

Introduction

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Text and Context in Functional Linguistics

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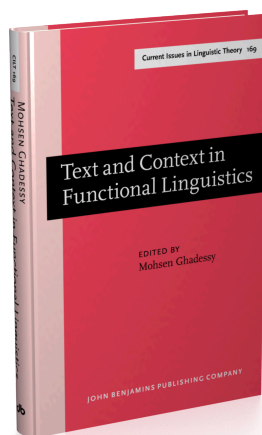
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Introduction

Text and Context in Functional Linguistics opens with a contribution by Michael Halliday and ends with another by Ruqaiya Hasan. Both these scholars have contributed significantly to our understanding of many concepts and notions in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The indebtedness of the other contributors to them is clearly shown by many references made to the works of Halliday, Hasan, or Halliday and Hasan throughout the remaining chapters. The eight chapters collectively present a comprehensive picture of the fundamental issues in text analysis and context modelling not given in any other single volume to date. The following provides a synopsis of the main points/topics discussed in each chapter.

We start the present volume with an absorbing article by Michael Halliday who, more than anyone else in Systemic Linguistics, has helped us to understand many of the concepts relating to *context* and its relationship to *text*. Halliday first discusses the origins of the notion *context* with reference to Malinowski, Firth, Sapir, and Whorf. “Two founding traditions of the study of language in context” are established by these pioneers of modern linguistics. Malinowski and Firth stressed “the situation as the context for language as text”, — *context of situation*, while Sapir and Whorf stressed “the culture as the context for the language as system” — *context of culture*. Halliday emphasises that these two traditions “are in an important way complementary to each other”.

In the latter part of the article Halliday focuses on language education and puts forth the argument that “a theory of language in context is not just a theory about how people *use* language ... it is a theory about the *nature* and *evolution* of language, explaining why the system works the way it does”. (original emphasis) With reference to language education at different levels in UK, USA, Canada, and Australia, Halliday then gives a detailed account of how educators have tried to resolve what he calls “contextual contradiction” i.e., the problem of relating what happens in the classroom to the outside world. In the final section

of the paper “the scope of language education” is discussed under three headings, i.e., “language learning — language as substance, learning through language — language as instrument, and learning about language — language as content”.

Focusing mainly on English texts, Martin’s major concern is with “modelling context”. He provides a brief account of how initially he, together with others, looked at “ways of modelling a range of registers, including casual conversation ... spoken narrative ... service encounters ... doctor/patient consultations and so on”. At first it was necessary “to reconcile” Gregory and Halliday’s positions, i.e., “the tension between a three and a four term framework”. Gregory’s “functional tenor” is selected as “a (superordinate) variable that ranged across metafunctions in terms of realisation and could be used talking globally about a text’s social purpose”. Functional tenor is renamed “genre” because of its “concern with global text organisation”. The term *genre* referred to “staged purposeful social processes, modeled at a deeper level of abstraction than field, mode, and tenor variables”.

A second stage starts when the relationship between connotative and denotative semiotic systems is formalised in a stratified model. First language becomes “the expression plane of register” and then register becomes “the expression plane of genre”. Martin emphasises that the main purpose was “to map culture as a system of genres”, “to reconstrue language as a source for making meaning rather than a conduit for expressing thoughts and feelings”, and to create “a model of context that could be used to explore the functionality of language in relation to how it is used”. Martin discusses in some detail seven points in connection with the proposed “stratified model”. A later development in modelling is the adoption of Halliday’s “co-tangential circles modelling” to show the relationships between strata. In the last part of the paper, Martin briefly discusses the concepts of *genesis* (change) and *ideology* (power) in relation to genre. He maintains that “a stage a culture has reached in its evolution provides the social context for the linguistic development of the individual, and the stage this development has reached provides resources for the instantiation of unfolding texts”. Martin finally wishes “to open up a meta-theoretical space in which different registers of SFL can be considered and compared”.

O’Donnell’s concern is with a dynamic modelling of context, i.e., “how context constrains behaviour potential at each point of a social process; and how the context is changed as the result of behaviour”. Initially a distinction is made between “static and dynamic context” with the former implying that “the field, tenor and mode are assumed to be constant for the text or interaction as a whole”.

However, as “the register of a text changes throughout a text, then the context must be changing, i.e., dynamic”. It is emphasised that not all of the context changes through an interaction but that the context is “*at risk* of changing”. A second distinction made is between “dynamic and synoptic modelling”. The former is used “in relation to types of models” which “model the interaction as it unfolds”, i.e., “the process of interaction”, whereas the latter represents “the overall shape of an interaction in a single pass”, i.e., “the products of interaction”.

After introducing an example of synoptic modelling by Berry (1981), O'Donnell briefly discusses the problems of such models, one such being that they “generate structures without regards to who makes the decisions within the process”. Three levels of dynamic modelling are then introduced and discussed in some detail. The first, “global context models ... model typical behavioural choices within a complete text/interaction”. The second, “contextual activation models ... model the limitations on behaviour potential at each point throughout an interaction”. The third, “full dynamic models ... model both contextual constraint on behaviour potential at each point, and effect of instantiated behaviour on context”. For O'Donnell the two crucial questions/requirements in a full dynamic context are “What can happen next?” and “How does the context change as a result of realised action?”.

Two main approaches in systemic linguistics, i.e., “single point potential” and “generalised behaviour potential” are then discussed in relation to the two requirements. In the latter part of the article, a few models for the “modification of context”, i.e., “transformational, transitional” models and “flowcharts” are introduced. Finally, O'Donnell discusses the “prescriptivism” inherent in all existing dynamic models and proposes some “revisions” by distinguishing between “subjective” and “objective” contexts and discussing the uncertainty of “consequences of action”. The concept of *functionalism*, i.e., that the act “brings about a desired target context” and the notion of *projected context*, i.e., that “our behaviour projects a situation” are also discussed in this section.

Thompson explores the relationships between lexico-grammatical choices on the one hand, and the contextual factors of field, mode and tenor on the other. He argues against the “context metafunction hook-up hypothesis” which correlates field with the experiential meanings, tenor with the interpersonal meanings, and mode with the textual meanings, the underlying assumption being that the speaker's choices are “exclusively” or “primarily” related to only one contextual factor. In practice, however, we “invoke aspects of two, or even all three, set of contextual factors to explain meanings which seem to fit fairly happily within one of

the metafunctions". By using original data from a series of doctor/patient consultations, Thompson shows that "the parameters of context of situation are not in fact independently established but are derived from the text in a circular fashion".

Thompson explains that "knowledge of the topic" (field), determines the way a doctor asks a question (tenor), and that the choice between different mental processes of knowing and thinking (field), is "directly motivated by tenor factors". Referring to ellipsis (mode), he maintains that "the use of ellipsis in itself projects the role of a co-operative hearer, and thus normally construes a friendly tenor for the interaction". Thompson's last set of examples for his argument comes from nominalisation (mode). An important question asked is "Why a speaker or writer might choose to use (or not use) nominalisation in a specific context?" A possible answer is "the use of nominalisations is a marker of his status" (tenor). Thompson concludes, "metafunctional choices construe not individual contextual factors ... but aspects of contextual configurations" and suggests that a "configurational match-up hypothesis" be established in place of "context metafunction hook-up hypothesis".

Ghadessy's chapter discusses the criteria that have been used to date to establish English text-types/registers. The argument of the paper is that so far mainly textual features, formal and/or structural, such as language elements smaller or larger than the sentence/clause are used by many text linguists for this purpose. It is maintained that such features belong to the ideational and/or interpersonal, i.e., field and tenor of discourse. A third set of features, i.e., textual (mode), have not been systematically used. Some analyses based on looking at items smaller than the sentence, a bottom-up approach, or elements of structure larger than the sentence, a top-down approach, are then discussed and exemplified. It is proposed that a third approach, based on clause characteristics, can also be used, especially if the textual metafunction is also accepted as an additional contributing factor for establishing English text-types/registers.

One aspect of the textual metafunction, i.e., thematic organisation, is then introduced and discussed in relation to five different text-types. Ghadessy shows that a classification of text-types based on thematic development can be different from a classification based on features that belong mainly to the ideational and/or interpersonal metafunctions. Ghadessy's conclusion is that to date many text linguists have shown us different ways of establishing English text-types by their pioneering work. The criteria they have used are necessary but not sufficient. Also the unit of analysis in their research has to be extended to accommodate the additional linguistic features that belong to the domain of discourse. In this way,

we can provide a more valid profile of English text-types/registers based not only on the ingredients of the products, i.e., texts, but also the processes of meaning that underlie them.

Bowcher's chapter deals with the concept of *predictability* in language and the investigation of parameters in the context of situation that make prediction possible. She uses Hasan's (1981) notion of *institutionalisation* for her discussion and subsequent text analysis. Bowcher proposes "a concrete set of guidelines for investigating the degree of institutionalisation in both the context of situation and the material situational setting of a social process". Institutionalisation constitutes a continuum along which texts are interpreted and contexts negotiated. "The more one observes the system (language) in use, the more can one identify clusters of linguistic choices corresponding with clusters of cultural phenomena". Bowcher focuses on "those features which work to constrain individual control over the nature of the social process and the nature of the social relations". To determine the degree of the institutionalisation of context, sub-categories of Field and Tenor are used. The former includes "a first order of 'field'", i.e., the nature of the social process, and "a second order of 'field'", i.e., the subject matter. The latter includes Cloran's (1987) sub-categories of social relations, i.e., "institutionalised hierarchic, institutionalised non-hierarchic, non-institutionalised hierarchic, non-institutionalised non-hierarchic". This network, she maintains, "affords a useful means of examining the nexus between institutionalisation and hierarchy in any situation".

In the second part of the chapter, Bowcher focuses on the material situational setting of "radio sports commentating ... of professional rugby football matches" in Australia. This is "a language-constitutive social process" with a "monologue (play-by-play) and a dialogue ('colour' commentary)". The degree of institutionalisation is then decided by asking relevant questions about the three dimensions of Field, Tenor, and Mode. The context of situation for radio sports commentating has "a high degree of institutionalisation" which "lies mainly in a predetermined time and time frame, radio channel, physical location, the requirement of participants to wear identification tags, and specific visual coding specifications". Her conclusion is that "Contexts which are highly institutionalised are consequently highly predictable and reveal a great deal of constancy over time".

In her chapter, Cloran first distinguishes between the two concepts of *material situational setting* (MSS) and *context of situation* (CS) and shows, by a detailed analysis of an example, how a single MSS can be "the site of four different contexts, each with their own specific configurations of field, tenor and mode".

A genuine dialogue between a mother and a child is then analysed for this purpose. Cloran maintains that “where language IS the social activity (constitutive, decontextualised) ... the MSS of the text’s production is irrelevant”. However, “where language facilitates the social activity (ancillary, contextualised) ... the MSS is likely to be extremely important”.

Cloran uses cohesive harmony and rhetorical unit analyses to answer a number of research questions after initially segmenting the dialogue “on an intuitive basis”. The questions include “Do each of the segments construe the same or different contexts?”, “What evidence can be adduced to support an answer?”, “If separate contexts and therefore texts are identified, on what basis are the boundaries between these determined?” Detailed discussions of the results of cohesive harmony and rhetorical unit analyses are then presented to support the argument that “the one material situational setting is the site for the construal of a number of different contexts to which it is relevant in varying degrees”. It is concluded that “in naturally occurring routine interactions speakers weave through different texts not losing their way as long as language is serving to get things done”.

Hasan’s contribution as the concluding chapter to this volume deals with “the relation of text and context” in Systemic Functional Linguistics. It is argued that some of the past/present assumptions on this relationship “do not tell the whole story”. She rejects the “unidirectional logic” and the “monological determinism” inherent in some beliefs which “create gaps between context, language and speaking”. Hasan argues for a “dialogical perspective” and, “with reference to the relations of text and context, language and culture”, maintains that “each is instrumental in the precise definition and development of the other”, i.e., “the speaker’s perception of the context *activates* her choice of meaning” and “the meanings meant in speaking *construe* contexts” (original emphasis). It is only with such an “orientation” that “a more powerful account of the relations of context and text, culture and language” can be “opened up”. Hasan proposes to explore “some categories for a dialogic perspective”, “relevant to the relations of text and context”. Giving the proportions “language:culture::text:situation”, the focus of her paper is on the “situation”, i.e., “the realisational relations of context and text in a dialogical modelling that takes the other three terms of the proportions as essential to the argument”.

In the second part of the chapter, three genuine texts, i.e., a blurb, an economic transaction, and a dialogue between a mother and her child are analysed in relation to “contextual consistency”, “contextual/registral changes”,

the meaning of “coherent with respect to the context of situation”, “the formal means for indicating the potential for ... changes”, and “the essential unity of the social process”. Subsequently, many old/new terms and/or concepts such as *probe*, *repair*, *realign*, *material situational setting*, *field*, *tenor*, *mode*, *the principle of contextual/registral consistency in text production*, *goals*, *outcome*, *design*, *virtual and actual addressee*, *dependency*, *complex text*, *the principle of contextual/registral integration*, and others are reintroduced, defined/redefined, and exemplified with reference to the three texts.

In the third part of her paper, Hasan argues for “a dynamic perspective” of context. Maintaining that “the most important concept relevant to field is *action*: what is being done”, Hasan creates, step by step, a delicate systemic network for the field of discourse. She distinguishes between “verbal action, material action, sphere of action”, and “iteration” with each leading to several other sub-systems. As with Halliday’s article, Hasan’s chapter also contributes significantly to our understanding of the relationship between text and context. The influence of her insights is evident in some of the contributions to the present volume especially in the chapters by Bowcher and Cloran.

The chapters by Halliday and Hasan both set the boundaries for the discussion of textual and contextual issues as well as push the limits outward. The chapters by others show how other new territories can be established. We hope that collectively the chapters open up new avenues into relevant research on the relation of text and context in the future.

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