

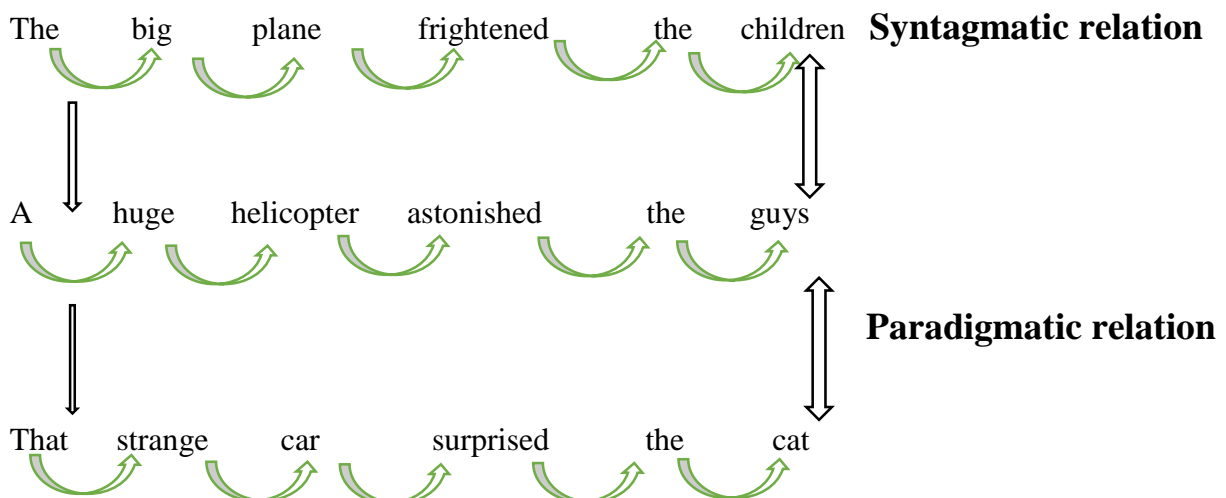
Introduction to Functionalism

De Saussures' structuralism inspired other linguists. A similar theory was that of

C.Sanders Pierce who assumed that the best way to study a system of communication would be « semiotics ».

Semiotics also called semiotic studies or (in the Saussurean tradition) semiology, is the study of signs and sign processes (semiosis), indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. Semiotics is closely related to the field of linguistics, which, for its part, studies the structure and meaning of language more specifically. Semiotics is often divided into three branches:

- **Syntactics:** Relations among signs in formal structures.

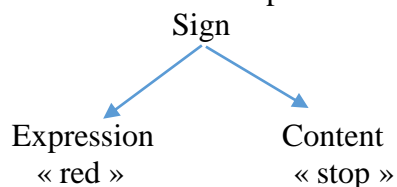


- **Semantics:** It means determining existing relation between signs and the things to which they refer; their denotata, or meaning. To explain this, we can exemplify with traffic lights :

The sign « red » denotes (means) « stop », the sign « green »denotes « go on ».

- **Pragmatics:** Relation between signs and the effects they have on the people who use them. For instance, the sign red in traffic lights implies « stop » and peoples 'act of stopping is « the paradigmatic act »(in semantics you understand and in pragmatics you act).

Another linguist is L. Hjelmsleo (Russian linguist) who defined language as an abstract system and to describe it we need to define the internal relationships of its items or signs. He used two words : Content and Expression



The best example to take would be « traffic lights », the red means an expression whose content is « stop »,The relationship between red and stop is commutative or implicative. I.A. Richards and C.K Ogden (1923) : have simply repeated the idea of de Saussure' signifier-signified and the linguistic sign differently. They said that whenever we say a

word we have a « symbol » a « referent » and a «reference » , and there is a permanent association of the referent and the reference stored in our brain.

De Saussure's theories had been largely developed by his followers from Geneva School like F.Frey.. , Copenhagen School...ect but the immediate historically most important effect of de Saussure's structural theory of language was Prague School. Functional linguistics sees language as a part of social semiotics (social semiotics is any system that uses words, signs, or symbols to communicate meaning). Structuralism and functionalism are closely linked as when we use different linguistic elements to execute different social functions, we are giving meaning and importance to these elements.

Functionalism

Functionalism (Also called *functional linguistics*, contrast with **Chomskyan linguistics**). emerged in the early 20th century as a reaction against the more formalist approaches to linguistics that were dominant at the time. Its origins can be traced to the work of linguists such as Edward Sapir and Bronislaw Malinowski, who emphasized the importance of studying language in its cultural context.

The establishment of functional linguistics follows from a shift from **structural** to **functional** explanation in 1920s sociology. **Prague**, at the crossroads of western European structuralism and Russian formalism, became an important centre for functional linguistics.

Functionalism in linguistics can be defined as the approach which study the purpose of language and its relation to context in which a language transpires. The starting point for **functionalists** is the view that language is first and foremost an instrument for communication between human beings

Linguistic functionalism thus, is a theoretical approach to the study of language that emphasizes the **communicative function** of language and its role in human interaction. This approach views language as a tool for communication and sees the function of language as being shaped by its use in social contexts.

Functionalists believe that language use is motivated by communicative needs and that the structure of language reflects these needs. They are interested in how language is used to convey meaning and how it is adapted to different communicative situations. Rather than focusing on abstract grammatical rules or mental representations of language, functionalists prioritize the analysis of language in use and its social and cultural context.

Functional Linguists have four claims:

- 1. Use of language is functional.*
- 2. Making meaning is the major function of language.*
- 3. The social and cultural context has great influence over meanings of language.*
- 4. The process of making meaning in a language is by choice.*

Context and Language use

Context has an impact on language use.

Which aspects of language use appear to be effected by particular dimensions of the context. *For example*, if we contrast texts in which the interactants are friends with texts where the interactants are strangers, we specify where in the language they use this contextual difference will be expressed.

Functions of Language :

Language can have a wide range of functions. If you think about all the different kinds of social interactions you have on a day-to-day basis, you'll probably be able to pick out a few of these different functions. Some examples include:

- using language to organise events, people, or activities.
- using language to get people to do things for us or to ask for favours.
- using language to express our needs and ensure they're met.
- using language to build and strengthen social relationships.
- using language to find out new information and ask questions.

In the functionalist approach to language, there are a few specific functions that language can be used to carry out, the three main ones are :

The three basic functions of language :

Informative also referred to as cognition which means relating information: The informative language function refers to the **communication of information**. In other words, the goal of informative language is to inform. (

Informative language is used to give more **details** about events or facts, or to **share information** with others. For example, informative language is used by teachers in schools to **educate** students, and by reporters and newscasters on tv to **share the news** with an audience. We can also use the informative language function on a daily basis to tell people where we're going, what we're doing, or about things going on in our lives.

Expressive : (indicating mood)The expressive language function is based on the **emotions, feelings, attitudes, ideas, and opinions** of the writer or speaker. In other words, expressive language is used to express oneself.),

Expressive language can be positive (such as expressing happiness or excitement) or negative (such as expressing sadness or anger), and can be used to **create deeper connections** with other people in social situations (sharing your beliefs and opinions is a good way to let people know more about you and therefore become closer to you).

Directive or conation (exerting influence): The directive language function refers to the use of language for **giving orders or making requests**. In other words, directive language is used to direct others.

Directive language can be used to **give commands** (e.g. "*Pick up that piece of litter.*"), to **instruct** someone to do something (e.g. "*Place your left foot on the clutch and push it all the way in when you want to change gears.*"), or to **make a request** (e.g. "*Please wash your dishes before you go to bed.*"). The directive language function is essentially based on **getting things done**.

There are two schools of thought:

1. Prague School of thought (Jacobson)

2. Copenhagen School of thought (Halliday)

Prague school (school of linguistic thought and analysis): What is now generally referred to as the Prague school comprised a fairly large group of scholars, mainly European, who, though they may not themselves have been members of the Linguistic Circle of Prague, derived their inspiration from the work of Vilém Mathesius, Nikolay Trubetskoy, Roman Jakobson and other scholars based in Prague in the decade preceding World War II.

-Established in Prague in the 1920s by Vilém Mathesius. The school was most active during the 1920s and '30s.

- The most characteristic feature of the Prague school approach is its combination of structuralism with functionalism. The latter term (like “structuralism”) has been used in a variety of senses in linguistics. Here it is to be understood as implying an appreciation of the diversity of functions fulfilled by language and a theoretical recognition that the structure of languages is in large part determined by their characteristic functions. Functionalism, taken in this sense, manifests itself in many of the more particular tenets of Prague school doctrine

-Linguists of the Prague school stress the function of elements within language, the contrast of language elements to one another, and the total pattern or system formed by these contrasts, and they have distinguished themselves in the study of sound systems.

- The Prague school was best known for its work on phonology. They developed distinctive-feature analysis of sounds .



Jakobson announced his hypothesis that phonemes, the smallest units of speech sounds that distinguish one word from another, are complexes of binary features(+/-), such as voiced/unvoiced and aspirated/unaspirate

So phonemes are defined as sets of distinctive features ; by this analysis, each distinctive sound in a language is seen as composed of a number of contrasting articulatory and acoustic features, and any two sounds of a language that are perceived as being distinct will have **at least** one feature contrast in their compositions.

For example, in **English**, /b/ differs from /p/ in the same way that /d/ differs from /t/ and /g/ from /k/. Just how they differ in terms of their articulation is a complex question. For simplicity, it may be said that there is just one feature, the presence of which distinguishes /b/, /d/, and /g/ from /p/, /t/, and /k/, and that this feature is **voicing** (vibration of the vocal cords). Similarly, the feature of **labiality** can be extracted from /p/ and /b/ by comparing them with /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/; the feature **of nasality** from /n/ and /m/ by comparing them with /t/ and /d/, on the one hand, and with /p/ and /b/, on the other.

Each phoneme, then, is composed of a number of articulatory features and is distinguished by the presence or absence of at least one feature from every other phoneme in the language. The distinctive function of phonemes, which depends upon and supports the principle of the duality of structure, can be related to the cognitive function of language. This distinctive feature analysis of Prague school phonology as developed by Jakobson became part of the generally accepted framework for generative phonology

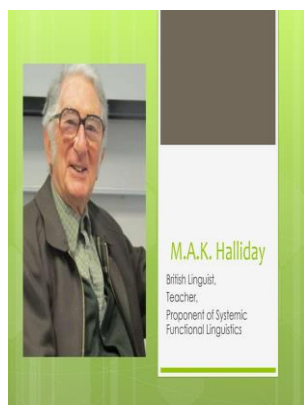
Two other kinds of phonologically relevant function were also recognized by linguists of the Prague school: **expressive and demarcative**. The former term is employed here in the sense in which it was employed above (i.e., in opposition to “cognitive”); it is characteristic of stress, intonation, and other suprasegmental aspects of language that they are frequently expressive of the mood and attitude of the speaker in this sense.

The term demarcative is applied to those elements or features that in particular languages serve to indicate the occurrence of the boundaries of words and phrases and, presumably, make it easier to identify such grammatical units in the stream of speech. There are, for example, many languages in which the set of phonemes that can occur at the beginning of a word differs from the set of phonemes that can occur at the end of a word. These and other devices were described by the Prague school phonologists as having demarcative function: they are boundary signals that reinforce the identity and syntagmatic unity of words and phrases.

The notion of markedness was first developed in Prague school phonology but was subsequently extended to morphology and syntax. When two phonemes are distinguished by the presence or absence of a single distinctive feature, one of them is said to be marked and the other unmarked for the feature in question. For example, /b/ is marked and /p/ unmarked with respect to voicing. Similarly, in morphology, the regular English verb can be said to be **marked** for past tense (by the suffixation of *-ed*) but to be **unmarked** in the present (*compare* “jumped” versus “jump”).

Roman Jakobson: Jakobson distinguishes six communication functions, each associated with a dimension of the communication process.

1. **Referential** (= contextual information-to be operative message requires a context)
2. **Aesthetic/poetic** (= primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication)
3. **Emotive /expressive** (= self-expression)
4. **Conative** (= engages the Addressee (receiver) directly e.g. Tom! Come inside the house)
5. **Phatic** (=physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee-enter or stay in conversation e.g. hello, ok?, Hmmm)
6. **Metalingual** (= checking code working- language common to the addresser and the addressee)



Copenhagen School of thought lead by Michael Halliday:

The most prominent linguist associated with the functional theory of the English language is **Michael Halliday**, a British linguist who pioneered the **systemic functional linguistics** model of language.

Halliday (1975), like Saussure, sees language as a social and cultural phenomenon as opposed to a biological one, like Chomsky.

- Some of Halliday's early work involved the study of his son's (Nigel) developing language abilities and how he learned to communicate.
- Halliday identifies seven functions that language has for children in their early years.
- Children are motivated to acquire language because it serves certain purposes for them.
- The first four functions help the child to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs.

A central notion of SFL is stratification: language is analysed in terms of four strata:

1. Context,
2. Semantics,
3. Lexico-Grammar and
4. Phonology-Graphology.

His functional theory was based on studies he conducted on the language of his infant son. According to Halliday, children grow a “meaning potential” that helps them to learn a new language and its grammar. **When you learn a language, you learn how to mean it.**

Halliday expanded upon the three basic functions of language we looked at earlier (informative, expressive, directive) and came up with a total of seven, commonly referred to as **Halliday's functions of language**.

The 7 functions of language with examples are:

- **Instrumental** - used to express the needs of the speaker. For example, “I'm getting hungry”.
- **Regulatory** - used to tell other people what to do. For example, "Take the dog for a walk".
- **Interactional** - used to form social relationships. For example, "Thank you for helping me with my homework".
- **Personal** - used to express opinions and feelings. For example, "I can't stand country music."
- **Heuristic** - used to ask questions. For example, "Why is the sky blue?"
- **Imaginative** - used to express creative language. For example, stories and jokes, "Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side."
- **Representational** - used to communicate information. For example, "I ate the food in the fridge".

To conclude, today, linguistic functionalism is a broad and diverse field that includes a range of approaches and methods. It is influential in many areas of linguistics, including pragmatics, discourse analysis, and language acquisition, and has been applied to the study of many different languages and language families.