1 Systemic Functional Grammar

1.1 An Introduction to Functional Grammar

In 1985 Michael Halliday published the first edition of the consolidation of his work on English grammar, titled *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. This work impressed many readers as a strikingly innovative contribution to the field; it and subsequent editions have generated well over 45,000 Google Scholar hits since that time. And few would quibble with assigning the title of genius to the author of a visionary work of this kind.

We need to remind ourselves however, as Halliday himself would have been the first to admit, that the genius of this description of English was entirely dependent upon the genius of the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory which Halliday and his colleagues had concomitantly designed (rooted firmly as it was in the European functional/structuralist tradition). In this book we take up the challenge of showing how to do it – how to take SFL theory and use it to produce a grammatical description of this order. We do this by focusing on three world languages, English, Spanish and Chinese.[1] We don't do this primarily in order to compare and contrast these three languages. Our main purpose is, rather, to lead readers step by step through theoretical architecture and practical reasoning, which can be used to ground descriptions of the meaning-making potential of the grammatical systems and structure of languages (and related semiotic systems of any kind).

We can't all, of course, be Michael Hallidays and enact his unsurpassed 'feel' for the intricate ways in which English grammar means. But we can all learn how to take SFL theory and deploy it to formulate descriptions. This is the theoretical and practical knowledge we are attempting to share in this monograph.

1.2 Introducing This Book

This book builds in particular on two foundational introductions to SFL language description (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997/2009; Martin, Wang

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[1] For Spanish we focus on the Chilean variety; by Chinese we mean the modern standard variety, in common use and with official status in China, also known as Mandarin or Putonghua.

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and Zhu, 2013) – with a view to modelling our perspective on the reasoning through which grammatical descriptions of languages can best be formulated.

The first of these, Matthiessen and Halliday (1997/2009), provides an overview of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), exploring its various dimensions and situating it as a model of one level of language within the linguistic theory known as Systemic Functional Linguistics. The second, Martin, Wang and Zhu (2013), takes one of these dimensions, axis, and introduces the basic principles of system network writing – including reasoning about the motivation of systems. That book reveals how the other fundamental dimensions of the theory (i.e. rank, metafunction and stratification) can all be derived from SFL's axial orientation to language analysis. These two books are critical resources as far as this publication is concerned.

This book pushes deeper, exploring in detail how SFG descriptions can be most effectively developed; it uses three major world languages, English, Spanish and Chinese, as exemplars. The book zeroes in on the grammar of clauses, groups and phrases – with chapters dedicated to central categories in the analysis of nominal groups, verbal groups, and MOOD, TRANSITIVITY and THEME clause systems respectively. Clause complex relations and word morphology will be brought into the picture only where needed to interpret clauses, groups and phrases. Each chapter begins with a discussion of English systems, followed by Spanish and then Chinese.

At the start of each chapter we review the context variables (i.e. register and genre choices) that are most relevant to the grammar systems considered. We next review the discourse semantic systems which bear critically on the grammar choices we will explore. We then move on to key grammatical systems and structures of English, Spanish and Chinese, building up a description step by step from first principles in order to make the reasoning involved as explicit as possible (including reasoning from above with respect to discourse semantics and, where relevant, from below with respect to prosodic phonology). This means, of course, that our descriptions cannot be as comprehensive as those found in grammars that are less explicit about their reasoning and which make more assumptions about SFL and about long-standing traditions of grammar analysis that are available for English, Spanish and Chinese. We have adopted this strategy because our goal is to model the way in which we feel SFL grammarians can best go about the work of developing rich functional descriptions. In doing so we hope to foster work on languages for which grammars informed by SFL have not yet been developed and to encourage critical appreciations and renovations of work that has already been done.

For many of our analyses we draw on published descriptions by SFL grammarians, work we acknowledge as we do so. For some of our analyses, we

extend these extant descriptions and for others we propose alternatives. And in some of our analyses, we approach dimensions of English, Spanish and Chinese that haven't been described before.

In SFL the founding principle of our analysis is that of choice – of language as a system of systems enacting the registers and genres through which we live our lives. Inspired by Halliday (e.g. 1978, 1984a), SFL treats language as social semiotic behaviour and thus gives priority to modelling language paradigmatically as a meaning-making resource. We will develop grammar for English, Spanish and Chinese in precisely these terms.

The key to this modelling, as introduced in Martin, Wang and Zhu (2013), is axis – the dimension of SFL that privileges paradigmatic relations over syntagmatic ones, but at the same time motivates systemic choice in terms of its ultimate structuration. This book is about modelling how we believe this can most effectively be done.

In the next section we outline the model of language and context we will assume for purposes of this modelling. We assume a stratified model of context (as register and genre), as introduced in Martin (1992) and elaborated in Martin and Rose (2008). And we assume a stratified model of language (as discourse semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology/graphology), whose discourse semantic stratum is outlined in Martin (1992), popularised in Martin and Rose (2003/2007) and elaborated in Martin and White (2005). It is with respect to this framework that we reason about lexicogrammatical systems (as introduced in Section 1.4 below): (i) from above with respect to context and co-text, (ii) from around with respect to simultaneous systems and (iii) from below with respect to lower-ranking grammatical systems and phonology/graphology. For collections of grammatical descriptions assuming modelling and argumentation of this kind, see Martin (2018a); Martin, Doran and Figueredo (2020); Martin, Quiroz and Figueredo (2021); and Doran, Martin and Zhang (2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b).

1.3 Above Grammar: Context and Co-text

In our approach to SFL, grammar systems realise higher-level systems that we refer to here as genre, register and discourse semantics. This allows us to bring patterns in context (i.e. the functions of language in use) and co-text (i.e. structure beyond grammar) to bear on grammar analysis. We introduce these higher-level systems here to emphasise the sense in which they offer an integrated holistic perspective on social semiotic behaviour. Grammar is a level of language, but it is one level among others. In a system where *tout se tient* 'everything interconnects' (Meillet, 1903), we have to take all meaning-making resources into account.

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1.3.1   *Context (Register and Genre)*

First, context. In SFL, behaviour is brought into the picture by modelling context semiotically as systems of choice. There is general consensus in SFL that this model of social behaviour should include three key variables – referred to as field, tenor and mode. In SFL the relation of language to context is generally modelled using co-tangential circles, as in Figure 1.1, with the inner circle representing language and the outer circle context (factored as field, tenor and mode).

We begin by introducing some basic field, tenor and mode register variables – using topologies to exemplify the choices involved. Topologies are models of semiotic choice that treat systems of choice as clines. This kind of modelling allows us to treat registers as more or less the same, a useful modelling strategy in contextual analysis. The basic schema for topologies involving two variables is set out in Figure 1.2. Registers in this diagram are positioned at the prototypical centre of each quadrant; however, depending on their semiotic likeness to one another, they can, in principle, be positioned anywhere along either cline. For a more detailed set of proposals, alternatively organised as system networks, see Martin (1992); for discussion of topology in relation to typology, see Martin and Matthiessen (1991), Martin, Wang and Zhu (2013).

Field is a resource for construing phenomena as activities oriented to some global institutional purpose, or as items involved in these activities, along with associated properties (Martin, 1992; Doran and Martin, 2021). One key variable thus has to do with whether phenomena are construed dynamically as activity (unfolding through time) or statically as items (taxonomised by classification and composition). A second key variable has to do with whether phenomena are construed in everyday terms (through ostensive definition and by undertaking activities with others) or as technical discourse (through reading
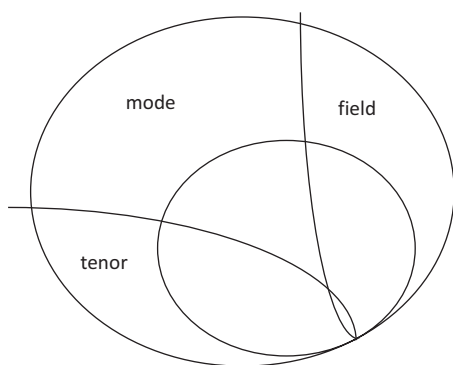

Figure 1.1   Language in context (field, tenor and mode)

and writing activities in institutions that have been developed for regulating access to uncommon sense discourse). These two variables are presented as clines in Figure 1.3 and exemplified as recounting a holiday (an everyday activity perspective), explaining evolution (a technical activity perspective), classifying crocodiles (a technical taxonomy perspective) and describing a pet (an everyday taxonomy perspective).
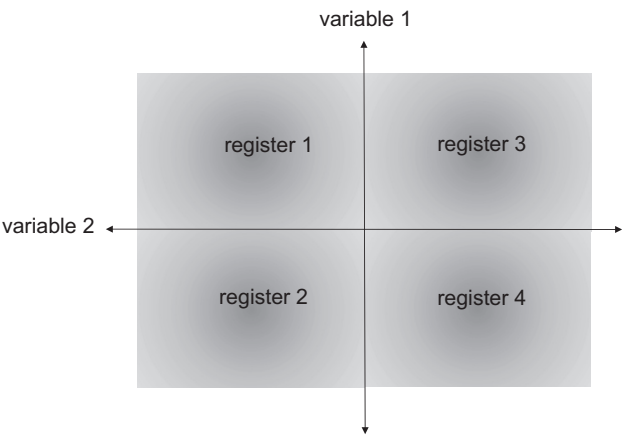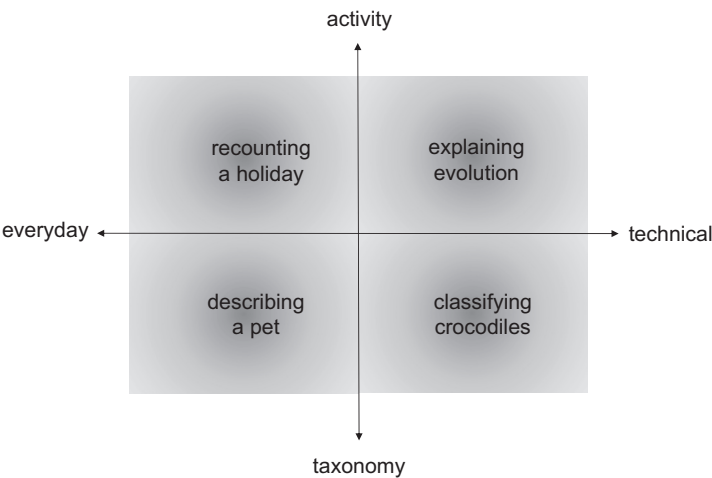

Figure 1.2 Modelling context topologically

Figure 1.3 Field relations

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                           equal
                             ↑
        ┌────────────────────┼────────────────────┐
        │                    │                     │
        │      close         │      casual         │
        │      friends       │      acquaintances  │
        │                    │                     │
close ←─┼────────────────────┼─────────────────────┼─→ distant
        │                    │                     │
        │    supervisor/     │      dean/          │
        │    PhD student     │      student        │
        │                    │                     │
        └────────────────────┼────────────────────┘
                             ↓
                          unequal
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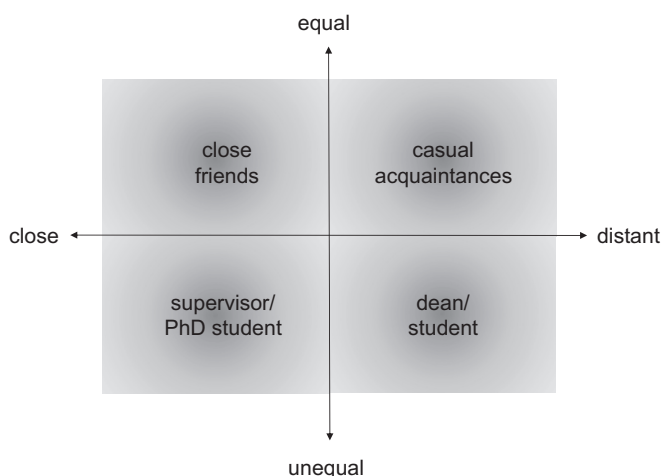
Figure 1.4 Tenor relations

Tenor is a resource for enacting social relations of power and solidarity. One key variable manages the power dimension of discourse – are the interlocutors of equal status or not, and if not, who will dominate and who must defer? A second key variable manages the solidarity dimension of discourse – how closely involved are the interlocutors with one another? These two variables are presented as clines in Figure 1.4 and exemplified as relationships involving close friends (close equal relations), casual acquaintances (distant equal relations), a faculty dean and students (distant unequal relations) and a supervisor and their PhD student (close unequal relations).

Mode is a resource for texturing information flow, depending on the medium of communication (speaking, writing, phoning, e-mailing, texting, blogging and so on). One key variable composes the context dependency of discourse – is the language part of what is going on or is it constitutive of the interaction taking place? In terms of multimodal discourse analysis, this variable is responsible for how much work is being done by language in relation to other modalities of communication and behaviour. A second key variable composes discourse as more or less interactive – does it feature turn-taking with immediate aural and visual feedback, or is it relatively monologic with various degrees of delayed response? These two variables are presented as clines in Figure 1.5 and exemplified as composing casual conversation (dialogic constitutive texture), news stories (monologic constitutive texture), sports commentary (monologic ancillary texture) and domestic exchanges (dialogic ancillary texture).

For some models of SFL, a stratified model of context has been developed, with genre as a higher level of abstraction, above register (Martin, 1992; Martin and Rose, 2008). In these models genre is treated as a recurrent

configuration of field, tenor and mode variables, typically unfolding in stages as a text consummates its social purpose. In this book we deal with just a few genres which are instantiated as the key texts we use as sources of examples in our chapters. The texts we focus on are outlined in Table 1.1, aligned with the chapter sections they inform.
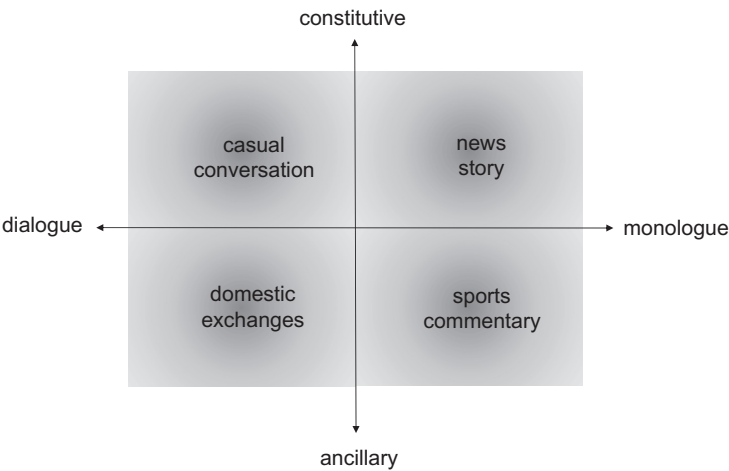

Figure 1.5 Mode relations

Our choice of data is opportunistic and designed for pedagogic purposes. Just a few texts play a central role in as many chapters as possible, supplemented only where necessary by additional material. We adopt this strategy so readers can see how texts with which they become increasingly familiar look from the perspective of different grammatical systems. For similar reasons we focus on just one dialect of English, Spanish and Chinese, so as not to have to spend time discussing dialectal variations. As we outline in Chapter 7, this is not the approach to data we recommend for research purposes.

Three main English texts are deployed. One is a feature article about a rescue operation by lifesavers at Bondi Beach, Sydney, when freak waves swept

Table 1.1 *The main texts contextualising examples in this book*

Chapter	English texts	Spanish texts	Chinese texts
2 Nominal group	Bondi Beach	La Ola Maldita	Sea Lettuce
3 Verbal group	Random Chatty Vlog	La Ola Maldita	Interview with Curator
4 MOOD	Youth Justice Conference	El Cambio de Plan; El Decodificador	Reckless Driving
5 TRANSITIVITY	Random Chatty Vlog	La Ola Maldita	Interview with Curator
6 THEME	Bondi Beach	La Ola Maldita; Sopaipillas	Sea Lettuce

250 people out to sea; we refer to this as our Bondi Beach text. One is a vlog (i.e. a video blog) about the recent experiences of an American housewife and mother; we refer to this as our Random Chatty Vlog text. And one is a transcript of a New South Wales Youth Justice Conference, a legal process in which adolescent offenders meet with their victim and other community members to negotiate an apology and some form of community service by way of recompense for their offence (Zappavigna and Martin, 2018); we refer to this as our Youth Justice Conference text. These texts provide us with most of the range of spoken and written language features we need to ground our top-down approach to English grammar description.

Our main Spanish text is a feature article retelling the stories of the survivors of a massive earthquake and tsunami that devastated the coast of Chile in 2010; we refer to this as our La Ola Maldita ('the hellish wave') text. We also draw examples from two call centre texts, one asking for a change of cable TV plan and the other sorting out a problem with a set-top box; we refer to these as our El Cambio de Plan ('change of plan') text and El Decodificador ('set-top box') text respectively. We also include consideration of a pumpkin fritters recipe, which we refer to as our Sopaipillas ('fritters') text.[2] Once again these texts provide us with most of the range of spoken and written language features we need to ground our top-down approach to Spanish grammar description.

The description of Chinese is based on three main texts. One is a feature article published on the website of the Institute of Oceanology, Chinese Academy of Sciences – about controlling sea lettuce, a kind of green algae, that grows along the coast of East China's Qingdao city and which threatened sailing events during the 2018 Olympics; we refer to this as the Sea Lettuce text. Another is an interview with Mr Shan Jixiang, then retiring curator of Beijing's Palace Museum (also known as the Forbidden City) – reviewing his work experience in the Palace Museum and airing his wishes for the museum's future development; we refer to this as our Interview with Curator text. The third is a court trial dealing with a reckless driving case, in which two young drivers raced against each other, lost control of their vehicles and caused serious damage and injury; we refer to this as our Reckless Driving text. These texts provide us with most of the spoken and written language features we need to ground our top-down approach to Chinese grammar description.

The relevance of these texts is outlined, chapter by chapter, in Table 1.1. Except for the Youth Justice Conference text and Reckless Driving text (which are too long), they are presented in full in Appendices 2–4; relevant citations are provided there.

The genres involved in these texts are outlined in Table 1.2, alongside the register variables through which they are realised. Our story genres are mainly monologic but do include some more interactive quotations. The El Cambio de Plan service encounter is constitutive; but the El Decodificador call includes phases of interaction in which the server gets the client to deal hands-on with the set-top box to get it working again.

The stratified model of language and context used to model these genres is imaged in Figure 1.6. In terms of realisation, the model treats choices among genres as realised through recurrent configurations of register choices, and register choices as realised through recurrent patterns of choices in language.

Table 1.2 *Key register variables for main texts*

| genre			field	tenor	mode
stories	*Random Chatty Vlog* *Bondi Beach* *La Ola Maldita* *Sea Lettuce*		domestic natural disaster	close/equal distant/unequal	≈ monologic/ constitutive
procedure	*Sopaipillas*		cooking recipe	distant/unequal	monologic/ constitutive
service encounters	*El Cambio de Plan* *El Decodificador*		pay TV contract set-top box disorder	distant/unequal	dialogic/ ≈ constitutive
conference	*Youth Justice Conference*		restorative justice	distant/unequal	dialogic/ constitutive
interview	*Interview with Curator*		work experience	distant/unequal	dialogic/ constitutive
court trial	*Reckless Driving*		criminal offence	distant/unequal	dialogic/ constitutive
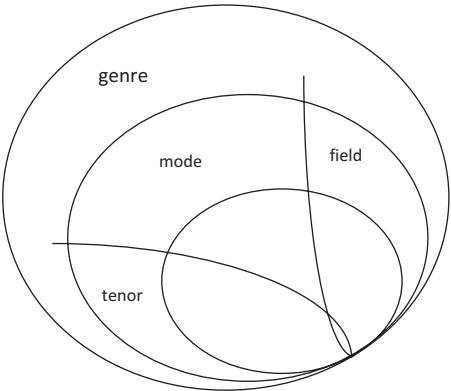
Figure 1.6 The stratified model of context assumed for this book

1.3.2   Co-text (Discourse Semantics)

In SFL the extrinsic functional organisation of language (field, tenor and mode) introduced above is correlated with the intrinsic functional organisation of language. Field is treated as by and large construed through ideational meaning, tenor as by and large enacted through interpersonal meaning and mode as by and large composed through textual meaning. In SFL these functional components of language are referred to as metafunctions. The correlations between extrinsic functionality (field, tenor and mode) and intrinsic functionality (ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning) are outlined in Figure 1.7. As the diagram implies, genre and register are modelled as strata of meaning – the social semiotic perspective on language as behaviour we outlined in Section 1.3.1.

Alongside being organised by metafunction, language is organised by stratum – as choices in discourse semantic systems realised by choices in lexicogrammatical systems realised in turn by choices in phonological systems (Figure 1.8). At the level of discourse semantics, we are concerned with meaning realised both inside and between clauses, whether these clauses have any grammatical relation to one another or not. The focus in other words is on co-text.

We will briefly introduce six discourse semantic systems here, organised by metafunction in Table 1.3. For a detailed presentation of these systems,
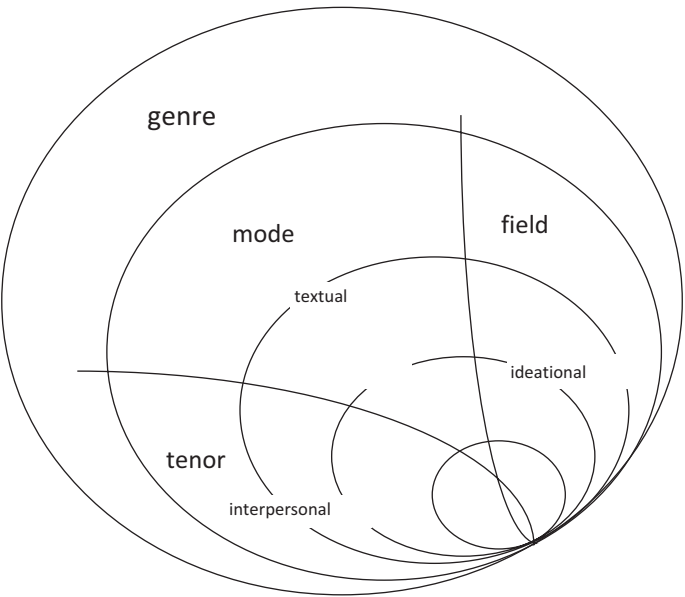

Figure 1.7 Extrinsic functionality (context) and intrinsic functionality (language)