

Pre-ISFC 2005 Institute
Resourcing Researchers and Tooling Teachers
Monday 11 – Friday 15 July, 2005

Overview for Discourse Analysis course

Recommended reading prior to Institute:

Using Functional Grammar: An Explorer's Guide, (2000) by D. Butt, R.Fahey, S.Feez, S.Spinks, C.Yallop, published by NCELTR, Sydney.

Note: participants will be given a set of course notes when they register at the venue.

Monday 11 July

Session 1: Understanding your “semiotic address”: grammar, meaning and discourse

Presenter: David Butt

In this session, we will set out from how a text might be relevantly ‘divided’ (or otherwise organised for analytic purposes) in relation to different research tasks and different theories of discourse analysis (viz. SFL, CDA, and CA: note session 7 will focus on the comparison of such theories). Our approaches to analysis will then be related to the different dimensions of the systemic functional model. These dimensions include: composition, axis, stratification, metafunction, instantiation, delicacy, realization, validation. The approach here is to naturalize these technical terms by showing that each of the dimensions is a crucial aspect of the semantics of text, to which we all respond as language users. By knowing “where we are” – our semiotic address – in relation to the overall dimensions of the model, we can establish the similarities and differences between texts in a principled way.

Tuesday 12 July

Session 2: Between semantics and grammar: structure statements at the levels of meaning and form

Presenter: David Butt

Semantics and lexicogrammar are both ways of seeing the organization of meaning in a text. We need to ask ourselves, in our research methods, how we are going to allocate responsibility to the 2 levels in achieving our research goals. For instance, setting out from the lexicogrammatical consistencies in a text is relatively straightforward, since the rank scale and the systems of grammar have achieved a high order of explicitness and consensus.

On the other hand, units in the semantics are likely to be closer to the working distinctions made within a culture, but the number of proposals (in SFL, in linguistics, and in other disciplines which can lay a reasonable claim to semantics) makes for a higher level of indeterminacy. For example, one needs to consider the issue of a rank scale at the level of semantics.

How does one come to a practical resolution of the need for both kinds of structure statement in a specific research situation?

Tuesday 12 July

Session 3: Between semantics and grammar: structure statements at the levels of meaning and form (groupwork and discussion)

Presenters: David Butt, Rhondda Fahey, Annabelle Lukin, Alison Moore

For the first 40 minutes, we will divide into specialist groups, each chaired by one of the presenters (e.g. researchers in: education, health, literature, media, etc) to discuss the problems that typify analysis in the various specializations. We then move to combined discussion of the difficulties raised in the groups, with a special emphasis on resolving questions such as extent of data, relevance of quantification, deciding on what is a relevant pattern, and what can be excluded from a given inquiry (so that one is not committed to discussing everything).

At this point, **the plenary by Professor Hasan (Tuesday, final session) on semantics and semantic networks in her research** will assist us in coming to a working knowledge of both the concepts and tools that semantic analysis opens up.

Wednesday 13 July

Session 4: Modelling context

Presenter: David Butt

When we ask the level of context to bear more responsibility in accounting for similarities and differences across social processes, many of the difficulties in text analysis become tractable. Just as the plethora of phenomena at other levels have been brought into a systemic map, structure statements can be made with respect to context.

There is no reason why the regularities of our social interactions cannot be sorted into variables/parameters on the basis of their interdependencies and their consequences for the ongoing exchange of meaning. In this session, we bring the level of context to bear on other strata/levels of language, showing how the notions of motivation, construal, and realization assist us in building a cross-stratal picture of our data.

The discussion will model context, drawing on work by Halliday, Hasan, Martin, and Butt. *Parameters of Context* (Butt, 2000, from reader supplied to participants), which sets out detailed networks for Field, Tenor and Mode, will be applied to a selection of texts in the first half of this session. Participants will then work in groups either on their own text, or on a text supplied by presenter, with a view to raising issues for a later session.

Wednesday 13 July

Session 5: Relating grammar to meaning and context: examining cross-stratal and metafunctional relations

Presenter: David Butt

In this session, we will review the major systems and concepts of SFL theory (with respect to the three strata discussed so far) in order to prepare for the focus on register theory in session 6. There will be opportunity also here to address more formally difficulties that participants have with the theory.

Thursday 14 July

Session 6: Major systems of grammar, meaning and context: the arguments for a register (functional variety of text)

Presenters: David Butt, Rhondda Fahey, Annabelle Lukin, Alison Moore

A register is a crucial concept for characterizing a clustering of semantic features, or similarity of settings along the various dimensions discussed above. Register theory is a systematic approach to texts contributing in a similar way within a specific community of users.

The issue in arguing for register is not the 'sameness' of texts, (over which one will always be frustrated), but the principled variability of the texts grouped together. That is, one can state how shifting selections at one level (e.g. small changes in the context) will have semantic consequences for the levels below – in the probabilities of selection in the semantics and grammar. On the other hand, accumulating evidence/consistency from the lower levels will predict that there has been a shift in the parameters of context.

We will examine this notion of principled variability across data drawn from a range of registers, such as health, education and media discourse. In these three areas, the volume and variety of text generated are particularly challenging; and we will review various ways of managing argumentation in the light of these challenges.

Thursday 14 July

Session 7: Theories of discourse analysis

Presenter: David Butt

How is analysis from a systemic functional perspective like or unlike other kinds of discourse analysis? Are different theories complementary or contradictory of each other? Is it the case that linguistic theory with a social orientation must adopt a separate social theory? How can interdisciplinary exchanges with linguistics be most productively pursued? In what way is a linguist working probabilistically as well as categorically? Is fuzziness a bad thing in a semiotic theory? How do current theories of science – eg. complexity theory, systems theory, chaos theory – offer us opportunities and confirmation in our own linguistic inquiries?

Friday 15 July

Sessions 8-9: Multimodality

In the Friday sessions on multimodality, Prof. Michael O'Toole (*Structure, Style and Interpretation in the Russian Short Story* (1982), *The Language of Displayed Art*, (1994)) will apply the functional theory of arts and architecture that he has developed in collaboration with M.A.K. Halliday's linguistic theory. The main discussions will focus on architecture and will review the literary and aesthetic theories that have contributed to the broad semiotic perspective as well as the detailed systemic analytic frameworks in current multimodal thinking.