

Exploring the influence of medium and culture on language use in an online support group

Daniel McDonald

IDL, 20/3/2015

- Show you all what my PhD research is about
- Introduce *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (SFL)
- Discuss some of the problems *SFL* might help *us* solve
- Discuss some of the problems *you* might help *me* solve

- I'm researching longitudinal linguistic change in a 12 year old bipolar disorder forum
- 60,000 posts
- 5821 unique usernames
- A few veterans with over 1000 posts, most users have 1–5
- Rules: no asking for diagnosis, stay 'anonymous'
- Normative biomedical ideology (c.f. Vayreda & Antaki, 2009)
- People come for information and/or social support
- Veterans answer questions, welcome new members, speak as 'we'

Bipolar Disorder Message Board

[HealthBoards](#) > [Mental Health Board](#) > [Bipolar Disorder](#)

New Thread

← Click here to post a new message



















Page 1 of 450

1
2
3
11
51
101
>
Last
»

Threads in Board : Bipolar Disorder

Board Tools ▼





Search this Board ▼

	Thread / Thread Starter	Rating	Last Post ▼	Replies	Views
	Sticky: For Those Recently Diagnosed amybp		08-30-2013 04:50 AM by amybp ▾	0	152
 	Sticky: NEW BOARD: Family & Friends of Mentally Ill III Administrator		07-12-2010 10:18 PM by Administrator ▾	1	17,243
	Sticky: Help with Medication or Medical Costs Administrator		07-08-2009 08:26 PM by Administrator ▾	0	9,666
 	Sticky: On this board, negative discussion of bipolar people is inappropriate. Administrator		10-26-2007 03:20 PM by Administrator ▾	0	15,288
 	Sticky: Attention Newbies! Please Read: Bipolar Disorder Symptom Primer reesie	 ★★★★★	06-06-2005 08:51 AM by reesie ▾	0	37,272
	Lithium issues? Fringephotos		10-19-2013 07:57 PM by Fringephotos ▾	0	35
	Geodon withdrawals gardeningfool		10-18-2013 02:56 PM by gardeningfool ▾	0	47
 	meds Strawberry.hill		10-14-2013 10:26 PM by Strawberry.hill ▾	0	46

- *Wget* to spider the forum
- Extract text from HTML with *Beautiful Soup*
- Spelling normalisation via *PyEnchant*
- Parse posts for constituency and dependency grammar with *Stanford CoreNLP*
- Create subcorpora based on post count
- Build `corpkit`, some tools for searching parse trees, manipulating and plotting results: `pip install corpkit` (Alpha!)
- Develop an *IPython Notebook* interface for working with the corpus/toolkit
- <https://github.com/interrogator/corpkit>,
https://github.com/interrogator/sfl_corpling

How do we actually make sense of this huge collection of data?


Katlin09's early posts look like this:

Subscribe To Bipolar Disorder		LinkBack
03-20-2008, 02:26 PM		
<p>katlin09 </p> <p>Inactive (female)</p> <p>Join Date: Mar 2008 Posts: 5,070</p> <p></p>	<p>Help with the lingo</p> <p>Can someone help me with the lingo y'all use?</p> <p>Pdoc...does this mean Psychiatrist or primary doc?</p>	
03-20-2008, 10:00 PM		
<p>Llama </p> <p>Senior Veteran (female)</p> <p>Join Date: Dec 2004 Posts: 1,232</p> <p></p>	<p>Re: Help with the lingo</p> <p>Pdoc means psychiatrist. 😊</p>	


... and here's one of her later posts...

06-17-2012, 02:15 AM

#3

katlin09 

Inactive
(female)

Join Date: Mar 2008
Posts: 5,070


Re: Psychiatrist vs DR. Psychologist regarding BP Diagnosis

HI. Sorry you're having such a tough time.

It's not completely unheard of for Pdocs (psychiatrists) to come up with different DX's for the same patient. When you start looking at the DX's you notice they're not all that different.

Your Pdoc DX'd you Bipolar Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder

BiPolar Disorder and Major Depressive Disorder are the same thing. MDD is the Unipolar Depression if your took the Mania away from BiPolar Disorder. When you have Mania and Depression you get BiPolar Disorder. Nowadays this is treated with all types of meds antidepressants, ant-seizure meds, anti-anxiety meds, mood disorder meds, anti-psychotics. The type of med used to treat BiPolar Disorder is not as important as the Cocktail of different meds and what works.

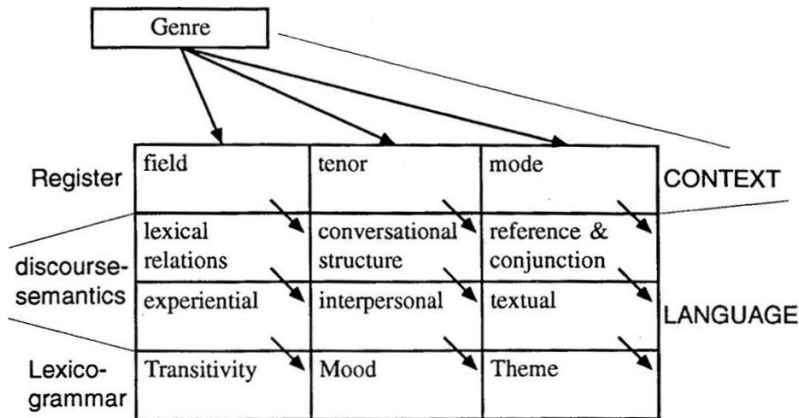
What's happening with her language use?

- Has her language use changed over time?
- Does this same change happen to other members?
- What *causes* the change?
- If many things cause the change, how can we distinguish what forces are acting and when?

To answer these kinds of questions, we need a *theory of language*

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) conceptualise language as:

- ① Systemic: a sign-*system*, from which users select realisations
- ② Functional: structured to achieve meaningful social goals
- ③ Constitutive of context: context is mapped onto abstractions of grammatical systems (mood, transitivity and theme)
 - ▶ **Context is in text.**

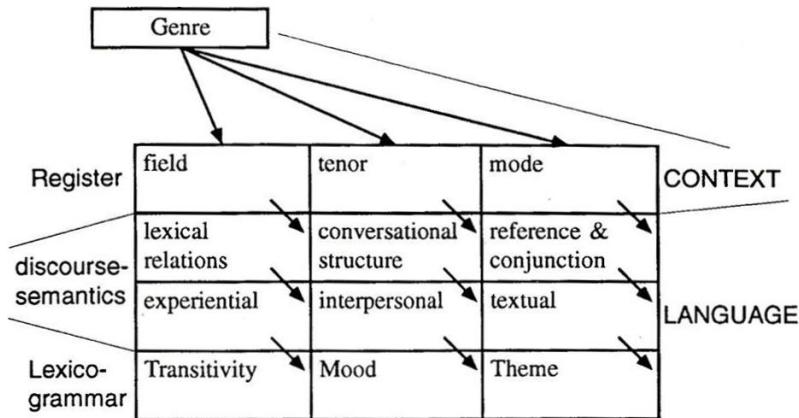


SFL argues that we can break communication into *strata*

- Context:
 - ▶ Genre
 - ▶ Register
- Language:
 - ▶ Discourse-semantic
 - ▶ Lexicogrammatical
 - ▶ Phonological/typographical

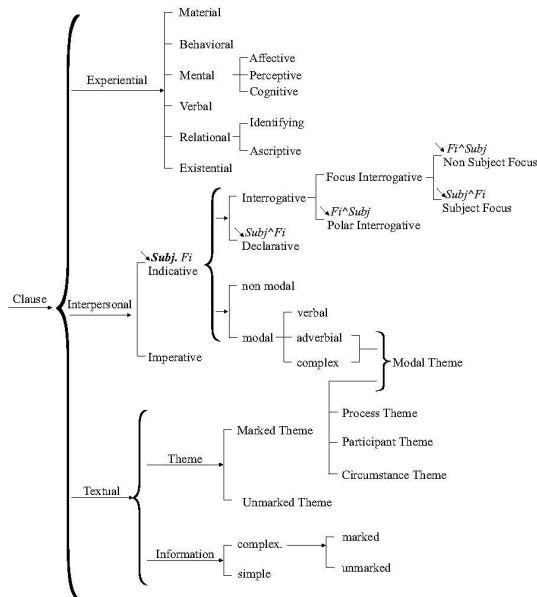
In SFL, language/images are communicating *up to* three different *kinds* of meaning simultaneously:

- Interpersonal meaning: roles and relationships between people
- Ideational meaning: what happens to whom, under what circumstances?
- Textual meaning: the role that language is playing in the interaction



Each function is accomplished through different linguistic subsystems at the level of lexicogrammar.

- **Interpersonal meanings** are made by the **mood system**:
imperative, interrogative, declarative, modality
- **Ideational meanings** are made by the **transitivity system**:
predicates and their arguments
- **Textual meanings** are made by the **thematic system**: *linking texts together with and, but, so ...*



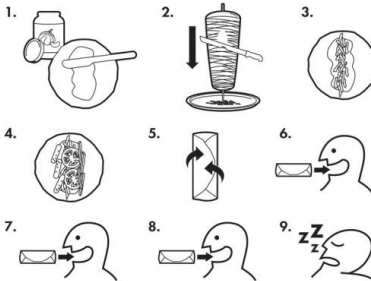
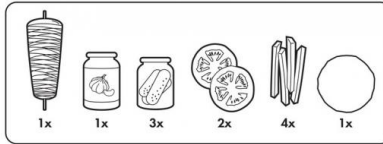
Fi=Finite.
Subj=Subject.

Fig. 1. — Sample system for the English clause

- When there's a power disparity, some interpersonal meanings are less available to the one with less power.
- A good example is the mood system (Questions, statements, commands):
 - ▶ Me: Would you tell me the answer? / I think you should tell me the answer. / Tell me the readings!
 - ▶ You: Can you speak slower? / We're having trouble understanding you / _____ ?

- Multimodality: the (simultaneous) use of different channels/modes to communicate
- Inherent to online communication (page layout, at the very least)
- We can look at images as also accomplishing the three metafunctions...

SHAWARMA



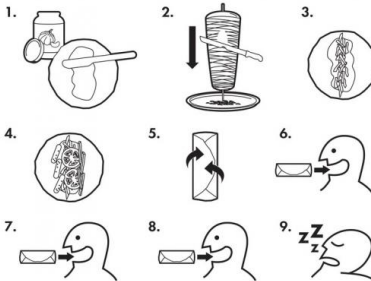
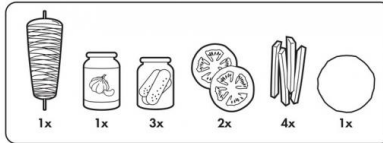
IKEA Restaurant & Bistro



- In SFL, a genre is a staged, goal-oriented social process
- Culturally recognised sets of role relationships, things being spoken about, and modes of communication
- We can actually figure this stuff out from looking at the lexicogrammar
- Example:

Submissions must contain 8–10 references.

SHAWARMA



IKEA Restaurant & Bistro



- More imperatives
- More *I would*
- More jargon
- More ‘metadiscourse’
- etc.

What's causing the change?

Two contradictory hypotheses:

- ① **Socialisation:** new members learn from veterans and implement the linguistic repertoire they've learned
- ② **Genre awareness:** new members know they are newcomers, and act like it

... and what role does the technology itself play?

We can use SFL's idea of metafunctions as an explanation for why a certain kind of language change occurs.

- **Interpersonal change:** jargon demonstrates expertise, belonging
- **Experiential change:** jargon distinguishes between hypertechnical things
- **Textual change:** shorter words are easier to type

The important thing to remember is that different kinds of meaning are made *simultaneously*.

What *interpersonal*, *experiential* and *textual* meanings can we make by:

- Using imperatives: *do this, go there*
- Vague language: *things will get better, things are alright*

- More awareness of multimodality, hardware influence, site architecture
- Can we predict the influence of the three metafunctions?
- Can we *measure* the influence?
- How does it play out in new technology? *Reddit? iPhones?*
- A framework for doing SFL with mediated communication?

Help!

Thoughts?

- Halliday, M., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Routledge.
- Vayreda, A., & Antaki, C. (2009). Social support and unsolicited advice in a bipolar disorder online forum. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(7), 931–942.