



# Exploring English Grammar – the world of clauses

**Course Notes Winter 2021/22**

online:

<http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/grammar>

Robert Spence

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Grammar is a resource for making meaning.

## 0 Basic Organization

### 0.1 General information

#### 0.1.1 Overall goal

This course provides an overview of English grammar from a SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL perspective, and is designed to help students develop their own repertoire of strategies for answering the following questions:

- “What do I need to pay attention to when I’m in the middle of doing a translation into English and have to make a choice about how to re-word a part of the meaning of the source text?”
- “How can I do it in such a way that the sentence I’m writing means what I want it to mean and doesn’t make a native speaker of English unexpectedly wince or laugh?”

#### 0.1.2 Who this course is for

The course is designed for native or near-native speakers of one of the Romance languages French, Spanish, or Italian, and is intended specifically for Erasmus students. Other students are welcome to attend the course provided they have a reasonably sound knowledge of English. It is also assumed that students taking the course have some knowledge of German.

The main language of instruction is English, but sometimes German will be used, depending on the nature of the particular problem under discussion.

The course devotes special attention to the things that can go wrong when it is the grammar of a Romance language that is interfering with the grammar of English, but we will also look at some of the things that can go wrong when the source of the interference is the grammar of German.

#### 0.1.3 How the course works

The course runs for one 15-week semester ( $1 \times 2 \text{ SWS} = 2 \text{ SWS}$ ) and is held each Monday from 14:15 to 15:45. In summer semester, a companion course (*Exploring English Grammar — the world of groups and phrases*) is offered, which covers all the material that could not be covered in winter semester. Most of the material covered in summer is based around nominal or verbal groups, including a great deal of work on tense.

After each class (15 x 2 hours) there is a small amount of homework, consisting of exercises designed to review what has just been learnt and prepare the ground for what is to come. The total extent of the course is thus 30 (15 x 2) contact hours, plus an additional 45 to 60 hours devoted to homework, making a total of 75 to 90 hours for 3 credit points. (An equivalent amount of work is involved in the summer semester course, which is also worth 3 credit points.)

#### 0.1.4 Communication

All students taking the course should make sure that their correct email address is on the course mailing list. (Online registration is available via LSF. Please try to attend the first videoconference so that I can get to know you!) When sending an email to the course leader, please make sure that the piece of text

[grammar]

(including the square brackets!) is included in the subject line. (This will happen automatically if you are reading any email I have already sent you concerning this course and you simply hit the "Reply" button.)

Each lesson is accompanied by a worksheet of questions which students are expected to answer. These questions will be discussed in class, but in general the worksheet does not need to be handed in. (If you hand them in, it will increase your grade.)

Assessment for the course would normally be on the basis of a final examination (to be held during the normal class time in the last week of lectures) plus a small number of hand-in exercises spread throughout the semester. The examination itself would be based entirely on the questions contained in the weekly worksheets. But due to the difficulty of conducting a 'remote' written exam during a pandemic, this will be replaced by an assignment (a text analysis) and/or an oral exam.

Most of the course materials, including the weekly worksheets, will be included in the course notes and placed on the website; certain additional materials will be distributed in the lessons; and other materials can be accessed by following the links on the course website.

#### 0.1.5 Successful participation

Students are expected to attend regularly. *If you are unable to attend one of the lessons, it is vital that you contact me beforehand to let me know. Missing more than two lessons altogether would seriously compromise your chances of successfully completing the course.*

ERASMUS students taking the course can obtain a graded certificate (*benoteter Teilnahmechein*) for 3 ECTS points by attending regularly and handing in all the required worksheets and assignments.

## 0.2 Provisional timetable

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Description</i>
01	18.x	–	Collect survey and initial test
02	25.x	–	Return survey and initial test
03	01.xi	–	NO CLASS
04	08.xi	00	Basic organization; initial orientation
05	15.xi	01	Theoretical introduction, based on the guessing game from the first meeting, and merging with:
06	22.xi	02	Overview of English grammar within the SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL model of language
07	29.xi	03	Clause as message: THEME (Theme & Rheme)
08	06.xii	04a	Clause as exchange (1): MOOD, POLARITY, and MOOD TAGGING
09	13.xii	04b	Clause as exchange (2): MODALITY
–	20.xii	–	Christmas break
–	27.xii	–	Christmas break
10	03.i	05a	Clause as representation (1): process types and participants
11	10.i	05b	Clause as representation (2): the grammar of ‘being’
12	17.i	07a	Above the clause (1): brief overview of clause complexes (PARATAXIS, HYPOTAXIS; EXPANSION, PROJECTION)
13	24.i	07b	Above the clause (2): reports vs. ideas vs. facts vs. acts;
14	31.i	07c	Complexing below the clause: hypotactic verbal group complexes (‘catenative structures’)
15	07.ii	—	General questions

In summer semester 2022 we will look at “the world of groups and phrases” (Unit 6), doing a lot of work on tense (Unit 6b) as well as on basic morphology (Unit 11). In addition, we will look at information structure and the role of intonation in English grammar (unit 8), cohesion in English (unit 9), and “grammatical metaphor” (including nominalization) (Unit 10). If necessary, unit 7c could also be moved to summer semester.

### 0.3 A note on how to use these course notes

Each unit of this course typically consists of the following parts:

0. An attempt at a one-page executive **summary** of the unit in graphic form.
1. A set of **workpoints**—a list of contrastive examples designed to lead in to the unit by casting light upon a particular ‘region’ of the grammar of English and highlighting some of the differences between English and German.
2. A checklist of **learning goals** for the unit.
3. An **outline** of the relevant region of the grammar of English.
4. A discussion of the **problems** that each region of English grammar may pose for German-speaking learners.
5. A list of **references** which can be consulted for further information.
6. A **worksheet** containing exercises for guided practice.

At the very beginning of the course, we look not at the *grammar* of English but at the *grammatics* (theory of grammar) used by SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS. This is then immediately followed by a “bird’s eye view” of the whole of English grammar, before proceeding to the individual topics.

After each class, students should complete the corresponding worksheet; before the next class, they should study the next set of contrastive examples.

The examination at the end of the course will be based on the weekly worksheets.

## 1 Some basic concepts

Language evolved.

That has consequences.

## 1.1 Workpoints

The linguist M. A. K. Halliday on why he chose the title *A Short Introduction to Functional Grammar* for one of his books:

It is an introduction to **functional** grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather than a formal one. It is functional in three distinct although closely related senses: in its interpretation (1) of texts, (2) of the system, and (3) of the elements of linguistic structures.

(1) It is functional in the sense that it is designed to account for how the language is **used**. Every text — that is, everything that is said or written — unfolds in some context of use; furthermore, it is the uses of language that, over tens of thousands of generations, have shaped the system. Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to those needs — it is not arbitrary. A functional grammar is essentially a ‘natural’ grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used.

(2) Following from this, the fundamental components of **meaning** in language are functional components. All languages are organized around two main kinds of meaning, the ‘ideational’ or reflective, and the ‘interpersonal’ or active. These components, called ‘metafunctions’ in the terminology of the present theory, are the manifestations in the linguistic system of the two very general purposes which underlie all uses of language: (i) to understand the environment (ideational) and (ii) to act on the others in it (interpersonal). Combined with these is a third metafunctional component, the ‘textual’, which breathes relevance into the other two.

(3) Thirdly, each **element** in a language is explained by reference to its function in the total linguistic system. In this third sense, therefore, a functional grammar is one that construes all the units of a language — its clauses, phrases, and so on — as organic configurations of functions. In other words, each part is interpreted as functional with respect to the whole.

[Halliday 1994<sup>2</sup>: xiii–xiv]



## 1.2 Learning goals

In this unit, you will learn:

- to distinguish between **descriptive** and **prescriptive** (and/or **proscriptive**) approaches to grammar
- to distinguish between **formal** and **functional** approaches to grammar
- to distinguish between **structural** and **systemic** approaches to grammar

More specifically, you will become familiar with the following concepts and will learn some of the ways they interact with each other:

- **Stratum** ('a is stood-for by b at a lower level of abstractness')
  - [bistratal model:] content  $\longleftrightarrow$  expression
  - [tristratal model:] semantics  $\longleftrightarrow$  lexicogrammar  $\longleftrightarrow$  phonology
- **Manifestation** ('b is based on sound, or shape, or body movement')
  - phonetics / graphetics / 'signing'
- **Function** ('x meets the basic need y')
  - function  $\longrightarrow$  value  $\longrightarrow$  meaning
- **Metafunction** ('y = reflection/action/relevance & explains why language has x')
  - ideational  $\longleftrightarrow$  interpersonal  $\longleftrightarrow$  textual ('textbildend')
  - ↓
  - experiential  $\longleftrightarrow$  logical
- **Rank** ('c is made up of smaller units at the same level of abstractness')
  - [grammar:] clause  $\longleftrightarrow$  group/phrase  $\longleftrightarrow$  word  $\longleftrightarrow$  morpheme
  - [phonology:] tone group  $\longleftrightarrow$  foot  $\longleftrightarrow$  syllable  $\longleftrightarrow$  phoneme
- **Axis** ('m is related *in absentia* to l and n, and *in praesentia* to p and s')
  - paradigmatic (axis of choice; 'l and m and n'; formalized using **systems**)
  - syntagmatic (axis of chain; 'p and m and s'; formalized using **structures**)
- **Instantiation** ('k is an instance of i')
  - culture  $\longleftrightarrow$  domain  $\longleftrightarrow$  situation-type  $\longleftrightarrow$  situation
  - language  $\longleftrightarrow$  register  $\longleftrightarrow$  text-type  $\longleftrightarrow$  text

### 1.3 Dimensions of the systemic functional model of language

The systemic functional theory of language uses several dimensions. These are briefly described below:

#### 1.3.1 Stratum

'STRATA' (the plural of 'STRATUM') are implicitly defined by the notion of a **sign**: if one thing 'stands for' another thing, then we already need two strata to describe what's going on: some kind of 'content' is being stood-for (or represented) by some kind of 'expression'.

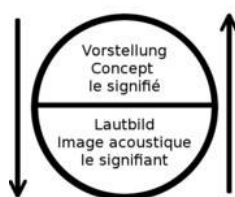


Abbildung 1: The sign function (Saussure) (Source: Wikipedia)

The protolanguage that children invent for themselves from age 7 months to age 18 months, like the language of many other species, has no more than these two strata: sounds stand directly for meanings. There is a fixed number of things that can be meant, and a fixed number of ways in which to mean them. Each utterance thus consists of just one sign: a word.

But adult human language, in addition to having words, also has grammar — and that changes everything, because now sounds stand for words, and words (in grammatical structures) stand for meanings. So we can define three strata:

There is SEMANTICS (the system of all possible linguistically expressible meanings), there is LEXICO-GRAMMAR (the system of all possible wordings — choosing words (lexis), and arranging them (grammar)), and there is PHONOLOGY (the system of all possible linguistically relevant sounds). Phonology is the least abstract of these three strata, as it is closer to real physical sound.

The development of a three-level semiotic system in our species was one of the most significant events of the last few million years.

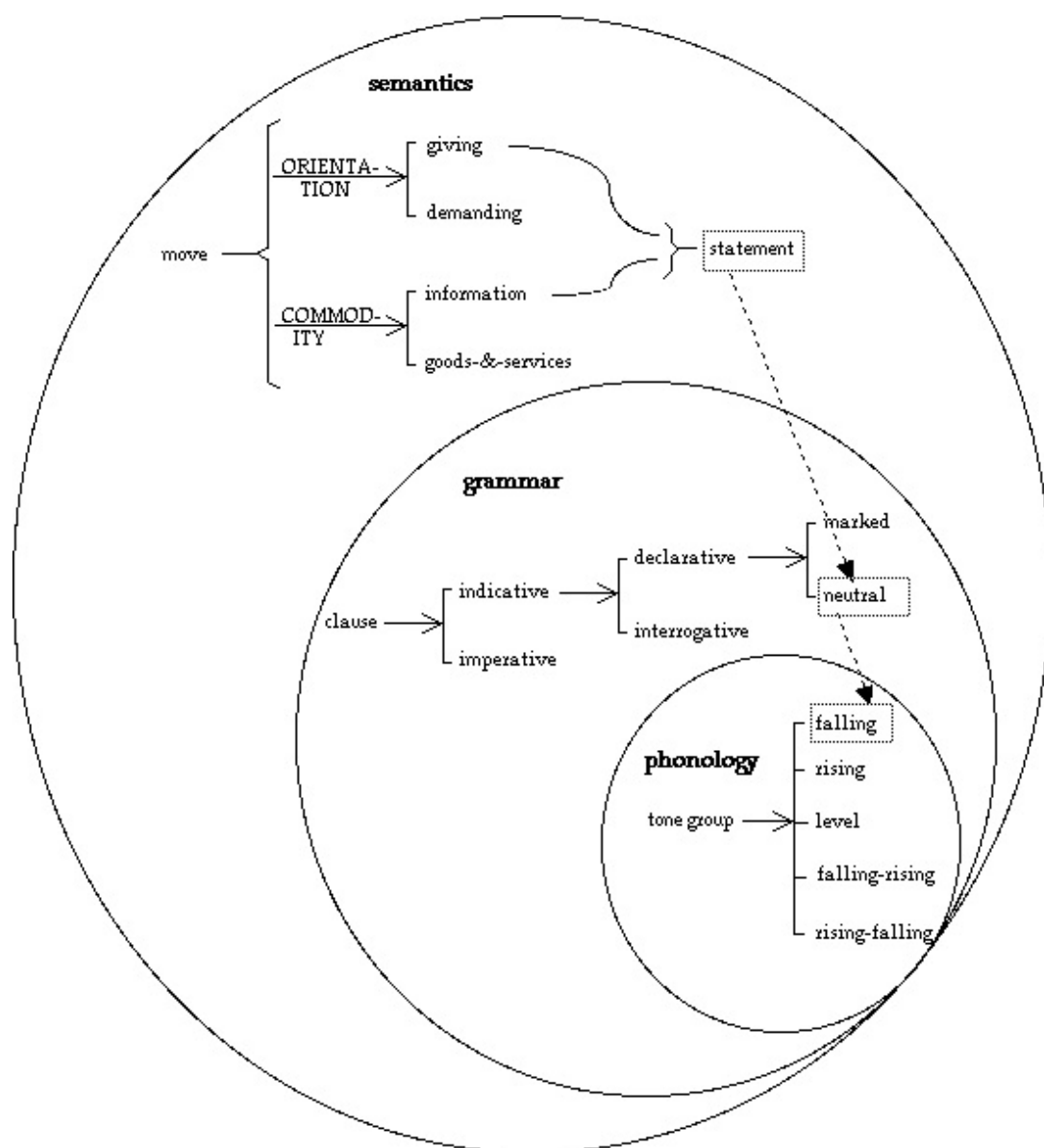


Abbildung 2: Strata (Source: C.M.I.M. Matthiessen)

### 1.3.2 Manifestation

Originally all human language was spoken language: it had only one ‘manifestation’, namely as SOUND. Some time after the neolithic revolution (development of agriculture and livestock-raising in settled communities), a system of written symbols evolved, standing for the elements of language and thus providing a second manifestation for language: WRITING. There is also a third manifestation, in the form of the SIGNS (*Gebärden*) that make up the sign language of the deaf.

### 1.3.3 Function and metafunction

Human language evolved because it served two very useful extrinsic functions: it provided a way of understanding the world by classifying the phenomena of experience so that one person’s experience can be shared with others, and a way of changing the world by interacting with the other people in it. These two functions need to be woven together intrinsically, so that pieces of shared experience and interaction are relevant to the situation and to what has gone before.

The internal arrangement of language is a reflection of the functions it serves in society. Because it has to classify experience and establish the logical relationships between different ‘portions’ of that experience, it has an **experiential** and a **logical** function (together called the **ideational** function). Because it has to enable social interaction between individuals, it has an **interpersonal** function. And because it has to create relevance, it has a **textual** (or ‘text-creating’) function. (The notion of ‘text’ is related to the notion of ‘textiles’, in the sense of something that is ‘woven together’. Text could perhaps be called ‘Sinngewebe’.)

	An asteroid	killed	the dinosaurs	
clause as representation:	Actor			(experiential)
clause as interaction:	Subject			(interpersonal)
clause as message:	Theme			(textual)

Abbildung 3: An English clause partially analysed according to three different functional dimensions of meaning (‘metafunctions’)

If we look inside language, we see that it contains a number of resources for fulfilling these different functions, and that these resources are largely independent of each other. I can tell you that Mozart wrote 41 symphonies or that Beethoven was Viennese or that the moon is made of green cheese; in each case, what I am ‘doing’ stays the same: ‘giving information’ (which may or may not be true); but the kind of experience I am representing varies from Mozart’s symphony-writing to Beethoven’s Vienneseness to the moon’s internal composition. Alternatively, I can ask you to close the window, ask you whether you’ve closed it, or tell you that you already closed it; in each case, I am representing the same process of ‘window-closing’, but doing different things interpersonally (a command, a question, and a statement). Finally, I can tell you that Beethoven died in the year 1827, that the year Beethoven died in was 1827 or that it was in 1827 that Beethoven died; in each case, I’m representing the same process of dying (rather than symphony-writing), and performing the same act of information-giving (rather than information-demanding), but I’m presenting the information in different ways to make it easier to take in.

These internal reflections of the external functions of language can be called ‘metafunctions’ (‘meta’ in the sense of ‘more abstract’).

### 1.3.4 Rank

So far, we have three dimensions: stratum, manifestation, and metafunction. Now we add a fourth: rank.

When people use language, they produce it in ‘bits’. But the bits are made up of smaller bits, which in turn are made up of even smaller bits, and so on. For most people, this is the most noticeable kind of ‘structure’ in language; it is similar to the structure of matter, with molecules made up of atoms, atoms made up of subatomic particles, and so on.

At the stratum of lexicogrammar, we can recognize the following four ‘ranks’ of units: clauses, made up of groups or phrases, made up of words, made up of morphemes (Wortbestandteile). At the stratum of phonology, we can recognize tone groups, made up of feet, made up of syllables, made up of phonemes. If we change the manifestation from sound to writing, and replace phonology with orthography, then we can recognize units such as letters, making up orthographic words, making up subsentences, making up sentences, making up paragraphs, making up sections or chapters, making up written works such as books.

It would also be possible to recognize different ranks of units at the semantic stratum; but just how many, and what kind, would depend on which metafunction was most important to us. In any case, we can identify the central unit at the SEMANTIC STRATUM: it is the *text*.

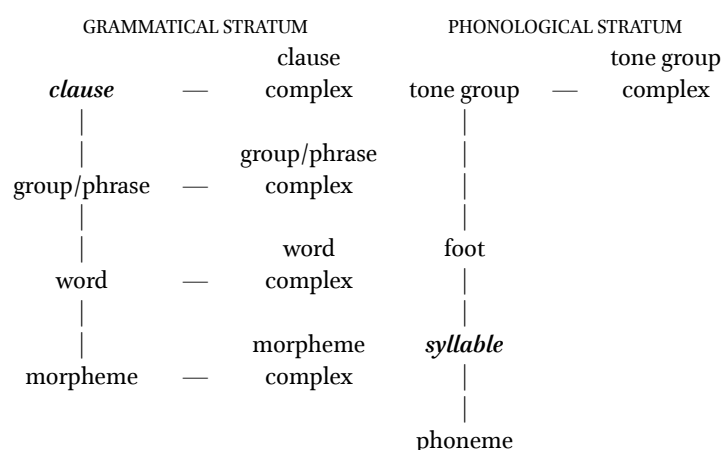


Abbildung 4: The concept of ‘rank’ (units made up of units): examples from different strata

### 1.3.5 Axis

Language has two axes — the axis of choice and the axis of chain. The first is called the paradigmatic axis, and consists of the relationships among all the items one of which could potentially be chosen at a particular point in a text. The second is called the syntagmatic axis, consisting of the relationships

among all the items that were actually chosen and that therefore occur together in the same portion of text.

Relationships on the syntagmatic axis are represented formally by using the notion of ‘structure’; the most easily recognizable kind of structure is constituency structure — the kind already mentioned in the discussion of the term ‘rank’ above. Constituency structure can be represented by drawing trees with a trunk that splits into branches and sub-branches, or by drawing boxes inside boxes inside boxes.

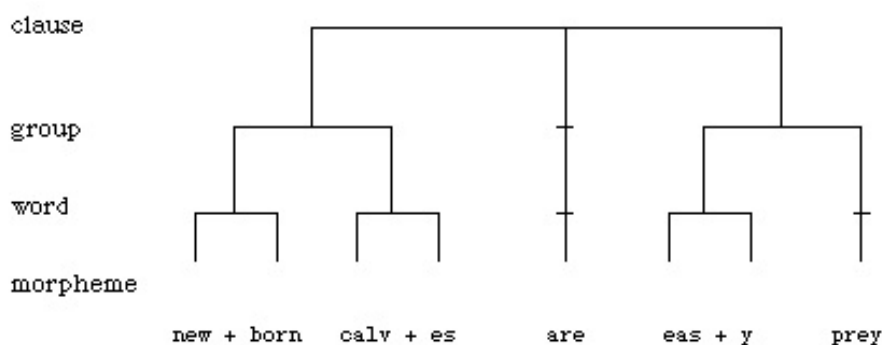


Abbildung 5: STRUCTURE: Constituency structure of an English clause shown as a branching tree (Source: C.M.I.M. Matthiessen)

Relationships on the paradigmatic axis are represented formally by using the notion of ‘system’. A system is defined as a set of mutually exclusive options, together with an entry condition; if the entry condition is fulfilled, one of the options (no more than one, and no less than one) must be chosen.

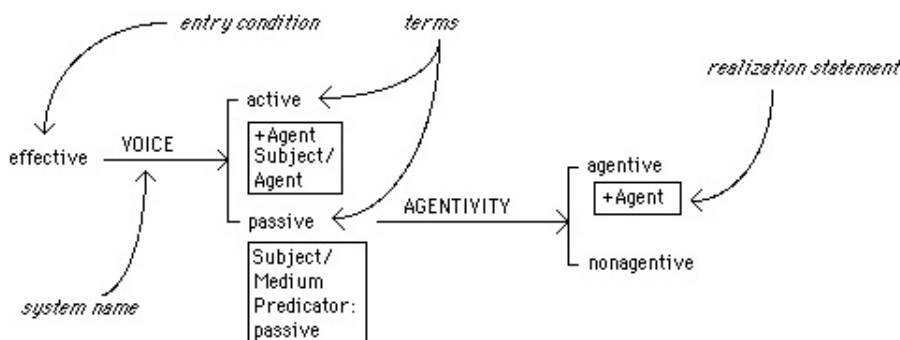


Abbildung 6: SYSTEM: Part of the grammar of English represented as a network of systems (Source: C.M.I.M. Matthiessen)

### 1.3.6 Instantiation

Climate is the potential for weather; and weather is the actual instance of that potential. In the same way, a language is the potential for creating pieces of (spoken or written, premeditated or spontaneous) text, and any one particular piece of text is an instantiation of that potential.

Instantiation is a ‘cline’ — a continuous variation space, with the potential situated at one end, the actual at the other, and with various intermediate degrees between the two ends.

Thus, if we plan to use language to say or write something, we are like an organist approaching a pipe organ: we select particular registers of pipes that we want to activate in order to play a particular piece of music. Just like a pipe organ, language can be configured in different ways if the particular text requires it. We call this partly actualized form of a language a register; a register allows us to specify a type of text (German: Textsorte, not Texttyp) to which our actual text belongs.

Whenever text is created, there is a context of situation: a group of people are engaged in a particular kind of social activity, are playing particular social roles, and have particular expectations about what role language can play for them in that situation. The particular configuration of 'social activity', 'social roles', and 'role of language' defines a situation. But each situation is an instance of a situation type; and a situation type is (ultimately) an instance of the situation-generating potential that we call a 'culture'.

Culture is realized by language (and other semiotic systems, like music) in the same way as (within language) meanings are realized by words, and words are realized by sounds.

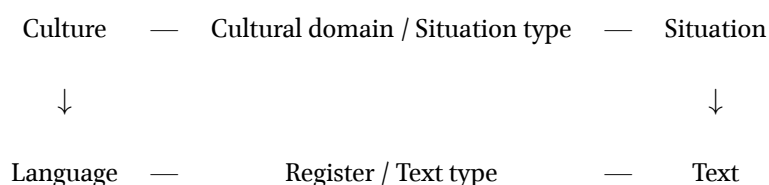


Abbildung 7: Culture, situation, language, text

### 1.3.7 Some general remarks

Here are two useful mantras:

A structure is a configuration of functional roles.

Meaning is function in context.

Their meaning will (I hope) become clear as they are repeated to you at every possible opportunity during this course.

And here are some general principles and some specific technical terms that are worth noting; some of them can cause confusion if it is not recognized that they are being used within a particular theory of language (SFL – systemic functional linguistics) in a particular way:

We shall assume that the best description is not necessarily the simplest; and that different descriptions will be appropriate for different purposes.

We shall deliberately seek mutually contradictory descriptions, and attempt to reconcile the contradictions dialectically.

Applying the above two principles more concretely:

When we analyse clauses (stratum: lexicogrammar; rank: clause; axis: syntagmatic) we shall use both function labels (such as ‘Subject’) and class labels (such as ‘nominal group’), even though minimalists would say this is redundant.

We shall not confine ourselves to function labels such as ‘Subject’ (metafunction: interpersonal), but will simultaneously use other function labels such as ‘Theme’ (metafunction: textual) and ‘Actor’ (metafunction: experiential). This will mean analysing clauses three times over, instead of just once. We shall try to keep the ‘Theme’, ‘Subject’ and ‘Actor’ kinds of analyses as separate as possible, so as to increase the tension between them and the benefits of allowing them to interact; keeping them separate will mean abandoning the term ‘Object’ — a term which mixes two meanings: ‘not responsible for the success of the exchange’ (interpersonal) and ‘the sufferer of the action represented by the verb’ (experiential).

## 1.4 Possible sources of difficulty

As ‘object languages’ (languages we are investigating), German and English are reasonably similar to each other. But as ‘metalanguages’ (languages [whose cultures are] providing technical terms to help us investigate languages with), English and German often diverge. The most significant example is the use of the term ‘Ebene’ in German linguistics; from a systemic functional point of view, this term blurs the distinction between ‘stratum’ and ‘rank’. Textebene (stratum: semantics; rank: text) — Satzebene (stratum: lexicogrammar; rank: clause) — Satzgliedebene (stratum: lexicogrammar; rank: group/phrase) — Wortebene (stratum: lexicogrammar; rank: word). In systemic functional linguistics, a text ‘is realized by’ a sequence of clauses or clause complexes; a clause ‘is composed of’ a sequence



of groups or phrases, which in turn ‘are composed of’ sequences of words; finally, these words ‘are realized by’ sequences of phonemes (manifestation: sound; stratum: phonology; rank: phoneme) or graphemes (manifestation: writing; stratum: orthography; rank: grapheme).

One specific but difficult point:

When talking informally about grammar, German-speakers often use terms like *Fragesatz*. Does this refer to the form (stratum: lexicogrammar) or to the function (stratum: semantics) of the sentence concerned? While it would be perfectly possible to construct a scientific terminology in which there was a strict distinction between ‘Frage’ (semantics) and ‘Fragesatz’ (grammar), modern grammarians of German have a preference for Latin-sounding terms — possibly in order to distance themselves from the ‘volksnahe’ grammar of the Third Reich.

In English, this fear of the vernacular is not present, so we will be able to wildly mix Anglo-Saxon, French, Latin, and Greek designations whenever and wherever we need to.

One general and difficult point:

The systemic functional approach to language is ‘culturally foreign’ from a central European point of view.

One desperate, probably hopeless point:

I shall try to use the term ‘sentence’ to refer solely to the orthographic unit whose boundaries are signalled by an initial capital letter and a final full stop (manifestation: writing; stratum: orthography; rank: sentence). The corresponding lexicogrammatical unit will be referred to as either a ‘clause’ or a ‘clause complex’, depending on whether it is simple or complex. The problem with this use of ‘clause’ will be that there is no good German equivalent for it: if a clause is a ‘Teilsatz’, then a clause complex would be a ‘Teilsatzkomplex’, which sounds unnecessarily complicated.

## 1.5 Further reading

The central reference work is M. A. K. Halliday, **An Introduction to Functional Grammar**, London: Arnold. The editions I use are the second (1994), the third (2004; revised by Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen), and the fourth (**Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar**; Routledge, 2014).

If you are interested in German approaches to grammar, I would recommend anything by Hans Glinz (because I agree with him) and anything by Ulrich Engel (because I don’t). There is an excellent German grammar for foreign learners by Helbig und Buscha (*Deutsche Grammatik – Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht*. Langenscheidt: 2008).

## 1.6 Worksheet

Read the following texts several times and make sure you understand the meaning of all the words and grammatical structures they contain. We will be using these texts for a number of exercises later on in the course:

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, “and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice “without pictures or conversations?”

So she was considering, in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, “Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!” (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and, burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down a very deep well.

Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her, and to wonder what was going to happen next.

(...)

— extract taken from: Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll

(...)

Lastly, tea—unless one is drinking it in the Russian style—should be drunk *without sugar*. I know very well that I am in a minority here. But still, how can you call yourself a true tea-lover if you destroy the flavour of your tea by putting sugar in it? It would be equally reasonable to put in pepper or salt. Tea is meant to be bitter, just as beer is meant to be bitter. If you sweeten it, you are no longer tasting the tea, you are merely tasting the sugar; you could make a very similar drink by dissolving sugar in plain hot water.

Some people would answer that they don't like tea in itself, that they only drink it in order to be warmed and stimulated, and they need sugar to take the taste away. To those misguided people I would say: Try drinking tea without sugar for, say, a fortnight and it is very unlikely that you will ever want to ruin your tea by sweetening it again.

(...)

—extract taken from George Orwell, 'A Nice Cup of Tea' (1946).