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From Ideology to Intonation:
a systemic functional approach to the analysis of political discourse
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Systemic Functional Linguistics: politicizing and problematizing the categories

cultural FOREIGNNESS (to continental linguists) of British Contextualism (Firthianism): “meaning is function in context”; radical anti-Cartesianism

the Hallidayan DIALECTIC: challenging Firth with Hjelmslev

AXIS: paradigmatic versus syntagmatic (with the paradigmatic carrying the greater descriptive load); formalization of paradigmatic relations as SYSTEMS — Firthian microsystems (“a system is a set of options together with an entry condition ...”) vs. the Hjelmslevian macrosystem (= “system NETWORK”); formalization of syntagmatic relations as STRUCTURES (“a structure is a configuration of functional roles”); all structure is process?

STRATUM: some problems in mapping a basically bistratal model onto a basically tristratal one; Phonetics – Phonology – Lexicogrammar – Discourse Semantics – Register – Genre – Code – Ideology

METAFUNCTION: “an empirical discovery” – system clusterings within the network (as reflexes of the most general functions of language in society; evidence from child language development – ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny?); ideational (experiential + logical) + interpersonal + textual; types of structure associated with each

RANK: ‘flat’ constituency (‘minimal bracketing’; fewer nodes, more branches per node); implicit claim of functionality of all nodes; rank not just on lexicogrammatical stratum but on phonological and semantic strata; RANKSHIFT (mismatch between form and function) – but non-existent at phonological stratum?

DELICACY: problematizes the notion of EMICITY in the extreme case; lexis as most delicate grammar? / grammar as least delicate lexis?

INSTANTIATION (system instantiated in structure/process – are syntagmatic relations part of langue or part of parole?)

vs

REALIZATION (transstratal symbolization; higher-order semiosis; metaredundancy, not simple ‘encoding’): a terminological/conceptual opposition with a difficult history!

Text (*parole?*) as instantiation of Language (*langue*) [via Register and Text Type] – empiricism, anti-Chomskyanism

Text (*signifiant*) as realization of (Context-of-) Situation (*signifié*) – Firthianism/Malinowskianism

(Context-of-) Situation as instantiation of (Context-of-) Culture [via Cultural Domain and Situation Type] – what’s the name of this ism?

Language (*signifiant*) as realization of Culture (*signifié*) – Whorfianism (Marxism?)

Some problematizable examples from some political discourse:

problematizing the interactions of the notions RANK, STRATUM, METAFUNCTION, DELICACY and EMICITY

problematizing the role of language in Cultural Transmission (via instantiations of language functioning in instantiations of culture, a.k.a. ‘texts in context’):

Generic Structure Potential (Hasan)

and

Critical Socializing Context (Turner) / Pedagogic Discourse (Bernstein)