to someone '*it's nice today, init?*' has nothing to do with informing your interlocutor about a fact that he knows. Like you, he can see that the day is nice. What is primarily at issue here is not only the sharing of evident information to the participants, but also to maintain social relations. Social networks such as Facebook, Tweeter, Utube are instances that serve this aim, besides their ideational function. This is called the interpersonal metafunction or language as action according to Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid). It is for them both interactive and personal (ibid: 30).

The two distinct types of meanings, the ideational and the interpersonal are related, when the grammar is represented systemically, to two distinct networks of systems (Halliday and Matthiessen (ibid). This signifies, first, that 'every message is about something and addressing someone', and secondly that the two types of meaning can be 'freely combined' and 'do not constrain each other' (ibid).

2.3 The Textual Metafunction

The third function that language serves is different in nature, as it is not related to any communicative need. It is an enabling function that gives the preceding ones their form and shape and contributes to the construction of text. It is concerned with how the linguistic message is organised. The textual function bestows, as said earlier, significance on the ideational and the interpersonal ones. They 'depend on being able to build up sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow, creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along' (ibid).

This, for Widdowson (2004: 27), implies that both the ideational and the interpersonal function 'are inert and are only made relevant … when acted upon by the textual'. It should be noted, however, that these metafunctions do not exist independently from each other. They are, in fact, realised simultaneously in any stretch of language use. It would be odd to claim that a clause has only one function. The fact is that all the metafunctions are interwoven to realise meaning. Their presentation in isolation is just for the sake of illustration. Any model of description is based on idealization/abstraction (see Widdowson, 1996) and SFL is no exception.

These three metafunctions are said to have their origins in Malinowski's notions of context of situation and that of culture (1923, 1935). The ideational metafunction is related to the context of culture, the

interpersonal to the context of situation and the textual to the verbal context (Szarkowska, 2012: 61).

Since humans first mastered speech, through the glories of world literature, right up to the cyber world of today with its html codes and texting, language has always been a means that fulfils these functions.

The question that may come to mind now is the difference between 'function' and 'metafunction'. Throughout my discussion I have been, somehow, using these two terms interchangeably though, according to the Systemic Functional traditions they are not. In what follows, I will try to shed light on their difference and dwell on what have motivated Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) to coin the term metafunction when referring to the above three mentioned functions.

All functional theories of language since Malinowski (1923) equate the term function with that of 'use' or 'purpose'. They all conceived it in non-linguistic terms. This is quite understandable since their orientations were anthropological (Malinowski, 1923, 1935), psychological (Bühler, 1934), ethological (Morris, 1967) and educational (Britton, 1970). Language per se was not their object of study; it was a tool to explain phenomena related to their fields of inquiry. In other words, they were momentary linguists in the service of their respective disciplines. Their findings are meant to be 'generalisation about language use rather than explanation of the nature of the linguistic system' (Halliday, 2007 [1975]: 172). In this line of thought, functionality was seen as extrinsic to language; whereas, from a pure linguistic perspective, it is 'a fundamental property of language itself …something that is basic to the evolution of the semantic system' (Halliday and Hasan, 1989: 17). ' A systemic analysis', Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:31) argue:

> shows that functionality is *intrinsic* to language: that is to say, the entire architecture of language is arranged along functional lines. Language is as it is because of the functions in which it has evolved in the human species. The term 'metafunction' was adopted to suggest that function was an integral component within the overall theory. (Emphasis in the original)

3. The Notion of Text

The three metafunctions: the ideational, interpersonal and textual are present in every semantic unit… the term is used here in its Hallidayan sense. The linguistic choices made from them constitute a text. This is defined as an instance of language use written or spoken. It is thus language that is functional; language 'that plays some part in a context of situation'. It is language that 'does some job' (Halliday and Hassan, 1989: 10). What differentiates it from non-text is its reason of realisation as such. In other words, its value as a text is determined by the intrinsic function that is intended to serve. Hence, it is functionally informed and has no place of its own without that functional purpose. This latter varies according to the context that the text is embedded in.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:3) make a distinction between text as 'artefact, an object in its own' where the focus of the grammarian is on the text per se, and text as 'a specimen', a tool used to unfold the system of language in which the text occurs. These two views of text are, according to the co-authors, complementary. One cannot deal with the text as an object revealing what it may about the linguistic system of the language it is used in, unless he knows its intrinsic value. Similarly, one cannot know what the text means unless he understands the system it is used in.

A text is said to have two main essential properties: meaning and choice. Though it seems to be made of words and clauses (written) or sounds (spoken), it is in fact made of meanings. Words, clauses and sounds are just means through which the text is realized/ encoded. It is thus a semantic unit, and being a union of content and expression, it has to be necessarily encoded in different strata of language: lexicogrammar, phonology then phonetics. It is the combination between these strata that allows the text, to use Halliday's words, to be 'subjectively experienced as a seamless flow'.

Secondly, a text is made of choice. It is an instance of social meaning from a set of potential options that are available, at the paradigmatic level, to its producer. It is the outcome of 'a continuous process of choice among innumerable interrelated sets of semantic options' (Halliday, 1975: 123). It is what can be meant, the possible, I would rather say. It is the immediate and the experienced from that initial potential. What determines the selection of one particular option at the expense of the other is its contextual environment. Text, in other words, is an instance … the actualization of the meaning potential of language as a system. It should be noted, however, that system and text are not two distinct entities, but two poles of the same continuum, I would say, seen from different 'time depth', and the relation between them is that of instantiation (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:26).

To make the notion of meaning potential a bit clear, let's take the following pieces of discourse:

Close the door!
Be an angel will you and close the door.
Would you close the door, please?
Close that damn door!
The door is open!
I'll be grateful if you could close the door.

In all these instances of language use, the communicative purpose is the same: to get the door closed even though the moods differ from imperative, to interrogative, to declarative. All these instances represent what is possible, for someone to say, in particular time and context. They can all potentially be used. However, only one will be used … realised as an actual linguistic behaviour. The choice of one particular option is determined by the contextual elements, i.e., the choice of mood relative to the context is conditioned by the participant social roles and their relative social status. It signals the kind of relationship that exists between the participants in the discourse and their attitudes. Thus, one type of language choice might not be appropriate in a particular situational context. Choice and status, I would rather say, have to go hand in hand.

All the above texts have the same status. They all get their meanings by selecting from the same meaning-making resources. However, what distinguishes them is the way these resources have been arranged. This meaning potential can be interpreted either by relating it to the context of culture or the context of situation depending on how we prefer to consider it:

> We may choose to think of the meaning potential as being the whole semantic system of the language; or we may choose to think of it in the form of specific sub-systems each of which (or each set of which) is associated with a particular class of situations. The former is a fiction; we cannot describe the whole semantic system. The latter is also, of course, a fiction; but it may be a more accessible one. It may be possible to represent the meaning potential in the form of sets of options that are specific to a given situation type.
>
> Halliday (2004 [1975]: 285)

4. The Context of Situation and Register

One of the definitions of text is that it is language that is functional, language that achieves a purpose in a particular context. This presumes that context precedes text. It is, as we have seen, context that shapes the text and accounts for the ways it is fashioned by relating it to situation it is realised in. No text can be understood unless it is contextulised. In fact, no text would exist without its contextual elements. These extralinguistic elements are referred to, in the SFL literature, as the context of situation. The term harks back to Malinowski 1923 who argued, quite convincingly, that ‘ the real understanding of words is always ultimately derived from active experience of those aspects of reality to which the words belong’ (Malinowski, 1935:58). He later extended the notion of context to include both that of situation (the environment of the text) and that of culture (the environment of the overall language system):

> The former stress the *situation* as the context for language as *text*; and they see language as a form of action, as the enactment of social relationships and social processes. The latter stress the *culture* as the context for language as *system*; and they see language as a form of reflection, as the construal of experience into a theory or model of reality. (Emphasis in the original)
>
> (Halliday, 1991:273)

However, Malinowski was an anthropologist who cared too little about linguistics to integrate the notion of situation as a type of context into a general theory of language. It was his younger colleague, J. R. Firth, a linguist by orientation, who incorporated the idea:

> My view was … that ‘context of situation’ is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events …A context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:
>
> A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
> (i) The verbal action of the participants.
> (ii) The non- verbal action of the participants
> B. The relevant objects.
> C. The effect of the verbal action.
>
> Contexts of situation and types of language function can then be grouped and classified.
>
> (Firth, 1957:182)

Halliday (1978:10) sees the context of situation rather as a ‘theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located’ consisting of three main components: the social activity taking place, the people involved in it and their relation to one another, then finally what part the text is playing. These variable contextual aspects, Halliday and Hasan (1989: 11) assert, ‘serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being ‘exchanged’’. They are to be found in every situation type and do make the difference in the way we use language. They are glossed, respectively, as ‘Field of discourse’, ‘Tenor of discourse’ and ‘Mode of discourse’. They, in fact, form the basis of Halliday theoretical framework of context of situation best known in SFL as ‘Register’. Halliday and Hasan (ibid: 38-39) define the latter as ‘a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, tenor and mode’. Elsewhere, Halliday (1978) defines it as ‘ a functional variety of language’. A simpler definition is to be found in Flowerdew (2013:13) who sees it as ‘a set of linguistic choices associated with a particular situation’.

4.1 The Field of Discourse: This has to do with what is happening in the situation and the social nature of the activity that is taking place. It is reflected in the ideational metafunction. The clause is viewed here as 'representation'.

4.2 The Tenor of Discourse: It deals with the participants that are involved in the action that is taking place, their social status, their roles in the situation and the relationship that might exist between them. Tenor is expressed through the interpersonal metafunction. The clause is viewed here as 'exchange'.

4.3 The Mode of Discourse: It is concerned with the role of language in the situation and what it is that language is doing for the participants. It deals with the mode of delivery of the message and the organization and coherence of the text. This third element resonates with the textual metafunction. The clause is viewed here as 'message'.

These three components, when conflated with one another are means through which meanings are constructed. They 'define', according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:34), 'a multi-dimensional semiotic space – the environment of meanings in which language, other semiotic systems and social systems operate'.

It should be noted that the concept of register relates language to the context of situation, whereas that of genre relates it to the context of culture (Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014:125).

5. The Clause and the Three Lines of Meaning

We saw that with each component of register, the clause takes on a different characteristic: message, exchange and representation. These three lines of meaning 'are mapped on to one another to produce a single wording' (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2014:88). Thus, the structure of the clause integrates its functions simultaneously in what is known as the Theme system (the Textual line), Mood (the interpersonal line) and, Transitivity (the ideational line). In what follows, I will consider these three metafunctional aspects of the clause. Let's begin with the one that gives the clause its character of message.

5.1 The Clause as Message: Theme and Rheme

A clause in any language is organised in a way that allows it to fit in with and contribute to the flow of discourse; i.e., fulfils its metafunction of message. In English this is achieved by assigning to one part of it the status of 'theme'. This combines with another part to form the message of the clause. 'Theme' is what constitutes the starting point/ block of the message, that which appears first in the clause. 'It is that which locates and orients the clause within its context' (Ibid: 89). By stating one part of the message in initial position the addresser/speaker indicates to the addressee/ hearer that this is the prominent part of it and on which the latter has to rely and process the message. The second part of the clause, what is to come after the 'Theme' is referred to, according to the Prague School tradition, 'Rheme'. The clause, therefore, consists of a 'Theme'; what is eminent, in its initial position … that what is thematic prominent, and a 'Rheme' that what comes next and is thematic non-prominent. To illustrate this point the following instance will do:

The novel *that John read*	*was Anthony Burgess's , A Clock Orange.*
Theme	Rheme

The 'novel' is set as the 'theme'. It is mentioned in the beginning of the clause and is thus highlighted to the reader so that to notice and focus on it to unfold the remaining part of the text. Notice, in the following example how the theme changes:

John	*read Anthony Burgess's novel, A Clock Orange*
Theme	Rheme

' John' figures initially in the clause, and hence he becomes the theme. We can go further:

Reading Anthony Burgess's novel, A Clock Orange,	*was what John did*
Theme	Rheme

What John did	*was Reading Anthony Burgess's novel, A Clock Orange,*
Theme	Rheme

As a general rule, a Theme of a clause is that which has some function. It can be a Participant, a Process or a Circumstance. I will return to these concepts into more detail in the section on Transitivity.

5.2 The Clause as Exchange: Mood

The second line of meaning in the clause is its interpersonal function as an exchange. Mood is said to be the grammatical system that governs this type of metafunctional dimension of the clause. There are, in the English language, three types of Mood: the Declarative, the Interrogative and the Imperative.

The Mood element consists of two parts: the Subject, a nominal group and a Finite, Operator, part of the verbal group. It is important to note, however, that the order of these two elements is not identical in all types of Mood. Thus, in the Declarative the order is as follow: Subject ^ Finite, in the Interrogative: Finite ^ Subject; whereas, there is no mood element in the Imperative.

The rest of the verbal group, after the Mood is the Predicator which is part of what is termed the Residue (what is remained in the clause). So, in the following instance:

He might object to it.

'*he*' is the Subject and '*might*' is the Finite. '*object to it*.' is the Residue with '*object*' as the Predicator. Therefore, '*he*' and '*might*' constitute the Mood. A clause, hence, consists of a Mood and a Residue. In what follows, I will consider the constituents of the Mood:

5.2.1 Mood Constituents:

a. The Subject:

Though the term Subject is well known in the traditional grammar, it is used in SFL in functional terms. The Subject has been defined traditionally as 'an entity of which something is predicted in the rest of the clause' (Thompson, 2014:54). According to Halliday, the Subject is the entity responsible for the validity of the proposition being advanced in the clause (ibid). One has to distinguish between the Subject 'on which rests the truth of the argument' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014:78), the Actor which is the doer of the action and the Theme, that which is the concern of the message. Mind you, there are circumstances when the Subject can embody all three. For example suppose we say

Routledge published a book on Linguistics.

Routledge	*published a book on Linguistics*
Theme Actor Subject	

Consider now the following sentence:

A book, on Linguistics, was published by Routledge.

A book	*on Linguistics (was published)*	*by Routledge*
Theme	Subject	Actor

How about this instance?

On Linguistics, a book was published by Routledge.

On Linguistics	a book (was published)	by Routledge
Theme	Subject	Actor

Book is the Subject, so it is only '*it*' that can figure in the tag and the response. In fact, all Subjects can be identified in Mood tag/ tag questions.

On linguistics, a book was published, wasn't it? Yes, it was. No, it wasn't.

b. The Finite:

The Finite is that verbal operator which expresses verbal tense, termed Temporal operator as: '*is'*, '*has'* or modality as: '*can*', '*must*' and referred to as Model operator. A complete list of these operators is to be found on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 145). The Finite constitutes the verbal component of the Mood; the Subject is the nominal one. The function of the Finite is to show:

1. Tense: the time validity of the proposition (present, past, future) as in

He was a sportsman. He still is.

2. Polarity: This has to do with whether the proposition is of positive or negative validity as in:

Have you seen John lately? Yes, I have. No, I haven't.

3. Modality: The extent to which the proposition is valid as in

It could be a mistake. Oh, it should be.

5.2.2 Residue Constituents:

As I have already stated, the Residue is the verbal group that comes after the Mood. It is, to quote Thompson (2014:62) ' what is left over once the Mood has been established.' It consists of three functional elements: Predicator, Complement and Adjunct.

a. Predicator:

It is the content part of the verbal group; that what comes immediately after the Mood. For example in the instances that follow:

The sun was shining.

The student has been reading.

The car is broken.

He might have seen him.

The parts *shining*, *been reading*, *broken* and *have seen* all function as Predicators. The function of the Predicator

is to:

1. Specify time, other than that of the speech event, the one Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:151) refer to as 'secondary tense: past, present or future, relative to the primary tense'.

2. Specify the nature of the process: action, event, mental or relation. I will discuss the notion of process in detail in my talk on Transitivity.

3. Specify the voice: either active or passive, and

4. Specify aspects and phases as seeming, trying, hoping

b. Complement:

It is that part of the Residue that has the potential of being Subject, but it is not. Being a Participant, it is, hence, realised by a nominal group.

John offered Marry a ring for her birthday.

In this instance, we have two complements, *Marry* and *ring*. Either of them could be Subject.

Marry was offered a ring for her birthday by John. Or,

A ring was offered to Marry for her birthday by John.

c. Adjunct:

Unlike Complement, the Adjunct cannot be a Subject. It is realised by a verbal group or a propositional phrase. In

The soldier was decorated with a medal yesterday by the General.

there are two Adjuncts: the adverbial group *yesterday* and the prepositional phrase *by the General.* An adjunct in general amplify or modify the meaning of the message of the clause. There exist three types of Adjunct which they all contribute to the experiential meaning of the clause. Circumstantial Adjuncts are all concerned with the circumstances surrounding the event: the when, where, how and why. These will be dealt with in the discussion that follows.

She left home with her kid yesterday.

' *Yesterday'* is a Circumstantial Adjunct.

Other Adjuncts are the ones we term Conjunctives. These relate the clause to the text that precedes it. Instances of Conjunctives are: 'however, on the other hand, whereas, alternatively, as a result, thus, nevertheless, then, etc.'. However, one must not get confused between Conjunctives and conjunctions. The former show how clauses are related to each other; whereas, the latter link two clauses together to form a sentence.

The newcomer, however, is far better than his predecessor.

'*However*' is a Conjunctive Adjunct.

The third type of Adjunct is Modal Adjuncts. Modal Adjuncts are either Mood Adjuncts, if they provide additional information, or Content Adjuncts if 'they orient the hearer to the message by signalling a standpoint from which to view the information in the clause' (Thompson, 2014: 162).

James could hardly think of it. (Mood Adjunct)

They have, no doubt, done their best to reach their goals. (Content Adjunct)

5.3 The Cause as Representation: Transitivity

I said earlier that one of the metafunctions of language is the ideational. Language has resources to express actions, events and states. In the following discussion, I will relatively explore one of the ways these 'Processes' get realised, namely what in SFL is referred to as 'Transitivity System'. Basically, this is the system that enables us to precise 'who does what to whom. where, when and how.' This is concerned with the Participants, the Processes and the Circumstances in a given text. It allows us to see who the participants are, their roles, the type of processes they are involved in and the circumstances that surround the events in which the text is produced. These circumstances are not ' directly involved in the process; rather they are attendant to it' (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004: 213). To illustrate the point made, let's consider the following example:

They offered their kid a gift in Christmas.

Considering who does what to whom, where, when and how, we will say that '*they*', '*kid*' and '*gift*' are Participants, '*offered*' is the Process and '*in Christmas*' is the Circumstance**.** Mind you, a clause may have more than one Participant as is the case in our example. The circumstance is optional; however, the process is the nucleus of the clause. Important is to know that the term process belongs to the level of meaning and not form. As such, it is part of the semantic and not the syntactic description of the clause. However, the 'Process' is always expressed in the 'main verb' of the clause, so too is the 'Participant' expressed in the 'Subject' and 'Complement'. Consider the following clause:

They won the game.

Type of description	*They*	*won*	*the game*
Semantic description	Participant	Process	Participant
Formal description	Subject	Verb	Complement

People may associate process with doings, yet this is not always the case. Consider the Processes

(underlined) of the following instances:
They thought the car was expensive
The grass is green.
They nicknamed him Volcano.
There is a stranger in the office.
The parents breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing the news of their daughter's success.
Though they are all Processes, they are different in nature. Their types differ as they express event, relation, physical, mental and emotional state. We will identify the process types of these clauses as the discussion progresses. This leads me to dwell upon the six existing types of processes: Material, Mental, Verbal, Existential, Relational and Behavioural. Each, Process is associated with a unique set of Participants as indicated in the table below:

Processes	**Participants**
Material	Actor, Goal, Scope, Attribute, Client, Recipient
Mental	Sensor, Phenomenon
Verbal	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage
Existential	Existent
Relational	Carrier/Attribute, Token/Value
Behavioural	Behaver, Behaviour

In the remainder of this heading, I will concentrate on describing these processes and their associated configurations of participant roles.
A. Material Processes: These are processes that describe actions that are concrete and tangible. They are all related to 'doing'. They are all concerned with our experience of the material world. To identify a Material Process, one needs to ask the question: *What did x do?*
As in the previous example: '*They offered their kid a nice gift'*, to identify the Material Process type, one asks the question: What did they do? … *They offered their kid a gift*. Therefore, material processes are about actions and theses require necessarily an 'actor' or a 'participant'. I said earlier that a clause might contain more than one participant as in: '*They offered their kid a gift*''. '*They*', '*kid*' and '*gift*' are all participants. However, only one is doing the action and can be referred to as the 'actor': '*they*'. So how about the two remaining participants? For sure, they cannot be called actors too. ' *their kid*' is, in this instance, the receiver of the '*gift*'. Participants of this kind are called ' recipients'. In order to identify the recipient, we need to ask the question: *what did x do to y?* .
We are now left with the third participant: '*gift'*. This is the participant that is affected by the action of *offering.* We call this 'Goal'. So, a detailed semantic description of '*they offered their kid a gift*' would be as follow:

They	*offered*	*their kid*	*a gift*
Participant (Actor)	Process (Material)	Participant (Recipient)	Participant (Goal)

Consider now the following instance:
They played football.
Obviously, '*they*' and '*football*' are the participants. '*Played*' is the process. If we can identify '*They*' as being the actor, we are not so sure about the second participant, '*football*' as it does not in one of the cases that we have dealt with. '*Football*' is here neither a 'Recipient' nor a 'Goal'. So, what is then? '*Football'* in this situation is unaffected by the action of playing. Participants like this are referred to as 'Scope'.

They	*played*	*football*
Participant (Actor)	Process (Material)	Participant (Scope)

We are now left with two kinds of participants of material processes : 'attribute' and 'Client'. The former, as its name suggests, has to do with a quality ascribed or attributed to an entity, the latter refers to the beneficiary of the action. For whom/which the action occurs. Let's illustrate this with an example, the following will do:
They painted the room blue for their kid.
A semantic/functional description would be as follow:

They	*painted*	*the room*	*blue*	*for their kid*
Participant (Actor)	Process (Material)	Participant (Goal)	Participant (Attribute)	Participant (Client)

It is important to bear in mind that the difference between Goal and Scope lies in the fact that ' 'Goal' is that which is affected by something being done to it (that is, it either changes its position or its status). If it remains unaffected (or unimpacted), it is not 'Goal', but 'Scope' ' (SFG Page). The second important point to remember has to do with the difference between 'Recipient' and 'Client'. Indeed while the former 'takes the preposition 'to', the latter takes 'for'' (ibid).

He gave it (to) his son. (Recipient/the receiver of the service/goods)
He bought it (for) his son. (Client / the beneficiary of the action)
B. Mental processes: They do not describe actions or doings and are thus probed differently from material processes. The concern here is *'What x think/feel/know about x?'*.
According to Halliday Mental Processes fall into three categories: cognition (Knowing, thinking, understanding, e.g. *They thought the car was expensive.*), affection (fearing, liking, e.g. *He dislikes being interrupted.*), and perception (hearing, seeing, e.g. *Mike saw it on the movie.*). 'Mental clauses are concerned with our experience of the world of our own consciousness' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 259).
All Mental Processes have two participants. However, these participants and because of the difference between material and mental processes cannot be labeled 'Actor', 'Recipient' and son on. We need, then, to identify them differently. I said that Mental Processes have two participants; one of them should necessarily be a conscious human or anthropomorphized non-human participant who feels, thinks, perceives, etc. To this, we give the technical name 'Senser'. The second non- active participant in the Mental Process clause is labelled 'Phenomenon'. This is which is thought, perceived, hated, etc., by the conscious 'Senser'.

He	*hates*	*onions*
Participant (Senser)	Process (Mental)	Participant (Phenomenon)

Halliday goes further and split Phenomenon into two more classes: 'Phenomenon' as 'Act' and 'Phenomenon' as 'Fact'. The former is realised 'by an imperfective non-finite clause acting as if it were a simple noun' (Eggins, 2004:227). For example:

He	*saw*	*The demolition of the building*
Participant (Senser)	Process (Mental)	Participant (Phenomenon: Act)

To determine an Act, one needs to bear in mind that we cannot insert the word 'that' directly after the Mental Process:
He saw that the demolition of the house. (Wrong!)
'Fact' phenomenon is 'an embedded clause, usually finite and usually introduced by a 'that', functioning as if it were a simple noun. It can be identified as a Fact-embedding because a Fact-noun can be inserted before the (explicit or implicit) that which introduces it' (Ibid: 228).

He	*regretted*	*that he didn't tell her.*
He	*regretted*	*The fact that he didn't tell her.*
Participant (Senser)	Process (Mental)	Participant Phenomenon: Fact

'Fact phenomenon' can be reversed by using the fact embedded clause as Subject.

The fact that he didn't tell her.	*annoyed*	*him*
Participant (Phenomenon: Fact)	Process (Mental)	Participant (Senser)

C. Verbal processes: They contain three Participants: 'Sayer' (the addresser), 'Receiver' (the addressee, or the entity targeted by the content) and 'Verbiage' (the propositional content of what is said or targeted). This is 'a noun expressing some kind of verbal behaviour (e.g. statement, questions, retort, answer, story, etc.' (ibid: 235). In other words they all refer to processes of saying.

They	*nicknamed*	*him*	*Volcano*
Participant (Sayer)	Process (Verbal)	Participant (Receiver)	Participant (Verbiage)

D. Existential processes: Existential Process clauses are those referring to existence containing only one Participant. They are usually used with 'be' and introduced with an empty 'there'. They never occur in the progressive form.

There is	*a stranger*	*In the office*
Process (Existential)	Existent	Circumstance (Location)

E. Relational processes: Relational Processes clauses have to do with being and existing. The relational verb process is in most cases the verb 'be'. Other verbs are 'look', 'seem', 'become' and 'have'. They require necessarily two participants. The Relational Process clauses are of two sub-types: 'Identifying' and 'Attributive'.
Identifying: *A* is the identifying of *x*
Attributive: *A* is the attribute of *x*
'In identifying relational process clauses, the participants are *identifier*, which usually precedes the verb, and *identified*, which usually follows the verb' (Flowerdew, 2013: 17). (Emphasis in the original)

That boy	*is*	*my son*
Identifier	Relational Process	Identified

In 'identifying' processes, the participant can be reversed:

My son	*is*	*that boy*
Identifier	Relational Process	Identified

What was the subject, grammatically speaking, in the first clause, become the complement and vice versa. In 'Attributive' clauses the participants cannot be, however, reversed. The obligatory participant is the 'Carrier', which comes before the verb. The verb is followed by an 'Attribute', which may be an adjectival or nominal group (ibid).

The grass	*is*	*green*
Carrier	Relational Process	Attribute

F. Behavioural processes: Examples of Behavioural Processes include watch, listen and cry. Behavioural processes are intransitive. The 'Behaver' is the only Participant in the behavioural clauses, though there may also be another participant, the 'Behaviour'. Behavioural Processes are in the intermediate between Material and Mental Processes as they incorporate both types of meaning: they include verbs that are, in part, material and verbs that are psychological. The clause can be checked with ' *What did the 'Behaver' do?*', which is not the case with Mental Processes clauses.

The parents	*breathed*	*a sigh of relief*	*upon hearing the news*
Behaver	Behavioural Process	Behaver	Circumstance

They	*stared*	*at him*
Behaver	Behavioural Process	Behaviour

Overall, I will assert that the three lines of meaning map onto each other functionally and structurally to allow us to actualize the meaning potential of language. This combination allows grammar in SFL to be of a 3-layers construction:

Metafunctions	*The parents*	*offered*	*a gift*	*to their son*
Interpersonal	Subject	Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
Experiential	Actor	Process	Goal	Recipient
Textual	Theme	Rheme		

The three set of option/semantic choices: Transitivity, Mood and Theme form, as such, the structural shape of the English clause:

Ideational Clause as representation ***Transitivity*** (What the clause is about)	**Interpersonal** Clause as exchange ***Mood*** (What the clause is doing)
Textual Clause as message ***Theme*** (How the clause is organised as message)	

The structural shape of the English clause

6. Language Ontogenesis Development and learning

Halliday feels unease with Chomsky's syntactic structures and acquisition. For him, language development is rather a continuous semiotic process of construction/construing rather than acquisition. It is based on semantics rather than syntax (Halliday, 1979: 07). As children we have to construct language, i.e. learn how to mean and this construction is not done on our own, it is rather than with interaction with our immediate family members … Halliday (2004) terms them 'meaning group' … who not only serve as a model but also engage in this construction process. The metaphor of acquisition, as to Halliday, does not reflect this process:

> There is still the view that the mother tongue is what the child is striving to "acquire" from the outset. In my view this conception is wide of the mark. What small children are doing is learning how to mean.
>
> (Halliday in Painter, 2009:87)

Language has always been seen either as consisting of expressions and meanings for the psychologists,

or expressions and structures for the linguists. Neither these two views are satisfactory for Halliday. Both neglected either the abstract system of grammar or the realm of meaning. Halliday, in fact, sees language as a three level- strata construct: meanings, lexicogrammar and expressions. This is, so to speak, part of the architecture of the adult language. Infant protolanguage, for so Halliday terms it, consists of only two strata: content and expression. How does, then, language evolve to a complex multi strata system? This is the concern of my next move.

A comprehensive account of the ontogenesis of language development requires the discussion of two major themes: the different phases of language development from birth to adulthood and the three facts that inhere to language development: learning language, learning through language and learning about language.

6.1. Phases of Language Development:

One of the frames of meaning creating process (semogenesis) is what Halliday calls ontogenesis. This refers to the individual development of language. Four longitudinal case studies on individual children are said to serve as evidence for SFL theory on language development (Painter, 2009:87). The famous one remains that of Halliday with the then six months son Nigel (1975). During that study, Halliday noticed that language development goes through 3 non- discrete phases:

6.1.1 Phase 1: Protolanguage

The first phase in the development of language is described as protolanguage (Halliday, 2003 [1975]), and (by hypothesis) in the evolution of language in the human species (Matthiessen, 2006). It is when the child starts developing some proto-words that express certain functions. These proto-words are not the outcome of the child's, Nigel in this case, interaction with his caregivers, but his own 'creation', if we can say so.

> The text-in-situation by which [the child] is surrounded is filtered through his own functional- semantic grid, so that he processes just as much of it as can be interpreted in terms of his own meaning potential at the time.
>
> (Halliday, 1978: 124)

This protolanguage is bi-stratal consisting only of content and expression. Thus, the meaning is expressed by a simple sound or a gesture of any kind (Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:24). The second characteristic of protolanguage is the fact that it is microfunctional in organization. The microfunctions that the proto- words serve, and which are as follow:

Instrumental: the 'I want' function.
Regulatory: the 'do as I tell you' function.
Interactional: the 'me and you' function.
Personal: the 'here I come' function.
Heuristic: the 'tell me why' function.
Imaginary: the 'let's pretend' function.
Informative: the 'I've got something to tell you' function.

(Flowerdew, 2013: 11)

are linked to a particular context of use: 'their meaning potentials are organized into a small number of microfunctions, each one of which is associated with a different context of use (Matthiessen et al, 2010:195-196).

Though protolanguage serves different functions; it is, indeed, 'monofunctional' as its multifunctionality is limited. The above listed microfunctions 'are not simultaneous in the system - they are alternative modes of meaning, and speakers can only mean within one microfunction or another at a given moment in time' (Matthiessen, 2006: 58). In this stage, therefore, function equals use and is directly tied to context. The child cannot, at this stage, use his protolanguage, to name things, to refer or engage into structured form of discourse. For that, a third stratum that is interpolated between content and expression is needed: lexicogrammar.

6.1.2 Phase 2: Transition

The second phase of the ontogenetic developmental process of language is the one that Halliday (1975) identified as the transition phase from protolanguage to adult language. If the first phase is micro-functional in organization, the second is rather macrofunctional with two macrofunctions: the mathetic for learning (reflecting on and understanding the world) and the pragmatic for doing (acting on the world via the caregivers). The distinction between them is realised by the intonation pattern: the former is realised by a falling tone and the latter by a rising one. The two macrofunctions are still in this phase, it should be noted, mutually exclusive and never instantiated together. Finally, what can be noticed however, is the gradual splitting of the content plane into two content strata: the stratum of semantics and that of lexicogrammar.

> What emerges in the transition phase, then, is that the content or ideational meaning of the utterance is signalled by the articulation of the name, while its interpersonal or illocutionary meaning as a speech act (i.e. its status as a demand or comment) is signalled by intonation or voice quality. The

> significance of this is that for the first time, two strands of meaning – an ideational one relating to content or topic (e.g. cat vs dog) and an interpersonal one relating to speech function (e.g. demand vs comment) – can be separately notated in the utterance so that it is possible to mean two things simultaneously.
>
> (Painter, 2009: 91)

6.1.3 Phase 3: Adult language

The adult-post infancy is the last of the three ontogenetic phases. The child move from the macrofunctional meaning to the metafunctional one with three functions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. These metafunctions are simultaneous, complementary and can be instantiated together. They all, indeed, combine together to realise the meaning potential of language, as said earlier.

To sum up, one can track the ontogenesis development of language as progressing from a 'non referring' proto language to a 'referential' language, then almost at once, from 'proper' to 'common' reference, that is from 'individual' reference to 'class' reference, then from 'concrete' to 'abstract' reference, and finally from 'congruent' to 'metaphorical' reference, i.e., from 'actual' to 'virtual' reference (Halliday, 2010). These ontogenesis developmental phases of language

> are roughly matched in the progression of the contexts in which meanings are exchanged.... first the home, the neighbourhood, then the primary school, then the secondary school. And this is, of course not a coincidence, because these **c**ontexts are the social institutions that have evolved to exploit the development sequence in the child potential to mean.
>
> (Ibid: 14'25'')

What should be stressed, however, is that whatever phase is identified, each one encompasses the one/ ones that preceded it.

All longitudinal studies after that of Halliday's (1975) confirmed Halliday's basic assertions that:

> the nature of development cannot be viewed as some kind of flowering that occurs independently with the child, or through the child's autonomous explorations of the environment, but must be seen from its inception as a profoundly social process … the SFL account of language development is one that has always stressed the dialogic, interpersonal nature of the process from birth onwards.
>
> (Painter, 2009: 95-96)

The following table illustrates the phases of language ontogenesis evolution with their characteristics:

Phase1	Protolanguage	Microfunction	Bi-stratal: - Content - Expression	Tied to context
Phase 2	Transition	Macrofunction	Tri-stratal: - Content with the gradual emergence within it of another stratum, that of lexicogrammar - Expression	Becomes dissociated from context
Phase 3	Adult language	Metafunction	Tri-stratal: - Content - Lexicogrammar - Expression	Context variable

6.2 Learning language, learning through language and learning about language:

Halliday claims that 'the ontogenesis of language is at the same time the ontogenesis of learning' (Halliday, 1993:93). Language learning is not a matter of 'learning sounds and words' nor 'learning how to name and refer' (Halliday, 1995: 7), but rather a process of 'learning how to mean'. Whatever socio-cultural environment children are brought up in, when learning to speak, children are engaged into a three-phase socio-semiotic process. This starts from birth onwards. This leads me to talk about the second major theme related to language ontogenesis development and the three facets that inhere to it: learning language, learning through language and learning about language.

6.2.1 Learning Language:

Learning language is on-going social semiotic interactive process of construal and construing and in which the child, from birth onwards is actively involved. The SFL theory of Halliday refuses to see the child as an isolated individual and language as a ready made product to be picked up, 'a commodity', to quote Halliday (1979: 8) 'out there to be possessed'. Language learning is a social phenomenon which main actors are the child and his social entourage/meaning group doing the unconscious 'tracking', that of assisting him in his learning process (see ibid: 10). The essential task of the child is to construe the three level strata-system which language consists of; the ones I mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter: meanings, lexicogrammar and expressions. In

this act of construal, the child moves through different phases of meanings. He moves from the microfunctional, to the macrofunctional then finally the metafunctional meanings where language reaches, so to speak, its adulthood shape. Each phase is associated with its proper context of situation, the home, the neighbourhood and the school with knowledge changing in nature: from commonsense (the discourse of the neighbourhood) to educational knowledge (the discourse of the primary school), then to the technical one (the discourse of the high-school). Halliday (2010: 16'57'') even talks about pre -commonsense knowledge that which is associated with the protolanguage phase and its context of situation, home.

As the child moves to larger social groups and interacts with his peers in his neighbourhood, his demand for more linguistic resources expands as he has more social needs. In fact, his 'survival' depends on his ability to cope, through his linguistic behaviour, with his mates. The child has now to know the discursive strategies, simple though they might be at the beginning, to succeed in this transitional stage so to enter the stage of learning through language.

6.2.2 Learning through language:

With the era of school, socially in charge of language development (Halliday, ibid: 11), comes the period where the child becomes conscious of language namely because a new medium comes into the linguistic scene, that of writing. The teacher, now loco parentis, will provide him with the necessary tools, linguistic … of course, to negotiate not only meanings but also his social status through another medium than that of speech. The child will now learn cultural patterns related not only to his social groups, but to language as a whole. New forms of expressing experience, meanings and learning about language come into being. The child will learn how to use language so that to construct a reality of two kinds in nature: that of his inner world: thoughts, feelings and perceptions and that of his outer one: the reality out there. From now on, language becomes a tool for learning.

6.2.3 Learning about language:

Knowledge about language has to do with knowing how language works, its nature and function. This knowledge is unconscious, as we all humans have gone through the process of learning language, and can hardly be explicit. The evolution of writing as a system is the proof that this knowledge does exist. There was, according to Halliday (ibid: 17) 'no conscious analysis of language behind it'. Every system of writing, Halliday goes on saying, informs us about the nature of language, and the strata that it consists of. A distinction should, however, be made between this knowledge and the popular beliefs and speculation about how language is used (folk linguistics).

The relevance of these components of language development: 'learning language', 'learning through language' and 'learning about language' lies in the fact that they help us see that the ontogenesis development of language is a long social semiotic process that expands, with the contribution of the social institutions in which meanings are exchanged, from one stage to another: protolanguage, transition and adult language. Throughout these phases, meaning potential/ knowledge is accumulated and reorganised when necessary.

Finally, there is a need to remember that the separate study of the three components as distinct elements does not entail nor should it entail that they are separate; they, in fact, are three aspects that inhere to a single process.

7. Conclusion

SFL is a theory of linguistics that gives prominence to the social aspect of language and considers language as being the outcome of the interaction of the individual with his ecological and social environment. Language according to Halliday is better understood in relation to the social structure of its users. Its knowledge, far from being acquired, is socially transmitted. What is important in this theory is, unlike many other theories, its focus on the paradigmatic, vertical dimension of language. It thus, prioritises the choices available to the language user at any point in the utterance over how the constituents of the structure, syntagmatically, of course, maybe combined with others to produce a well-formed clause. For SFL, grammatical structures are seen as outcomes of the choices made at the paradigmatic level. What matters are not the wordings themselves, but how they are used in producing meaning. In other words, the concern is not the form but the function. Language is, first of all and above all, a social semiotic activity. Its study helps us understand what as humans we do share in common. It also raises our awareness that the diversity of our languages reflects our difference, as social creatures, in construing and reacting to our world. Each language reflects the reality of its users. And as long as these realities differ, the languages that do embed them differ too. It would be difficult to account for this linguistic diversity without an adoption of a purely systemic functional approach to language study. Herein lies, I would argue, the relevance of such an approach. This relevance is made more evident when we relate SFL to learning. It should be stressed that this theory has always been concerned with applied issues, especially with Halliday who does not distinguish between theoretical and applied linguistics by contrast to the mainstream formal traditions (Halliday & Hasan, 2004). SFL has, as a matter of fact, contributed greatly in the emergence of a theory of language with applied consequences in education. Two of its theories set it apart from other linguistic theories in the field of education and pedagogy. Register and genre theory help not only in the identification of text types but also in the

explanation of their significance to language learners. Halliday's Register theory is said to underpin the development of the English for Specific Purposes movement (Flowerdew, 2013). The metafunctional theory of grammar, in its turn, provides a significant understanding of how grammatical choices of any context of situation realise text types (see Christie, 2004). Not only that, SFL also gives us an account of the central social processes of learning and the conditions believed to promote its success. It has; indeed, served as a theoretical framework to several approaches to language teaching where content unit is functional and learning consequence, communicative competence.

Though sketchy might this paper be, in fact one cannot render justice to Halliday in such a contained space, it is hoped, however, that it has managed in presenting a clear picture of what SFL is; its main lines of thoughts and the important role that it may play, if used as a tool of analysis, in the description of various linguistic phenomena. Indeed, this theory, I would argue, has a lot to offer to the field of applied linguistics in particular. Future research might also reveal its relevance in other interdisciplinary and international fields of research that have until now remained unexplored.

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