Course: Linguistics   **Level: L2**   **Lecturer: Prof. Saliha CHELLI**

Unit: 2   Contemporary   Approaches to Linguistics   **Lesson: 9**

Functional Linguistics

Introduction

The field of linguistics witnessed a considerable number of theories during the twentieth century with distinct orientations. Among them, Chomsky's Universal Grammar and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguist have been successful in accounting for aspects of language from a particular perspective. Chomsky, maintains that human language is a system for free expression of thought, essentially independent of stimulus control, need-satisfaction or instrumental purpose" (1980: 239). His 'Transformational-Generative Grammar (TG Grammar) emphasizes the cognitive processes involved in understanding and producing language and the ways in which sentences can be transformed into other sentences while retaining their underlying meaning. Not all linguists share Chomsky's view and some of them put emphasis on the role of language in communication as being central to its study. Halliday, in *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978), chalks out his viewpoint of language as a functional system which is embedded in its use in a social context. This lecture will introduce linguistic functionalism including Systemic Functional Linguistics

1.Linguistic Functionalism

Functionalism, in linguistics, is an approach which emerged as a response to formalist theories of language (such as structuralism and generative grammar), which were more concerned with the formal rules of language rather than how language is used in practice. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the role of language in communication and its function in conveying meaning, rather than focusing solely on the formal structures of language (such as syntax and grammar). This theory prioritize the social and communicative functions of language, suggesting that linguistic forms and structures evolve primarily to serve practical communicative needs. The Prague School, with its emphasis on the communicative function of language, played a significant role in the development of linguistic functionalism, influencing later approaches like

2. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Michael Halliday)

One of the most influential schools of functionalism is **Systemic Functional Linguistics** (SFL), developed by Michael Halliday. SFL views language as a system of choices that speakers make in order to fulfill different

functions. SFL emphasizes the functional aspects of language, focusing on how language serves to communicate and perform various social functions. Unlike formalist approaches that prioritize abstract structures or rules, SFL views language as a tool for interaction, meaning-making, and achieving specific communicative goals within social contexts.

3. Functional Grammar

Functional grammar is a specific theoretical approach within functional linguistics. It focuses on the analysis and description of language from the perspective of its functions—how linguistic structures (such as syntax, morphology, and phonology) are used to fulfill communicative goals.

The **Systemic Functional Grammar** (SFG) by **Michael Halliday** is one of the most well-known models in this field. Halliday identified three main meta-functions of language:

- o **Ideational**: Concerned with the representation of experience and the world.

- o **Interpersonal**: Focused on social interactions and relationships between speakers.

- o **Textual**: Concerned with organizing and structuring information to make discourse coherent.

The language system consists of three macro-functions known as meta-functional components: the interpersonal function, the ideational function, and the textual function, all of which make a contribution to the structure of a text. According to Halliday8 it is called functional grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather than a formal one.

4. Halliday's Model of Language

Halliday proposed that language operates on three levels:

- o **Lexicogrammar**: The set of choices that combine lexical items (vocabulary) and grammatical structures (syntax). It is the system that helps convey meaning and fulfill communicative functions.

- o **Phonology**: The system of sounds used in spoken language.

- o **Semantics**: The system of meaning, which includes how words, phrases, and sentences are used to create and communicate meaning.

Halliday's function	Description	Example
Instrumental: I want	– getting things done – satisfying material needs	"I want a banana!" "Excuse me Mrs H, can you help me with the computer?"
Regulatory: Do as I tell you	– influencing the behaviour, feelings or attitudes of others – includes the language of rules and instructions	"You mustn't take things that don't belong to you." "First I … you need a rake and you have to build over the rake."
Interactional: Me and you	– getting along with others – to include or exclude	"Can I please have a go after you?" "Do you like cricket too Henry?"
Personal: Here I come	– expressing individuality and personal feelings – making public his/her own individuality	"I know that song 'cause we sang it at Kindergarten." "And … I've got a dog!"
Heuristic: Tell me why	– seeking and learning – using language to explore his/her environment – a way of learning about things	"We could make a water thing to tell how much rain we got." "Why?"
Imaginative: Let's pretend	– creating stories, games and new worlds – linguistic play including poems, rhymes and riddles – not necessarily 'about' anything at all	"Does this hurt when I bend it? You have fractured your leg really bad girl!" "Alice the camel has one hump, one hump, one hump."
Representational: I've got something to tell you	– communicating information – conveying a message with specific reference to the processes, persons, objects, abstractions, qualities, states and relations of the real world around him/her	"I made these earrings with pink and purple beads!" "It is raining really heavy and heavy all day."

Adapted from Halliday, M. A. K. 1969, 'Relevant models of Language', in 2003, *The Language of Early Childhood*, Continuum, London.

References

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Systemic functional linguistics:

https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/epgpdata/uploads/epgp_content/linguistics/15._pragmatic_and_discourse_analysis/05._systemic_functional_linguistics/et/8498_et_5_et.pdf