

Abstract

In this presentation we describe the task of recycling and resituating an undergraduate course in comparative Systemic Functional Grammar. The course was originally designed for native speakers of French, on the basis of sixty hours of class time, and is now to be offered (in a “lite” version of only fifteen hours) to native speakers of German as well; the primary object language is in each case English. We deal with the issues of selection and sequencing of content, choice of terminology, design of materials, classroom methods, and evaluation. Selection is made easier by the fact that the students taking the “lite” course are also taking forty-five hours of English grammar classes based on a non-functionalist approach, which means that the SFG-based course can live on the other courses’ leftovers, viz. most of the textual metafunction, much of the interpersonal metafunction, and those parts of the experiential metafunction classified in other models as “semantics”.

Both selection and sequencing of material are influenced by typological differences between the object language systems involved; we report on our experiences to date with different sequencings of the topics in the unit dealing with MODALITY. Choice of terminology is influenced by three factors: the need to integrate terminologically with non-functionally-based courses designed and taught by non-linguists, the typological differences between object languages, and the differing degrees of importance attached to syntax (and its relation to semantics) in the broader cultural context of the historically evolving metalanguages of germanophone and franco-phone academia. We report on our experiences teaching English Theme-Rheme and Information Structure at the intersection of the EU’s three de facto working languages.

Design of materials is a sensitive issue; one of the main obstacles (from a teacher perspective) to expanding the “Lebensraum” of SFG in Europe would appear to be the lack of suitable textbooks, although students have already largely adapted to an online environment. We present a selection of grammar materials originally designed for a paper-based environment, as well as more recently-evolved “virtual reality” variants. The questions of classroom methods and evaluation involve broader issues of empowerment and disempowerment, and thus constitute an ideal breeding ground for constructive criticisms of existing mainstream practices. We discuss the interaction within the classroom of materials carried by different media, and the political issues raised by alternative forms of student (and teacher) assessment.