The language system at the heart of the systems that make up the human being

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The contents and organization of this book mirror the vastness of the territory of Systemic Functional linguistics (SFL), as well as the diversity of its inhabitants, e.g., the researchers who throughout the world have elected it as their research paradigm. In their uptake of SFL, the researchers here included have threaded, in some cases, the paths of either the theory or the application, or both, within the limits of constrained and regulated disciplinary borders, but, in other cases, they have threaded the paths of new territories, by crossing those constrained and regulated disciplinary borders and boundaries to distinct ideational domains. By looking around and trying to make sense of what they saw, these researchers established new interpersonal possibilities for trans-disciplinary research development and possibly to the symbolic re-organization of the theory. In a certain sense, these researchers did not just look around in SFL, they looked outside SFL for a cartographic account of the territory that lay beyond and, in some cases, what they saw was not totally different from what was already well established in the cartographic chart of SFL. Although the chapters by Bronckart and Mackenzie do not fit in the above description, considering that neither of their authors is a systemist, that is, a researcher developing their research within the realms of SFL, they actually represent what lies beyond SFL which may be considered SFL-related, e.g., Socio-Discursive Interactionism (SDI) and Functional Discourse Grammar (FDG).

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The language system at the heart of the systems that make up the human being

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Introduction

In this paper we will discuss some of the principles and proposals of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), from the perspective of our own epistemological framework, which we qualify as Socio-Discursive Interactionism (SDI).

SDI is a contemporary attempt to continue the trend of social interactionism, whose symbolic figure is the psychologist Vygotsky (1927/2010, 1934/1997), but which was also promoted in the works of authors of the first quarter of the 20th century, such as Mead (1934), Dewey (1925), Wallon (1938), and many others. We will start by stating four general principles of social interactionism.

1. The emergence of language and human social history are the two determining factors in the process of constitution and development of individual psychological capacities, on the one hand, of collective worlds of "works and culture" (in Dilthey's sense - cf. 1883/1992), on the other hand.

2. There should be only one, integrated human science, because specifically human capacities are products of interactions between biological, psychological, sociological and linguistic dimensions. In other words, it is these interactions, and not each particular dimension, that are constitutive of the human being.
3. This human science must have a profound and solid philosophical foundation; in the case of social interactionism, this foundation consists in the philosophical position inherited from Spinoza (1677/1974), such as it is developed in Hegel's and in Marx and Engels' works (cf. Marx and Engels 1845/1951).

4. This human science must aim at social usefulness, which means that educational problems are an integral part of its object. The contemporary SDI adopts these four principles and attempts to complete the works of the historical founders of social interactionism in three directions.

First of all, the development of a more technical approach to language, one which firmly rejects the cognitivist and/or Chomskyan perspectives, and which is based on the theoretical contributions and proposals of two authors who are very well-known but who are also widely misread. The first of these authors is, paradoxically, Ferdinand de Saussure, because his real theoretical position, especially his semiology, is not the one that can be inferred from his Cours de linguistique générale (Course in General Linguistics), but the one that can be reconstructed from his notes and his students' notes. This is what we are trying to do with several researchers (cf. Bronckart, Bulea, and Bota 2010). Valentin Voloshinov is the second widely misread author, for more obvious reasons, namely because Bakhtin attempted to take over his work, thus causing a whole series of confusions that we have denounced elsewhere (cf. Bronckart and Bota 2011). It is Voloshinov who formulated in his work (especially in his Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, 1929/2010): – a decisive approach to the links between activity in general and verbal activity; – a modern approach to the status and organization of text genres; – the analysis of dialogism, the active-responsive attitude, intertextuality, etc.

The second direction of contemporary SDI takes into account the contribution of various non-linguistic disciplines which deal, first, with psychological organization and functioning (the central reference here is Piaget 1970, 1974), and secondly, with the forms of sociological organization (with Durkheim 1898, and Habermas 1987, as major references).

Finally, the last direction is defined by a concrete and militant commitment to educational problems, which materialized more particularly in a methodology for teaching languages and texts (didactics), intended for native language teaching.

The theoretical proposals of SDI have been formulated in three main texts:

-Genres de textes, types de discours et "degrés" de langue, 2008 (Text genres, types of discourse and "degrees" of [a natural] language).

When constructing the 1985 model, we explicitly drew on two of the founding texts of functional linguistics, Notes on transitivity and theme in English (Halliday 1967) and Cohesion in English (Halliday and Hasan 1976). But we progressively lost contact with the approach known today as SFL.

In what follows, we will first formulate some of the principles or assumptions of SFI, which we completely agree with; – we will then identify some points on which there might be disagreements, or rather differences of emphasis; – And finally we will present four aspects of the commitments made and of the research developed within the SDI framework.

1. Some converging principles between SFL and SDI

1.1. The status of language

The main converging point is the status of language, more specifically the following three main principles:
- Language is, fundamentally, a semiotic system, and we unconditionally approve Halliday's following statement:

Language is a system of meaning – a semiotic system. [..] "semiotic" means 'having to do with meaning (semiosis)'; so a system of meaning is one by which meaning is created and meanings are exchanged. (Halliday 2003:15)

- Language is, primarily, an activity; it is usage within a social context, whose dynamic character was justly emphasized by Hasan (1981) and O'Donnell (1999).
- Language constitutes the instrument of the construction of specifically human properties and we consequently subscribe to Halliday's following statement:
Language is not a passive reflex of material reality; it is an active partner in the constitution of reality, and all human processes however they are manifested, whether in our consciousness, our material frames, or in the physical world around us, are the outcome of forces which are both material and semiotic at the same time. Semiotic energy is a necessary concomitant, or complement, of material energy in bringing about changes in the world. (Halliday 2003:16–17)

Language must be analysed as a system, or rather as a system of interlocking systems (phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic, etc.), which carry out a series of functions, both on a cognitive or epistemic level, and on a praxeological level. And we agree, on the whole, with Martin’s phrasing of the three functional couples defined by Halliday:

SFL models of language involve a trinocular conception of meaning as comprising ideational resources for naturalizing reality, interpersonal resources for negotiating social relations, and textual resources for managing information flow; these generalized orientations to meaning are referred to as metafunctions. In addition, Halliday’s trinocular perspective on meaning is projected onto social context, giving rise to the register variables of field, tenor, and mode. (Martin 2009:11)

1.2. The major unit of analysis in linguistics is the text

On a methodological level, the text is the major unit of analysis, because it is the text as a whole that lends meaning to verbal activity. In addition, the text organizes the correlations between the sub-systems of linguistic structuring (morphosyntactic, lexical and phonological):

For a linguist, to describe language without accounting for text is sterile; to describe text without relating to language is vacuous. (Halliday 1985:10)

Moreover, as it was emphasized by certain contemporary trends of SFL, in particular by the Sydney School, texts are differentiated in multiple genres, which are the various, culturally oriented ways of constructing and organizing significations (or meanings):

The model was further elaborated by adding on a level of genre, whose job it was to coordinate resources, to specify just how a given culture organizes this meaning potential into recurrent configurations of meaning, and phases meaning through stages in each genre. (Martin 2009:12)

1.3. A scientific approach aiming at social usefulness

Finally, we agree, on the whole, with the philosophy and social-political position underlying Halliday’s following statement:

The value of a theory lies in the use that can be made of it, and I always considered a theory of language to be essentially consumer oriented. (Halliday 1985:7)

One of the concrete accomplishments of this utilitarian aim is what the SFL authors describe as “educational linguistic work with teachers”, something that we call language didactics, which includes a didactics of text genres.

2. Elements subject to debate

The first point concerns the conception of the sign. Halliday has recently come up with this definition:

The simplest account of a semiotic system is as a set of signs, a “sign” being defined as a content/expression pair, like “red means ‘stop!’” [...] Some semiotic systems are minimal, like this one (as presented here). A language, obviously, is not; it is vastly more complicated. (Halliday 2003:17–18)

For us, the linguistic sign is by no means a content/expression pair, and its specificity is not at all a consequence of the complexity of the systems in which it is included, as Halliday argues in the same text.

The second point on which we disagree is the definition of what a text genre is.

We will go back to the example provided by the contributions of the Sydney School, and in particular to a comment made by Martin about a text produced by a student, whose genre he defines as being an exposition.

This perspective on genre is illustrated in Text 1 below, from one of our interventions in a Year 6 (age 11/12) primary school class of students, most of whose parents were born overseas and who thus spoke English as a second language. The genre being taught is exposition.

Text 1
Should an amphitheatre be built in Wiley Park? [Filippa]
[1] I strongly believe that the amphitheatre in Wiley Park should be built for these following reasons, such as: it attracts more people to the area, shops and public transport will earn a larger profit, people will become more interested in Wiley park, and it is suitable for all ages. (Martin 2009:13)
From our point of view, exposition is not a genre, but either a type of discourse, or a text sequence, occurring within a genre.

The third and final debatable point, which perhaps is only a slight difference of perspective, or a nuance, deals with how the connections between linguistic, psychological and sociological dimensions of human conduct are conceived. In a passage from an already quoted article, published in 2009, Martin takes up the three types of personal resources constituting meaning (ideational which Halliday sometimes calls experiential; interpersonal; textual) and argues that the contextual registers result from a projection of three types of personal resources:

In addition, Halliday's trinocular perspective on meaning is projected onto social context, giving rise to the register variables of field, tenor, and mode. This tripartite metadimensional perspective makes it possible to interpret meaning in relation to context along three dimensions: (i) ideational meaning as a resource for building field knowledge, enabling participation in domestic, recreational, academic, and professional activities; (ii) interpersonal meaning as a resource for valuing these activities and enacting tenor (i.e., power and solidarity in relation to shared values); and (iii) textual meaning as a resource for phasing ideational and interpersonal meaning together in textures sensitive to mode (i.e. the communicative demands of spoken and written discourse, and alternative modalities of electronic communication). (Martin 2009:12)

The position expressed here seems to me to belong to a bottom-up sociological perspective, closely connected to ethnomethodology. Our position leaves more room for top-down sociology (inspired by the tradition of Durkheim and Habermas), and tries to conceptualise both movements, ascending and descending. More generally, we allow more autonomy for the different human dimensions (or systems), and we believe that the interactions between linguistic, psychological and sociological dimensions are less direct and more "mediated".

3. A few aspects of the SDI approach

3.1. The status of signs and their role in the constitution of the human psyche

Our position on this point is the result of a work integrating the contributions of three authors who are often considered to be in opposition to each other, but whom we consider to be perfectly compatible: Saussure, Vygotsky and Piaget.

Saussure firmly rejected the conception of the verbal sign previously presented, considered the sign as an expression/content pair. For him, verbal semiosis is much more complex, and in one of the manuscripts that were found in 1996 (On the Double Essence of Language – De l essence double du langage – cf. 2002:17–88), he demonstrated that:

- the two sides of the sign are not constituted of "material" ingredients (respectively of sounds or objects) but of "images", that is, of mental representations shaped as a result of the interaction between human subjects and material ingredients in the external world;
- these two types of images arise only insofar as they are "associated" or "coupled" with each other: they are established as images only insofar as they unite in a linguistic sign (they do not have an autonomous existence outside of the sign);
- this constitution and delimitation of images depends, in addition, on other images co-existing, on both sides of the sign, in the "associative sphere": the delimitation and span of each image are conditioned by the "place" already occupied by neighboring images.

Saussure thus demonstrated that signs are created through interdependent mental processes, which are organized in a system of relationships:

We are always led back to the four irreducible terms and the three irreducible relationships between them, which add up to a whole in the mind: (a sign / its meaning) = (a sign / another sign) and furthermore = (a meaning / another meaning). [...] This is what we term as the LAST QUATERNION and, as far as the four terms in their interrelationships are concerned: the irreducible triple relationship. (Saussure 2006:22)

In this perspective, the sign is an integrally mental and radically arbitrary entity, which means that the choice of the acoustic images constituting the signifier has nothing to do with the properties of the sensory images. This can also mean that the association of the two sides of the sign results from social agreements which are synchronically random and whose historical transformation is unpredictable.

Vygostky proposed a schema of the conditions for the emergence of thought that can be summarized as follows.
- At birth, the child is equipped with inherited interaction processes, the implementation of which generates a primary structure of the
psyche. Also from birth, the human community inserts the child into verbally commentated practical activities.
- In this context, the child appropriates elements of language production and utilizes them to structure and regulate his or her own games and activities. This egocentric language is thus the object of a progressive interiorization, first preserving the external language’s set of properties, then becoming condensed and losing a number of its lexical and morphosyntactic properties.
- The egocentric language thus becomes an inner language, which in part governs the child’s behavior, and in part restructures itself into a system of predicative relations.

To the extent that linguistic signs are molded by socio-historical values, as Saussure shows, the thought process that develops in the child is itself of a socio-historical nature, by means of its base elements. According to the well-known Vygotskian phrase, under the effects of the interiorization of signs, “the very type of development changes. It changes from a biological form of development to a socio-historical form of development” ([1934] 1987:120).

If Saussure’s analysis of the processes through which signs are established is reformulated using Piaget’s concepts, we notice that:
- the first operation implicates the processes of assimilation and accommodation involved in the formation of all types of mental images;
- the second operation sets in motion the processes of differentiation-opposition;
- the third operation activates the process of constructive association.

Using Piaget for revisiting Saussure thus reveals that the creation of signs only requires elementary processes that are common to human and animal. In this scenario, however, the inherited processes are no longer applied to physical objects, but rather to social objects, to these “little sounds the mouth makes” as Bloomfield put it (1933/1970) that are conventionally associated with dimensions of human activity: this is the aspect of the human rupture; it transfers the psyche from the bio-behavioral system to the socio-historical system. Piaget helps us understand that signs are the very point of continuity/rupture, because they possess that quality, radically novel in evolution, of forming psychological crystallizations of units of social exchanges.

3.2. The units of analysis of a science of language

For SDI, the units of analysis of language are defined according to the following schema:

a) Specifically human verbal activity is the most general level. The primary function of this activity is to produce significations and to allow the establishment, within a group, of an agreement regarding the properties of non verbal activity (or general activity) and the properties of the world in which this activity takes place. Verbal activity is a psychological, or behavioral, unit.

b) Linguistic activity within a social group is carried out by mobilizing the subclass of linguistic resources this group has selected, at a given moment of its historical evolution (and by linguistic resources we mean the resources of a natural language). The whole process results in the production of a text (oral or written). The text can then be defined as the linguistic manifestation of a verbal activity. But whereas any kind of text mobilizes linguistic units, the text is not by itself a linguistic unit: it constitutes a communicative unit.

c) Texts have different organization modes, and this diversity is directly connected to the type of general activity in which the text is used, and to the functions carried out by the text in each specific context. In other words, texts are differentiated in text genres, which adapt to certain types of general activity: the novel, the lecture, the interview, the news coverage, the leading article (in a newspaper), etc.

- On a synchronic level, text genres are stabilized by usage, but they necessarily change during time, and can moreover be diverted from their initial purposes, which makes them available for the expression of other, secondary, purposes.

- But even if their classification will forever be problematic, text genres continue to exist and to fill up a historical sub-space of “worlds of works and culture” that we call the architext.

d) Whatever the text genre is, each text is, with some rare exceptions, composed of different segments. A historical novel, for instance, can be composed of a main segment which sets out the chronological line of events, and of intermediate segments introducing dialogues performed by the characters, and/or reflections carried out by the author. Similarly, a scientific monograph can be composed of a central segment in which the author’s argument is presented, and of intermediate segments relating the chronology and the constitution of competing arguments. These segments which can be identified by their semantic and pragmatic function, are
characterized by relatively stable configurations of linguistic units (subgroups of verb tenses, pronouns, argumentative markers, adverbial modal markers, etc.) and by relatively stable syntactic units. These segments form superior linguistic units, which we call types of discourse.

We claim that there are four types of discourse, based on two binary decisions. The first decision (disjunction-conjunction) concerns the coordinates which organize the verbalized thematic content: these coordinates are either explicitly separated from the general coordinates of the situation in which the agent produces his text (this is the NARRATING mode), or they are explicitly articulated to the coordinates of the agent’s situation (this is the EXPOSITION mode). The second decision concerns the verbalized agents: they are either directly connected to the agent producing the text and to the situation in which he performs his verbal action (implication), or they are not (autonomy). Combined together, these decisions produce four different “speech attitudes” that we have called discursive worlds: implicated NARRATING, autonomous NARRATING, implicated EXPOSITION, autonomous EXPOSITION.

On a large corpus of multilingual texts, we conducted distributional and statistical analyses of configurations of units and processes expressing these discursive worlds (cf. Bronckart, Bain, Schneuwly, Davaud and Pasquier 1985). This allowed us to identify four types of discourse: the interactive discourse (discours interactif), the theoretical discourse (discours théorique), the interactive report (récit) and the narrative (narration). These are, of course, ideal types, which means that there is the possibility to mix different types of discourse, and that this possibility varies according to each natural language.

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<th>Conjunction</th>
<th>Disjunction</th>
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<td>EXPOSITION</td>
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<td>Implication</td>
<td>Interactive discourse</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Theoretical discourse</td>
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Examples

Interactive discourse
- Good morning, Peter. Better late than never!
- Morning Ian, I’m not late, am I?
- No, you aren’t, but you aren’t as early as usual,
- I’m only joking. What happened? Did you get up late?
- ....

Theoretical Discourse
Manufacturers, and firms which offer a service, often use advertising agencies to make their products or services known to the public and to increase their sales. Parkad, though not a very large agency, has organised successful advertising campaigns for many products and services......

Interactive report
Ten years ago I had the fortune of meeting a Yaqui Indian from Northwestern Mexico. I call him “Don Juan”. I made Don Juan’s acquaintance under the most fortuitous circumstances: I was sitting with Bill, a friend of mine, in a bus depot. We were very quiet......

Narrative
Many years ago, there was an Emperor, who was so excessively fond of new clothes, that he spent all his money in dress. He did not trouble himself in the least about his soldiers; nor did he care to go either to the theater or the chase, except for the opportunities then afforded him for displaying his new clothes. [...] Time passed merrily in the large town which was his capital; strangers arrived every day at the court. One day, two rogues, calling themselves weavers, made their appearance. [...]
make momentary choices. The different natural languages (English, Portuguese, French, etc.) are the results of these choices, or the particular forms that the universal “langue” takes at a specific place and time.

But Saussure also mentioned, as it is well known, the existence of “états de langue” (stationary states of “langue”). When he deals with these stationary states he no longer holds an ontological point of view, but a gnoseological one: “la langue” as it is known and lived by its users.

In its first sense, “la langue” as a stationary state is a “reservoir” (a treasury) of signifying values produced by verbal activity, which are stored in the speaking subjects’ brain.

Tout ce qui est amené sur les lèvres par les besoins du discours, et par une opération particulière, c’est la parole. Tout ce qui est contenu dans le cerveau de l’individu, le dépôt des formes entendues et pratiquées et de leur sens, c’est la langue. (in Komatsu and Wolf 1996:65-66)

Saussure adds that these forms which are thus interiorized become classified, an activity which results in the constitution of a series of terms defined by a similarity/dissimilarity relationship, based on criteria related to sound or semantics. The term we use to refer to this first type of stationary state, located within each individual, is “internal ‘langue’”.

However, besides the individual, Saussure claims that this “langue” is also grounded in the collective.

Language is a phenomenon; it is the exercise of a human faculty. “La langue” is the interlocking forms that the language faculty assumes among a group of individuals at any particular time. (2006:85)

This collective stationary state of “langue” is the level where social control occurs, as the normative activity of generations of speakers — and the terms we use to refer to this are “external ‘langue’” or “normalized ‘langue’”. This is the kind of “langue” that linguists try to describe.

A synthesis of all this leads to the following distinctions.

Texts as the first domain of the life of signs, they are a continuous production of signs, both synchronically and diachronically.

Internal “langue”, as the system of the psychological organization of the signifying values extracted from texts, constitutes the second domain of the life of signs, and as such, it carries the imprint of the individuals’ life story and particular properties.
External "langue", as the organizing system of signifying values extracted from texts, which is managed by social groups. This is the third domain of the life of signs.

These three domains of the life of signs are fundamentally interdependent. At the level of synchronic functioning, we can say they are caught in a permanent dialectic movement: signs and their values are activated in texts; they are appropriated by the individuals (or persons) and are re-organized in their psychological apparatus, according to their distinctive individual characteristics; signs are then extracted from this apparatus and are re-injected into new texts, following the norms of the external "langue". The individual part of this process ensures the innovative or creative dimension of new productions, the social part ensures some of their normative dimensions.

3.4. The relationships between linguistic, psychological and sociological systems

The problem of the relationship between these three systems is highly complex, because these systems are closely interacting and determining each other. The differences in perspective when analysing this problem are largely due to questions such as "where we begin" or "what we consider to be the most important" for philosophical or political reasons.

In the tradition of social interactionism, the human social history and its products come first (our position is that of a top-down sociology); we analyse first the genealogy of the systems, or the conditions in which the systems emerged (points A and B), then the synchronic conditions of the interaction between systems (points C and D).

A) From the linguistic system to the sociological system

*Sapiens sapiens* is a talkative or a loquacious species and for approximately the last one hundred fifty thousand years it has been using the resources of the universal "langue" to produce texts, which progressively generated human knowledge. This knowledge is to be understood, in Durkheim's sense (1898), as collective representations, that is, organized mental entities which are stored not in the individuals' brains, but in cultural works (for instance, in books). Following Habermas' guidelines (1987), it seems useful to distinguish between three types of collective representations which have different statuses and organisation modes. Habermas calls these types of collective representations *formal worlds* and defines them as follows:

- The *objective world* – organises all knowledge relating to the universe (or the environment) in its physical dimensions; this knowledge can be evaluated in terms of truth (and efficacy).
- The *social world* – organises all knowledge relating to interpersonal relations (to the manner in which humans must live together); this knowledge cannot be evaluated in terms of its truth value, but in terms of its degree of conformity to changing socio-historical norms.
- The *subjective world* – organises all knowledge relating to the individuals' inner life; this knowledge can only be evaluated in terms of authenticity or sincerity.

In the objective world we must also include:
- knowledge about the *architect*, more precisely knowledge about the different text genres and their usage conditions (for example: what a newspaper leading article is, and in what communicative context we can use it);
- knowledge about the *system of the natural language currently in use*, that is, what we called "external 'langue"; this knowledge is described in dictionaries, grammars and various works in linguistics.

B) From the linguistic system to the psychological system

Each individual is confronted with texts, and by appropriation and interiorization, he generates his own internal language, which comprises, on the one hand, sign classification processes, and, on the other hand, sign interrelating operations (inner speech, in Vygotsky's sense). These elements constitute the foundation on which conscious thinking is constructed, and, more specifically, on which individual representations are constructed; and this is a process which is explained by both Piaget and Vygotsky.

As Piaget demonstrated, this construction is generated through abstraction and generalisation processes; as a result, signs (whose value depends on the system of natural language being used) are transformed into notions or into concepts, more precisely into mental entities which display a tendency towards universal values, independent from the semantics of a particular language.

But as Vygotsky stresses, conscious thinking is equally the result of confrontations with data already available in the social environment, with fragments of collective representations, which are in particular presented to children during educational activities. Consequently, like the tripartite formal world with which it interacts, conscious thinking develops along three lines: – cognitive (personal knowledge about the physical universe); – rela-
tional (knowledge and attitudes regarding human relationships); – identity or self-related (knowledge regarding one’s own personality).

C) Interactions generating new texts

Our analysis of the conditions of text production relies on two components. The first one is composed of two already mentioned elements of the objective world: the architext (the configuration of text genres and their instructions for use) and the system of the natural language in use. More precisely, what intervenes during the production of a new text is the specific knowledge acquired by a speaking subject with regard to the architext and to the rules of the natural language in use in his own environment. The second component is constituted by the representation a subject has about his own situation of verbal action, as well as about the thematic content he is about to verbalize. First we have representations concerning the physical dimensions of verbal production (who the “sender” is; who the “receivers” are; what is the space-time of production). These representations set the rules for the use of deictic expressions. Then we have representations concerning the socio-subjective dimensions involved in the communication situation: what are the social roles played by the sender and by the receivers (these roles are that of enunciator and interlocutor), in what social framework (type of institution) does the production take place; what is the purpose of the production? Finally, we have the producer’s knowledge about the thematic content his verbal intervention refers to.

According to his own representations:

– the speaking subject will adopt the text genre that seems the most relevant to his situation of verbal action (generic dimension);
– the speaking subject will adopt this text genre to the specific properties generated by the three registers of his thinking (cognitive, relational and identity/self-related); which gives the stylistic dimension of the text.

D) The respective roles of text genres and types of discourse

*Text genres are complex communicative entities*, which undergo significant changes in time, because they are fundamentally linked to the evolution of human general activities and to the evolution of communication media. To give just an example, the evolution of the conditions in which commercial activity takes place gave birth to different previously unknown advertising genres; obviously, the development of computerized media gave rise to new genres which will either survive or disappear. The capacity of producing the right kind of genre and of mastering its characteristics is a *praxeological* capacity, that of performing a socially relevant action.

*The types of discourse are linguistic formats* which serve as organizers of representations; they are the necessary filters of the continuous exchanges between individual representations and collective representations. Any set of representations that originates from an individual must, in order to be communicated and interact with collective representations, necessarily be organised according to the rules of a specific type of discourse: the theoretical discourse, the interactive discourse, the interactive report or the narrative. The same applies to any representation originating from a collective group and addressed to an individual.

This means that human representations are always, at first, structured in discourse, and that, in order to be exchanged, these representations must be discursively re-structured.

4. Issues for further debate

Although the extent to which SDI has developed so far is not comparable to the vast scale reached by SFL (the origins of SDI are more recent and it has been adopted in more circumscribed areas, internationally and institutionally), we feel entirely legitimate to draw attention to the main points of agreement between the two approaches, which clearly belong to one and the same epistemological “family”, and to indicate some of the issues which can become the object of constructive debate.

In so far as they seem “obvious”, some of these points of agreement have not been specifically mentioned so far, but we believe it is useful to bring them to the fore.

At the epistemological level, the two approaches lay emphasis on the *praxeological* dimension of language, on the fact that it is first and foremost a dynamic activity, continually interacting with other types of social activity. This point of view implies that all of the approaches stemming from the logico-grammatical tradition must be rejected, in that they aim to formalize the units and structures of language by considering *a priori* that they are organized by structures which are either ontological (Aristotle), cognitive (Port-Royal), or biogenetic (Chomsky).

At the methodological level, the two approaches articulate their assumptions on the basis of a *careful and rigorous analysis of linguistic data*, as they are produced in concrete social settings and as they are organized as *utterances, themselves organized as texts*.

And at the sociopolitical level, the researchers in the two trends argue
against the divide between theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics, because they consider that scientific activity must be oriented – among other things – towards social usefulness; this leads them to engage in a process of reform and development of language teaching.

Quite a number of issues could be dealt with on this common ground, but we will conclude by bringing up only three fundamental questions.

The first concerns the nature and importance that must be recognized, even in a praxeological or functional perspective, to the system of a natural language. Must we abandon the concept of linguistic system altogether, or should we rather re-think the articulation between natural languages and texts/discourses and attempt to re-distribute the concepts about language according to their respective domains?

The second question concerns the levels of organization of linguistic entities. Halliday (1967) was one of the first linguists to put forward a theory combining concepts at the syntactic level with concepts at the textual level. Several other contributions (among those of SDI) also argued for the existence of intermediate levels of different kinds (macro-syntax, sequences, types of discourse, etc.). It seems necessary to review these different options and to attempt to build a more general model in which these intermediate levels are clearly defined.

Finally, the third question concerns the way in which the interactions between sociological, linguistic and psychological dimensions of human functioning can be conceived. This is a crucial issue, but dealing with it would require the respective disciplines to interact with one another, and such interaction is lacking at present. In fact, this issue ultimately refers to the necessary utopia of building a unique, integrated human science.

References


Rhizome, language-games and Systemic Functional Linguistics: ontogenetic dialogues

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1. Introduction

The socially oriented inclination of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) theory has led it to open an array of possibilities of interaction with other disciplines as a way of understanding and explaining the relationship between language and society. As Matthiessen (2009:12) suggests, SFL may be seen as ‘an open dynamic system serving as a resource […] for reflecting on language’.

Based on these possibilities of dialoguing with other disciplines, which SFL not only permits but also encourages, we intend to present reflections from a philosophical perspective to discuss subjectivity and genres. We do so by taking the concept of language-games proposed by Wittgenstein (2001), in his Philosophical Investigations, to reflect on genre studies, as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of rhizome, to reflect on ontogenesis.

In the model proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) and later discussed by Martin and Rose (2007), phylogenesis provides the environment for ontogenesis, which in turn provides the environment for logogenesis. On the other hand, logogenesis provides the material for ontogenesis, which in turn provides the material for phylogenesis.

Considering that the language system is responsible for providing the environment in which the individual’s meaning emerges (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999:18), we look at ontogenesis using the six principles proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in A thousand plateaus, namely: