

THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

 **Asst. Lect. Huda Hussein Shamal**
College of Medicine, University of Kufa

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an in-depth explanation of the construction of Functional Grammar theory, by providing insights from other theories that discuss, for instance, functionalism from the Prague School, Dik's Functional Grammar and ending with Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. Moreover, it highlights the foundational aspects such as ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta functions. The paper emphasizes how these frameworks conceptualize language as a tool for communication and meaning-making rather than a set of structural rules, as it reflects the impact of functional approaches on contemporary linguistic analysis. Therefore, terms like transitivity, markedness and theme and mood were also mentioned to support the multifunctionality of language.

Keywords: SFG, Role and Reference, Halliday, Transitivity, Markedness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Functional Grammar is a way of looking at grammar in terms of how grammar is used (web source 1). It is used for describing languages in functional terms. It focuses on the development of grammatical systems as a means for people to interact with each other.

Functional Grammar, based on systemic linguistics, emphasizes the way spoken and written language operate in different social situations (web source 2). In particular, it is very useful in showing how texts work beyond the level of the sentence, how different texts are structured, and how language varies to suit the purpose of the users. It takes on a descriptive approach and focuses on groups of words that function to make meanings.

2. On the Theories of Functional Grammar

2.1 Functionalism: The Prague School

The Structuralist functionalism of the Prague school was the earliest functionalist framework in the 1920s (web source 3). Mathesius conception of Functional grammar has a psychological(linguistic) background. He starts from the assumption that:

"Every communicative act of speech involves, before it comes to the real utterance, two fundamental processes, namely a process of naming selected elements of reality by means of the vocabulary, and a process of putting the particular naming units into mutual relations so as to constitute a sentence whole".

Thus, he arrives at two major sections of grammar, called **Functional Onomatology** and **Functional Syntax**(ibid). Mathesius was convinced that language phenomena should not be unduly separated from the activity of speaking.

Out of the classical Praguian research resources, assumptions and initiatives, the following two conceptual domains: **Functional Stylistics** and **Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP)**.

2.1.1 Functional Stylistics: has stood at the centre of interest of the Praguian school from the beginning, and it was treated as a linguistic discipline. Mathesius (1942\1982) defines style as a significant manner in which linguistic means of expression have been employed or will usually be employed for a concrete purpose.

2.2.2 Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP): The concept of **FSP** was suggested and elaborated by Mathesius. Mathesius started from the distinction between the sentence as a grammatical (and semantic) structure and the actual use of an utterance (enunciation, message and communication). Such utterance units appear in a context and situation, are associated with a certain speaker's intention and with a communicative effect, and it is precisely the regular outcome of the operation of these factors in the sentence that the term **FSP** refers to. Within an utterance, two points can be distinguished: the **theme** (what the speaker is speaking about) and the **rheme** 'enunciation proper' (what the speaker says about the theme). Mathesius ideas have been further developed by a number of Czech scholars, systematically by J. Firbas and his group, who advanced and refined the **FSP**-analysis by introducing the notion of different degrees of communicative dynamism of utterance components. Later, the Prague group of P. Sgall began consistently to inquire into **FSP**, critically following Fibras' suggestions and developing the concept of **FSP** in the frame of reference of their 'functional' generative approach (web source 3).

2.2 Functional Grammar (FG):

Functional Grammar was developed by the Dutch linguist Simon Dik and his colleagues from the late 1970s onwards (Barber& Stainton, 2010). Dik made a strong commitment to the centrality, in the formulation of a grammar, of the concept of communicative function:

"In Functional paradigm,.... a language is in the first place conceptualized as an instrument for social interaction among human beings, used with the intention of establishing communicative relationships. Within this paradigm, one attempts to reveal the instrumentality of language with respect to what people do and achieve with it in social interaction" (Dik, 1997a: 3).

Dik (ibid: 8) rejected the thesis that syntax is autonomous from Semantics and Pragmatics:

"Semantics is regarded as instrumental with respect to pragmatics, and syntax as instrumental with respect to semantics. In this view, there is no room for something like an 'autonomous' syntax. On the contrary, to the extent that a clear division can be made between syntax and semantics at all, syntax is there for people to be able to form complex expressions for conveying complex meanings, and such meanings are there for people to be able to communicate in subtle and differentiated ways."

This quotation suggested that pragmatics, as the driver of semantics, which in turn is the driving force behind the syntax, should play an important part in **FG**, and Dik does indeed set up a criterion of pragmatic adequacy for his grammar. He also made a commitment to the criterion of psychological adequacy, according to which the grammar should at least be compatible with what we know of the storage and processing of language (Barber& Stainton, 2010).

He does, however, accept that grammar is a structural system, governed by a set of rules and principles, which should nevertheless be explained, wherever possible, in terms of the functioning

of language as a communicative device (ibid). For example, Dick (1986: 27-28, 43) points out that expression types used to express politeness, deference, and social distance are typically longer and more complex than less polite counterparts, and that reflects two types of iconic principle: that of **dimension** vs. **augmentation** (important=high, big; unimportant=low, small) and the avoidance of directness. Dik's early model was purely a sentence grammar, although he did present a programmatic model of discourse structure in his later work.

FG has always had a strongly typological orientation. Dik (1997a: 14) stated that **FG** should: "*be typologically adequate, i.e., that it should be capable of providing grammars for languages of any type, while at the same time accounting systematically for the similarities and differences between these languages*".

2.3 Role and Reference Grammar (RRG)

Role and Reference Grammar made a strong commitment to the study of language as communication, as shown by the following quotation from an early work in which the initial basis of the theory was developed (Foley & Van Valin, 1984: 7):

"The theme underlying the various functional approaches is the belief that language must be studied in relation to its role in human communication. Language is thus viewed as a system of human communication, rather than as an infinite set of structural descriptions of sentences."

The last sentence is clearly intended to contrast the perspective taken in **RRG** with that of Chomskyan linguistics (Barber & Stainton, 2010). With this orientation goes a concern for the functional motivation of the grammar: "***RRG** takes language to be a system of communicative social action, and accordingly, analyzing the communicative functions of grammatical structures plays a vital role in grammatical description and theory from this perspective*" (Van Valin, 1993: 3).

In practice, **RRG** prioritizes cognitive over sociocultural explanation, adopting what Van Valin and LaPolla (1997: 15) refer to as a 'communication-and-cognition perspective'.

The autonomy of syntax is firmly rejected (Van Valin, 1993: 2):

*"Syntax is not autonomous. In terms of the abstract paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations that define a structural system, **RRG** is concerned not only with relations of co-occurrence and combination in strictly formal terms but also with semantic and pragmatic co-occurrence and combinatory relations."*

In other words, **RRG** postulates that semantics, pragmatics, and syntax aspects of language, and their combinations, are all critical in explaining the observed properties of language. Syntax, however, is only relatively motivated by semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive concerns; that is, syntactic phenomena cannot just be reduced to matters of semantics and pragmatics, and there remains some arbitrariness in the formal system (Barber & Stainton, 2010).

2.4 Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG):

Halliday (1994) said that the fundamental opposition in grammars of the second half of the twentieth century is between those that are primarily syntagmatic in orientation, the formal grammars rooted in logic and philosophy, and those that are primarily paradigmatic, the functional ones rooted in rhetoric and ethnography. The former sees a language as a list of structures, from which regular relationships may be established. They tend to take grammar as the foundation of language. The latter sees language as a network of relations, using structures as the realization of

these relationships. They emphasize variables among different languages, to take semantics as the foundation, and so to be organized around the text, or discourse.

According to Halliday (1994) it is called functional grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather than a formal one. In a functional grammar, a language is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meaning can be realized.

The theory underlying functional grammar is systemic theory, which is a theory of meaning as choice. It is functional in three different but closely related senses: In its interpretation: 1) Of texts, 2) Of the system, and 3) Of the elements of linguistic structures.

Eggins (2004) stated that we are constantly required to react to and produce bits of language that make sense. So, a functional grammar is essentially a 'natural' grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained by reference to how language is used. The relationship between the meaning and the wording (grammar) is not an arbitrary one: the form of the grammar relates naturally to the meanings that are being encoded.

Furthermore, the fundamental components of meaning in language are functional components, called metafunctional components, consisting of **ideational** or (reflective), **interpersonal** or (active), and **textual**. The first two underlie all uses of language: 1) to understand the environment (**ideational**), and 2) to act on the others in it (**interpersonal**), and the **textual** breathes relevance into the other two.

Halliday's (1994) main purposes of his functional grammar are a contribution to the understanding of the text: the linguistic analysis enables one to show how, and why, the text means what it means; and a contribution to the evaluation of the text: the linguistic analysis may enable one to say why the text is, or is not, an effective text for its own purposes.

The three metafunctional components proposed by Halliday serve to express three largely independent sets of semantic choice.

- 1) **Theme** structures express the organization of the message: how the clauses relate to the surrounding discourse, and to the context of the situation in which it is being produced;
- 2) **Mood** structures express interactional meaning: what the clause is doing, as a verbal exchange between speaker-writer and audience;
- 3) **Transitivity** structures express representational meaning: what the clause is about, with associated participants and circumstances.

These three sets of options together determine the structural shape of the clause.

2.4.1 THEME:

The **theme** is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is concerned with the organization of information within the individual clauses. E.g. (Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 1997):

Your reporter repeatedly interrupted her replies.

Her replies were repeatedly interrupted by your reporter.

Repeatedly, your reporter interrupted her replies.

The **theme** can be identified as that element which comes in the first position in the clause. The rest of the message, where the clause moves after the point of departure, is called **Rheme**. The clause as a message is organized into (**Theme+ Rheme**). The **theme** is not necessarily from a nominal group; it can be from an adverbial group or propositional phrase, like the following examples (ibid: 21):

Theme	Rheme
- <i>John's friend</i>	<i>came to see me yesterday.</i>
- <i>Last night</i>	<i>a girl was drowned in this river.</i>
- <i>Next door</i>	<i>is an elementary school.</i>
- <i>Leave</i>	<i>that door open.</i>
- <i>Friends like that,</i>	<i>I can do without.</i>
- <i>Have you</i>	<i>finished your homework?</i>

The **theme** of a clause can have **ideational**, **interpersonal**, and **textual** stages.

2.4.1.1 Ideational (topical) Theme: is the first element in the clause that expresses some kind of 'representational' meaning. It is a function from the transitivity structure of the clause; it can be the '**participant**' as in: *Charles Dickens was famous for his first novel ' Oliver Twist'*; or it can be '**circumstance**', giving information about time, place, manner, etc., as in: *In 1876, Shaw joined his mother and sister in London.*

Marked and Unmarked (topical) Theme

In a declarative clause, the typical pattern is Theme as subject, then the **Theme** choice is a neutral or '**unmarked**' one, giving the **Theme** no special prominence, as in: *She went to the Cinema.* (*She*) here is **Unmarked Theme**\Subject, while the rest of the sentence is **Rheme**. However, when the topical **Theme** of a declarative clause is not the subject, it gains a greater textual prominence. **Non-subject Themes** are '**marked**' Themes, such as: *Someday you'll understand that.* [(someday) is the **marked Theme**]; [(you) is the subject and the rest are the **Rheme**.]

2.4.1.2 Interpersonal Theme: it includes one or more of the following: The **Finite** (auxiliary verb in the thematic position, signals that a response is expected), as in: *can you lend me your car?*; A **Wh- element**(signalling that an 'answer' is required from the addressee): *who killed the man?*; A **Vocative** (identifying the addressee in the exchange): *Mia, it was an amazing story*; An **Adjunct**(typically realized by an adverb). It provides the speaker's comment, assessment or attitude toward the message, as in: *perhaps, he won't notice you.*

2.4.1.3 Textual Theme: which almost always constitute the first part of the **Theme**, coming before any **interpersonal Themes**. They give thematic prominence to textual elements with a linking function, usually a structural conjunction, relatives, conjunctives, or continuatives, as in: *But, don't you realize it?*

2.4.2 Mood:

The system of **mood** belongs to the interpersonal metafunction of the language and is the grammatical resource for realizing an interactive move in dialogue, involving speaker, or writer, and audience (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997). It governs the basic structural features of the sentence- whether the sentence chooses between declarative, interrogative or imperative forms. Thus, the mood system is the part of grammar which is most inherently linked with the roles which speakers adopt in the use of language. Halliday (1994) explained that in the act of speaking, the most fundamental types of speech roles are just two: 1) **giving**, and 2) **demanding**. It means that either the speaker is giving 'something' or a 'commodity' to the listener, or he is demanding 'something' from him. E.g.

Example	Mood
1) <i>He came from a Southern city of China.</i>	<i>Declarative</i>
2) <i>Did he come from a Southern city of China?</i>	<i>Interrogative: Yes\No</i>
3) <i>Don't do that again.</i>	<i>Imperative</i>

Other Elements of Mood Structure:

2.4.2.1 Residue: which can be left out or ellipsed. It consists of three kinds of functional elements: Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct, like the following examples:

<i>I</i>	<i>didn't</i>	<i>tell</i>	<i>that</i>	<i>to my father.</i>
S.	Finite	Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
Mood	Residue			

2.4.2.2 WH- Interrogative, Exclamative, and Imperative Clauses:

Wh-element is always linked to one or another of the three functions: Subject, Complement, Adjunct. If it is linked to the subject, it is part of the mood element, and if it is linked to a Complement or Adjunct, it becomes part of the Residue.

<i>who</i>	<i>killed</i>	<i>John Lennon?</i>
S.	Finite	Kill
Wh-	Past	predicator
Mood	Residue	

<i>Whoose little boy</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>you?</i>
Comp.\Wh-	Finite	Subject
Residue	Mood	

2.4.3 Transitivity:

The system of **transitivity** belongs to one mode of the ideational metafunction 'the experiential one' (web source1). It is a resource for construing our experience in terms of configuration of a

process [typically in the form of a verbal group], **participant** [in the form of a nominal group] and **circumstances** [in the form of an adverbial group or prepositional phrase]. The concept of process, participant and circumstance are semantic categories which show how phenomena of the real world are represented as a linguistic structure. Thompson (1996) analyzes that when using language to interact with people, we clearly use it to talk about the world, either the external world, things, events, etc., or our internal world, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, etc.

When we look at how language works from this perspective, we are focusing primarily on the content of a message. When we account for the content meanings, it is the role of the experiential perspective in the grammar to allow us to do so. In addition, the term **transitivity** is a way of distinguishing between verbs according to whether to have an object or not. However, in functional grammar, it is used in a much broader sense. In particular, it refers to a system for describing the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its object.

The system of **transitivity** discriminates six different types of processes in English. The three major ones are material, mental, and relational. In addition, there are three other process types: the behavioural, verbal, and existential (web source 1).

2.4.3.1 Material process is a process of ‘doing’, which expresses that some entity ‘does’ something to some other entity. The **Actor** (the one doing the material deed), the **Goal** (a participant affected by a doing), and a **Beneficiary** (a participant benefiting from the doing); in the clause without a **Goal**, a **Range** is found instead (a participant specifying the scope of happening) (web source 2).

2.4.3.2 Mental Process is a process which construes a person involved in conscious processing, including processes of perception, cognition, and affection. The nominal groups serving as **Senser** (the conscious being that is feeling, thinking, or seeing), which denote non-conscious entities, have to be construed metaphorically as ‘personified’. E.g.

The man knew too much.

Her tasks interested her.

Besides the senser, the mental clauses may involve a further type of participant, the **Phenomenon** being sensed, felt, thought or seen. It can be any entity entertained or created by consciousness- a conscious being, an object, a substance, an institution, or an abstraction. Grammatically, a wide range of units can serve as a Phenomenon.

The man knew too much.

Her tasks interested her.

2.4.3.3 Relational Process is a process of ‘being’. Halliday (1994) applies the category of relational clauses to the traditional notion of ‘copula’ construction. The English system operates with three main types: 1) intensive; 2) circumstantial; 3) possessive. Each type occurs in two distinct modes, attributive and identifying. The attributive mode is an entity having some quality ascribed or attributed to it (Carrier+ Attribute), while the identifying mode is something having an identity assigned to it (Token+ Value).

2.4.3.4 Behavioural Process means the participant who is ‘behaving’, typically a conscious being, labelled as **Behaver**. E.g. mental: look, talk, think; physiological: cry, laugh, breathe; social: sing, dance, chat, etc.

2.4.3.5 Verbal Process is the representation of ‘saying’, it includes verbal (asking, stating, offering) and semiotic processes (indicating, showing). The central participant is labelled

as the **Sayer** (the participant saying, stating, informing, asking, etc., it can be a human or a human-like speaker). For example,

She told me a strange story.

The paper says there'll be another election.

it also may represent the addressee of a speech interaction, the **Receiver**, e.g. *they told me to leave at once.*

2.4.3.6 Existential Process represents that something exists or happens. They resemble relational processes, but they are different in that there is only one participant. The existential clauses typically have the verb 'be' beside other verbs meaning 'exist' or 'happen', 'take place' and 'occur'. In other circumstantial features: 'follow', 'sit', 'stand', 'hang' (ibid).

There was a storm.

On the wall there hangs a picture.

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