Unit 03

we

An Introduction to Text Production (2)

within the SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL model of language

Print version of the
Written Expression
presentation given on
We 23.iv.2025

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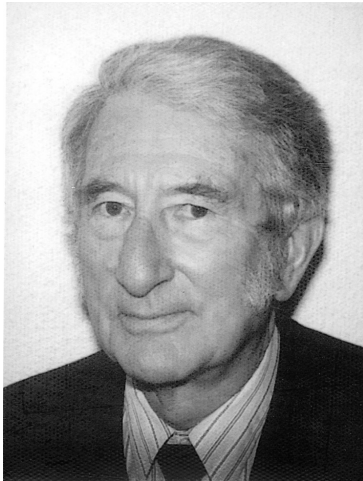
03.1

To the memory of my teacher:

Image supplied by M.A.K. Halliday

M.A.K. Halliday (13.4.1925–15.4.2018)

03.2

Goals

The learning goals for today's session are:

1. To explore the "textile" metaphor for text(s)
2. To explore the geological metaphor of 'strata' in language
3. To explore in more detail how the functions language serves in real life are reflected in the way language is organized as a system
4. To examine some simple examples of different 'genres'

03.3

1 Text and Textiles: the weaving metaphor

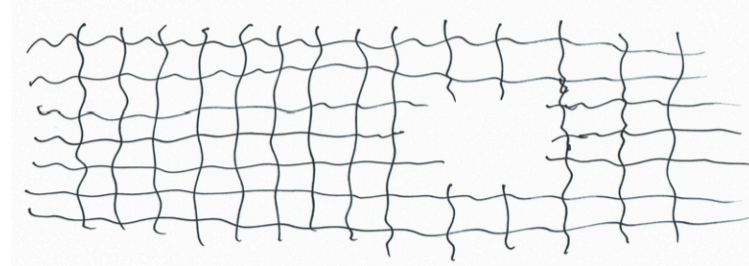· Text and Textiles: the weaving metaphor
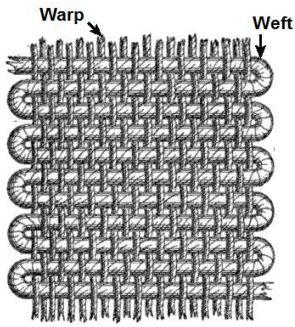
Where did the notion of 'context of situation' come from?

· Text (or 'a text') (whether spontaneously spoken, or written) is a tissue of relevant meaning(s) – ein 'Sinngewebe'.
· But what if some of it is missing?
· You can often work out what the missing bit is from the CONTEXT (the surrounding text)...

·
· The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) had written down the conversations of the Trobriand Islanders he was studying.
· But when he read them, he realized you had to know who was talking and what was going on (the CONTEXT OF SITUATION), otherwise you couldn't understand the 'text'
· If 'CONTEXT' is redefined in this way, we can use the term 'CO-TEXT' for the original sense of 'the surrounding text'.

Can you understand this text?

· See your handout: pp 300-301 of Malinowski's essay at the end of *The Meaning of Meaning*: `http://www.spence.saar.de/writtenexpression/unit03_20251/C__Additional_Handout/01_malinowski_text.pdf`
· Part of the problem can be solved if you know this: `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Gil3nvclTE`
· That will help with the CONTEXT OF SITUATION of this text.

2 Context and Meaning

· Context and Meaning
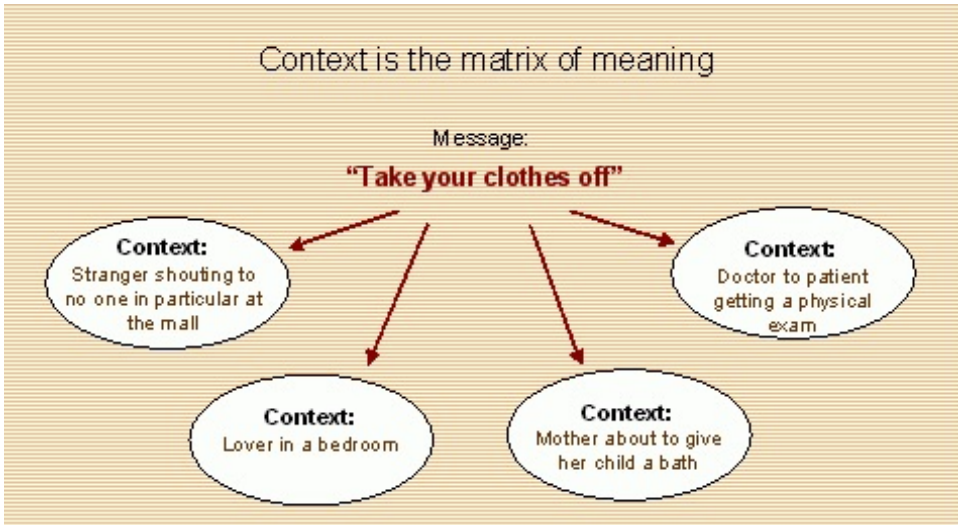
03.7

What about 'Context of Culture'?

· Later, Malinowski realized that you also needed to have more background information than just who was talking to whom while doing what, etc.
· You needed to know the different types of occasions on which people recited particular kinds of texts about things that happened long ago.
· This involved a deeper background knowledge of the culture.
· In the culture of the Trobriand Islanders competitiveness and boasting play an important part.
· You can find more information on CONTEXT OF SITUATION and CONTEXT OF CULTURE in *Language, Context, and Text*.

03.8

3 Some systemic–functional viewpoints
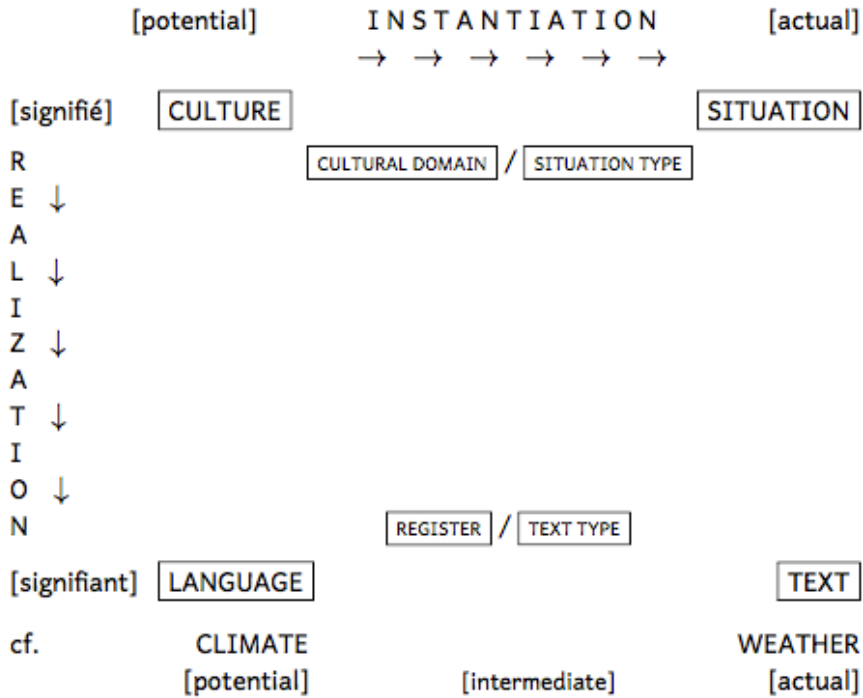
Culture, Situation, Language, Text (1)

· German culture is the potential for German situations.
· This situation is an actual instance of German culture.
· The German language is the potential for German text(s).
· This text is an actual instance of the German language.

('Pünktlichkeit')	('Verabredung')
culture	**situation**
language	**text**
(Partikel)	(*noch! schon!*)
POTENTIAL ————————	ACTUAL
climate	weather

· The climate is the potential for weather.
· Today's weather is an actual instance of the climate.

03.9

[potential]　　　　　I N S T A N T I A T I O N　　　　　[actual]
→　→　→　→　→　→

[signifié]　CULTURE　　　　　　　　　　　　　SITUATION

CULTURAL DOMAIN / SITUATION TYPE

R
E ↓
A
L ↓
I
Z ↓
A
T ↓
I
O ↓
N

REGISTER / TEXT TYPE

[signifiant]　LANGUAGE　　　　　　　　　　　TEXT

cf.　　　　CLIMATE　　　　　　　　　　WEATHER
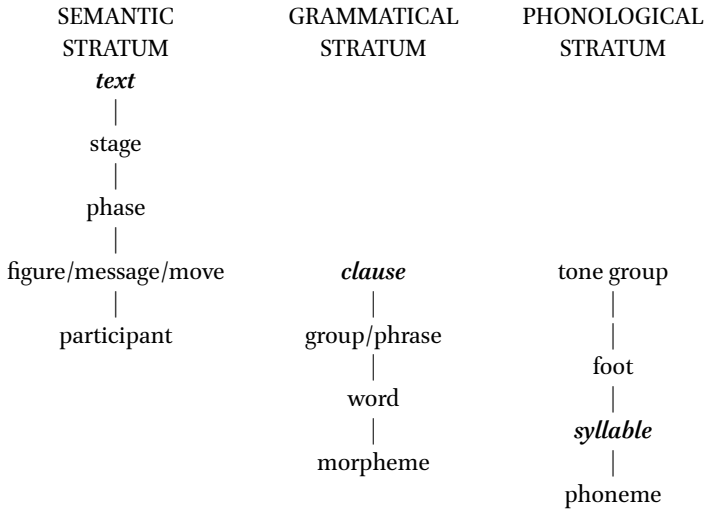　　　　[potential]　　　　　[intermediate]　　　　[actual]

03.10

A 'text' is a semantic unit

- The 'text' is the central unit of semantics.
- The 'clause' is the central unit of grammar.
- The 'syllable' is the central unit of phonology.

03.11

Rank scale of units

SEMANTIC STRATUM	GRAMMATICAL STRATUM	PHONOLOGICAL STRATUM
text		
stage		
phase		
figure/message/move	*clause*	tone group
participant	group/phrase	foot
	word	*syllable*
	morpheme	phoneme

03.12

Peculiarities (1): formal lexis, semanticky grammar

TYPE OF LINGUISTICS:

	NON-FUNCTIONAL	FUNCTIONAL
lexis is treated:	semantically	formally
grammar is treated:	formally	semantically

Lexis as 'most delicate grammar' ('feinste Grammatikstufe') alternatively: treat grammar as 'least delicate lexis' ('gröbste Stufe der Lexik')

Peculiarities (2): grammar as 'context-neutral meaning'

NON-FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS	FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS
pragmatics	semantics
semantics	lexico-
syntax & morphology	grammar
phonology	phonology
phonetics	phonetics

syntax = grammar 'above the word'; morphology = grammar 'below the word';
lexis = dictionary; grammar = grammar book;
if you only have your dictionary and your grammar book, you have a description of the 'context-neutral' meaning
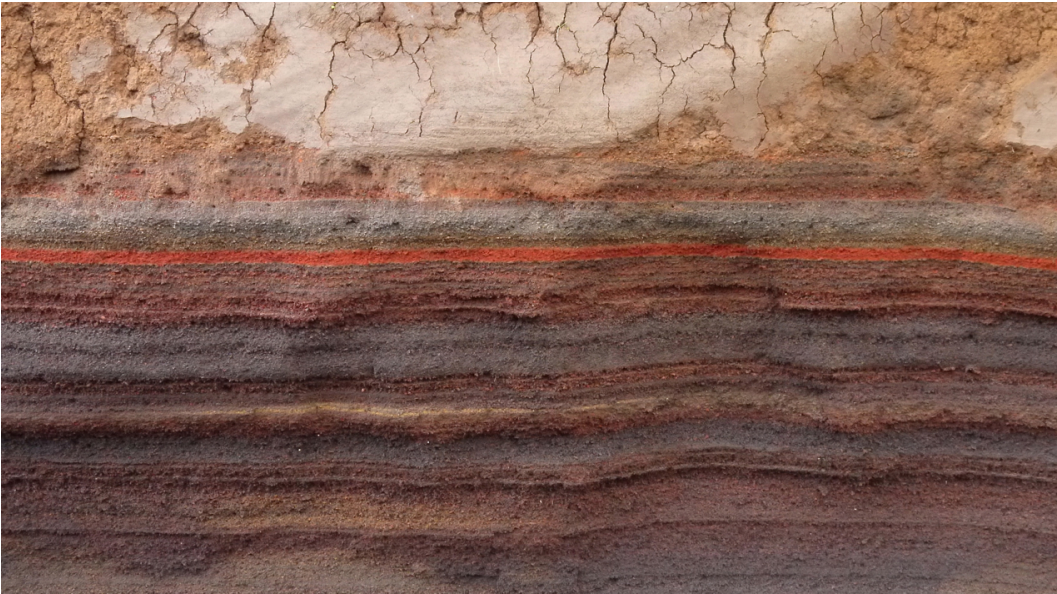— but how much of the 'actual' meaning can you understand in real life?
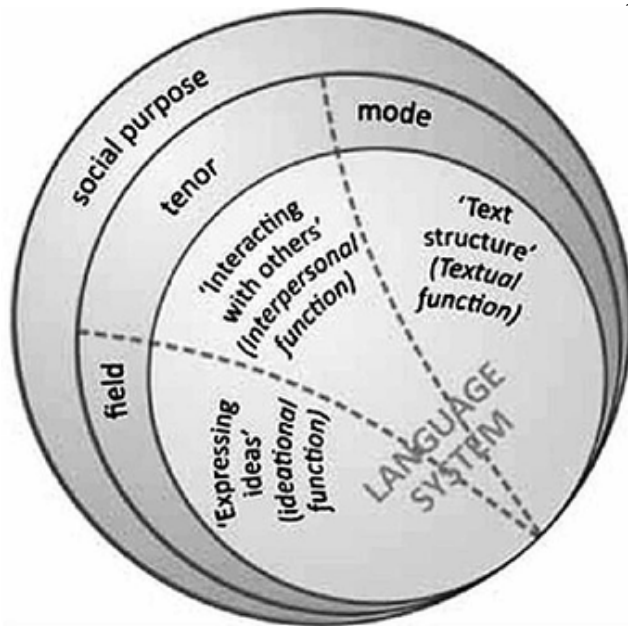*"Just a trim, is it?"*

4 Strata
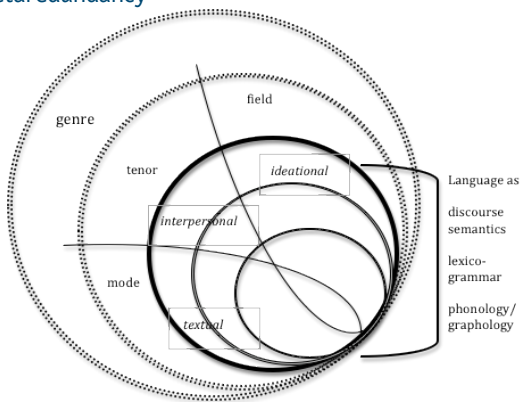
· Strata

03.15

Language in its social context (3), repeated

STRATA (top left to bottom right)

(META)FUNCTIONS (bottom left to top right)

03.16

6

Source: https://reclaimingthelanguage.wordpress.com/2016/11/26/sfl-a-living-theory-of-the-living-language/ (after Sue Hood)

... the system of phonology realises that of lexicogrammar; the system of lexicogrammar realised in phonology realises that of semantics; the system of semantics realised in lexicogrammar realised in phonology —which we call "language" —realises the system of context (i.e. the "culture", considered as a semiotic potential).

Halliday & Matthiessen (1999: 605-6)

## Higher strata 'constraining' lower strata

- · *"Language: the noises we make with our faces in order to live"*
- · (Material reality: Bipedal apes living)
- · **Ideology** (what is thinkable? what is doable?)
- · **(Code)** (who's an insider? e.g. two insiders: „Unn?" — „Jo.")
- · **Genre** (what kind of text for what social purpose?)
- · **Register** (what's going on? who's taking part? what role is language playing?)
- · **Discourse Semantics** (what do the words and structures mean... in context?)
- · **Lexicogrammar** (what do the words and sentences mean... regardless of context?)
- · **Phonology** (are those the kinds of sound patterns you find in English words and sentences?)
- · **Phonetics** (are those human sounds? AND: are those the kinds of sounds you'd hear in English?)
- · (Material reality: Bipedal apes making noises with their faces)
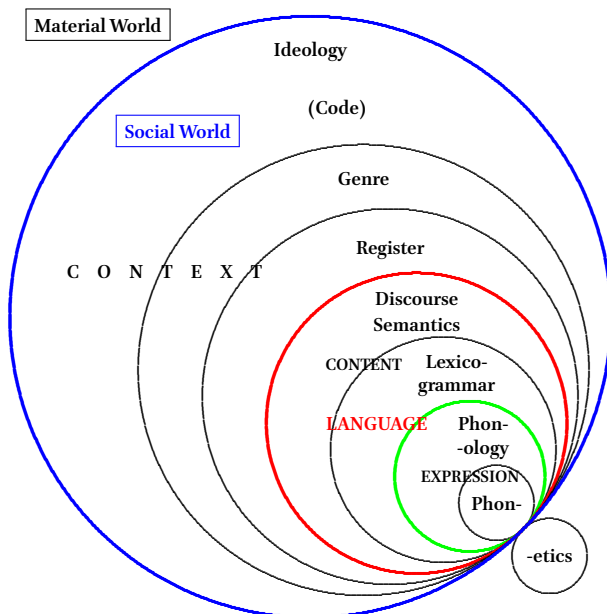
Ideology is historically conditioned
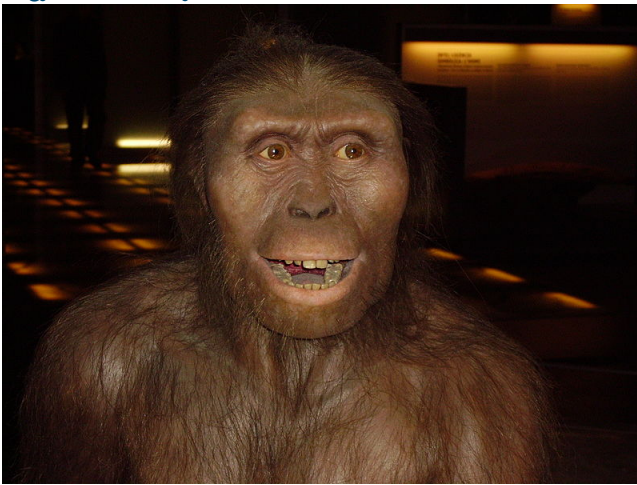
It's 3.2 million years ago. You're an *Australopithecus afarensis*. What is thinkable? What is doable?
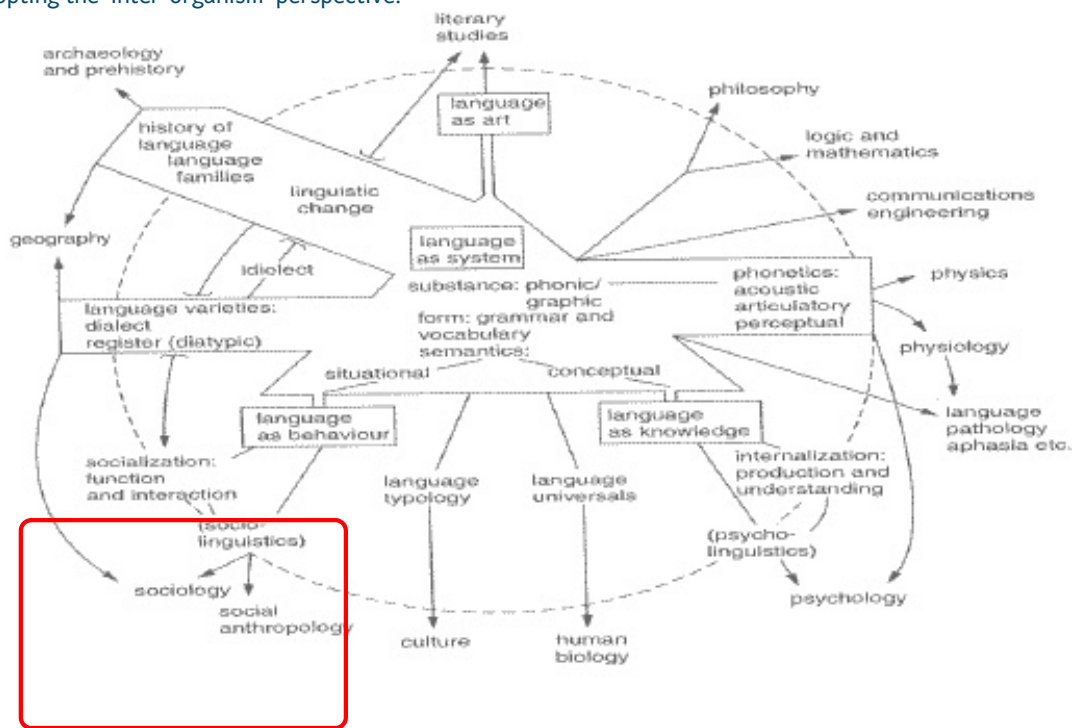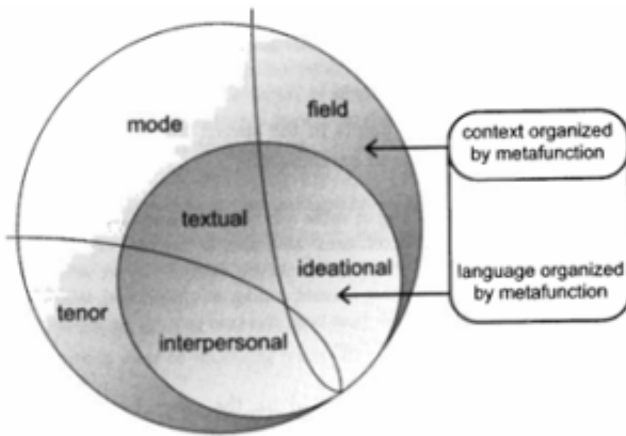
Adopting the 'inter-organism' perspective:

Figure 1: The domains of language study and their relation to other fields (Halliday, 1978).

5 Metafunctions

· Metafunctions
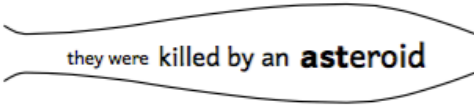
[Martin & Rose (2007: 297)]

03.21

Functional components of language and the type of structure associated with each (1)

Function of language		Examples	Structural type

ideational	logical	—Chris said ...
		    that Jane thought ...
		        that Tom had claimed ...
		            that Peter likes Mozart
			linear
			
			("string"-like)

	experiential	—the dinosaurs died —an asteroid killed the dinosaurs —Peter likes Mozart —Sally's the cleverest girl in the class	nuclear ("particle"-like)
interpersonal		—he likes Mozart —he's, like, sooo totally into Mozart —I suspect he's possibly rather fond of Mozart, wouldn't you say?	prosodic ("field"-like)
textual		—an asteroid killed the dinosaurs —they were killed by an asteroid —they were killed by one —it was an asteroid that killed them	culminative ("wave"-like)

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Function of language		Examples	Structural type

(natural logic)	modification, quotes/reports, subordination, coordination, apposition, ...	Chris said ...
		 that Jane thought ...
		  that Tom had claimed ...
		   that Peter likes Mozart
			linear
			
			("string"-like)

reflecting upon the world (experience) ⟶	processes, par-ticipants, circum-stances ...	Pete — like — Moz	nuclear ("particle"-like)
acting upon the world by in-teracting with the other peo-ple in it: mood, modality, negation, attitude, ...		? suspect...possibly...rather...wouldn't ?	prosodic ("field"-like)
creating relevance: theme–rheme structure, information structure, ...		they were **killed by an asteroid**	culminative ("wave"-like)

03.23

6 Generic Stucture (Potential): some examples

Approaching the notion of genre: J. R. Martin (1993): *English Text*

SEQUENCES (Barthes 1966/1977):
'telephone call':
telephone ringing ˆ picking up the receiver ˆ speaking ˆ putting down the receiver (1966/1977:101)

"having a drink":
order a drink ˆ obtain it ˆ drink it ˆ pay for it (1966/1977:101)

"offering a cigarette":
offering ˆ accepting ˆ smoking ˆ lighting (1966/1977:102)

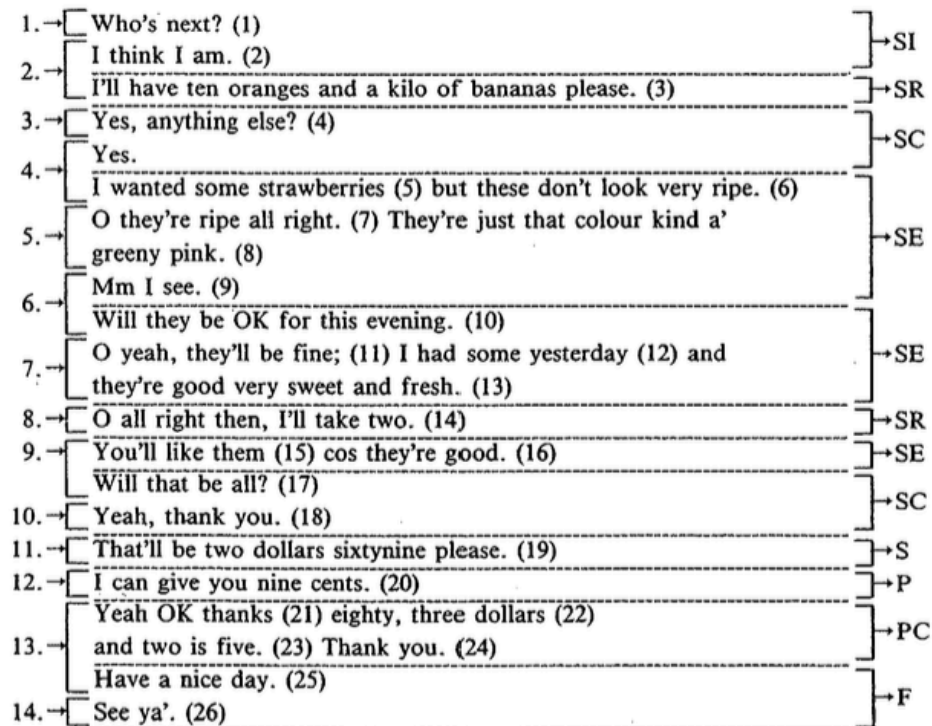TEXT STRUCTURES (Hasan 1977, 1984b, 1985a/9):
"medical appointment making":
Identification ˆ Application ˆ Offer ˆ Confirmation (1977:233)

"service encounter":
Sale request ˆ Sale compliance ˆ Sale ˆ Purchase ˆ Purchase closure (1985a/1989:60)

"nursery tale":
Initiating event ˆ Sequent Event^n ˆ Final Event^n (1984b:80)

A very simple example of a genre – a service encounter (Hasan 1985)

1.→	Who's next? (1)	→SI
2.→	I think I am. (2)	
	I'll have ten oranges and a kilo of bananas please. (3)	→SR
3.→	Yes, anything else? (4)	→SC
4.→	Yes.	
	I wanted some strawberries (5) but these don't look very ripe. (6)	
5.→	O they're ripe all right. (7) They're just that colour kind a' greeny pink. (8)	→SE
6.→	Mm I see. (9)	
	Will they be OK for this evening. (10)	
7.→	O yeah, they'll be fine; (11) I had some yesterday (12) and they're good very sweet and fresh. (13)	→SE
8.→	O all right then, I'll take two. (14)	→SR
9.→	You'll like them (15) cos they're good. (16)	→SE
	Will that be all? (17)	→SC
10.→	Yeah, thank you. (18)	
11.→	That'll be two dollars sixtynine please. (19)	→S
12.→	I can give you nine cents. (20)	→P
13.→	Yeah OK thanks (21) eighty, three dollars (22) and two is five. (23) Thank you. (24)	→PC
	Have a nice day. (25)	→F
14.→	See ya'. (26)	

The key to symbols

SI = sale initiation	SR = sale request
SC = sale compliance	SE = sale enquiry
S = sale	P = purchase
PC = purchase closure	F = finis

7 Classifying genres

One possible way of classifying genres by FIELD (IFG4)
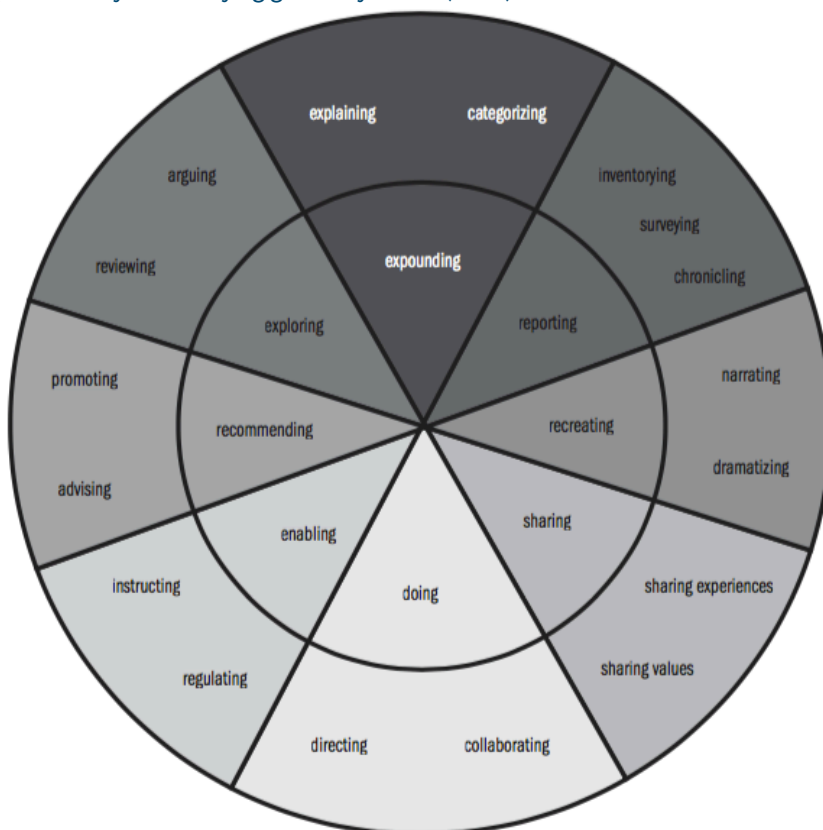
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