



مختبر مقاربات الخطاب  
Laboratory of Approaches to Discourse



## Editors

**Akila Sellami-Baklouti**

**Fatma Benelhaj**

**Sabiha Choura**

**Nadia Abid**

This special issue compiles papers from the 48th Systemic Functional Congress (ISFC48) organised in March 2023 by the Systemic Functional Linguistics Association of Tunisia (SYFLAT) and the Laboratory of Approaches to Discourse (LAD-LR13ES15), under the auspices of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at the University of Sfax. This special issue, which explores the theme of power and empowerment in relation to language and systemic functional theory, is divided into two volumes. The contributions in this first volume provide some reflections on SFL notions, which can empower both the theoretical apparatus and its application to different types of discourse. The papers in the second volume showcase how SFL language descriptions can empower pedagogical practices.

<https://recherches-universitaires-flshs.com>

Ce site permettra aux internautes qui s'y inscriront via l'«Espace Membre» de consulter ou de télécharger des articles déjà parus dans les numéros précédents de la revue ou alors de soumettre des articles pour évaluation à paraître après acceptation dans un prochain numéro.

## Acknowledgements

The editors would like to express their sincerest thanks to the esteemed scholars who kindly contributed to the review process in this special issue.

- Radhia Bebes
- Maria Brisk
- Izaskun Elorza
- Najla Fki
- Lise Fontaine
- Sondes Hamdi
- Ameni Hlioui
- Imen Ktari
- Fayssal Maalej
- Anne McCabe
- Mimoun Melliti
- Dorra Moalla
- Nesrine Triki
- Zhenhua Wang

The editors would also like to express their sincere gratitude to Prof. Sadok Damak, Editor-in-Chief of *Academic Research*, for his invaluable support and guidance throughout the preparation and publication of this special issue.

<https://recherches-universitaires-flshs.com>

Ce site permettra aux internautes qui s'y inscrivent via l'«Espace Membre» de consulter ou de télécharger des articles déjà parus dans les numéros précédents de la revue ou alors de soumettre des articles pour évaluation à paraître après acceptation dans un prochain numéro.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv

**Introduction** – Power and Empowerment in SFL:  
Theoretical insights and discourse applications – 1  
*Akila Sellami Baklouti & Sabiha Choura*

**1**  
Lexicogrammar: The powerhouse of language – 10  
*Lise Fontaine*

**2**  
The power of grammatical metaphor: How does it  
differ from conversion and derivation? – 30  
*Miriam Taverniers*

**3**  
Multivariate exploration of instantial variation in  
situational context: The powerful role of the  
individual instance of language use – 68  
*Stella Neumann*

**4**  
MACUVIN: Features of ‘the Meant’ under the  
constraint of genre – 89  
*Zhenhua Wang*

**5**  
A comparative study of substitution in chemical and  
anthropological magazine news and journal  
commentaries – 108  
*Sabiha Choura*

6

Linking adverbials in Tunisian research articles across two disciplines: A comparative corpus-based study – 129

*Donia Kaffel*

7

(Dis)empowering Ukraine/Russia through journalese: A Transitivity approach – 148

*Ameni Hlioui*

8

“The woman who rode away”: A Transitivity reading that matches the Sufi understanding of the circles of the inner self’s journey in time and space – 166

*Cyrine Kortas*

9

Modality in court hearing transcripts: An SFL approach – 183

*Ahlem Laadhar*

10

A comparative analysis of the construal of real-world experiences in English translations of interviews with three speakers of Djerbi Berber – 210

*Mohamed Elhedi Bouhdima*

# MACUVIN: Features of ‘the Meant’ under the constraint of genre

Zhenhua Wang

## Abstract

*Systemic Functional Linguistics addresses three modes of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. However, when the concepts of ‘meaning’, ‘to mean’, and ‘sense’ converge, how do these three modes of meaning align? In communication, speakers or writers aim to convey their intended meanings, and in this paper, it is called ‘the meant’, while listeners or readers interpret the meanings intended by the speaker or writer. In this process, language users play a crucial role, and ‘the meant’ represents a combination of linguistic meaning and social meaning. However, the concept of ‘the meant’ and its characteristics have not been extensively elaborated in traditional linguistics. This paper aims to explore how the genre in the Sydney School facilitates the communication of appropriate meanings, examines the methods through which these meanings are conveyed, and discusses the features of ‘the meant’. Finally, the implications of this research are discussed in the conclusion. This paper consists of five parts. In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, it examines two social doings in which two conceptual metaphors are created. Then the paper moves to ‘the meant’ of the language users in their social doings. Additionally, the features of ‘the meant’ are explored from the perspective of genre.*

## Keywords

*social interaction; genre; linguistic meaning; social meaning; the meant; MACUVIN*

## Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) addresses meaning from the three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual). It theorizes the meaning model of ideational, interpersonal, and textual both at the level of grammar (Halliday 1985; 1994; 2004; 2014) and at the level of text/discourse (Martin 1992; Martin & Rose 2003/2007). Halliday, as a grammarian, devoted to the research of meaning making, developed robust systems for the analysis of grammatical meaning. Martin (1992; 2000; Martin & White 2005), as a discourse analyst, influenced both by Halliday’s grammatical perspective of the meaning of clause (Halliday 1985; 1992) and by Gleason’s perspective of discourse semantic structure (Gleason 1968), developed equally robust systems for the analysis

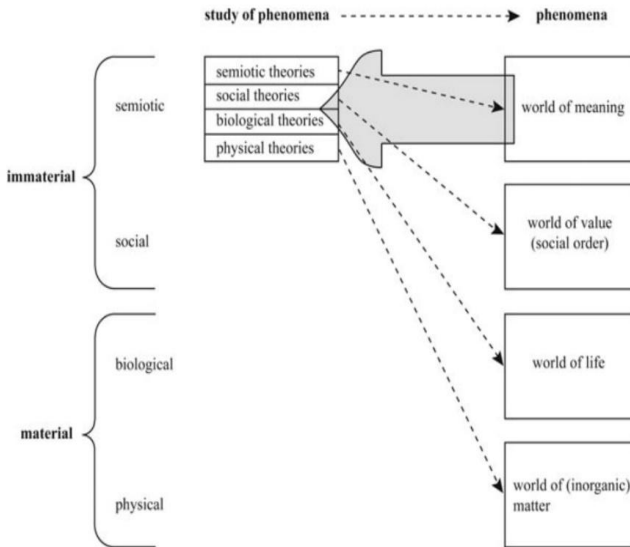
of the meaning of text/discourse. Both the well-developed grammatical and discourse semantic tools work to explore the meaning of language as social semiotic. But one point that needs further exploration is the dynamic meaning of language used in the social communication. In practice, due to the contextual constraint, what speakers say may be the same as what they want to mean, or may not be the same as what they want to mean. Due to the contextual constraint, what listeners interpret may be the same to what the speaker meant, or may not be what the speaker meant. Therefore, the meaning of the language in use in which the speaker (including the writer), the listener (including the reader), and the context are bundled together becomes much more complicated. It is necessary to revisit the concept of meaning and dig the features of what is meant, i.e., ‘the meant’ (note, the meant goes without inverted commas afterwards) to help further actualise the social accountability of the linguistic theory of SFL.

In the following sections of this paper, the author first introduces social phenomena that contribute to the generation of two conceptual metaphors. One metaphor illustrates the relationship between emotion and the meant, while the other indicates the modality of the meant. The author, then, explores how the genre within the Sydney School facilitates the communication of appropriate meanings, examines the methods through which these meanings are conveyed, and discusses the features of the meant. Finally, the implications of this research are addressed in the conclusion.

### **1. Social doings and conceptual metaphors out of them**

Matthiessen and his colleagues indicated that “any theory is a semiotic construct—a construct made out of meaning” (Matthiessen et al. 2010, 2), and provided a figure as follows:

*Figure 1 Theories as semiotic constructs (as made of meaning)*



(Source: *Matthiessen et al. 2010, 2*)

Figure 1 indicates that the *semiotic* and the *social* go hand in hand in the system of immaterial, where the world of meaning and the world of value are interrelated. In a sense, the value embedded in the social order enables the world of meaning. Similarly, *biological* and *physical* aspects in the material system are closely related as well, where the world of life and the world of matter are interdependent. When the world of meaning and the world of value in the immaterial system converge with the world of life and the world matter in the material system, semiosis and somasis are generated (cf. Ngo et al. 2022). Therefore, the idea of theories as semiotic construct informs us that the four worlds are interconnected, and the meaning is derived from various source modes in language and paralanguage, or their combination. All the modes are constrained by the context: context of culture and context of situation, theoretically referred to as genre and register. Influenced by this perspective, this article focuses on social doings, i.e., any doing for socialization, and the intended meanings of the users, *the meant*, that arises out of them.

This present article holds that meanings are buried in the social doings in which human beings behave, think and communicate.

This holding can be illustrated in the virtual as well as the real world. As to the virtual world, *Bianlian*, a Sichuan opera in China, is taken as an example for illustration. *Bianlian*, or literally in English *face changing*, shoots out dozens of changes of facial spectrum of emotions in a blink with the three techniques of wiping, pulling, and blowing. This performance involves efforts from different people, including the **script composers**, **crafts people**, and **performers**. The composers create the face changing script, which is a socially constructed story in which characters interact. In the story, various sources, complicated situations, different types of encounters, and multiple modes of expressions are presented. The **crafts people** design masks for different kinds of emotional expression. The masks take on different kinds of spectrum. The crafts people have various kinds of situations on their mind when they make these designs, and they use multiple colors representing different emotions. The **performers** display different emotional masks to meet the demand of different reactions to something impacting them in different ways. In the performance, various activities, moves of hands and body, and postures together with different voices take place. The **design, production, and distribution** (in Kress & van Leeuwen's (2001) terms) make the opera multimodal. The implication of this opera leads to the conceptual metaphor **EMOTIONS ON THE FACE DETERMINE WHAT IS MEANT**. The face changing bears deep cultural and social implications. It indicates and reveals changes of social doings and of human characters. The various changing patterns display different psychological status and convey various emotional meanings.

As for the real world, the following segment of a TV report of people's reactions towards the verdict of O. J. Simpson's trial is taken as an example:

**Barry Nolan** (male TV reporter): It was over a year ago that the brutal double murders ripped apart the quiet, exclusive neighborhood of Brentwood, and all during the trial, emotions have run high throughout the City of Angels. Tonight, Sylvia Villagran has reaction from the community to the verdict.

**Foreman:** Orenthal James Simpson not guilty of....

**Viewers:** Yes!



**Sylvia Villagran** (female TV reporter): At the Brotherhood Crusade in Los Angeles, the not-guilty verdict represented justice.

**FI 1** (female interviewee 1): To me, they did not prove that he committed this crime.

**FI 2:** The truth brought the case for the jury, the truth.

**Sylvia Villagran:** And those who supported O. J. throughout the trial wanted to give him a message.

**FI 3:** We are the people that are really supporting you. There are other people supporting you, but those of us will be dramatically forgotten. We're still out there. And come to the neighborhood. We need you.

**Sylvia Villagran:** But for some people in O J's Brentwood neighborhood, the verdict brought no peace, only more sorrow.

**MI 1** (male interviewee 1): I kind of feel let down, er, I don't know if he did it or not. But a lot of evidence show that he did, you know. Then...I don't know. I feel kind of sad really about the whole thing.

**FI 4:** I plainly thought he was guilty. It's a matter of evidence that was against him. Er..., he got away with two murders. It's unbelievable.

**FI 5:** Money buys justice. There's nothing to do with what color he is. He bought..., he has the best defense money could buy. It isn't about races; it's about class. (transcribed from *StarPlus*, Phoenix TV)

Different reactions toward the verdict in this segment were determined by those people's attitudes toward the verdict. Before an attitude is made, people choose from the attitude potentials. Making a choice means some things are agreed upon and kept, and some other things are not agreed on and discarded. For example, FI 1 said, "To me, they did not prove that he committed this crime". By saying this, she meant that the prosecution party did not provide enough evidence to prove that OJ was guilty, and was not able to convince the jury to make a guilty verdict. She kept her decision that justice was served instead of the other way round. But FI 4 held an opposite attitude by saying "I plainly thought he was guilty", and also expressed her explicit judgment by the utterance "he got away with two murders. It's unbelievable". The conceptual

metaphor drawn out of this analysis can be created like this:  
**DECISIONS OF WHAT IS MEANT ARE MADE BETWEEN THE TWO POLES.**

*Bianlian*, the Sichuan opera, as a piece of art work, displays its value by various kinds of emotions on the facial patterns. The different facial spectrum each activity of pulling, wiping, and blowing produces is to reveal a type of social phenomenon. The intended meaning is conveyed beyond the activities and the facial spectrums themselves, for the activities and the spectrums are related with different social practices now and in the past. The different reactions toward the verdict of O. J. Simpson in the second example are conveyed via the utterances of the people in the neighborhood. This means that the linguistic meaning plays a role in revealing one's attitude. In the next section, the meant of social doings will be explored from the genre perspective in terms of applicable linguistics to "solve problems that arise in communities around the world", problems "involving both reflection and action" (Matthiessen 2012, 436).

## **2. Social doings and the meant**

*The meant* in this article refers to the subjectified meaning potential of the speakers in their social doings and semiotic activities they engage in. It is constrained by the social context and the language used. Therefore, *the meant* is the meaning pattern of linguistic meaning and social meaning. *Speaker* in this working definition indicates an individual or a collective group that toss a proposal or a proposition, or produce a text or a discourse. *Meaning potential* means that one chooses what she or he wants to mean due to the current context she or he encounters. *Subjectified* means that the meaning produced by the speaker has been sifted mentally and culturally in the process. *The meant* is different from the term *meaning* in that meaning mainly refers to the meaning of language or symbol itself, such as the meaning of a word, an expression, or a gesture. It is also different from the term *sense* in that sense mainly refers to one of the possible meanings of a word or an expression.

Social doings occur in both our physical and mental worlds. In the process of social doings, various social means and forces come into play. People utilize these means and the forces to create products, consume them, and distribute them. They also use the

means and the forces to build interpersonal relations and social connections, thereby socialising themselves. For instance, lawyers and their clients are connected through the process of prosecution. Lawyers ask questions during examinations and cross-examinations, and they use judgments to express their attitudes. Therefore, all social doings carry their own meanings, contributing to a complex edifice of meanings.

Social doings have their behaviour potentials, and these potentials are realised by the meaning potentials. The meaning potentials are realised via social semiotics (language is one of them), and the social semiotics *per se* “**can say**, **can do** and **can mean**” (Halliday 1973; 1978). Language can be taken “as social behaviour” (Halliday 1973, 48), and can be treated “as a form of behaviour *potential*. It is what the speaker **can do**”. And “the potential of language is a meaning potential. This meaning potential is the linguistic realization of the behaviour potential; ‘**can mean**’ is ‘can do’ when translated into language. The meaning potential is realised in the language system as lexico-grammatical potential, which is what the speaker ‘**can say**’” (Halliday 1973, 51-2).

We argue that the ideas of *can do*, *can mean*, and *can say* can be mapped to the meant. **Can say** offers linguistic meaning for the meant. When FI4 said “I plainly thought he was guilty”, she was airing what she believed. Her utterance is a Mental clause, and the Senser and the Phenomenon complete the “thinking”. “I” and “plainly V-ed” compose the declarative mood of the clause, where the Subject is put before the verb to start the message. The Given is “I”. The New is “plainly thought he was guilty”. **Can do** enables social doings. The utterance “I plainly thought he was guilty” is taken as that the speaker’s speaking is doing: speaking her thinking. **Can mean** brings about social meanings. By uttering “I plainly thought he was guilty”, the speaker expressed her judgment of OJ’s behaviour: He was guilty of the murders. Though the speaker clearly stated her idea (‘plainly thought’), she also left the room for negotiation because of the verb ‘thought’, for it was only her personal idea, and that could not represent other people’s attitudes.

**Can mean** plays a key role in socialization. This is proved by the three metafunctions in the SFL tradition: the interpersonal

metafunction to enact relationships, the ideational metafunction to represent experience, and the textual metafunction to organize texts. People have to do something in order to establish social relationships with each other, and when they do, there is interaction. The process of interaction involves experience, knowledge, and messages. When it comes to experience and knowledge, these become the ideational metafunction when translated into language. During the process of interaction, individuals have their own understandings, opinions, and attitudes towards experience, knowledge, and messages. When these understandings, opinions, and attitudes are consistent, people's relationships are harmonious; otherwise, conflicts may arise. When these interpersonal relationships are expressed in language, the function achieved is the interpersonal metafunction. The methods and means used in interaction can have either positive or negative effects. When these types of interactions are translated into language, this is the textual metafunction. These features of *can mean* are applicable to people's socialization not only through the rank of clauses, but also via discourse semantics. See the table quoted from Martin and Rose (2007).

*Table 1 Systems of Discourse Semantics*

	Discourse Systems	Metafunction
APPRAISAL	'negotiating attitudes'	interpersonal
NEGOTIATION	'enacting exchanges'	interpersonal
IDEATION	'representing experience'	ideational
CONJUNCTION	'connecting events'	ideational
IDENTIFICATION	'tracking people and things'	textual
PERIODICITY	'the rhythm of discourse'	textual

(Source: *Martin & Rose 2007, 8*)

Social signs and symbols, because of their **pre-here & now** (once in being, they have already gained their meaning/s) use, have their linguistic meanings, i.e., "meanings in vacuum" (Wang 2019). This kind of meaning is usually approached by looking at the structure of language in the syntagmatic way. Features of "meanings in vacuum" are static, simple, and pure. Grammatical analysis can afford to fulfil the task. For example, FI 5 states, "Money buys justice." This statement encompasses both

Participants and Process, which together produce ideational meaning. It also serves as a statement about the exchange of goods and services, thereby generating interpersonal meaning. The word “Money” is positioned at the beginning of the clause as the Theme, effectively serving as the topic. The phrase “buys justice” acts as the Rheme, elaborating on the Theme of “Money.” Furthermore, in terms of information structure, “Money” is considered Given, while “buys justice” is regarded as New. The use of the end focus strategy creates a rhetorical effect, even as the clause conveys textual meaning.

Social signs and symbols, because of their **here & now use** (in current usage), has social meanings. This kind of meaning can be compared to ‘**meanings in the Face Changing style**’. Features of this kind of meaning are various. They can be contextual, dynamic, multiple layered, volatile and mutating. Grammatical analysis is not enough for them. It needs discourse analysis from the genre perspective. Let’s take the utterance “Money buys justice” again for example. By this utterance, FI 5 made a comment contextually on the verdict. What she meant was that money played an important role in the judgment of OJ’s case, and justice was not served but bought. If that saying is doing holds water, then her utterance is a social doing, and her meant is a kind of *the meant* of her social doing. That is, in her view, by saying “Money buys justice”, she meant that OJ could afford to hire a strong and powerful defense team of lawyers. Therefore, language itself plays the role of description; the user of language determines the social meaning of the language s/he uses.

We now conclude that **the meant of social doings refers to the combination of linguistic/semiotic meanings and the social meanings**. Zolyan (2019) states:

The functioning of social institutions appears as the processes of semiosis and communication, or as governed by specific rules of language games. This makes it possible to combine linguistic meanings with social meanings by showing their interdependence, and at the same time differences in their manifestation. (Zolyan 2019, 403)

He illustrated with the constitution of a state:

A constitution of a state is a verbal text as well as a set of rules for the functioning of a society, including the rules of communication between social institutions and citizens. These rules are not determined by this linguistic text, but they are described by it. (Zolyan 2019, 403)

In some sense, the meant comes out of language user's mutual assessment of each other's knowledge, ideas, and intentions. It is the emotionally cognized substance of the feeling transmitted by using social semiotics in the forever changing social interaction and practice. It is determined by the user and descriptively represented via structures of the social semiotics.

### 3. Genre and Features of the Meant (MACUVIN)

Genre defined by the Sydney School is "a staged, goal oriented social process" (Martin & Rose 2008, 6), and "each genre involved a particular configuration of tenor, field and mode variables" (p. 16). Therefore, "genre is a pattern of register patterns, just as register variables are a pattern of linguistic ones" (Martin & Rose 2003/2007, 310). More specifically, "genre is positioned as an abstract level of analysis co-ordinating field, mode and tenor (known collectively as register)" (Martin & Rose 2008, 231). Language as social semiotic is "**a denotative semiotic** realising social context, and social context is **a connotative semiotic** realised through language", and "**cultures** seem to involve a large but potentially definable **set of genres**, that are recognisable to members of a culture, rather than an unpredictable jungle of social situations" (Martin & Rose 2008, 16-17). The Genre Model developed by J. R. Martin is a functional model of language and social process.

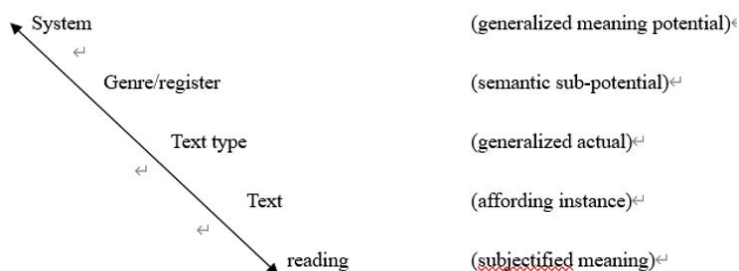
From the perspective of the Sydney School's genre theory, each genre is the result of people's interactions within a socio-cultural context through the configuration of field, tenor, and mode. This viewpoint illustrates that any social process is related to people, language, and events. Every event or situation (field) involves human participation (tenor), and participants use language or semiotic resources (mode) to facilitate the occurrence, development, and completion of events. For example, the outcome of the Simpson trial elicited vastly different reactions and attitudes from the audience regarding the verdict. These reactions and

attitudes represent the speaker's intended meanings, i.e. the meant. The expression of these intended meanings is realized through explicit or implicit language in most of the cases. Therefore, genre, the context of culture, determines the meant of the language user.

The meant of a person's social doings is usually constrained by the social practice, social communication, social semiotic, and his/her feeling and knowing. **Social practice** generates social meanings. Any activity of a person is meaningful, and "situations are inherently meaningful" (Riemer 2010, 6). **Social communication** provides the channel for interaction between people in which the meant is made. Any activity that human beings engage in is generally inseparable from interactions, some of which are direct, such as face-to-face communication. Some are indirect, such as writing or reading. Thus, meaning exists in social interactions, and already there in the world (Riemer 2010). Meaning is conveyed through social signs & symbols, the **social semiotic**. They are meaning materials, including language or speech, as well as gestures, facial expressions, movements, sounds, colors, pictures, scenes, etc. In social practice and communication activities, "the sender of every message depends on the receiver to make the message effective as expected" (Hodge & Kress 1988, 4). The meant is closely related to the user's **feeling** and **knowing** as well.

The feeling towards and the knowledge of the social semiotic in the social communication in the social practice make the user build his/her meant to complete his/her journey from the community reservoir to his/her personal repertoire. The figure by Martin and White (2005) exemplifies this view. See Figure 2:

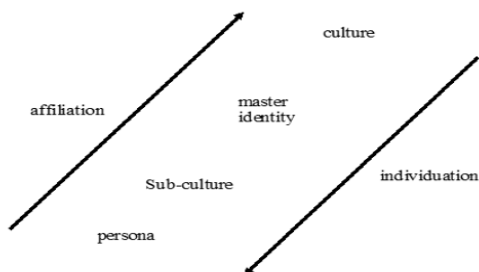
*Figure 2 Cline of Instantiation*



(Source: Martin & White 2005, 25)

In Figure 2, the meant lies in the personal reading of a particular text, which belongs to one type of text categorized according to the pattern of field, tenor, and mode. It is evident that the meant of the personal reading is constrained by the context of culture, that is, the genre in SFL. On the other hand, the context of culture also allows the meant to be changeable. This variability depends on whether the user (either the speaker or the listener) chooses to individualise themselves from the other party or to affiliate to the other party. If they prefer to be individualised, their meant is constrained by the culture. In the aforementioned TV report of people's reactions towards the verdict of O. J. Simpson's trial, FI 2, a black female, endorsed the jury's verdict upon hearing it, stating, "The truth brought the case for the jury, the truth." However, MI 1, a white male, expressed skepticism about the jury's verdict, saying, "I kind of feel let down, er, I don't know if he did it or not. But a lot of evidence shows that he did, you know. Then...I don't know. I feel kind of sad really about the whole thing." In fact, the true meaning of his words is that O. J. Simpson is guilty, because "a lot of evidence shows that he did." The two individuals, coming from their respective racial communities, have their own cultural value bases, and these differing cultural values can lead to completely different attitudes towards the same event, resulting in different intended meanings, the meant. If people wish to affiliate, their meant becomes multiple, with this multiplicity existing within the scope of shared culture. This phenomenon is very common in social media. Both individuation and affiliation are influenced by and constrained by the context of culture. Due to the context of culture, to make the meant out of individuation or out of affiliation is the decision between the two poles. See Figure 3 :

*Figure 3 Individuation and affiliation*



(Source: *Martin 2010*)



Cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization are indeed fundamental aspects of our daily lives. They shape our experiences and influence how we interact with the world around us. Cultural reproduction refers to the way cultural traits and values are passed down through generations, ensuring that our shared meanings and practices endure. This process highlights the importance of tradition and continuity in shaping our identities. Social integration, on the other hand, involves the ways in which individuals come together to form cohesive groups. This can lead to both positive outcomes, such as a sense of belonging and community, and negative ones, like exclusion or conflict. The meanings derived from these interactions can significantly impact our social fabric. Lastly, socialization is the process through which we learn and internalize the norms and values of our society. The experiences we encounter during socialization—whether positive or negative—play a crucial role in shaping our emotions and perceptions. These emotions, in turn, contribute to the meanings we attach to our experiences and relationships. In essence, these three concepts are interconnected and continuously influence one another, creating a rich tapestry of human experience that defines our social world.

Contextualization plays an important role in the making of the meant of social doings. Doers, any party involved in the social doings, concern the social phenomena that determine what is to be meant. A social phenomenon can be anything that is material, mental, verbal and relational. In social doings, doers contextualise the social phenomenon. They cognize the phenomenon and have their interpretation. If they communicate with a third party over the phenomenon, another course of contextualization happens. Therefore, **when context changes, the meant changes**, and the social meanings are different.

Being constrained by the context of culture, social doings are usually undertaken nonlinearly, and the meant the social doer wants to convey is nonlinear. This is related to neural networks. What is on the mind when one concerns a social phenomenon? How does s/he want to behave? Would one convey what is on his or her mind truly or not? All these are up to the doer him- or herself in his or her doings. It is not easy at all to catch the exact meaning of the meant of the social doings. It is the nonlinearity of social doings

that enables the features of the meant, such as miscellaneous-sense, adaptability, complexity, uncertainty, volatility, incompleteness, and navigation, which are abbreviated as **MACUVIN**.

Due to the information asymmetry between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader in terms of context of culture and context of situation, the listener/reader may have deviations in understanding the meant of the speaker/writer's output. The meant of the speaker/writer represents a kind of potential meaning for the listener/reader, who can only passively guess and infer the meant of the speaker/writer. If the result of the guess or inference is close to the meant of the speaker/writer, the listener/reader will be guided (that is, **navigated**) by it, adjusting (that is, **adapting**) their judgment and responding accordingly. Otherwise, the listener/reader may misunderstand the meant of the speaker/writer, leading to responses or reflections that are off track. This misunderstanding and deviation in responses are caused by the **ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty, volatility, and incompleteness** of the speaker/writer's intended meaning.

The MACUVIN features have to do with users, their speech, and the matter the speech is about. This can be seen in the following dialogue, which happened between two street peddlers. The patterns of field, tenor, and mode in terms of context of culture are encoded in the story that the dialogue tells. The dialogue took place on a street connecting a Chinese third-tier city and the country, and the location our story took place in was close to the city. Street peddlers were not allowed to vend their stuff along this street. The local government patched market supervisors to patrol the street frequently. If a peddler was caught on spot by the supervisor, s/he was usually warned not to come back for vending again. If the supervisor caught one who repeatedly came to vend along the street, the peddler most probably would be fined. Due to this, the peddlers were highly vigilant against the supervisors. In our story, the peddler who initiated the conversation (hereafter A) intended to park his vending truck to sell socks, but he was not sure whether it was permitted officially or not. But his initial question to the man who was sitting by a vending truck selling fruits (hereafter B) created misunderstanding on B's part, but the ending is dramatic. The dialogue goes as follows:

A: Who permitted you to park here?

B: (perplexed & scared. no response)

A: I mean, who told you to park your vending truck here?

B: (I will) Hit the road now.

A: Why?

B: I'm not aware ah.... Is parking not allowed here?

A: (not answering B's question) Is there any market supervisor inspecting this area?

B: (verify the question in a slightly relaxed low tone) Ah?

A: No supervisor, right?

B: Yes, some supervisor supervises this area. Absent.

A: Oh. I'll move my car here, too, if no one is inspecting. I'm selling socks.... ?

B: (with indignation) I thought you were the supervisor!

A: No, I'm vending socks. Shall I park my vehicle here...?

B: (whining tone, loudly) You **Frightened Me!** Who... You questioned if parking here is allowed. Who told me to park here? You let me assume you were the marketing supervisor!

“Who permitted you to park here?” is verbal. Ideationally, “who” and “you” complete the process of permitting. The permission comes from “who”, and “you” is the receiver of the permission. Interpersonally, this utterance can be tagged by asking “Didn’t who?”. Textually, the message starts from “who”, which is the Theme, and “permitted you to park here” is the Rheme. The triad metafunctional analysis of the structure of this utterance clearly describes the message conveyed, as well as the regulation and the organization of the message. This is only at the level of grammatical analysis. The meaning rendered here is linguistic meaning. But this is not what A really meant. What he meant was that B must have permission to sell fruits there, otherwise B could not be so relaxed, sitting on a chair engaged with his mobile phone. A wanted to make his speculation certain by asking such a question. That was his meant through his question.

A believed that his intention was correctly described linguistically. But B didn't share A's belief. He did not take A's question literally, but inferred that A must be a market supervisor, and that the meaning of A's question was to catch him as an unlicensed peddler on spot, and that the consequence was either to be criticized or to be fined. Therefore, the sudden changes on his face indicated that he was startled and scared, and he stood up and grabbed his chair to withdraw. He even went as far as promising to leave with his truck immediately after A repeated his question. Why did B have such an interpretation of A's question? There are at least two reasons: 1) A's choice of question. To choose *who* (谁 *shéi*) to initiate a *wh*- question in Chinese produces a very strong tone indicating that the speaker is more powerful. He put emphasis on the word *shéi*, and used the falling intonation to complete the question. These prosodic operations also left an impression on B that A came from the market administration. 2) The location. The location the conversation took place in was not a place for peddling. If peddling was conducted, the peddler would be asked to move away, otherwise be fined according to certain rules or regulations. B's misunderstanding was caused by the social context, that is, the local culture system. It is the local culture system that made A's question miscellaneous, complicated, incomplete, and uncertain to B, and navigates B to the misunderstanding.

It was dramatic that A was puzzled when B responded that he would leave soon. A was not aware it was his question that caused B to leave, for he thought that he was only asking a plain question. But A's "why" soothed B's nerves, and B started to assume that A might not be the supervisor, and then dared to ask, "Is parking not allowed here?" And this question by B led to A's adapted question "Is there any market supervisor inspecting this area?". When B confirmed that there was no supervisor, their mutual misunderstanding was released. The colour on his face turned normal and he expressed his anxiety and scare by uttering "You Frightened Me!"

#### 4. Implications and Conclusion

Social doings happen in a certain culture, and involve belief, value, ethic, and moral over what is interacted. The habitual nature of human beings is to maximize their benefits and power, and

minimize their loss. If this nature is challenged, emotions are stirred, the meant becomes complicated, decisions are made accordingly, and relations are changed negatively. This may lead to the consequences such as quarrels, fights, conflicts, or wars.

In this paper, we argue that the features of the meant are miscellaneous, adaptive, complicated, uncertain, volatile, incomplete, and navigating. These characteristics are determined by cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization, all these processes of recontextualization.

Learning the natures of the meanings of miscellaneous sense, adaptation, complexity, uncertainty, volatility, incompleteness, and navigation, we can mitigate the conflicts, and improve relations in our social doings.

## References

- Austin, J. (1975). *How to do things with words*. Clarendon Press.
- Gleason, H. A. Jr. (1968). Contrastive analysis in discourse structure. *Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics 21* (Georgetown University Institute of Languages and Linguistics)
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). Academic Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1973). *Exploration in the functions of language*. Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). Language as social semiotics: Towards a general sociolinguistic theory. In A. Makkai, & V.B. Makkai (Eds.), *The first LACUS forum* (pp. 17-46). Hornbeam Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (Second Edition.). Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2005). On matter and meaning: The two realms of human experience. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, 1(1), 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.1558/lhs.2005.1.1.59>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (Third Edition). Edward Arnold.
- Hodge, R. & Kress, G. (1988). *Social semiotics*. Cornell University

Press.

- Jaszczolt, K. M. (2002). *Semantics and pragmatics: Meaning in language and discourse*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman Group Limited.
- Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, J. R. (1992). *English text: System and structure*. Benjamins.
- Martin, J. R. (1994). Macro-genres: The ecology of the page. In Z.H. Wang (Ed.), *The Collected works of J. R. Martin* (Vol 3) (pp. 78-126). Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.
- Martin, J. R. (2010). Semantic variation: Modelling realisation, instantiation and individuation in social semiosis. In M. Bednarek & J. R. Martin (Eds.), *New discourse on language* (pp. 1-34). Continuum. (Reprinted in Wang, Z. H. (ed.) 2012, *The collected works of J. R. Martin* (Vol. 8), pp.7-39)
- Martin, J. R., & Rose, D. (2003/2007). *Working with discourse: Meaning beyond the clause*. Continuum.
- Martin, J. R., & Rose, D. (2008). *Genre relations: Mapping culture*. Equinox.
- Martin, J. R., Zappavigna, M. & Dwyer, P. (2008). Negotiating shame: Exchange and genre structure in youth justice conferencing. In Z. H. Wang (Ed.), *The collected works of J. R. Martin* (Vol 8) (pp. 102-128). Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M., Teruya, K. & Lam, M. (2010). *Key terms in Systemic Functional Linguistics*. New York: Continuum.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M (2012). Systemic Functional Linguistics as applicable linguistics: Social accountability and critical approaches [Special issue]. *D.E.L.T.A.*, 28, 435-471. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-44502012000300002>
- Maton, K. (2013). Making semantic waves: A key to cumulative knowledge-building. *Linguistics and Education*, 24(1), 8-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2012.11.005>
- Ngo, T. Hood, S. Martin, J. R. Painter, C. Smith, B.A. and Zappavigna, M. (2022). *Modelling Paralanguage Using Systemic Functional Semiotics: Theory and Application*.

London: Bloomsbury

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Blackwell.

Wang, Z. H. (2019). Legal discourse: An introduction [Special issue]. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, 12(2-3), 95-99. <https://doi.org/10.1558/lhs.36987>

Zolyan, S. (2019). General sociolinguistics, social semiotics and semiotics of culture – ex pluribus unum? Forty years after language as social semiotic. *Sign Systems Studies*, 47(3/4), 400-419. <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2019.47.3-4.03>

### About the author

Dr. Wang Zhenhua is a full professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China, and director of The Martin Centre for Applicable Linguistics. He is a vice president of the China Association of Functional Linguistics and an international advisor for multiple academic journals. He was conferred the Vice-Chancellor's Achievement Award from the University of Sydney in 2019. He has published over 100 articles and several books on topics such as Systemic Functional Linguistics, discourse semantics, and legal language. His research interests include APPRAISAL, discourse semantics, courtroom discourse, and multimodality.

Affiliation: 1. School of Foreign Languages, Fujian Normal University. 2. School of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Email: [wzhenhua@sjtu.edu.cn](mailto:wzhenhua@sjtu.edu.cn)

## بحوث جامعية

دورية تصدر عن كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية بصفاقس  
ر.د.م. - ISSN - 2811-6585

Recherches Universitaires

## Academic Research

رئيس هيئة التحرير

صادق ديمق

أعضاء هيئة التحرير

حافظ عبدولي — هنده عمار قيراط — سالم العيادي — علي بن نصر — نجيبه شقير — حمادي ذويب — ناجي العونلي —  
محمد الجري — منصف المحواشي — رياض الميلادي — فتحي الرقيق — عقيلة السلاحي البقلوطي — مصطفى الطرابلسي —  
— سعدية يحيى الخيو

كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية بصفاقس

صندوق بريد 1168، صفاقس 3000 تونس

الهاتف: 74 670 557 (216) - 74 670 558 (216)

الفاكس: 74 670 540 (216)

الموقع الإلكتروني: www.flshs.rnu.tn

## العدد 19 خاص في جزأين باللغة الإنجليزية

أشرف على اعداده مخبر البحث في مقاربات الخطاب

## الجزء الأول

(ابريل 2025)