**Lecture Six: Systemic Functional Linguistics**

**Introduction**

The structuralists’ perspective of the language as a structure that should be studied was opposed by the French linguist André Martinet (1962), the American philosopher John Searle (1971), and theBritish linguist M.A.K. Halliday (1973). They instead defended the view of language as means of communication; they argued that the structure of the language is not enough to understand the nature of language but its function (what it is used for) also must be taken into consideration (Sadiqi &Ennaji, 1999). Language is not good or bad, it is appropriate or inappropriate to the context of use.

Many functionalist approaches have beenput forward, and they are often very different from one another.Two prominent ones are ***Role-and-Reference Grammar*** (RRG),developed by William Foley and Robert Van Valin, and ***Systemic Linguistics*** (SL), developed by Michael Halliday. RRG approacheslinguistic description by asking what communicative purposes needto be served and what grammatical devices are available to servethem. SL is chiefly interested in examining the structure of a largelinguistic unit – a text or a discourse – and it attempts to integrate agreat deal of structural information with other information (socialinformation, for example), thus, context is one of the central concerns of SFL.

1. **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

In the 1930s and 1940s, J.R. Firth in London, who in turn took ideas from Malinowski (the famous anthropologist), began laying the ground for Systemic Functional Linguistics. Both Firth and Malinowski believed that one could only look at language in relation to the *context* it occurred in. Later, his student M. Halliday developed Firth’s ideas in distinctive directions to come up with the most highly developed functionalist approach.

SFL is systemic because it models language as a system of choices, and functional because the language is seen as a source for making meaning and descriptions are based on extensive analyses and interpretations of written and spoken corpora. Because of its preoccupationwith texts rather than isolated sentences, the concepts of ***coherence*** and ***cohesion*** play a centralrole in the framework.

In contrast to most other approaches, SL explicitlyattempts to combine purely structural information with overtlysocial factors in a single integrated description. For that, the following questions are asked:What is this writer (or speaker) trying to do? What linguistic devices are available to help them to do it, and on what basis do theymake their choices? (Track, 2007 p. 293). In SFL, the appropriateness of linguistic options is conditioned by the current **“context of situation”,** in other words,language used could be structurally correct but not appropriate to the context. Context of situation is the situation in which the language event unfolds.

1. **Context and Situational Context**

***Context***refersthe words or sentences surrounding any piece of written or spoken text.

***Context of Situation*** (or extralinguistic Context): the whole situation in which an utterance is made i.e. who is addressing whom, whether formally or informally why, for what purpose, when, where, etc. The context of situation can be an important factor in interpreting meaning. Although some texts are complete in themselves, others rely heavily on the extralinguistic situation for the interpretation of pronouns and adverbials (e.g .here, there, now, then, yesterday). (Chalker and Weiner, 1994, p. 96).

We do not speak or write in isolated sentences. We speak or write in meaningful units called texts, which consist of stretches of language that ‘hang together’ in some way. Furthermore, texts are always produced in some kind of context. As features of context change, texts change. Or, to look at it another way, as texts change, the contexts that they evoke also change. Because of this, it is rarely possible to give an adequate account of why a particular grammatical feature is used in a particular clause or sentence without referring to, or trying to reconstruct, some context, including both features of the text that it comes from (the context) and feature of the situation in which the text was produced (the situational context) (Jones and Lock, 2011, p.2).

1. **Strands of Context**

Halliday models “context of situation”in terms of three strands:

***Field***: what is being talked about, it could be a typical field such as science, education, medicine, sports…as it can be more specific such as microbiology(Science),English Language education(Education),

***Tenor***: people involved in the communication and the relationships between them. The relationship between participantsincludes:

*– Power relations*:Unequal relations can be either high to low relation e.g., doctor/patient, teacher/student, or low to high relationse.g.daughter/ father. Equal relations can be exemplified by friend/friend, student/student relationships.

*– Formality:* formal or informal

– *Closeness:* close, distant, or neutral.

***Mode***: It deals with the channel of communication and the form of languageused (spoken or written). The way the interaction takes place. Nowadays, we have a variety of channels such as Facebook, blogs, Skype, email, telephone, cell-phone, videos, films, etc. (Montes et al. 2014 p. 106).

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