Written Expression, WS 2024/2025

This course should more realistically be called **Text Production**, as that is precisely what it deals with: the production of texts. The theoretical foundation of the course is **Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**, as developed by M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan in collaboration with many other scholars; it is part of an autochthonous British school of linguistics that is sometimes referred to in German as *Britischer Kontextualismus*. Within the SFL tradition there is an approach that has come to be known as **genre-based literacy pedagogy**. I am critical of some of the theoretical shortcuts of this approach, but I acknowledge its stellar success rates in transforming underperforming junior secondary level students at socially disadvantaged schools into top university entrance examination performers.

The course will be conducted for the most part in **hybrid** mode; participants can either attend in person or follow the course virtually via meetings on MS Teams. This teaching mode is not without its difficulties, but it provides more flexibility for participants. During the first few weeks only, an asynchronous online participation would be possible, with students working through the materials at their own pace.

Meetings for the course will take place at the following time:

Wednesdays 14:15-15:45

We will meet in:

Building A2 2, Room 2.01

and/or

the MS Teams meeting that will appear in your MS Teams calendar.

Please make sure you are registered on LSF and try to keep in regular contact with me via email or other means if we do not see each other each week. I strongly recommend not missing too many of the sessions though.

The course materials include slides, reading exercises, and various worksheets. The worksheets are voluntary, and do not constitute part of the **portfolio** you have to produce in order to pass the course. But note that the content of each worksheet will typically become the subject of the discussion at some point during the following meeting, so it is advisable to at least look at each worksheet and think about it ...

This semester I plan to experiment with a variety of new in-class activities, including the use of ChatGPT. Students attending in person should have something to write with (pen, paper), or have a laptop or tablet with them if they prefer a paperless approach.

The course will be structured in a number of **blocks**:

The **first block** will involve exchanging contact details and making decisions about communication channels and frequency of contact.

The **second** block will involve becoming more familiar with the basic concepts of **Systemic Functional Linguistics** and **genre-based literacy pedagogy**. There are two parallel access routes here — there will be reading material, as well as slide shows. This block will also involve weekly exercise sheets —some of these will be questions on the reading material, others will involve analysing certain aspects of four short texts. During this part of the course, it would be theoretically possible for students to work at their own pace and in their own time, but by the end of the second block we will

definitely have fully transitioned to synchronous learning via face-to-face meetings in the classroom with simultaneous videoconferences on MS Teams for those unable to attend in person.

The **third block** will consist of four major tasks, such as writing (or rewriting or editing) texts belonging to four different genres. We will explore the conventions of each genre and look at the regions of English vocabulary and grammar that the genre in question tends to foreground. Your grades for these four tasks will form the basis for your overal grade.

The **fourth block** will be the briefest, and will consist of general feedback. We will discuss grades, as well as arrangements for sending your results to the examinations office.

All materials will be made available here on the course website. If students express a strong preference for "having all the courses in one place on Moodle", then I could set up an empty shell on Moodle which would simply point you to the course website. I must apologize for my laziness here—this is my 73rd semester of teaching; I am now in fact in retirement; and students have still not yet made up their minds whether they prefer Moodle or MS Teams; and all of these different technologies require an enormous investment of time, a commodity which I no longer have. I will therefore continue my time-honoured practice of hand-coding both website and handouts in TeX.

Plan for Winter Semester 2024/2025:

Here you can find the plan for this semester's work:

http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/plan20242/index.pdf

Materials for Week 01 (16.10.2024):

All the materials you need for Week 01 can be found in this directory:

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit01_20242

You might like to look at the contents of subdirectories B through I first, and download anything you haven't got yet. Subdirectory J contains screen recordings of me going through the contents for Week 01 and taking you through the slides (which are in subdirectory G as a PDF file, along with a printer-friendly PDF file that contains all the information from the slides formatted more economically). Due to an acute lack of time, I have had to use recordings that have been 'recycled' from previous semesters; I hope this causes no problems.

Subdirectory K contains some pictures of some of the people you will meet (virtually) in this course.

If there are any problems, just contact me.

Materials for Week 02 (23.10.2024):

All the materials you need for Week 02 can be found in this directory:

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit02_20242

Subdirectory A contains the questions on chapter 2 of the initial reading material – you already have the whole of the reading material, from last week. Chapter 2 is concerned with the functions of language.

Subdirectory B contains the slides for this week and a printout of their content. These slides complement the reading material, without however being perfectly aligned with it (either in terms of timing from week to week, or in terms of the concepts used).

Subdirectory C contains an extra handout – one page containing five crucially important paragraphs by Saussure in the original French; and another page containing the English translation of them, sitting next to a diagram that I would normally draw on the whiteboard at the beginning of every class, because it is the most important diagram of all.

In subdirectory D you will find some short screen recordings (recycled from previous semesters).

Materials for Week 03 (30.10.2024):

All the materials you need for Week 03 can be found in this directory:
`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit03_20242`

Subdirectory A contains the questions on chapter 3 of the initial reading material – you already have the link to the whole of the reading material itself, from the first week. Chapter 3 is concerned with register variation – with the relations between context of situation and the functional components of language.

Subdirectory B contains the slides for this week and a printout of their content. These slides complement the reading material, without however being perfectly aligned with it (either in terms of timing from week to week, or in terms of the concepts used).

Subdirectory C contains an extra handout – one page containing a classic example by Bronislaw Malinowski to demonstrate why you need to know about the context of situation if you want to understand the meaning of a text.

In subdirectory D you will find some short screen recordings in which I walk through the slide presentation.

Subdirectory E contains an exercise that I designed during the pandemic to replace what had previously been an interesting series of class discussions about Texts A, B, C, and D (see the handout from week 01 entitled "Some texts to think about"). The exercise is a multiple choice questionnaire with radio buttons (it is possible that you may not be able to see these buttons properly in your browser; you may need to download the file and view it with a PDF viewer – the Adobe Acrobat Reader is recommended).

Remember that you can theoretically work entirely at your own pace for the first four weeks. By Week 05 (13 November) you should, however, be in regular contact with me. If you complete all tasks by the specified dates, it will help me to assess your abilities more accurately and thus to design better materials that will address all of the issues.

Weeks 5 and 6 will be largely based on studying Texts A, B, C, and D.

If there are any problems, just contact me.

Materials for Week 04 (06.11.2024):

All the materials you need for Week 04 can be found in this directory:
`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit04_20242`

Subdirectory A contains the homework for week 5, which is based on Text C (*The Chamber of the House*).

Subdirectory B is where you can find the slides and a printout of their content.

Subdirectory C contains an additional handout, showing a diagram which might be too small to see on the normal printout: it comes from Halliday and Hasan (1976), *Cohesion in English*. I have also included a later version of the diagram.

Subdirectory D contains the screen recordings in which I go through the slides. This is of course not as good as a real class because you are not able to interrupt, but please feel free to contact me with any questions you have – by email or WhatsApp or whatever. (The slides are recycled from a previous semester.)

Remember that you can work entirely at your own pace for the first four weeks. By Week 05 (13 November) you should, however, be in regular contact with me. If you complete all tasks by the specified dates, it will help me to assess your abilities more accurately and thus to design better materials that will address all of the issues.

Weeks 5 and 6 will be largely based on studying Texts A, B, C, and D; by week 7 we will be planning the first of the four writing tasks, and in week 8 we will be discussing the results of the first writing task.

If you are working online, then by Week 5 it would be best if you could join the weekly MS Teams meetings.

If there are any problems, just contact me.

Materials for Week 05 (13.11.2024):

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit05_20242

Subdirectory A contains the slides and a printout of their content.

Subdirectory B contains an additional handout of three pages. These documents are linked to from the slides.

Subdirectory C contains the screen recordings in which I go through the slides. This is of course not as good as a real class because you are not able to interrupt, but please feel free to contact me with any questions you have – by email or WhatsApp or whatever. NOTE: due to time constraints, I have once again simply 'recycled' the screen recordings from a previous semester; so just ignore the first slide with the date on it.

Subdirectory D contains homework in preparation for week 06.

By Week 05 (11 November) you should be in regular contact with me. If you complete all tasks by the specified dates, it will help me to assess your abilities more accurately and thus to design better materials that will address all of the issues.

Weeks 05 and 06 will be largely based on studying Texts A, B, C, and D; by week 07 we will be planning the first of the four writing tasks, and in week 08 we will be discussing the results of the first writing task.

If there are any problems, just contact me.

Materials for Week 06 (20.11.2024):

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242

Subdirectory A contains one document, namely the instructions for this week's work (the instructions also contain links to other materials as necessary):

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http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/A__Instructions/2402_
thematic_progression_instructions.pdf
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Subdirectory B contains what would have been (before the paperless era) the handout for this week:

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http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/B__Handout/
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The first item is the exercise on "Unscrambling thematic progression" that was linked to from the document in Subdirectory A. The exercise is about "normalising" the structure of each sentence in a text so that the text as as whole flows more smoothly. It would be good if you could have a look at the exercise before the class, as it will save time. I will ask individual students to give their solution to normalising each sentence, and we will look at alternatives. I will also list the names of the structures involved.

The second item contains the classic diagrams from František Daneš's 1974 article 'Functional sentence perspective and the organization of the text'.

The third item is merely Text A, the first of the four 'texts to think about', namely the paragraph about the English Constitution that is widely considered to be a very well structured English paragraph. Paragraphs in English texts are organised somewhat differently from the way they are organised in other languages, so it worth studying some good models to see 'how the writer did it'.

The other items contain additional material related to the exercises.

Subdirectory C contains some screen recordings from an earlier iteration of the course, in case you can't make it to the class this week. The units used to start with Unit 00, so the slides refer to "Unit 05"; it's the work for week 6, though, i.e. for this week:

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http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/C__Screen_Recordings_
OLD/
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Subdirectory D contains the instructions for preparing for week 7:

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http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/D__Preparing_for_Week_
07/
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The preparation consists in taking a text that a student presented without any paragraph breaks, and inserting a paragraph break wherever you think one is necessary. In class we will discuss your suggestions:

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http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/D__Preparing_for_Week_07/
02_konken2201nobreaks.pdf
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The text is also available as a .docx file and as a .pages file, so that you can edit it with your favourite word processor. Seeing the physical layout on the page, with your paragraph breaks added, will help you to decide whether the paragraph breaks coincide with the different stages of the text or not.

This exercise will lead in to a discussion of Task 1: a factual description of a place. We will spend the rest of the class time in week 7 discussing the Generic Structure Potential of factual descriptions and I will explain the 'gedachte Situation' of the description I want you to produce.

Between weeks 7 and 8 we will have to work somewhat harder than usual.

Subdirectory D also contains a word of warning, about what happens when parts of real life get cut out of their original context and put into a frame so they can be used in a classroom for teaching purposes:

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit06_20242/D__Preparing_for_Week_07/01_framing.pdf`

If there are any problems, just contact me.

Materials for Week 07 (27.11.2024):

All the materials for Week 07 can be found in this directory:

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242`

Subdirectory A contains everything that I would have included in a handout for you in class, back in the days before paperlessness.

Subdirectory B contains materials used in the class itself.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT THING:

Your first writing task is due by 4 p.m. on the Monday of Week 08 (2.12.2024):

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/01_Task01.pdf`

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Here is a more detailed list of what's in the subdirectories:

SUBDIRECTORY A:

00
The "old" plan for this lesson, which did not include the experimental "describe an unknown object" task:

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/00_Unit07_THIS-WAS-THE-OLD-PLAN.pdf`

01
The instructions for the first writing task (if there is anything that's not clear, just contact me):

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/01_Task01.pdf`

02 and 03
Two documents that I referred to in class – the 'Konken' text with all the grammatically marked Themes underlined, and another copy of the text with all the evaluative or interpersonal elements underlined.

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/02_konken2201group3_markedtheme.pdf`

`http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/03_konken2201group3_interpersonal.pdf`

04

The 'Tafelbild' from a previous version of this lesson:

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/04_2018-11-28_
15.48.04_Tafelbild.jpg

The whiteboard this time around contained only the two words 'hyponymy' and 'meronymy' – these are more technical labels for the 'is-a' and 'has-a' relations ("is-a" means 'is a kind of', and verges on the concept of 'function' – 'what's it for?'; "has-a" means 'consists of parts such as ...', and glides seamlessly into 'existential' clauses of the type "there is a ..."). If you want more information about the concepts 'hyponymy' and 'meronymy', look here:

M.A.K. Halliday, An Introduction to Functional Grammar, London: Edward Arnold, 1994 (2nd edition), chapter 9.5, pp 332–334:

http://www.spence.saar.de/arcanum/writtenexpression/general/IFG2/IFG2_2000.pdf

05
The page from the appendix of Humphrey, Droga and Feez, *Grammar and Meaning* that lists the social purpose, the structure, and the key grammatical features of a 'Factual Description':

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/05_
GrammarandMeaningApp1__1.pdf

This was also in the "handout" for week 01.

06
I've also added a summary of all the types of logical connections – either paratactic or hypotactic – that occur in English between clauses within a sentence:

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/A__Handout/06_clause_
complexing.pdf

These encompass all the types of logical relations in English apart from modification as found in nominal groups – e.g. "splendid old electric trains".

In factual descriptions, we expect to find mainly the logical relation of 'addition' (paratactic extension; 'and', 'but', etc. as coordinating conjunctions within a sentence, joining two clauses, or two nominal groups, etc.). There are also conjunctive Adjuncts like 'Furthermore' that more loosely link one sentence to the preceding sentence of a text.

If you want to read more about these things, check out:

M.A.K. Halliday, An Introduction to Functional Grammar, London: Edward Arnold, 1994 (2nd edition), chapter 9.4, pp 323–330:

http://www.spence.saar.de/arcanum/writtenexpression/general/IFG2/IFG2_2000.pdf

SUBDIRECTORY B contains two in-class attempts at inserting paragraph breaks in the Konken text – while also trying to justify those choices by referring to grammatical and lexical features of the text.

http://spence.saar.de/writtenexpression/unit07_20242/B__Classwork/

One is from the last time I taught this course, the other is from this semester's course. There are many possibilities, and no single 'correct' answer. This semester I spontaneously and instinctively went with a student who admitted that he had *not* prepared the paragraph-insertion exercise.

If anyone submits their first writing task for week 8 late, then it is possible that I will make an instinctive decision to devote part of the lesson to 'editing' their text so as to make it publishable.

I have long toyed with the idea of basing students' grades *solely* on the amount of time it takes me to "edit" their texts to the point where they become publishable. It is possible that during this semester we will be able to use ChatGPT to gain some ideas about how to "improve" your texts, but ChatGPT will probably produce its results in a split second – and may well start "hallucinating" in the process of doing so.

You are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of all the ideas we will be trying out over the next few weeks. If I say something which is wrong, please interrupt me immediately. Also, many of you have probably already done considerably more in the area of didactic theory than I have, so I would appreciate your comments and criticism.

Materials for Week 08 (04.12.2024):

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit08_20242

Here you can find what would have been the "homework" between week 08 and week 09. I felt that the workload had been somewhat excessive so far, so I intend to look at these materials briefly in the class in week 09 (Wednesday 11.12.2024).

Materials for Week 09 (11.12.2024):

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit09_20242

Here you can find the (remainder of the) class work for week 09 (Wednesday 11.12.2024).

Please note in particular the instructions for Task 02:

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VERY IMPORTANT:

Your second writing task is due by 4 p.m. on the Monday of Week 10 (16.12.2024):

http://spence.saar.de/courses/writtenexpression/unit09_20242/01_Task02.pdf

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