

Introduction

Power and Empowerment in SFL: Theoretical insights and discourse applications

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Ultimately, the overall power of our theory —the overarching metaphor, perhaps —attempts to replicate the power of language (Halliday 1997/2003, 269).

In systemic functional theory, language is perceived as the most powerful semiotic system enabling human beings to draw on both modes of being and doing (Halliday 2003). As “the central processing unit of language” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 21), grammar derives its power from the syntagmatic relations it construes and represents a powerful resource for paradigmatic meaning, with human beings drawing on a set of linguistic choices which reveal the meaning potential of language (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 21). This powerful potential of language lies in its ability to allow speakers not only to account for a wide range of material conditions in our environment and to address all the emerging changes in these conditions (Halliday 2003), but also to construe their interpersonal experience and maintain their interaction with others (Halliday 1995/2003, 428). Hence emerges the power of language as an active construal of the real world, drawing on both material and semiotic resources (Halliday 2003).

Along with this power of language as “*phenomenon*: as the primary realization of consciousness, and hence a major source of insight into its nature”, language “comes in as *metaphenomenon*: as the powerhouse of human intellectual endeavour —which involves constructing theories” (Halliday 1995/2003, 391: Original emphasis). Therefore, language empowers human beings to

develop theories and to interpret phenomena surrounding them, including language itself. On the one hand, language can be perceived as the outcome of our conscious processes whereby our thoughts are voiced and realized through linguistic choices. On the other hand, the potential of language is reflected in the potent theory strengthening our understanding, interpretation and acting on the world (Halliday 1995/2003, 428). This dialogic relation between theory and language uncovers the importance of developing a robust theoretical framework to account for language, thus fostering our perception of the world.

Considered as both “a means of reflection and a means of action” (Halliday 1985/2003, 197), language is perceived in Systemic Functional Linguistics as metalanguage whereby linguists voice their perceptions through language and use language to act on the world. This “strong sense of the social accountability of linguistics and linguists” renders language and the theory underlying it flexible, open to different outlets, so that “it has more power at its disposal than is actually needed in any one context” (Halliday 1985/2003, 197). This has made of SFL “an attractive theory for linguists and non-linguists looking for systematic approaches suitable for the investigation of language-related problems” (François & Sellami-Baklouti, Forthcoming). Being powerful, language provides the tools for linguists to explore, understand its potential and to fathom into the linguistic mechanisms accounting for linguistic phenomena. Linguists, thus, may come with new theoretical insights or redress previously developed theories to account for our understanding of the external world. These powerful theoretical perspectives enhance professionals and applied linguists’ knowledge about the theory and guide them in seeking to apply developed theoretical frames in different contexts including genres, disciplines, classroom discourse, political discourse, conversation and pragmatics. This leads to a wide application of the theory to real world issues in a variety of domains in expanding geographical contexts (François & Sellami-Baklouti, Forthcoming). Such applications can empower researchers and professionals to gain explanations of linguistic phenomena (Halliday 1992/2003, 211), to learn more about the language and to function better in their respective environments.

The theme of this special issue revolves around Power and Empowerment, in relation to language and systemic functional theory. The issue compiles contributions responding to a call for publication following the 48th Systemic Functional Congress (ISFC48), which took place in March 2023, organized by the Systemic Functional Linguistics Association of Tunisia (SYFLAT) and the Approaches to Discourse Research Laboratory, under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Sfax.

While the papers in the second volume of this special issue investigate how SFL language descriptions can empower pedagogical practices and provide a solid theoretical ground for contrastive studies, the contributions in this first volume address the notions of power and empowerment at theoretical and applied levels. At the theoretical level, the authors investigate some of the SFL notions with a view to empowering the theory's critical thinking. These notions include lexicogrammar (Fontaine), grammatical metaphor (Taverniers), instantial variation (Neumann), and 'the meant' (Zhenhua). The papers in the second part of this volume showcase how SFL theoretical notions can empower discourse approaches through the analysis of lexicogrammatical features in different genres, such as substitution across academic and popular discourse (Choura), linking adverbials in Tunisian research articles (Kaffel), transitivity in Ukraine-Russian news articles (Hlioui), transitivity in D.H. Lawrence's tale "The woman who rode away" (Kortas), modality in court hearing transcripts (Laadher) in addition to transitivity, taxis and metaphors in English translated interviews with three Berber speakers (Bouhdima).

In the first article in this volume, Fontaine provides some theoretical reflections on the nature of lexicogrammar, being directly relevant to the notion of empowerment because of its important position in the SFL stratified model of language (along with context and semantics). Despite the central role of the lexicogrammar as the main resource of meaning making to the extent of being considered as the powerhouse of language (Halliday 2005, 74), the author observes that it has remained understudied. She argues for the need to shed more light on the grammatical energy of this stratum, through examining the nature

of lexicogrammar and, in doing so, shifting the focus of attention to lexis, while applying the notion of meaning potential and actualisation. The development of a better understanding of lexis, the author argues, can empower both theory (by removing the 'blind spot') and individuals and fields (by better exploiting the meaning potential of language).

Halliday's metaphor of lexicogrammar as the powerhouse of language is also evoked in Taverniers' article on grammatical metaphor, which the author considers as the 'super process' providing 'a language's powerhouse with energy'. The study is motivated by the observation that, despite its power, the ideational grammatical metaphor is not frequently present in everyday language, as it is reserved for more elaborate, knowledge-based discourse. Based on this observation, Taverniers explores the nature of grammatical metaphor by highlighting its specific features taking a trinocular perspective ('from above', 'from below' and 'from roundabout'). This definition of grammatical metaphor in terms of stratification is, then, used to distinguish it from other functional shift processes such as transcategorization, conversion and rankshift.

Moving to another theoretical notion, Neuman's paper investigates the systemic functional concept of instantiation in relation to situational context and stresses the powerful role of individual instances in sharing the overall shape of language. The author challenges the view of registers as categories, with register variation perceived as variation between groups of texts. She argues that this approach does not provide a conceptualization of texts representing borderline instances and instances that show traits from two categories. The visual exploration of the results of the quantitative geometric multivariate analysis of data from the International Corpus of English reveals continuities and overlaps between register-based groups of texts, with fuzzy boundaries and widespread instantial variation. Based on these results, the author concludes that, in addition to a detailed qualitative analysis of language, a systematic quantitative analysis of large samples of texts is needed to assess the impact of individual language users' idiosyncratic choices within the broader context of social and situational factors.

In his paper, Wang addresses the notion of meaning in SFL theory and explores how the concept of genre in Sydney School can facilitate the communication of appropriate meanings by maximizing the power and benefit of social doings in the interpretation of these meanings in a social context. The author starts with pointing out at the complementarity between Halliday's grammatical approach to meaning (i.e. at the level of meaning making) and Martin's discourse analytical approach to it (at the level of its interpretation in text/discourse) and calling for the need to further explore the dynamic meaning of language used in social communication. Using a Chinese opera and a TV show as examples of social doings, the author reveals how 'the meant' emerges from language users' mutual evaluation of each other's knowledge, ideas, and intentions. 'The meant' also embodies the emotionally perceived essence of the feelings conveyed through social semiotics within constantly evolving social interactions and practices. In the light of this complex combination between users and social context, 'the meant' can be characterised by a set of features, which the author abbreviates as MACUVIN (**m**iscellaneous, **a**daptive, **c**omplicated, **u**ncertain, **v**olatile, **i**ncomplete, and **n**avigating).

Choura's paper uses the concept of stratification with SFL's architecture of language, with context being the higher stratum motivating semantic construals that, in turn, determine lexicogrammatical selections from the system, to explore the impact of generic and disciplinary conventions on lexicogrammatical choices. She investigates the lexicogrammatical realisations of substitution across journal commentaries and magazine news, both of which communicate scientific knowledge but differ in information literacy, and across the disciplines of chemistry and anthropology, representative of different research paradigms. The comparison of the four sub-corpora shows the powerful impact of genre and discipline on the choice of substitution. These results highlight the role of SFL theory in empowering genre analysis by providing descriptive and methodological tools.

Kaffel also addresses the textual metafunction in relation to sub-generic and disciplinary conventions. She focuses on linking adverbials in Tunisian Research Articles across Linguistics and Computer Sciences, with a view to understanding how they

contribute to the textual cohesion of the text. Relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, the author analyses the distribution and semantic functions of linking adverbials first across disciplines and second across research article sections, i.e. Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion, following Halliday and Hasan's model (1976). The study shows that linking adverbials are frequently used in both disciplines. It also reveals that they serve the communication functions of each section and the disciplinary specificities of Linguistics and Computer Sciences, thus testifying to the power of context in determining lexico-grammatical choices. The author suggests that the findings of this study may empower academic authors and develop their writing skills.

Hlioui shifts the focus to the experiential metafunction and in particular the transitivity system. She investigates Ukraine-Russian news articles for the choices of transitivity at the clause level in order to explore how the war is construed differently by the opposing parties. The author adopts a mixed method approach as she carries out a semi-automatic annotation of the texts, using the UAM CorpusTool, and provides a qualitative account of the data. The study reveals that the war is construed differently so as to empower one nation over another. While Ukraine journalism uses attributive relational clauses to present Russians as criminals and savages, Russian narratives opt for identifying relational clauses to unveil Ukraine as a US threatening tool.

Kortas revisits the experiential metafunction, yet in a literary register. She mainly analyses transitivity in "The Woman Who Rode Away", a tale by D.H. Lawrence, with an emphasis on process types, participants, namely the female protagonist and the Indians, and circumstances of time and place. She attempts to explore the mystical and the spiritual in portraying the character of the female protagonist and to account for her journey in terms of Sufism and its influence on Lawrence's prose. To this end, Kortas conducts a quantitative analysis of the aforementioned features, relying on the UAM CorpusTool, coupled with the qualitative analysis of the protagonist's identity. The study indicates that mental processes are the most frequent, revealing the main character's emotional journey and the way she struggles to discover and free herself from societal norms. The findings of this study

may give insights into how experience empowers characters and fosters their transformation in literary discourse.

Drawing on the interpersonal metafunction, Laadhar's study explores modality in Court Hearing Transcripts. Laadhar examines how different participants use modality at four levels of analysis, i.e. modality type, modality realization, modality orientation and modality source, and attempts to relate such use to the power status of the participants. To achieve these objectives, instances of modality are annotated using the UAM CorpusTool across two court hearings and are qualitatively interpreted in relation to generic conventions. The study shows that the distribution of modality reflects the power status of the participants, with the highly powerful ones opting for more congruent forms of modulation. The author concludes that the findings of this study may empower legal studies and people in court hearings.

Bouhdima's research aligns with the logical, experiential and interpersonal metafunctions. He investigates an inventory of features including process types, participants, circumstances, hypotactic and paratactic relations in addition to lexical and grammatical metaphors in three English translated interviews carried out with three Berber speakers of Djerba. He opts for a mixed-method approach where he draws on both Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003) to compare the distribution of the aforementioned features across the three samples. The study reveals that the participants do not construe their experiences in the same way and that such differences are not affected by social norms. The author concludes that the combination of Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics can empower both frameworks and provide a robust methodology for research and analysis.

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