

# 1 Introduction

This thesis is about language and the social order. It adopts a Hallidayan perspective of language, viewing it as a social semiotic meaning making system. It utilises the tools of systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) to analyse grammatical and semantic options made by speakers and to put on display the language-context relationship. The language examined is that of a group of women who live in a small Australian island community and whose relational ties constitute a closely-knit social network. When described in systemic terms, this social network can be seen as the social system, or culture, of the group. The integration of SFL with a social network perspective thus allows for a way to model our relational universe and to start to make grounded statements about the reciprocal nature of language and the social order.

The overriding aims of this research can be seen as twofold. In its narrower aspect, this thesis is about the language and social relationships of a particular social network. In its broader perspective it is about the relationship of language and the social order. In the former sense, this thesis examines the interplay of the different linguistic options that four women employ as they interact with each other. Negotiation and re-negotiation of role relations occur when we interact with our fellow beings and it is through such interaction that we construct reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Social beings speak to each other, they engage with each other through language and this reciprocal action is what goes a long way to establishing our social order. At the same time, our personal relations, our friends and associates who we come into contact with, play a large part in creating the sorts of language options that are available to us as individual speakers. Language is not just about achieving goals, it is a meaning making device utilised by speakers to construe relationships of power and solidarity, indeed to construct social

reality. A concern of this research is to put this reality construction on display.

The site of the investigation is the social network of a small group of four female participants on Pagewood Island, an island situated on the outskirts of one of Australia's major cities. It is a small island community that displays many characteristics of a closely-knit social network. The study examines the social network and linguistic traits of the four women all of whom have young children and who frequently meet together to socialise, to offer support and friendship to one another. As outlined in detail below, a goal of this study is to examine how changed social network conditions may exert influence over individual linguistic behaviour. For this reason two exchanges were recorded. Phase 1 was an exchange that took place between four women at the island playgroup and phase 2 was an exchange that took place between the same four women in the adjoining park fifteen months later. Taped excerpts from both exchanges were transcribed and analysed with the help of the tools of SFL.

At the same time as the data was collected and analysed, a social network analysis was carried out and the participant's network ties measured. That is to say that each individual's degree of integration into the group was measured with the help of a Solidarity Index. This index was devised to enable each participant to receive a Network Strength Score, an analytical tool that allows meaningful statements to be made about network positioning. The Network Strength Score allows individual members of a given social network to be discussed in terms of central and more marginalized membership, or more precisely, to talk in terms of core, secondary and peripheral membership. In the present study such network positioning of the participants was then related to the linguistic traits of the network members in order to allow for an examination of the

extent to which network positioning might influence the linguistic options. A further part of the study is a look at the extent to which the linguistic options themselves influence the positionings within the social network. Adopting SFL as an analytical tool to relate positions within the social network to linguistic choices made offers the theoretical viewpoint of language and the social network being seen as two sides of the same coin. That is to say, not only do social positionings shape linguistic choices made by participants, but that these linguistic choices shape positionings within the social network. This is an integral point of the present study and is taken up in the broader perspective outlined below.

A major concern of this thesis is the highlighting of the reciprocal nature of the language–context relationship, and this can in a sense be seen as the broader perspective of the study. The narrower perspective outlined above takes us into the linguistic and social analysis of two events, two instances of the social network culture. These are employed as examples for illustrating how the systemic model of language can display the language–context relationship. They are taken as a means of portraying the bigger picture, of putting on display the workings of the SFL model to highlight the mutually reciprocal relationship of language and the social order.

Anticipating somewhat the discussion below, the social network may be seen to constitute the culture of the group, meaning that the network represents the relevant meaning potential of the group. From this viewpoint the social network constitutes the behavioural options available to its members. The grammatical and semantic selections of the network members are both shaped and constrained by the network and the relationships of the members are at the same time influenced by these linguistic options.

That is to say that the network is also shaped and constrained by its members.

Thus, not only does this thesis offer a detailed analysis of the linguistic output of the participants and relate this to their social positioning within the network, but this exploration also hopes to provide evidence of the working of the Hallidayan systemic functional model of language in its attempt to exemplify the relationship between language and its context.

This introduction hopes to offer a clear and concise picture of the research project undertaken and act as a guide to the thesis. At the same time it offers definitions of some of the fundamental principles with which this research is concerned. Each section deals with a particular aim of the thesis.

Section one begins with a look at the site of investigation, namely casual conversation, outlining why such a type of interaction is an ideal site for speakers to jointly construe their social reality. Section two then turns to the linguistic framework adopted in the present study with the aim of briefly outlining why systemic functional grammar is the chosen framework. The tools of SFL are employed to analyse the linguistic output of the group, but the relationships are analysed using the analytical tools offered by the social network concept. It is the notion of social networks and their relevance to the present research that is the topic of section three. Section four addresses the issue of combining the two analytical concepts of social network and SFL. It highlights an overall aim of this thesis, namely how the bringing together these two sets of tools can allow for a richer description of both language and the social, an interpretation that gives valuable evidence to both the linguistic behaviour and the social relations. This section also

includes a brief discussion of how Hallidayan linguistics can put on display the mutually reciprocal relationship of language and the social order. Finally this introductory chapter turns to focus on change. The notion of change in relationships and change in language use is mapped over a period of 15 months. Section five details how this thesis attempts to incorporate change into the Pagewood Island study and how useful the social network/ systemic functional perspective can be in such an examination.

## **1.1 Casual conversation as a site for construing our social universe**

Speaking is an interactive event through which we negotiate meanings and build up a picture of our lives as social beings. This reality world construction takes place in different types of interaction. This thesis is concerned with just one type of interaction, namely casual conversation.

Defining such casual interaction is extremely difficult. A useful point of departure to find a working definition of casual conversation is offered by Eggins and Slade who refer to casual conversation in terms of what it could be but is not. For them casual conversation is conversation that 'is not motivated by any clear pragmatic purpose' (Eggins and Slade, 1997:19). This is useful as it allows us to compare other types of interaction where speakers are looking to achieve a pragmatic goal. For example, pragmatically oriented conversation could include buying and selling, request for information or accomplishing some specific task. Eggins (2000) adds that casual conversations can be further distinguished by the display of certain characteristics which can be summarized as:

- colloquial language
- often multilogue where pressure to get a turn becomes apparent
- high frequency of contact
- high affective involvement (i.e. interactants matter to each other interpersonally)
- expressions of involvement (e.g. swearing, slang etc.)
- humour
- often lengthy exchanges
- ranging topic choice

Whilst these added characteristics of what constitutes casual conversation are more helpful in addressing the challenge of finding a suitable working definition, the situation remains somewhat problematic in that it fails to remind us that *all* interaction is functionally motivated. In a casual context this motivation may be less obvious. We may, in a casual environment, be less conscious of the specific incentives driving us to make certain linguistic choices, but all grammatical and semantic organizations are functionally motivated. In every exchange roles and relationships are negotiated by the interactants. Eggins and Slade themselves convincingly point this out in their analysis of casual conversation, which they see as a ‘highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity’ (Eggins and Slade, 1997:6). This present study then sees casual conversation as a functionally motivated meaning making activity in which the goals are frequently masked by the seemingly unconscious nature of the interaction.

No speech then is free of functional motivation. It is patterned and these patterns are meaningful and reveal the way in which language encodes social relations.

Conversation, while seemingly trivial is in fact, like all communication, to be seen as a device through which parties to interaction can jointly build their social reality. When speakers come together to chat they are both enacting their social realities and, at the same time, construing social roles, relationships and identities within their social universe. This leads us to Eggins and Slade’s ‘paradox of casual conversation’ (1997:16). It is these everyday interactions, the ‘very encounters we think of as the most

trivial and unimportant turn out to be instrumental in constructing and maintaining the social identities and interpersonal relations that define our social lives' (Eggins, 2000:130).

Whorf talks of how 'we hold an illusion about talking, an illusion that talking is quite untrammelled and spontaneous and merely "expresses" whatever we wish to have it express' (1956:221). This illusion is what makes the paradoxical nature of casual conversation invisible to speakers. Indeed, in the present study, speakers often found it difficult to recall what they were talking about after the recording sessions and could not reconstruct what they had said. When asked about topic, participants typically commented that they were talking about 'nothing much' or comments such as 'nothing, I can't remember' were made. As Eggins and Slade (1997) point out this trivial nature then masks the social work that goes on in our everyday interactions.

An initial claim of this research then is that conversation is an ideal site to display language as a resource for the construction of meaning and reality. That when we enter into casual exchanges we are employing 'language as a resource for doing social life' (Eggins, 2000:130). Furthermore, rather than casual conversation being the 'genre ... which is formally least about power' (Kress, 1985:26), casual conversation, like all modes of communication, is essentially about negotiating power and solidarity, about defining our social roles.

In a theory such as SFL that treats language as a social semiotic the relationships between the participants then is crucial. And it is how these relationships are negotiated that plays an important part in how the interactants position themselves and are

positioned by those with whom they interact. In contradiction to earlier comments, Hodge and Kress confirm that power and solidarity are crucial to the negotiation of these relationships:

What is at issue in social processes is the definition of social participants, relations, structures, processes, in terms of solidarity or in terms of power. Semiotic processes are means whereby these can be tested, reaffirmed, altered. Hence questions of power are always at issue, whether in the affirmation of solidarity or in the assertion of power; whether in the reproduction of a semiotic system or in a challenge to that system. (Hodge and Kress, 1989:122)

Thus casual conversation is, like all forms of interaction, about power. It is an ideal site for the interpersonal enactment of power. It is through the positioning of speakers and listeners in the interpersonal meanings that power is enacted.

A further claim of this study is that an individual's network of friends, family and workmates, indeed all the people with whom he or she contracts social ties are crucial in defining social roles. That through their casual encounters speakers are influenced by and in turn can influence members of their networks with whom they have close social ties. The hypothesis posited about network and language usage on Pagewood Island is that the social networks that speakers form influence their linguistic choices.

Simultaneously, the linguistic selections that the network members make crucially shape an individual's positioning within the network. That is to say that differences in the degree of network integration are related to differences in the linguistic choices of the individuals. The question that needs to be asked then is to what extent can the linguistic traits, the linguistic choices made by the four speakers from the Pagewood Island social network, be mapped against their social relations?

Two sets of tools have been employed in the present study to help answer this question. Firstly, Halliday's SFL offers tools to allow for a systematic analysis of specific features



of speech and to examine the relation between linguistic choices and the social order. Secondly, a detailed analysis of relationships between social entities is obtained via the adoption of the social network concept. The following section takes a look at the systemic functional perspective adopted in this study. This is followed by an introduction to social networks as an analytical and descriptive tool to model social ties.

## **1.2 Interpreting language from a systemic functional perspective**

The interpretation of language offered in this present study sets out in agreement with Halliday's argument that a linguistic analysis that 'is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all' (1994: xvi). This thesis adopts the tools of functional grammar taken from Halliday's systemic functional theory of language. SFL allows for a very rich and complex view of language as a social semiotic, a meaning making behaviour in which language is viewed as a 'shared potential' (Halliday, 1984:6) that constructs our social universe. Each exchange is organized as an interactional event where the speaker is an 'intruder in reality' (Halliday, 1979:60). As Halliday further points out:

The principle characteristic of language is that it is a system of meaning, that is a semiotic system. It is the only semiotic system that embodies all human experience and all human relationships. Language is not only semiotic it is semogenic and that means meaning creating. We're saying that language is not a code – a code is something that takes pre-existing meanings and dresses them up in some form or other for transmission. Language creates meaning. (1998: 12)

In this section I wish to give a general introduction to SFL with the aim of outlining the value of Hallidayan theory to the present study. For a detailed overview of SFL theory and the tools that have been employed to put on display the linguistic traits of the Pagewood Island participants please see chapter two.

SFL sees language as a social semiotic, a system that is embedded in the social and cannot be divorced from it. This social semiotic perspective treats language as a system

that is essentially engaged in creating, shaping and maintaining social reality, a system that expresses the social system. The relation of language to the social system however is not seen as simply one of expression, 'but a more complex natural dialectic in which language actively symbolizes the social system, thus creating as well as being created by it' (Halliday, 1978:183). In systemic terms the 'linguistic structure is *the realization of* social structure, actively symbolizing it in a process of mutual creativity' (Halliday, 1978:186).

In a social semiotic perspective then the linguistic system is organized so as to allow interactants to build up a model of the exchange of meanings and construe their interpersonal relationships. An individual can then be seen to be 'actively shaped by the sum of his own interactions and hence by the nature of the semiotic codes prevalent in his community' (Hasan, 1996a:38). This perspective has been illuminating in terms of the present study with its central focus on a small group of women and the realization of their linguistic and social relations.

In SFL language is defined in terms of the stratum of context, semantics, grammar (or more accurately, lexicogrammar) and phonology. At the lexicogrammatical strata, SFL's semiotic theory distinguishes three metafunctions that are employed to allow interaction to be looked at in three ways. The analogy of a map is often used to highlight the workings of these metafunctions within systemic functional grammar. The grammar is like a map in that it can be used in different ways to look at grammatical reality. Firstly, the grammar functions to represent experience, which can be defined in terms of language as reflection (ideational function). Secondly, language can function as a unit of interaction (interpersonal function), and finally, as a message organized to signal what is

relevant and to create coherent discourse (textual function). These three components, the three metafunctions, are woven together in a clause and make up the internal organization of language. The Pagewood Island research is involved with speakers and their role relations, and is thus concerned primarily with the interpersonal as a tool to put on display 'language as action' (Halliday, 1979:60), to investigate the complex social relations of those who are taking part in the exchange.

The interpersonal, this language as action, is described in terms of mood, modality and Appraisal. This interpersonal metafunction constructs personal relations between the interactants. It also displays the degree of formality or informality between speakers and allows for opinions and evaluative expressions to be encoded. The grammatical resources that embody interpersonal meanings include the mood categories of declarative, imperative, interrogative etc. And an analysis of the different categories chosen allows us to differentiate how speakers function interpersonally, how different speakers negotiate roles of power and solidarity. A simplified example could be as follows. The choice of the imperative *give me the key* can be seen to position the speaker in a greater position of power than the interrogative *may I have the key?* Furthermore, the way in which statements or questions are responded to will have a bearing on how interactants are positioned. For example the response *here you are* can be seen to be suggestive of informality, solidarity and a relationship of equal status. If we compare a different response to a request for a key, say *yes sir*, this would typically suggest a definite hierarchical relationship between the speakers. Another relevant factor considered under the interpersonal metafunction is who gets to be nominated Subject of a clause. Other tools include terms of address and Appraisal.

The features of the grammatical category mood realize different speech functions at the semantic strata. The speech functions are semantic resources to distinguish between giving or demanding of either goods or services or information. The four most basic speech functions are offer, statement, command and question and together they tell us something about the contribution being made to the exchange. In terms of power and solidarity, a speaker who frequently positions him or herself (and equally important is allowed by others to be positioned) so as to be able to select a commanding option is likely to be seen as a powerful participant in an exchange, one who can put forward his or her own topics for negotiation and exert influence over the interaction. By contrast, a speaker who continually adopts a position of compliance in response to a demand for information may, for example, be seen as less powerful or motivated by a desire to gain solidarity with the demander. Other crucial factors here include who gets to initiate exchanges and the way interactants choose to align themselves with others by the types of responses they select.

An appealing aspect of systemic theory lies in its focus on the relationship between language and the social order. The interconnectedness of language and the social order is described via the theoretical link between language and context. That is to say that in the Hallidayan model of linguistics, language accounts are interconnected with the accounts of the context. SFL describes meaning making systems of language in use and these descriptions of linguistic output are reciprocally bound to descriptions of their social contexts in which they are embedded. The concepts of field, tenor and mode of discourse are employed to relate the semantic and grammatical categories, through a relationship of realization, to the context of situation. The situational variable field is

systematically related to the ideational, the tenor relates to the interpersonal metafunction and, finally, the mode of discourse corresponds to the textual metafunction. For the present study, with its interpersonal focal point, the most relevant contextual variable is that of tenor. Tenor is the motivating relevancy concerned with the participants to the interaction, their status and role relationships. Referring to the social roles played by interactants, it includes the level of formality and social distance created by linguistic options.

Fundamental to the SFL model is the relationship between different levels of meaning which are defined in terms of the levels above activating the levels below and the levels below construing the levels above. This relationship is dialectic. And it is this relationship that allows SFL analysts to describe the social since the social, via its modelling in terms of field, tenor and mode, is realized through language. That is to say that the linguistic analyses can be related to social analyses through the concept of realization. Speaking with reference to the concept of register, Martin states:

When we say that language realizes register...we mean that language construes, is construed by, and over time reconstrues the social. Power in other words is not a fixed variable; it shifts around as texts unfold..., as social subjects develop and as communities evolve. (2000a:279)

SFL continually stresses the crucial nature of language and its context. The context in which language is embedded, is divided into context of situation and context of culture. Context of culture is the context of the overall linguistic system, it is the total behaviour potential. Context of situation is the immediate context surrounding a text and is comprised of the three variables of field, tenor and mode. Intermediate between the two, between the context of situation and the context of culture, is the concept of register (see, for example, Matthiessen, 1993), the configurations of meaning that are typically exchanged under given conditions of use (Halliday, 1987).

The majority of studies that adopt a social network perspective for linguistic analysis have been concerned not with register but with regional variants (for example, Milroy, 1987; Gal, 1979; Russell, 1982; Lippi-Green, 1989 etc.). Registers can be distinguished from such regional dialects in that registers differ from each other semantically whereas dialects are simply different ways of saying the same thing. While regional dialects may differ only lexicographically and phonologically, a register is concerned with different ways of saying different thing. 'A register is "what you are speaking" (at a given time), determined by "what you are doing", the nature of the ongoing social activity' (Halliday, 1978:185). Register and, most importantly for casual conversation, the contextual category of tenor are crucial to the present study which shows how the registerial, or contextual, demands motivate interactants to select certain grammatical options. SFL allows us to show how motivation from an individual's social order will determine the semantic principles in an exchange.

The concept of register is particularly revealing in the present study in that it is a particular skewing of the context of culture that shapes the options linguistically available for the participants in the speech event. Such a skewing is mapped in the Pagewood Island study utilizing the notion of social network and realized linguistically via a SFL analysis (see section 1.4. in this chapter).

This thesis analyses the casual conversation of four women. From the linguistic evidence of this detailed analysis this study hopes to put forward a convincing argument about how the grammatical and semantic options chosen by (and available to) the interactants shape their social world, and how, at the same time, they and their

relationships are shaped by these linguistic selections. The linguistic tools offered by Halliday's SFL were chosen because they allow for interpretation which can make explicit the latent patterns or consistencies in the text. They allow us to look for the semantic design of a text and see the semantic consequences of particular linguistic options that individual speakers make. SFL sees language as embedded in the social and such a rich theory of language can put on display or confirm the social order and at the same time show how we linguistically reproduce our social order. Semiotic theory allows analysts to make value judgements about the degree to which meaning constructs the social context. More specifically, in the present study, SFL tools can help to put on show the extent to which the participants' linguistic choices are motivated by their social network positioning. Put another way, SFL tools allow us to put forward a linguistically plausible account of how the social network members are positioned in relationship to each other.

Systemicists who see the value of utilizing SFL as a way of modelling our social worlds include Halliday (1977, 1978, 1994); Hasan (1996) and in the context of casual conversation Eggins and Slade, (1997); Eggins, (2000) and Ventola, (1983, 1995). This present research aims to explore the world of languaged social reality and at the same time to extend this exploration to examine the relationships between speakers. It aims to adopt a means of modelling not only the linguistic traits of individual speakers, but also to model relationships in a way that can be employed to usefully describe the link between language and the social order. In agreement with Martin, this study sees Halliday's metafunctions as the 'most powerful technology we have for factoring out the complementary meaning of a text and relating them systematically to their social context' (2000a:296). It aims to observe and comment on both the language of the

participants and also their relationships with each other. It is at this point that the concept of social network will be introduced. This concept is a means of interpreting relationships that has proved a particularly useful analytical tool in recent years.

### **1.3 Social networks as a model of relational ties**

Our world of experience is based on our social world relationships. The question facing researchers is how do we model this relational universe? How do we analyse our social behaviours and experiences? As we have seen above, SFL offers tools which allow analysts to make statements about the linguistic output of individuals and to look outwards to the context to talk about the social aspects of linguistic choices. To add to this body of linguistic evidence, a concept that models relationships in both descriptive terms and as an analytical procedure has proved valuable in the present study. The notion that has been employed is that of the social network which provides us with a systematic way of viewing the interpersonal relations that an individual contracts in his social sphere.

Social networks have enjoyed increased popularity in research in social and behavioural sciences in recent years because of their concern with the interdependencies of human relations. When these relations are viewed from a social network perspective we can measure a person's degree of group membership and thus researchers are able to 'study not only social actors but the social relationships among these actors' (Wasserman and Galaskiewicz (1994:xii).

A social network can be broadly defined as 'the social relations in which every individual is embedded' (Boissevain, 1974:24). It is the structural links which binds



individual members together, ‘the informal social relationships contracted by an individual’ (Milroy, 1987:178). A social network consists of a finite set of actors and the relation or relations defined on them. The relational information, relations being defined as linkages among network members, is a crucial and defining feature of a social network. Once a set of actors or members and the ties among them have been established, the network analyst must model these relationships in order to portray the structure of the group. It is then possible to examine the impact of the structure on the behaviour (in the case of the present study the linguistic behaviour) of individuals within the group, to observe linguistic patterns that tell us about how individuals are positioned in relation to others.

Network analysis then makes a variety of assumptions about social entities and their relationships. These can be summarized as follows:

- Actors and their actions are viewed as interdependent rather than dependent, autonomous units
- Relational ties (linkages) between actors are channels for transfer or “flow” of resources (either material or nonmaterial)
- Network models focusing on individuals view the network structure as providing opportunities for or constraints on individual action
- Network models conceptualize structure (social, economic, political, and so forth) as lasting patterns of relations among actors (Wasserman and Faust, 1994:4)

A major claim of social network research is that the social network environment provides opportunities for constraining and shaping an individual’s behaviour. It acts as a mechanism for exchanging goods and services and for imposing obligations and conferring corresponding rights upon its members. ‘A person’s network thus forms a social environment from and through which pressure is exerted to influence his behaviour; but it is also an environment through which he can exert pressure to affect the behaviour of others’ (Boissevain, 1974:27). In linguistics, Milroy’s pioneering Belfast study saw the value of the network concept as a means of examining the extent to which

individuals could exert power and influence the linguistic traits of other network members (Milroy, 1987). Others researchers, influenced by Milroy's findings, have shown how a speaker's linguistic behaviour is constrained and shaped by the sorts of social contacts he or she maintains (for example Gal, 1979).

Within the field of linguistics, researchers who have utilised the network concept have generally been concerned with trying to understand phonological variation in speakers in terms of the individual's location and level of integration in the network. By contrast, and as outlined above, the interest of this thesis lies in examination of the grammatical and semantic choices that participants make and how analysis of these higher strata categories can be used to make useful statements about the positions and degree of involvement of participants within the network. This study draws on much of the methodological conceptual designs of others employing a social network perspective working within linguistics and adapts it to interpretation of grammatical and semantic choices. It is particularly indebted to the Network Strength Score devised by Milroy (1987) which allows for social network to be used as an analytical tool rather than simply a device for describing social relations. In this analytical mode, social network becomes a tool to portray the 'real and reliable relationship between a speaker's language and the structure of social network' (Milroy, 1987:154).

Other systemicists have seen the benefits of looking at language with the help of the social network concept. Butt employs a term more familiar to those in the systemic functional tradition and refers to social networks in Firth's terminology of speech fellowship. For Butt speech fellowship or social network refers to 'all those who are linked, by customs and by roles, to a particular social context. It is the network of

persons relevant to a form of transaction or activity' (2000b:321). In the present study the terms speech fellowship and social network are considered interchangeable.

A further term that needs clarification is group. Group in network terms refers to the collection of individuals on which links are to be measured, in other words, the unit of investigation. In the present study therefore group refers to the four female participants who make up the close-knit social network which is the research's focal point.

The Pagewood Island study utilises the concept of social network as a means of accounting for the variability in individual linguistic behaviour. The notion of social network enables the analyst to focus on the social identities of the speakers in their interactional sphere. It allows for a detailed description of small, self-contained groups such as those found in Pagewood Island's rural community. In such cases the concept of social network, which is based on the total configuration of members' relationships to the network through the individual, is a valuable tool. In the present study the social network perspective is seen as a clearer predictor of an individual's linguistic patterning than an abstract grouping such as social class. The group of women participants is not described in terms of hypothetical notions such as community or class. The group is not described as white, middle-class Australian women aged between 35 and 40. Rather, rejecting this abstract viewpoint that describes relationships in terms of units of class, gender and the like, the favoured stance is to examine the individuals defined by their relational ties. In other words, to define the group in terms of their involvement and transactional links. Social network analysis 'focuses its attention on social entities or actors in interaction with one another and on how these interactions constitute a framework or structure that can be studied in its own right' (Wasserman and

Galaskiewicz, 1994:xii) and is considered a fruitful perspective for the analysis of individual behaviour.

Network analysis is particularly suited to a study such as the present one because of its statistical and descriptive focus. It allows the analyst to put on display the relationships amongst individuals in a group and link this to the linguistic output of the interactants.

As Coates puts it, the ‘value of the social networks as a concept, and of the NSS [Network Strength Score] as an analytical tool, lies in their ability to demonstrate a correlation between the integration of an individual in the community and the way that individual speaks’ (Coates, 1993:90). As Wasserman and Faust state, social network analysis provides ‘explicit formal statements and measures of social structural properties that might otherwise be defined only in metaphorical terms’ (1994:17).

Network studies then reveal that a person’s positions within his or her own personal network structure can influence linguistic selection. In addition what this network study aims to accomplish is to show how linguistic choices can shape the network. It is anticipated that jointly the two models, SFL and social network, will highlight this dialectic relationship. The following section addresses the value of integrating these two models into a study of human linguistic behaviour.

#### **1.4 A social network/ systemic functional linguistic partnership: A model of social life**

The preceding section highlights how the notion of social network as a sociolinguistic research tool offers flexibility and scope to the study of individual manipulation and acts as a framework with which to model our relational ties. This introductory chapter has

also outlined the benefits of employing SFL tools to analyse individual linguistic traits and to show how these can be systematically related to the context and thus start to make claims about the creation of our social environment. When brought together these two different frameworks can be seen to be a powerful means to examine how the internal structure of the network affects language choice.

Participants differ in their level of integration into their social network and the linguist needs to be concerned with comparing individual language behaviour with the level of integration into the group. When the notion of social network is used to give individuals a score of network integration this can be related to their linguistic choices and we can start to see to what extent those most integrated into the group select different linguistic options from those more marginalized members. Thus correlation between a speaker's position in the network and the linguistic choices available to him or her can be used to describe differences in the character of an individual speaker's links to, or transactions with, other members with whom he or she has social ties.

Once we can model speakers in this way, once we can incorporate the social positioning of the speaker into our linguistic analysis, we can enrich our interpretation and start to build a picture of how linguistic traits are mapped against these social relations. We can start to make judgements about why a speaker selects certain linguistic options. Rather than portraying a speaker as choosing a particular semantic option due to the fact that he or she has, for example, simply a higher social status, we can talk in terms of his or her network positioning. We can start to examine how our relational ties, our social configurations, constrain the linguistic options available to us. This leads to greater evidence and usability.

With regard to the broader picture, this thesis also aims to put on display the relationship between language and the social order. We saw above how through the notions of context of situation and register linguistic exchanges can be related to context. When we examine the register variable tenor we can start to relate linguistic patterns (e.g. speech functions) to contextual variables outlined in the social network analysis.

The full significance of utilizing both a systemic model and a social network perspective becomes apparent when we start to talk in terms of the framework of the social network as an instantiation of the social system or culture of the group, determining the possible linguistic behaviour of the women. In systemic terms the network constitutes the behaviour potential of the group. Each exchange is one instance of this overall potential, one slice out of the total possible whole that occurs at other instances or have the potential to do so.

When we integrate the social network concept with systemic functional theory we can see how the register variable of tenor allows us to explore the culture of the group. We can start with the network, described in terms of the context of situation, and go in to look at a single exchange, or we can look at the situation from the opposite perspective and choose to start with the text and go out to look at and start to say things about the culture. In our depiction of the social network we have the culture of the group. In other words, the semantic system realizes the social configuration of the group. In the linguistic exchanges analysed we have instances of that culture through which we can examine how a speaker constructs a particular kind of social universe in response to the various pressures and options of the particular social network. Thus a marrying of the

two frameworks of analysis allows us to put on display the language-context relationship. It is possible to see our social network as register, realizing what we can call the culture or meaning potential of the group, we can employ this notion to examine the mutually reciprocal relationship of language and the social order. Then we can start to talk in terms of the language and the social order being mutually delimiting in that the language becomes the realization of the members' roles in the speech fellowships. Those in the systemic tradition do not see an opposition between culture and language, rather the relationship between language and the social order is one of interdependency. When we see how the language of the group construes the social relations and how, at the same time, these social ties determine the social relations, we are portraying the workings of the systemic model.

This thesis aims to show how a successful combination of the two different perspectives of SFL and social network can be useful in an analysis of individual behaviour. In short this thesis hopes to illuminate how integration of these two concepts allows for a successful modelling of our relational universe.

## **1.5 Social network and SFL as a model to look at change**

Roles and relationships are continually being negotiated linguistically. We continually meet new people and build new social roles and relationships and at the same time renegotiate our social positions with older acquaintances. This change is reflected in the social network itself, which is continually shifting as its members constantly negotiate their role relationships with each other, as they transact their way through their everyday encounters. As Butt states 'every transaction with a person is at the same time a reappraisal of the subjective placement of that person' (Butt, 2000b:324). Boissevain

also sees a person's network as a flowing concept where 'social relations are not static, but dynamic. They form a shifting pattern of power relations between persons and groups' (Boissevain, 1974:27).

This change is depicted in linguistic choices. And in order to capture this change the present study maps the language and social network of its participants at two points in time, fifteen months apart. This permits search for answers to questions such as how does language change as social order positions are changed? Or put another way, when we change our social roles how does this affect our negotiations with others? The present study then aims to capture change over time and to examine how change in a social network structure may have bearing on the linguistic output of its members. The goals of examining two exchanges are (1) to reveal change over time; (2) to test the viability of the original analysis; (3) to demonstrate that although the language chosen by the four female participants is different it is consistent with patterns revealed in the social network analysis and (4) how different participants can change their network positions over time and how language reflects and realizes this.

In the present study the two analyses, the two synchronic mappings are useful in shedding light on the diachronic process. The two snapshots of language represent a diachronic mapping of the fluid process of social role negotiation (Saussure's diachronic process of language). This putting on display of change over time then both increases the validity and expands the scope of the present research. At the same time the Pagewood Island analysis attempts to reveal how the differences in the two extracts can be discussed in terms of a change in the network positioning of the members being reflected in language.



## 1.6 Conclusion

This thesis is both descriptive and theoretical. A study of the language and relational ties of the Pagewood Island network explored hopes to add value to social network theory in providing insight into how the social network concept can be extended to examine linguistic behaviour other than regional variation. It also hopes to examine to what extent a social network perspective can be of use to the systemic functional interpretation of linguistic output. At the same time this research hopes to show the extent to which when we incorporate the two perspectives of social network and SFL we can put on display the interdependent relationship of language and the social order.

Social network as an analytical and descriptive tool is considered a powerful means to make insightful statements about relational ties. It gives evidence for the social analysis of the participants. At the same time, the SFL model provides a comprehensive tool to analyse the linguistic options of the network and also to put on display the relationship between language and social order. This thesis examines the role of casual conversation in the creation and maintenance of our social being in our social world. A model of language that proposes that should language cannot be examined without its context; that the social is *in* the language is considered the most informative in the present research.

In summary, this thesis aims to:

- increase the body of evidence that sees casual conversation an ideal site for the creation of our social reality;
- outline how the concept of social network can be used to model the social ties of the participants in this study;
- extend the notion of social network into exploration of grammatical and semantic (rather than regional) variation;

- show how an integration of SFL and the social network perspective can highlight the relationship of interdependency between language and social order;
- highlight how SFL and the concept of social networks can be used to model change.

To best treat the above aims this thesis is divided into six chapters. Following this introduction is a chapter outlining in detail the systemic functional framework adopted in the present study. This introduces systemics from a historical point of view and continues to detail the relevant aspects of this rich and holistic theory that are crucial to the understanding of the study that follows. Chapter three offers a summary of the literature relevant to the social network analysis. Here we look at a brief history of the concept of social network in the social sciences and how it has been successfully adopted in linguistics in recent years. This is followed by the methodology chapter, which both presents an outline of the preferred conceptual method of the present investigation and shows, via a discussion of research methods employed in other studies, why the research design was chosen. The social network and SFL research data are presented and analysed in chapters five and six. Chapter five introduces the Pagewood Island data and deals with the analysis of the relational ties of the social network of the four female participants. Chapter six then incorporates and builds on the social network analysis results in its linguistic analysis of two texts taken from the Pagewood Island data. Finally, chapter seven summarises and discusses these findings and offers a conclusion that emphasises the significance of the study. It also suggests how other interesting research questions are opened up with the hope that some of these findings may be the point of departure for future research.

## **2 Language from a systemic functional perspective**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Pagewood Island study may be primarily seen as an attempt to put on display the systemic functional model of language and it is in this chapter that the key aspects of the Hallidayan approach which are considered relevant to the present study are outlined. It begins with a brief look at SFL from an historical point of view, giving emphasis to the Saussurean way of looking at language and his notion of the sign. The chapter then moves on to give an overview of the modern conceptualization of SFL.

### **2.2 Historical overview**

The following is a brief historical perspective on SFL. It traces some of the relevant scholars who have had an influence on today's model (for example, Sapir, Whorf, Saussure, Malinowski, Hjelmslev, the Prague school, Lemke, Bernstein and Firth) and is a first step in the orientation of my research. Halliday's approach is very much derived from the meaning-based rather than formal traditions, and owes much to the socio-semantic linguistic theory of his teacher, the British linguist Firth, and it is with Firth that this overview begins.

Central to Firthian linguistics is the role of meaning, the interpretation of which 'is subject to the general rule that each word when used in a new context is a new word' (Firth, 1957:190). He goes on to say that, 'the main concern of descriptive linguistics is to make statements of meaning' and that these 'meanings' are to be found within the

study of language, and to be described by this semiotic resource. That is to say that the 'systemic constructs are neither immanent nor transcendent, but just language turned back on itself' (Firth, 1957:190). Moreover, and crucially, these meanings are to be studied 'as part of the social process' (Firth 1957a:181).

For Firth, then, meaning was 'function in context' and language a system of possible relations, or more precisely, interrelations. Firth's polysystemic approach saw language as a social event and insisted on the inclusion of Malinowski's 'context of situation' and 'context of culture'. He developed the notion of context of situation as an 'abstract representation of the environment in terms of certain general categories having relevance to the text' (Firth, 1957:183). Firth may be seen to have enriched linguistics concerning context of situation by establishing 'principles by which the actual observable context itself could progress to statements of the typical' (Butt, 2000b:322). It was also from Firth's notion of restricted register that much of the recent study of functional variation of the general system correlated with contextual variation has been developed (see for example, Matthiessen, 1993).

The present study is concerned with persons and their social networks and it was Firth who stressed that the linguist must study 'the speaking person in the social process' (Firth, 1957:190). Language is 'everywhere actively maintained by persons, that is by people who are members of society' (Firth, 1957:187) and to 'satisfy our needs we have to become social persons, and every social person is a bundle of roles or *personae*' that interact in various networks or speech fellowships.

Halliday then is indebted to both Malinowski and Firth for his orientation towards

language and context. And while Firth illustrated the systemic potential by highlighting the phonological stratum, Halliday has extended and developed this to give systemicists a more comprehensive framework to include the semantic and lexicogrammatical strata.

The notion of strata, or levels or planes (content and expression), has been largely influenced by Hjelmslev's glossematic theory of language. From Lemke language is seen as a human social system that belongs to the wider class of 'dynamic open systems'. Lemke's insights also include the notions of metaredundancy and intertextuality, both of which are important in modern SFL (Lemke. 1995).

Present day SFL has also gained further insights from the complementary perspective of Appraisal, which has been developed by Martin and his colleagues in Sydney, Australia. Appraisal allows for a supplementary interpretation of discourse semantics. Concerned with the use of evaluative lexis to position interactants interpersonally, Appraisal offers valuable understanding of how speakers 'negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations' (Martin, 2000b:145).

Returning to those scholars whose work has historically been of great importance to SFL, Sapir and Whorf can be seen as crucial to the development of SFL theory. Sapir and Whorf saw language as enacting social relations and their view of the relationship between language and culture must be included in an overview of scholars who have contributed to Hallidayan linguistics. Whorf, highlighting the 'different fashions of speaking', refutes the idea that languages are receptacles for pre-existing ideas or meanings. His contribution to SFL can be seen in comments such as, 'language is not

merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas’.

He goes on to say that we:

dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds. (Whorf, 1956:212)

Whorf’s view of the relative nature of reality, of a ‘linguistically determined thought world’ is embedded in Halliday’s system of language as a meaning potential and is clearly expounded in Hasan’s (1996) investigation of language as a ‘shaper of reality’. Linguists should avoid the ‘mirrorite’ approach (Butt, 1984), they should take care not to ‘fall into the trap of seeing discourse simply as the “reflection” of reality rather than as an essential element in reality construction’ (Hasan, 1983:22). In discussion of the role of language in the process of child socialization, Hasan elaborates that language does not simply reflect ‘something that exists independent of it. If language is capable of playing a part in socialization, then it should also be instrumental in fashioning these very social relations, processes etc.’ (Hasan, 1988:48).

Like Whorf, Bernstein’s social theory rejects the common sense dualistic view of reality. Bernstein’s concern lies with the role of language and ‘cultural transmission’ in child socialization and has been influential in orientating Halliday’s systemic model as language as social semiotic. Bernstein incorporated language as a key concept into the study of sociology and his ‘semantic coding orientations’ have been utilised as a link between language use and the social system (for example, see Hasan and Cloran, 1990).

SFL is not concerned with rules of grammar. Its concern does not stem from belief in an innate language faculty that gives rise to a universal grammar. Rather, indebted to the

various scholars mentioned above, Hallidayan functional grammar offers a holistic approach to 'language as a resource' for making meaning (Halliday, 1984:5) and rejects the notion of a competence-performance dichotomy:

In order to understand the system behind the conversational process it is not enough to discover 'rules of conversation'; we have to try and understand the relation of conversation to the linguistic system. The magical power of talk derives from the fact that it is, in every instance, the manifestation of a systematic resource, a resource which has been built up through acts of conversation, in the first place, and which goes on being modified in each one of us as we talk our way through life. (Halliday, 1984:32)

This brief historical orientation has so far made no mention of Ferdinand de Saussure, and yet it is Saussure who is perhaps the one scholar who has had the greatest impact not only on SFL but all of modern linguistics of which he may be said to be the founder. Indeed SFL and the notion of language as a meaning making resource cannot be understood without some grounding in Saussure and his concept of the sign.

## **2.3 Saussure and the sign**

In the book compiled by his students after his death in 1913 (*Cours de linguistique generale*), Saussure urged linguists to take note of the theoretical nature of the system as a system of relations and the system's use of opposition as having explanatory value. He further expounded the crucial value in making the sign the object of attention in language analysis. This section gives a brief overview of the work of Saussure and highlights the relevance of the Saussurian legacy to today's SFL. See also Culler (1986) for a detailed discussion of Saussure's work and also for a re-reading of Saussure focusing on the meaning making aspects of Saussure's work see Thibault (1997).

### **2.3.1 Unfixed nature of the sign**

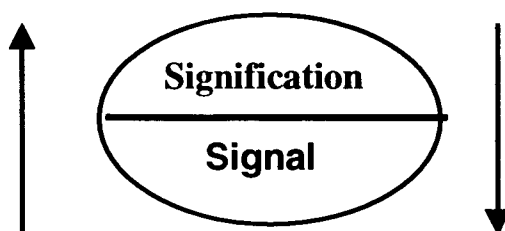
Saussure uses the example of the French word *nu* (bare) to exemplify the plethora of alternative ways to look at the object of study, to show the phenomena's lack of *inherent* meaning. *Nu* could, for example, be considered as a sound, as the expression of an idea, as the equivalent to the Latin *nudum* etc. He goes on to say, 'far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoints, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object' (1983:8), and it is in this we can see his denial of a thing as a 'pre-existing idea', of the notion of a given reality. More recently Hasan states that:

the notion of "truth", in the sense of correspondence with raw reality is alien to language. In fact, whatever aspect of raw reality has not been articulated semiotically remains unknown. This is the reason for suggesting that reality is not *found* but *shaped*, not *mirrored* but *constructed*. This construction is largely an artefact of the verbal sign system. (1996:22)

### 2.3.2 Language as a system of signs

Saussure saw language as a system of signs. The sign unites a concept (the signified) and a sound-image (the signifier). In the diagram below (figure 2.1) we see the concept, the content or thought (signification), and its expression in sound or writing (signal) with meaning defined in terms of 'the counterpart of a sound pattern' (Saussure, 1983:112). It is important to add here that this expression is in fact an acoustic image. Crucial to Saussure's work is the fact that both sides of the sign, the signification and the signal, are conceptual. It is not that the sound is first determined and followed by the concept. Rather, and vitally, it is that the sound and concept are co-determined. This is Saussure's outline of the reciprocal delimitation of sound and thought.

**Figure 2.1: Sound pattern and concept (signal and signification) relationship**



(taken from Saussure, 1983:113)



### 2.3.3 Arbitrary nature of the sign

The relationship of the sign to *raw* reality is not fixed; it is not merely a nomenclature, a naming process in which the sound image refers to the *thing*. Signified and signifier are interdependent but their relationship is of an arbitrary nature. That is to say, the association between the two can be altered without affecting the system in which they are found. For example, an ox can be *named* a dog or an ox, it remains the same *thing*. The link between the sound image and concept is arbitrary; there is no intrinsic reason for the association of the two. Saussure stresses the importance he places on this unmotivated relationship in comments such as:

The consequences which flow from this principle are innumerable. It is true that they do not all appear at first sight equally evident. One discovers them after many circuitous deviations, and so realises the fundamental importance of the principle. (Saussure, 1983:68)

Culler spells out some of these implications when he states that:

because the sign is arbitrary, because it is the result of dividing a continuum in ways peculiar to the language to which it belongs, we cannot treat the sign as an autonomous entity but must see it as part of a system. It is not just that in order to know the meaning of brown one must understand red, tan, gray, black, and so on. Rather, one could say that the signifieds of color terms are nothing but the product or result of a system of distinctions. Each language, in dividing the spectrum and distinguishing categories which it calls colors, produces a different system of signifieds: units whose value depends on their relations with one another. (Culler, 1986:35)

This refutation of the notion of language as naming a pre-existing reality is elaborated by Saussure who states that language does not ‘present itself to us as a set of signs already delimited, requiring us merely to study their meanings and organisation’ (1983:102).

Likening language to a game of chess, which is based on the possibilities afforded by the various pieces, Saussure shows that correct delimitation of signs requires identification of the contrasts between its concrete units (chess pieces in this example). Saussure asks us to imagine a game of chess where a piece is missing. To continue playing we need only replace the piece with some object. If, for example, a cigarette lighter *becomes* the rook we can continue to play. It can perform the same moves and is distinct from other

pieces in the game.

#### **2.3.4 Value**

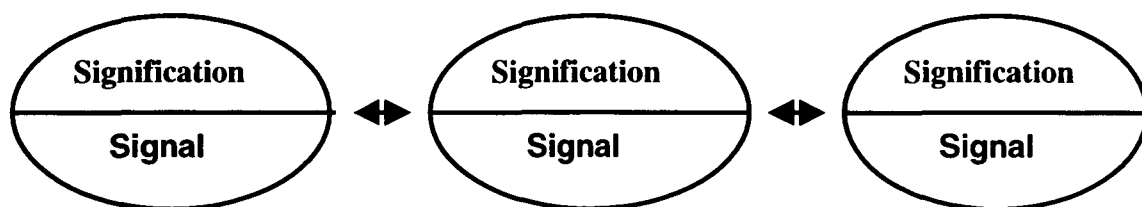
Following on from this, and considering the value of the nature of the rook to the pawn and the queen, we can see that the meaning, or value, of any one sign can only be reached by looking at what it does NOT mean, by looking at signs that stand in opposition to it. Saussure states that 'language has the character of a system based entirely on the contrasts between its concrete units' (1983:105). The object of study, being arbitrary, must then be seen as part of a system. To think of a sign as simply the combination of a certain sound and a certain concept would be 'to isolate it from the system to which it belongs' (1983:112). It is not an autonomous entity but part of a system in which value (*valeur*) plays an important role. Value 'remains entirely a matter of internal relations' (1983:112), and that is why the link between idea and sound is intrinsically arbitrary. The view of language seen in terms of elements that fit together and depend on the 'simultaneous coexistence of all the others' (1983:113) is diagrammatically represented below (see figure 2.2) and illustrates the relationship of the sign to other signs rather than by the relationship of the sign to an external reality.

When language is defined in terms of oppositions then, the interconnected nature of the system becomes evident:

A signified is what it is because of what it is not – it is defined negatively with respect to all other signifieds in the system. The same point needs to be made concerning the signifier. Hence, the two elements of a sign are delimited by the combination of both the vertical relations and the horizontal relations. (Butt, 1985:18)

He goes on to stress that the horizontal and vertical relations, the signification and value 'are a means for capturing the interdependence of the whole system' (Butt, 1985:10).

**Figure 2.2: Linguistic value**



(taken from Saussure, 1983:113)

Saussure spells out the paradoxical nature of the sign in the following:

On one hand the concept appears to be just the counterpart of a sound pattern, as one constituent part of a linguistic sign. On the other hand, this linguistic sign itself, as the link uniting the two constituent elements, likewise has counterparts. These are the other signs in the language' (Saussure, 1983:13).

This paradox is exemplified by consideration of the value of a five-franc coin, whose value must be determined by knowledge of two facts. Firstly, that the coin can be exchanged for a certain quantity of something different, like bread, and secondly, that its value can be compared to another value in the same system (e.g. a one-franc coin):

Similarly, a word can be substituted for something dissimilar: an idea. At the same time, it can be compared to something of like nature: another word. Its value is therefore not determined merely by that concept or meaning for which it is a token. It must also be assessed against comparable values, by contrast with other words. The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside it. As an element in a system, the word has not only a meaning but also – above all – a value. And that is something quite different. (Saussure, 1983:113)

Thus in linguistics the concepts are not purely differential, but defined by their relations with other terms of the system. Value is a key concept where language is defined in terms of a system of pure values. The sign is a semiotic entity allowing us to see linguistic elements as having a value, but not in relation to a fixed reality, but rather of being defined by their relations with the other delimitating terms. What Saussure showed us was that the relations or values between signs were fundamental to speakers whose social relations relied on the maintenance of these value relations.

Saussure, insisting that language is form rather than substance, introduces us to the concept of 'mutually complementary delimitation of units' produced by the relation of thought to language. Here we have a 'two-sided psychological entity'. This means that the sound-image shapes the concept as the concept shapes the sound-image (it is a dialectic). To clarify we can consider the example of waves on water. The waves are never without water and the water is never without waves. By shaping one we are shaping the other. Saussure gives a further example of one indivisible piece of paper with thought on one side and sound on the other.

### 2.3.5 Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations

There is another dichotomy that relates to the sign. The two kinds of relations that the linguistic sign can enter into are distinguished as syntagmatic and associative (or what Firth has named paradigmatic) relations. Here again we have a mutually delimiting relationship. 'Syntagmatic relations define combinatory possibilities: the relations between elements that might combine in a sequence. Paradigmatic relations are the oppositions between elements that can replace one another' (Culler, 1986:60):

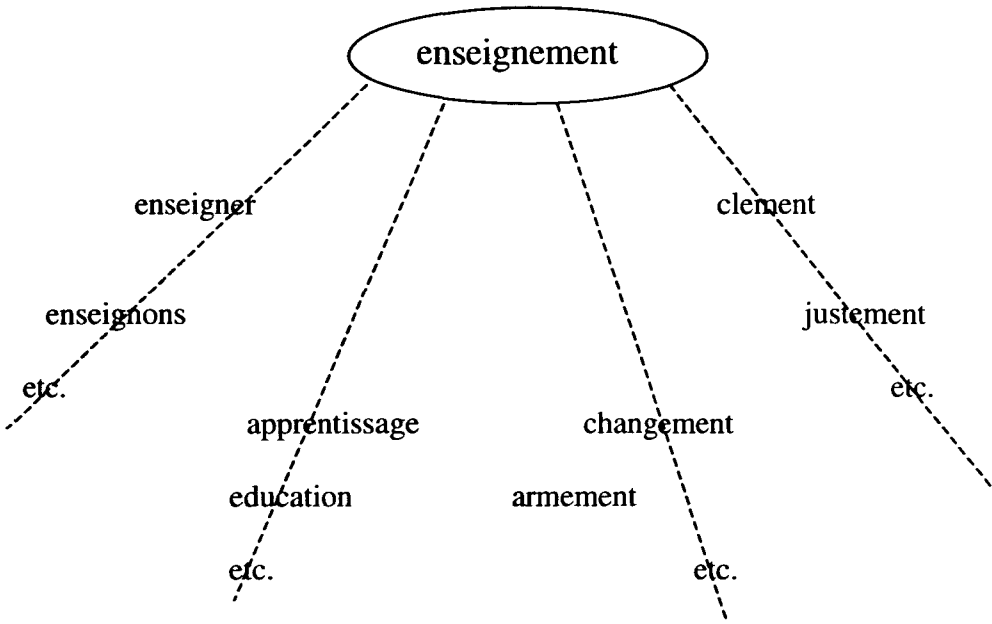
In studying a language, then, the linguist is concerned with relationships: identities and differences. One discovers, Saussure argues, two major types of relationship. On the one hand, there are those...which produce distinct and alternative terms (*b* as opposed to *p*; *foot* as opposed to *feet*). On the other hand, there are the relations between units which combine to form sequences. In a linguistic sequence, a term's value depends not only on the contrast between it and the others that might have been chosen in its stead but also on its relations with the terms that precede and follow it in sequence. The former, which Saussure calls *associative* relations are now generally called paradigmatic relations. The latter are called *syntagmatic* relations. (Culler, 1986:59)

It is the syntagmatic relations that give us structure and the paradigmatic relations that give us paradigms or sets of oppositions in a particular context.

Saussure uses the French word *enseignement* (teaching) to illustrate associative relations,

where the association may be based upon the common element *enseign* (for example in *enseignement*, *enseigner*, *enseignons* etc). At the same time, association may be based on similarity of signification (e.g. *enseignement*, *instruction*, *apprentissage*, etc) or based on sound patterns (e.g. the final syllable (*enseignement*, *justement*)). See figure 2.3 below.

**Figure 2.3: Paradigmatic (associative) relations**



(taken from Saussure, 1983:125)

Considering both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations together, Saussure gives the example of comparing a linguistic unit to a column. Firstly, syntagmatically, the column can be related to the architrave it supports, and secondly, paradigmatically, it can be related to other types of architecture.

### 2.3.6 Interim summary

The concepts of the sign and its arbitrary nature, of the interdependency of signification and value, and paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations have all been influential in the development of SFL. Language seen as a semiotic allows us to see that the world is not an absolute predetermined reality. As Hasan says, ‘from the arbitrariness of the sign follows its community-based nature, its dependence on social contexts, its truly creative aspect – namely our social reality’ (Hasan, 1985a:105). Semiotic interpretation, then, allows us to see language for what it is, not a naming device, but a system in which reality is constructed through the choices selected in the oppositions encoded in it. As Butt states:

Halliday’s grammar is Saussurian; in particular the sign in this model is always semantic and defined by relations – the meanings are a product of the delimitation of signifies and signifiants. And the entire systemic-functional grammar is built around the notion of choice amongst a range of possible meanings, or values. (1985:17)

In conclusion, Saussure offered a new way of looking at language and, although systemicists have discounted some areas of his work, he remains a crucial influence on the modern concepts of SFL theory. Areas of Saussure’s work that have been rightly rejected include his notion of the ‘collective conscience’ and his insistence of the study of *langue* over *parole*. Halliday’s functional approach rejects the dualism of *langue* and *parole*, stressing that in fact there is no distinction. The only distinction is that between the actual and the potential of which *parole* is an actualization (Halliday, 1974). It should be pointed out here that Saussure was working without the benefit of a theory of context of situation to give order to the apparent ‘chaos’ of *parole*. Yet Saussure’s concept of the sign, along with the relation between signification and value and the concept of mutual delimitation have remained crucial to the development of SFL. Such notions are fundamental in a theory of that sees language as creating meaning through its

relations in the social world rather than simply being a vehicle that connects a concept to the outside world.

## **2.4 Systemic functional linguistics as a tool of analysis**

The Pagewood Island study entails a linguistic analysis of the interaction between four women and employs the tools of SFL to present the dominant linguistic choices and consider the relevance of these selections with regard to the relationships between the women. This overview outlines the set of tools offered by SFL to help make grounded statements about how the significantly consistent patterns within the women's linguistic selections in casual conversation can construe and enact their social realities; to show how their social relations are shaped by their interaction. Looking ahead to the discussion that follows, this can be stated in systemic terminology as how, through a mostly interpersonal analysis it can be shown that the situational variables (mostly tenor) are construed in the text. This also highlights the text-context relationship and can, in a sense, be seen as step one, the first stage, whereby the context of situation has been described by the tenor, where the role negotiation has been construed out of the text.

But, as outlined in the introduction, there is a second step to this thesis. Social network analysis offers a quantifiable tool for describing the character of an individual's everyday relationships (Milroy, 1987). The four women constitute a social network and the linguistic potential of this network can, in the SFL model, be regarded as register. And just as the field, tenor and mode are constructed from the text, so too are they constructed *from above*, from the social network as register. Put another way, just as the tenor has described the context of situation, the situation type or register (social network) can describe the context of situation through the relationship of potentiality. The

situation type determines the potential of the field, tenor and mode.

It should be pointed out here that, due to the closed nature of the social network and its linguistic potential and because of the relationship of potentiality between the context of situation and context of culture, the situation type can also be mapped onto the context of culture. Similarly, the register and the linguistic system can be conflated (see section 2.13.4. for more detail). This study becomes then, not merely an account of an instance of language, or comparison of several instances, but a display of the language-context relation at the instantial, registerial (and cultural) levels. It becomes an attempt at modelling our social world.

The remainder of this chapter details the fundamental principles that underlie the model of SFL and its motivated order. First, it looks at the social semiotic and functional nature of language, then it utilises the Hallidayian concept of vectors to explore the four concepts of stratification, metafunctional diversification, instantiation and composition. Finally, for reasons that these introductory comments have hopefully made clear, the overview turns to context of situation and the notion of social network as register. The resources drawn from in this section include Halliday (1973, 1977, 1978, 1991, 1994); Halliday and Hasan (1985); Eggins (1994); Matthiessen (1993); Matthiessen and Halliday (1997) etc.

Since the Pagewood Island study is primarily an attempt to put on display the systemic model, to add to the body of evidence which supports the SFL theory, the overview is fairly extensive in what it aims to cover. Since the conceptual framework for analysis in the present study rests on the relationship between language and context, and the



phenomenon of register-language involves all the basic dimensions of language in context (Matthiessen, 1993), such an account is necessary to locate the approach to the present study.

#### **2.4.1 Language as a semiotic**

Semiotics, as discussed above, is the study of signs as developed by Saussure. Much of the research carried out in linguistics today however does not view communication as based on the sign-oriented system. By contrast, for systemic linguists the linguistic sign cannot be overlooked. Moreover, in order to see how a piece of social interaction, a slice of meaning, realizes meaning how it does, focus must be given, not to an approach based on the sentence but to an approach that is both social and semiotic.

For SFL the sign then is a crucial principle. In modern linguistics a set of traffic lights is often used as an illustration of the set of oppositions and discrete nature that make up a semiotic system, where the meaning (signified or content) of the sign is the set of possible behaviors that may be triggered and the representation (signifier or expression) is the particular coloured light (see for example, Eggins, 1994). Language is of course a far more complex system, but it follows the same principle of any semiotic system and follows too the Saussurian concept of arbitrariness between the relationship of content and expression. (See below however for the non-arbitrary relation between semantics and lexicogrammar and the creative potential of the system).

In the simple traffic light example the meanings, or content, (stop, slow down and go) are encoded, or realized, in the expression (red, amber or green) and expressions of different contents lead to different meanings. In SFL, to describe the sign system, three

rather than two levels or strata are required. In language, the meanings are realized by words (or wordings) which are themselves realized by sounds. Diagrammatically, the two systems may be compared as in figure 2.4 below.

**Figure 2.4:      Content and Expression**

	Traffic lights	Language
CONTENT	meaning	Meaning
		Words
EXPRESSION	lighting	sounds

(taken from Eggins, 1994:18)

Taking the Saussurian notion of sign, and ensuring there is no ‘atomistic’ conception involved in the definition of semiotics, Hallidayan linguists see semiotics as a system of signs, or a network of relationships, which, like other sign systems, gets its meaning from oppositions within the system. Halliday clarifies semiotics as ‘the study of sign systems – in other words, as the study of meaning in its most general sense’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:4). He goes on to say, that semiotics defines ‘the perspective in which we want to look at language: language as one among a number of meanings that, taken all together, constitute human culture’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:4). When next the ‘social’ in social semiotic is examined; when the fact that language as a semiotic is embedded in the social is emphasised, this meaning, or behaviour potential, becomes clearer.

## 2.4.2 A social perspective on language

Speakers interact in order to communicate; they talk to others. This is reflected in SFL where there is a social orientation to language. As Hasan states ‘the nature of interaction is inherently social’ (1996a:48) and must therefore be studied as part of the social process. Language does not take place in a social vacuum, and as Hasan points out, in analysis:

even though we may choose to begin with the individual, there is an important sense in which he can be seen as a being that is actively shaped by the sum of his own interactions and hence by the nature of the semiotic codes prevalent in his community. (1996a:38)

This echoes the work of Firth which, as introduced above, stresses the importance of the study of persons and the ‘accumulation of social roles’ (Firth, 1957) and is central to SFL’s understanding of language. Halliday states that:

One could hardly begin to consider language at all without taking account of social man, since language is the means whereby people interact. How else can one look at language except in a social context? (1978:10)

Social semiotics then is the study of language and social man. This, in Hallidayan terms, encourages us to look at language as a form of meaning potential, and leads us into the realm of what the speaker *can* do rather than what the speaker *knows* (in the Chomskyan sense of ‘competence’):

But “can do” by itself is not a linguistic notion; it encompasses types of behaviour other than linguistic behaviour. If we are to relate the notion of “can do” to the sentences and words and phrases that the speaker is able to construct in his language – to what he can say, in other words – then we need an intermediate step, where the behaviour potential is as it were converted into linguistic potential. This is the concept of what the speaker “can mean”. (Halliday, 1993a:49)

This meaning potential, the range of significant variation that is at the disposal of the speaker, allows us to make sense of what the speaker actually does. As Halliday goes on to say:

in the study of language in a social perspective we need both to pay attention to what is said and at the same time to relate it systematically to what might have been said but was not. Hence we do not make a dichotomy between knowing and doing; instead we place “does” in the environment of “can do”, and treat language as speech potential. (Halliday, 1993a:54)

Language then is part of the social system in which knowing a language is knowing how to mean (Halliday, 1975) and, if man is to be understood in terms of his behavioural potential as a social being, he needs to be looked at in his social environment. This is preferable to an idealized approach that is concerned with what is grammatically acceptable.

A point worth mentioning here is that, taking an inter-, rather than intra-organism perspective, taking the stance of language in relation to other organisms rather than from the point of view of the single man (Halliday, 1974), the need for a social theory distinct from language can be seen as questionable. We do not need to refer so much to a general social theory since ‘the social relations are co-determining and co-determined relative to the language’ (Butt, 1998a:38). Language and context are inseparable, and in agreement with Hasan’s line of argument, it follows that, ‘if “reality” is constructed through symbolic-discursive practices, it is... contradictory to invoke either the textual or contextual as the self-evident base of theory. The wording or textual will always be an expression of a social observation of distinction (Saussurian contrast) and the contextual does not correspond to the material situation setting as such, but rather to the semiotically relevant ordering of the material setting’ (Butt, 1998a:38). In his examination of child language, Butt states that ‘culture and language are two terms on a continuum of saying - a gradient of processes of meaning’ (1998b:68). Language and culture then should not be used as terms in opposition. In a holistic approach that sees language as a ‘constellation of meanings deriving from the semiotic system that constitutes the culture’ (Halliday, 1978:21), the notion of a social theory distinct from

language becomes less crucial.

Hasan's work convincingly shows the relation between language and the social order. In her examination of the patterns of ellipsis she finds that Urdu permits a higher degree of implicitness than that permitted by the system of English. She shows that the 'different ways of saying reveal different orientations to orders of relevance' (Hasan 1996d:240). In her paper she uses the words of Wittgenstein, 'the limits of my language mean the limits of my world', to highlight her view, and these words may be seen as congruent with the earlier comments of Malinowski where language is seen as a mode of action rather than a counter-sign to thought (1935). Hasan concludes with:

Meanings and ways of meaning are a function of human ability to construct symbolic systems – perhaps the only species-specific innate attribute. But there is no conclusive evidence that the meanings meant by humanity are entirely derived from and predictable as a result of the brute aspects of the physical world in which man lives. To understand language at its deepest level, we must see it primarily as a cultural phenomenon wherein systems of meaning appear not because the “real” world is thus and thus, but because the world has been construed thus and thus by specific subgroups of humanity; and this construed world is their real world. (Hasan, 1996d:234)

From a SFL perspective on language then 'ALL meaning is social' (Hasan, 1993:79).

Language is a social semiotic: it is a social resource whereby speakers can meaningfully interact. Further, the interconnectedness between language and the social order allows us to make statements about how speakers make meanings as they position themselves and are positioned by others in their social worlds. Prior to an investigation into how this linguistic behavior potential is conveyed through the organization of language, another fundamental aspect of SFL, namely its functional nature, shall be considered.

## **2.5 The functional principle of language**

SFL embodies the notion of a functional theory of language. There are two aspects to this functional nature. Firstly, function can be interpreted as *use*. In other words, we can

look at what people actually do with language, the purpose of a text as it unfolds within its context. Secondly, the linguistic system itself is organized internally on a functional basis. As Halliday puts it ‘the different components in the grammar ... are structured in ways which derive naturally from the “metafunctional” components of the semantic system’ (Halliday, 1984:7). Put more simply, the fundamental components of meaning in language are functional components and ‘each element is explained by reference to its function in the total linguistic system’ (Halliday, 1994:xiii). This functional or motivated organization allows us to look at how language is organized for use.

A fundamental property of the language itself is, then, its functional nature. Halliday discusses this functional basis of language and uses a case study of child development as an example (1973). The child displays a linguistic repertoire in which each utterance serves one function, in which ‘what the child does with language tends to determine its structure’ (Halliday, 1973:347). The adult’s language is likewise functional, but it is multifunctional, every utterance is serving more than one function. What happens is that, at an early age, in order to extend his/her linguistic repertoire the ‘adult’s linguistic form’ is developed, that is to say that the child develops an intermediate grammar and vocabulary (Halliday, 1973:354). The child, needing more than a simple system consisting of content and expression develops a lexicogrammatical level consisting of metafunctions (see section 2.8. below). Whilst this restricts the number of functions available to only three or four, these metafunctions can be combined in different ways and thus open up the entire behavioural potential of language to the adult speaker. So, as for the child, the adult language consists of ‘meaning potential, represented as a network of options, which are derived from a particular social function and are realized, in their turn, by structures whose elements relate directly to the meanings that are being

expressed' (Halliday, 1973:350). Put less technically, 'language is as it is because of what it has to do' (Halliday, 1973:354).

This discussion will turn next to look at both language and the context that it is embedded in. Both these are functionally diversified, that is to say that they both have different modes of meaning. The implications of this will be outlined below. And see Halliday and Hasan (1985:17) for an illustration of the functional basis of language through the analysis of a single sentence.

In summary of this section, we return to the words of Halliday which show us that, like all tools, 'language is shaped by its purpose':

In front of our eyes, as it were, are the "uses of language": we are interested in how people use language and how language varies according to its use. Behind this lies a concern with the nature of language itself: once we interpret the notion "uses of language" in sufficiently abstract terms we find that it give us an insight into the way language is learnt and, through that, into the internal organization of language, why language is as it is. Behind this again is a still deeper focus, on society and the transmission of culture; for when we interpret language in these terms we may cast some light on the baffling problem of how it is that the most ordinary uses of language, in the most everyday situations, so effectively transmit the social structure, the values, the systems of knowledge, all the deepest and most pervasive patterns of the culture. With a functional perspective on language, we can begin to see how this is done. (Halliday, 1973:365)

So, to briefly recap, this overview has looked at language as a social semiotic and discussed how a user oriented functional grammar, a system determined by behaviour, sees the selections made from the linguistic system as motivated by the purposes for language use. It will now outline several key terms that are necessary in an attempt to understand how, in this present Pagewood Island research, the reciprocal delimitation of language-context relations can be put on display. These key terms include; text, context, context of culture, context of situation, stratification, instantiation and register.

## 2.6 Text

Text is a semantic unit: it is the linguistic side of a social encounter. The systemic linguist, Ventola, gives a clear definition when she sees text as ‘an instance of contextually relevant and appropriate social behaviour realized by the linguistic structures generated by the choices from the linguistic systems’ (Ventola, 1995:4).

Text, then, rather than a decontextualized sentence, must be seen as the basic slice of language, or semantic unit, that represents choice and it may be spoken or written. ‘A text is “what is meant”, selected from the total set of options, that constitute what can be meant. In other words, text can be defined as actualized meaning potential’ (Halliday, 1977:20). Further, a text has texture and structure and is both product and process. It is an entity in that it is preservable, a ‘completed instantiation of the system’ (Matthiessen, 1993:229) and, as will be outlined later, an instance of meaning unfolding in a particular context (see context of situation, section 2.7.1. below). As process, text is a continuous set of selections of meaning potential. It is a path through, or map of, the linguistic network. Moreover, when looked at in a semiotic perspective, text becomes an interactive language event, ‘a social exchange of meaning’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:11). It is through analysis of the text we can start to say things about the social order:

It is in the text, language in its nonparticulate aspect, that the complex questions of social system, the agentiveness of language users, the reproduction of the linguistic and the social system in exchanges of meanings, and the change of the social and the linguistic system in the production of text as social action and as a social event can be addressed. (Kress, 1995:118)

A particular text only means what it does when looked at in the environment in which it takes place, or unfolds, namely its context. It is embedded or functioning in its context. And systemicists are always concerned with language in context, for it is only when text



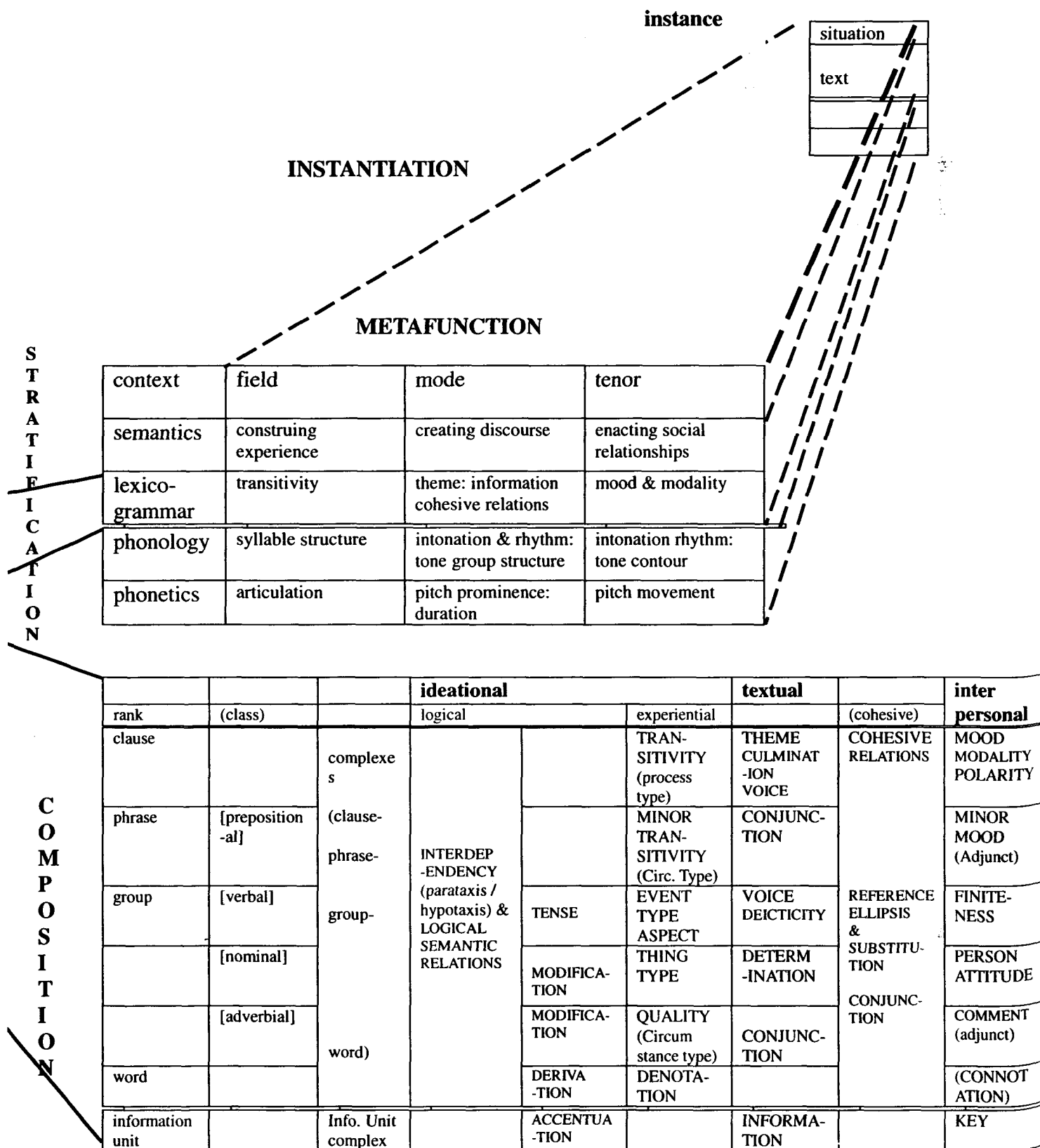
instances are examined in their environment that what they really mean can begin to be appreciated; how such texts are related and how they constitute our social world. It is the notion of context that will soon be explored. First however, in order to place context in the overall concept of semiotic organization, the vectors that define the semiotic space must be introduced.

To analyse the dimensions of meaning any given text must be located in the overall organisation of language. To do this, language can be seen as arranged along the four vectors of instantiation (the instance of the potential), stratification (the system organised into levels related by realization), metafunctions (the different modes of meaning) and composition (the internal makeup of the metafunctions). Matthiessen and Halliday (1988) show this diagrammatically (see figure 2.5) but are keen to point out that there is overlap, that the lines are 'fuzzy'. Beginning with stratification, the vectors will now be outlined, although it should be noted that, due to the complex nature of the linguistic system, it has been necessary to make several diversions along the way.

## **2.7 Stratification**

A stratum, or level, is an order of abstraction, and in SFL the relation between language and context is determined by means of stratification. Figure 2.6. shows that semiotic space consists of the four strata of context, semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology. Each strata, whilst having its own internal organization, is related to the next. This relationship is one of realization. The categories in the lower strata realize the categories of the higher stratum. Thus, for example, the lexicogrammar categories realize those of the semantic strata.

**Figure 2.5: Overall dimensions of meaning for text location**



(adapted from Halliday and Matthiessen, 1998)

Stratification is a useful tool to allow us to make statements of meaning, which, as Firth suggested some time ago:

cannot be achieved at one fell swoop by one analysis at one level. Having made the first abstraction by suitably isolating a piece of "text" or part of the social process of speaking for a listener or of writing for a reader, the suggested procedure for dealing with meaning is its dispersion into modes, rather like the dispersion of light of mixed wave-lengths into a spectrum. (Firth, 1957:192)

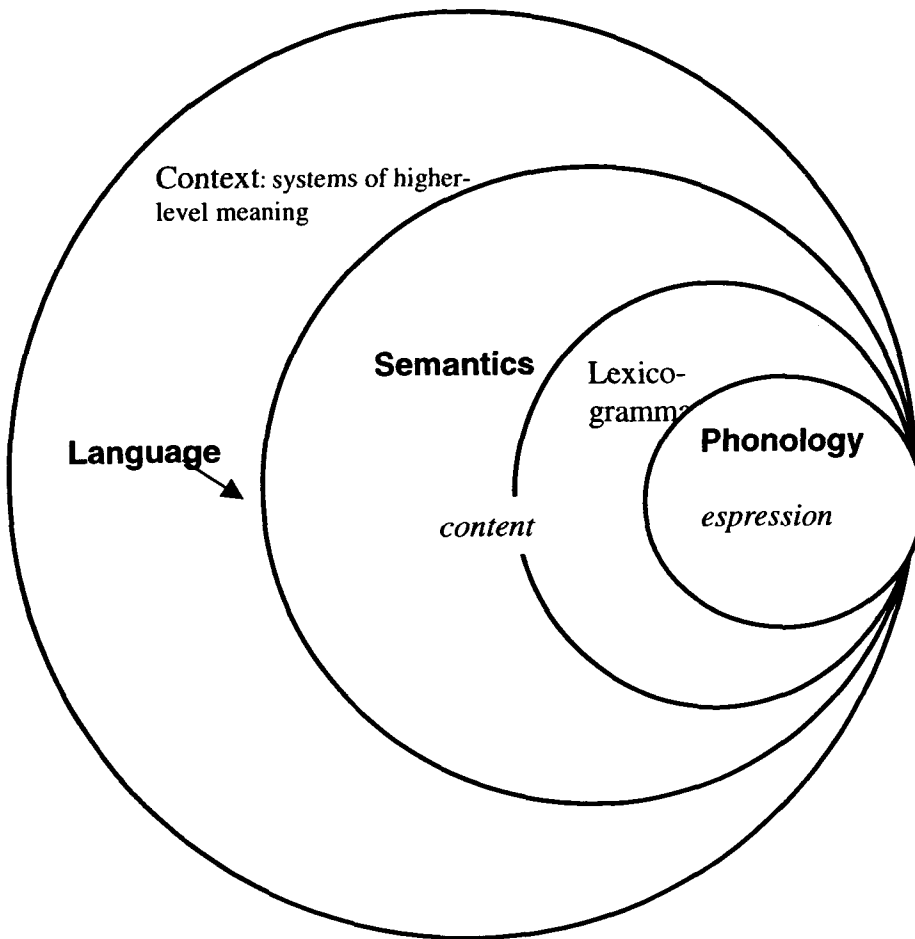
More recently, the systemicist Matthiessen sees that 'this chain of inter-stratal realizations bridges the gap between the semiotic in high-level cultural meanings and the material, either in speaking or in writing, through a series of intermediate strata' (Matthiessen, 1993:226).

For ease of description this overview will first look at the stratified vectors concerned with context and then those dealing with language. Context is a high-level semiotic system and a necessary aspect of linguistics, since text is never without context. Context can be discussed in terms of both context of culture and context of situation.

### **2.7.1 Context of situation**

It is when language is examined in context and the relationship of text to context portrayed that the notion of language construing our social world can be fully appreciated. To reiterate Malinowski's contribution to the notion of context of situation, emphasis must be placed on 'the situation in which the words have been uttered' (1935:51) since it is in these situations that words 'acquire their meaning' (1935:52). Malinowski, in exploring the life of the Trobriand Islanders found that the culture and environment could only be interpreted when the context was understood.

**Figure 2.6: Semiotic organisation in the stratified system – the relationship of realization.**



(taken from Mattiessen, 1993:227)

Firth, however, whilst indebted to the early anthropologist, found Malinowski's ideas too general for a linguistic theory. Firth maintained that context of situation:

is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events, and that it is a group of related categories at a different level from grammatical categories but rather of the same abstract nature. (1957:182)

He goes on to state the general categories which have relevance to the text:

- A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
  - (i) The verbal action of the participants.
  - (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.
- B. The relevant objects.
- C. The effect of the verbal action. (Firth, 1957:182)

Halliday introduces still more abstraction to enable us to interpret a situation, or more precisely a situation type, as a semiotic structure, as a ‘constellation of meanings deriving from the semiotic system that constitutes the culture’ (Halliday, 1977:21) although this is anticipating somewhat the discussion of register below.

Before such discussion it is necessary to stress the crucial reciprocal relationship between the context of situation and the organisation of the linguistic system. As the diagram indicates (see figure 2.6.), there is a realizational relationship between context and language. This means that we can talk in terms of both context creating language and context being created by language.

To expound on this we can start with words from Halliday who postulates that context of situation:

*is encapsulated in the text, not in any piecemeal fashion, nor at the other extreme in any mechanical way, but through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one hand, and the functional organisation of language on the other. If we treat both text and context as semiotic phenomena, as “modes of meaning”, so to speak, we can get from one to the other in a revealing way. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:12)*

This revealing way becomes apparent when context of situation is considered in terms of the three registerial variables that it is comprised of. Context of situation is organised according to three parameters of field, tenor and mode. It is functionally diversified into three kinds, or modes, of meaning that enable linguistic prediction. That is to say that together they allow us to predict meaning in interaction and it is to these contextual variables that this outline now turns.

### 2.7.1.1 Field, tenor and mode

The Pagewood Island study is concerned with the interaction between a small group of women who constitute a social network. This network is used to describe the context of situation, and it is through the situational variables of field, tenor and mode, the three 'motivating relevancies' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) that construe a text's meaning, that this is brought about. The field is the situational variable concerned with what is happening, it refers to the nature of the social action which is being engaged in; it covers the subject matter that is created as the text unfolds. Tenor is concerned with who are taking part in the interaction; it refers to the social roles played by interactants and includes the level of formality and social distance created by the language as the roles are constructed. The third motivating relevancy is mode which is concerned with the role that language is playing in the total context; it covers the medium (spoken, written, written to be spoken etc.) and the channel (face to face, graphic etc.). As suggested above, these three domains of discourse, field, tenor and mode, are not simply uses of language, but more accurately, together they constitute 'a conceptual framework for representing the social context as the semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings' (Halliday, 1978:22). They illustrate the functionally diversified nature of SFL and allow us to make predictions about a text's meanings.

It was Firth who introduced SFL to the idea of linguistic predictability. His concern was with the remarkable success in communication; that as persons are incorporated into our social organizations they learn to say 'what the other fellow expects us to say under the given circumstance' (Firth, 1957:28). Rejecting speech as 'boundless chaos' he went on to say that:

the roles and lines are there, and that being so, the lines can be classified and correlated with the part and also with the episodes, scenes and acts. Conversation is much more of a roughly prescribed ritual than most people think. Once someone speaks to you, you are in a relatively determined context and you are not free just to say what you please. (Firth, 1957:28)

The context of situation facilitates communication in that it allows a listener to apprehend what will be said next in a given situation. It means that we can, unconsciously, exchange meaning ‘within the framework of something that we knew was going to happen’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:9). This point will be further developed when we look at the relationship between the context of situation and the lower stratum and discover how the total meaning is the product of realization of the situational features of field, tenor and mode of discourse at the level of semantics. When, in other words, we discuss the nature of the context of situation in relation to the functional organization of language. First, however a closer look at tenor and interpersonal meanings, since, a study such as the present one, dealing with role structure, will necessarily take the tenor register variable as its focal point.

#### **2.7.1.2 A closer look at tenor**

When conversation and the role it plays in the creation of self and one’s social network is the concern of a study it is the interpersonal meaning that becomes the major concern. Here the principal relevant contextual variable is that of tenor. Eggins and Slade, in their (1997) systemic model of conversational analysis sub-classify role relations into four categories; status relations; frequency of contact or level of familiarity; degree of affective involvement; and orientation to affiliation. The first of these, status relations, is concerned with the equality (e.g., friends-friend) or inequality (e.g. customer-salesperson) of social roles. Affective involvement concerns ‘the degree to which we “matter” to those with whom we are interacting’ (Eggins and Slade, 1997:52) and can

range on a continuum from nil (distant, unattached) to high (close friends, family etc.). In between we have relations such as work colleagues with whom we have 'some' affective involvement. Contact is another factor determining our interpersonal relations and may be seen in terms of high or low frequency, regular or intermittent. It can also be determined in terms of voluntary or involuntary (e.g. forced contact with workplace colleagues). The fourth sub classification of the tenor variable is orientation to affiliation and this includes our 'inclination or disinclination to affiliate with various formal and informal social group' (Eggins and Slade, 1997:53). Here issues such as whether we negotiate 'insider' or 'outsider' status in our interpersonal relations become relevant.

Hasan's notion of social distance is also insightful here. She sees social distance as being 'a continuum, the two end-points of which may be referred to as MAXIMAL and MINIMAL' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:57). Social distance is 'determined by reference to the range and frequency of ...interaction. The wider the range and the more frequent their interaction with each other, the less the social distance between them' (Hasan, 1996:4).

In the present study these relationship criteria are incorporated into the social network Solidarity Index in an attempt to offer a more delicate classification of role relations (see section 4.6.1 below).

The interpersonal system of Appraisal as put forward by Martin is also relevant here. Appraisal can be seen to augment the SFL model of resources for realizing interpersonal meanings. It allows for interesting things to be said about the way in which attitudinal



lexis, the lexis of feelings, attitudes and judgement, are encoded in a text and this assessment of interpersonal values are ways that solidarity and intimacy are expressed in talk (Martin, 2000b).

As is the case throughout SFL interpretation, conversational context is vital to an Appraisal analysis. As Eggins and Slade point out, 'The interpretation of the meaning of lexical items is not only dependent on the co-text but also on the sociocultural background and positioning of the interactants' (1997:126). 'Analysis must be sensitive to the way in which alternative "readings" of lexical items are negotiated in the flow of talk' (1997:140).

An analysis of Appraisal highlights the negotiation of roles through the employment of attitudinal meanings of words used in a text or conversation. Eggins and Slade have used the system of Appraisal in their SFL model of analysing casual conversation. Relying heavily on Martin's theoretical framework for the analysis of evaluative meanings in a text, they recognize four main categories of Appraisal: appreciation, affect, judgement and amplification (Eggins and Slade, 1997). These categories have proved to be useful in identifying attitudinal meanings in the present research. See sections 4.5.3. and 6.3. for a more detailed account of how Appraisal is employed in the present research.

Before continuing to take a look at the context of culture it is necessary to take a look at what lies outside of the context of situation. It is important to remember that not all situations have a significant impact on the text. The 'material situational setting' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) refers to the location in time and space of the text and covers elements of the actual physical setting rather than those relevant to the context of the

text. Such elements remain outside the register variables of field, tenor and mode. As Hasan clarifies, what is to be considered part of, or remains outside, the relevant context will vary. In some situations (e.g. seminar, lecture or lyric), the material situational setting will be largely irrelevant. By contrast, the role of language may be subsidiary to the text (e.g. furniture moving). Here elements of the material situational setting will be incorporated into the context of situation. 'In principle we can think of the material situational setting as a dormant source for affecting the verbal goings-on. Elements of this dormant source are available for activation' (Hasan, 1996a:39).

### **2.7.2 Context of culture**

It is once again Malinowski who is generally credited with the first use of the term context of culture, or 'context of reference' (1935:51). He did not, however, develop the notion into a theoretical concept and likewise, Firth, although seeing the importance of man's cultural experience in statements such as 'every man carries his culture and much of his social reality about with him wherever he goes' (1957:27), showed little concern for the concept of culture.

Like the context of situation, the context of culture is a higher-order semiotic system above the linguistic system. If the context of situation can be seen as the context for the particular instances, then the context of culture can be seen as the context for the meaning potential, for the language system (Halliday, 1991:7). Context of culture, broader or more general than the context of situation, can be seen as the total possible meaning potential in which the text is embedded. It is the general framework, the vast repertoire of possible register variables 'by which members of the culture seek to achieve their goals through social processes' (Christie and Unsworth, 2000:12).

### 2.7.3 The Context of culture and context of situation relationship

To get a grasp on the relationship between context of culture and context of situation Halliday offers us the following example. He suggests that a school can be regarded as the interface between context of situation and the context of culture. The culture, the school as an institution with its perspectives on education, the curriculum etc., is the paradigm, or choices, of situation types – the total potential that lies behind each instance and each class of instances:

Thus just as the text realizes, and hence can construe, a context of situation, so the system, the potential that is inherent in that text – in this example, the potential built up by teachers and pupils as a discourse for exploring language – realizes, and hence can construe, a context of culture. (Halliday, 1991:17)

Hence the relationship between the two contexts is a dialectic one: culture and situation ‘are not two different things, but rather the same thing seen from two different depths of observation’ (Halliday, 1991:17). Similarly, in the present study it is suggested that the social network can be regarded as an interface between the context of culture and context of situation (see section 2.13.4. below).

Returning to the diagram above (figure 2.6.), we can see that context of culture and the context of situation are located within the same strata. They have been modelled from the point of view of potentiality, ‘a relationship of observer’s time-depth where a culture is a generalization across situation types’ (Matthiessen, 1993:238). In other words, rather than regarding the relationship between context of culture and context of situation from the dimension of rank or stratification, SFL interprets context in terms of more long-term cultural patterns. Matthiessen outlines these three possible dimensions:

- rank - a relationship of scale, a macro to micro relationship where a culture consists of situation type
- stratification - a relationship of abstract, a meta-relationship where a culture is realized by situation type
- potentiality - a relationship of observer’s time-depth where a culture is a generalization across situation types. (1993:238)

It is important to state that this present research, led by the Hallidayan model, takes the third possibility. Others within the SFL tradition see the second viewpoint as being most beneficial, especially in the interpretation of ideology as a separate plane, and this has implications for studies of registerial variation. (See Martin, 1986 as an example of for a stratified view, and see the section on register below for a more detailed discussion).

#### **2.7.4 Language**

In exploring the notion of stratification this overview began with context. This was in an attempt to highlight the fundamental role that context plays in systemic theory. As Halliday points out, and cannot be overstated, ‘meaning is a product of the relationship between the system and its environment’ (1985a:10). In our stratified system, language is the level below, and thus realizes, or encodes, the context. Language is itself a stratified semiotic system, a denotative semiotic, and is made up of the three strata of semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology. Since this research is concerned with language as a meaning making resource it will focus, not on phonology, the sound system and expression level, but on the content levels of language. The tristratal nature of language and the cut off point between content and expression (originally Hjelmslev’s terms) is shown in figure 2.4. above. A brief return to this diagram will show that semantics and lexicogrammar form the content layer and the phonology is the expression.

Lexicogrammar is the level of wording in the language system, it is ‘the resource for wording meaning, for realizing meanings in terms of grammatical structures and lexical items’ (Matthiessen, 1993:228). This ‘inner core’ (Halliday, 1994:15) of language is then the combination of both grammar and lexis (often referred to simply as grammar)

and realizes the discourse semantic (or simply the semantic) strata.

Semantics is the highest stratum within language and is realized by the patterns of the grammatical level. It is 'the linguistic *inter-level to context*' (Matthiessen, 1993:227); it is here that 'we investigate how grammatical units are constructed into discourse' (Halliday, 1994:15). Halliday goes on to say that SFL is essentially orientated towards the discourse semantics, 'that we are foregrounding its role as a resource for construing meaning' (Halliday, 1984:15).

Inherent in language is its infinite creative potential and it is through this principle of realization that we can see how language becomes a meaning making resource (Hasan, 1995). Hasan also highlights the need to view realization as dialectic rather than just a matter of conventional association between the semantics and lexicogrammar. She states that 'the higher stratum – semantics – activates the lower one – lexicogrammar – while the latter construes the meaning potential of language – its semantics' (Hasan, 1995:206).

In the SFL outline offered in this chapter the discussion of semiotic space and its realization patterns has focussed firstly on context and secondly on language. This has been done not to give priority to one over the other or to give the impression that they should be interpreted separately. Language and context are not two but one phenomenon looked at from different angles, and it is crucial that the linguistic system be discussed in terms of the culture in which it is embedded.

This discussion is looking at the linguistic system from the point of view of the overall

semiotic space of the vectors shown in figure 2.5. It has begun with a look at stratification. SFL is a theory of language that is unique in its proposal that a stratified semiotic has the property of being able to create meaning (Halliday, 1996:7). To highlight the role of stratification this section concludes with a return to the words of Firth:

To make statements of meaning in terms of linguistics, we may accept the language event as a whole and then deal with it at various levels, sometimes in descending order, beginning with social context and proceeding through syntax and vocabulary to phonology and even phonetics, and at other times in the opposite order. (1957:192)

Before going on to discuss the second vector, namely the metafunctions, it is important to return once again to the sign, more specifically the arbitrary nature of the sign and the implications for the creation of language as a meaning potential.

### **2.7.5 Return to Importance of the arbitrary nature of sign**

Saussure's demonstration of the arbitrary nature of the sign was discussed above. In SFL, with its tristratal structure of language at the content level, we need to concern ourselves with the relationship between these three levels. To begin, a discussion of the difference between the system as seen by Saussure and the modified system of today's SFL is offered. In Hallidayan theory an intermediate lexicogrammatical level has been 'slotted in' enabling the creative functional potential of language to come about.

Language is 'not a bi-unique semiotic system' (Eggins, 1994:117), where there is a one-to-one correspondence between the content and expression levels. Rather, as Eggins goes on to say:

the function of this grammatical level is to free language from the constraints of bi-uniqueness. The effect of this freedom from bi-uniqueness is that language can take a finite number of expression units (sounds) to realize an infinite number of contents (meanings). Thus, in language we use finite means to realize infinite ends. (1994:118)

It is in his discussion of language development, that Halliday most clearly describes why

we need to perceive language tristratally. As suggested above, the child's protolanguage stage, is one of reflection with given meanings. That is to say that the child's meaning potential is limited, each utterance having only one function. Once the stratified organization is introduced, once an abstract (i.e. one with no direct interface with the two material frontiers of language) level of organization between content and expression has been put in place, it is possible for the maturing child to increase his or her behavioural potential, it is possible to 'construct complex open ended networks of semantic potential in which meanings are defined relative to one another and hence can modify each other' (Halliday, 1996:7).

Returning to the nature of the sign, Saussure demonstrated that the relationship between the signified and signifier is arbitrary. Hjelmslev's content and expression levels are divided in the same conventional way. In SFL the relation between phonology and lexicogrammar remains largely arbitrary (but note the exception with intonation).

Semantics and lexicogrammar are however naturally related to one another. That is to say that any grammatical structure will be naturally realized at the semantic level. The form of language must be seen 'as nonarbitrary and natural; in short as functional' (Hasan, 1995:206). She goes on to quote Halliday, who states that the 'relation between the meaning and the wording is not...an arbitrary one; the form of the grammar relates naturally to the meanings that are being encoded' (Halliday, 1985a:xvii).

In the extended quote that follows, Halliday expands on this relationship. In an interview, he says:

A grammatical structure is a configuration of roles, or functions if you like, each of which derives from some option in the semantic system – not one to one, but as a whole. Let us take an example from child language. The child says *water on*, meaning "I want the water tap turned on." We relate this to some general meaning or function for which the child is using language: in this case, the satisfaction of a material desire. We can see that the grammatical structure

represents this very clearly. It consists of two elements, one identifying the object of desire, i.e., *water*, and the other specifying the nature of the request, i.e., *on*. We express this by means of structure labels. It is clear that the grammatical structure is a non-arbitrary configuration of elements which, taken as a whole, represent the function for which language is being used, and each of which constitutes a particular role within that function. Let me say in passing, that this was said by Malinowski fifty years ago, when he pointed out that the elementary structures of the child's language represented very clearly the function that language served for it' (Halliday, 1974:91)

Halliday, whilst stating his agreement with Malinowski, goes further and says that this non-arbitrary grammatical organization is also a property of adult language:

I agree with this, but I would go further and say that it is also a property of adult language: if you take a grammatical structure, for example a transitivity structure that we represent in terms of categories like agent, process and goal, or a modal structure, each of these grammatical structures represents a configuration that is derived as a whole from the semantic level of which it is the realization. So, in that sense, I would consider that the linguistic system at that point is non-arbitrary. The arbitrariness comes in simply in the relation between the content and the expression (Halliday, 1974:91).

## **2.8 Language functionally diversified: the metafunctions**

Language is a semiotic system through which meanings are made via linguistic choices. And, like context (with its field, tenor and mode), language too is functionally diversified. We saw earlier that in a young child's linguistic repertoire, 'function equals use' (Halliday, 1973:356). In adult language however there is no one to one relation between purpose and function. Whilst the adult linguistic system is immensely functionally diverse, there has actually taken place in effect a 'functional reduction' via the emergence of the grammatical, or more precisely lexicogrammatical level, which has led to only three or four metafunctions which remain identifiable (Halliday, 1973).

In SFL the grammar can be seen as an expression of meanings of different kinds. It is a 'resource for creating meaning in the form of wordings' (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997:3). As previously pointed out, it is important to remember that the grammar does not, reflect the *world out there*. It is constructed by the grammar; it is turned into



meaning by the grammar. The lexicogrammar stratum then is a means of expressing human experience and is split into the domains of the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. It is the ideational domain which allows us to 'represent patterns of experience' (Halliday, 1994:106). Via the ideational, speakers can 'build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them' (Halliday, 1994:106). The ideational is concerned with one particular aspect of our world and when we look at how language is organized to realize experiential meaning we utilise the descriptive Transitivity system. This system gives us the necessary tools to display the process types (in terms of material, mental, relational etc.), the participants (in terms of Actor, Goal, Sayer, Phenomenon, Carrier, Attribute, etc.) and circumstances surrounding the process.

The grammar then construes experience. But at the same time it also shows how speakers interact with the language, how they use it to express interpersonal meanings. In other words, the grammar also enacts social relationships. Or, expressed in another way, we enact our interpersonal relationships, for example status, intimacy, social distance and attitude, in the grammar. This interpersonal function then 'embodies all use of language to express social and personal relations' (Halliday, 1973:359) and in the description of language as a realization of interpersonal meanings, SFL employs the Mood system (in terms of Subject-Finite etc.) and, to describe the stance of the interactants, Modality (in terms of modalization and modulation).

This study is concerned primarily with the interpersonal which allows us to look at the clause as an 'interactive event' where dialogue 'can be interpreted as a process of exchange' (Halliday, 1984:11). At the semantic level the mood categories are defined in

terms of speech functions. These speech functions are linked to the grammar and allow more to be said about role relations and commodity exchange. Unlike Speech Act theory, which depends upon the notion of the illocutionary force of an utterance (Austin, 1962), SFL takes a different perspective. For systemicists the focus is on interpretation and explanation rather than overly emphasising a speaker's intention.

It must be emphasised that speech functions are not simply a relabelling of the mood categories, but that they are 'a distinct level of coding that is intermediate between the grammar and the social context' (Halliday, 1984:13). From this perspective the interpretation can be seen to face two ways. We can look down and see speech functions as being realized by the grammatical options in the mood and also look up and see speech functions as realizing the context.

The two metafunctions so far introduced, the interpersonal and experiential, encode different meanings. A third metafunction, the textual, is needed to make language 'into a text' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:23). This textual domain (described in terms of Theme and Rheme) acts as a point of departure for the flow of information. It:

fills the requirement that language should be operationally relevant – that is should have texture, in real contexts of situation, that distinguishes a living message from a mere entry in a grammar or a dictionary. This third component provides the remaining strands of meaning potential to be woven into the fabric of linguistic structure. (Halliday, 1973:361)

The Transitivity, Mood and Theme systems give the analyst a set of tools to put on display the linguistic system. For example, the interpersonal resources of the mood system in the grammar realise the interpersonal resource of speech function in the semantics and allow the interpersonal relationships between people to be better understood. Further, they are tools allowing for examination of how the interpersonal enacts social order via the choices made in the mood system. How when we make

interpersonal choices we are enacting our roles and relationships and constituting our social worlds.

It is necessary to stress that the metafunctions are to be regarded as being simultaneously interwoven into the language. Each metafunction consists of a set of internally organised systems in which:

the meanings are woven together in a very dense fabric in such a way that, to understand them, we do not look separately at its different parts; rather, we look at the whole thing simultaneously from a number of different angles, each perspective contributing towards the total interpretation. That is the essential nature of a functional approach. (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:23)

To sum up, language is multifunctional. Through the mood and modality systems, the interpersonal metafunction, the grammar enacts human relationships. At the same time the experiential metafunction, via the transitivity system, construes experience. The grammar, when looked at through the textual metafunction, is also, and importantly simultaneously, establishing the relations between the two other metafunctions as organising the discourse, engendering the text. And SFL, as a multistratal model of language, sees linguistic meanings in terms of an ‘interface looking “inward” to linguistic form and “outward” to the non-linguistic goings-on of people in various social and linguistic roles using language to get the goings-on done’ (Cloran, 2000:155).

## **2.9 Instantiation**

It is the semiotic sphere of language that is being discussed. So far stratification and the metafunctions that together give SFL its semiotic base have been outlined, and language in operation has been seen as ‘a social exchange of meaning’ (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). However, returning to our four vectors, it can be seen that both instantiation and composition are also crucial to a systemic approach to language. Instantiation is the

relation of system to text. To fully appreciate the concept of instantiation a brief diversion is necessary to explore the notion of system, or 'point of choice' (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997:3).

### **2.9.1 System and system networks**

System and choice are terms frequently employed in SFL where language is described as a meaning potential which is represented as a system of options. In other words, a text derives its meaning from the potential choices in the system, the 'network of interlocking options' (Halliday, 1985), that might have been made but were not. As already mentioned above (in discussion of Saussure's influence on SFL), language is a semiotic system, a system of inter-related signs which gain their value via their place in the overall system. Further, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes establish the relationship between choice and combination, they establish orientation. It is the syntagmatic relations that give structural orientation and the paradigmatic relations that give us paradigms or sets of oppositions in a particular context. In SFL the paradigmatic axes takes priority. The choices made give us as it were the syntagmatic axis. It is important here however, to reiterate the inter-relationship between the two, since any structural choice will necessarily influence the paradigmatic options.

A 'system is an abstract representation of a paradigm' (Halliday, 1993:51). The system of choice is modelled as a system network that illustrates the relational atmosphere of the system in terms of the sets of options, their interconnections and their realizations. Firth stressed the need to interpret language as 'a system of systems'. His polysystemic approach is adhered to in SFL where the conditions for entry must be stated for each set of possibilities. And the organisation of grammar is represented paradigmatically as a

network of given alternatives. A concise definition of system networks is taken from

Teich, a systemist whose interest lies in computational linguistics. She states that:

a system is the general category that realises “language as potential”. It is the basic means of representation of paradigmatic relations, encoding the linguistic options that are available in certain specifiable contexts. (1999:10)

A fuller description is taken from Hasan who states that, a ‘system is a set of interlocking options which represent what is “possible”, the potential, under some explicitly specified condition’ (1993:89). She goes on to give the following example which also illustrates the relatively independent nature of the metafunctions:

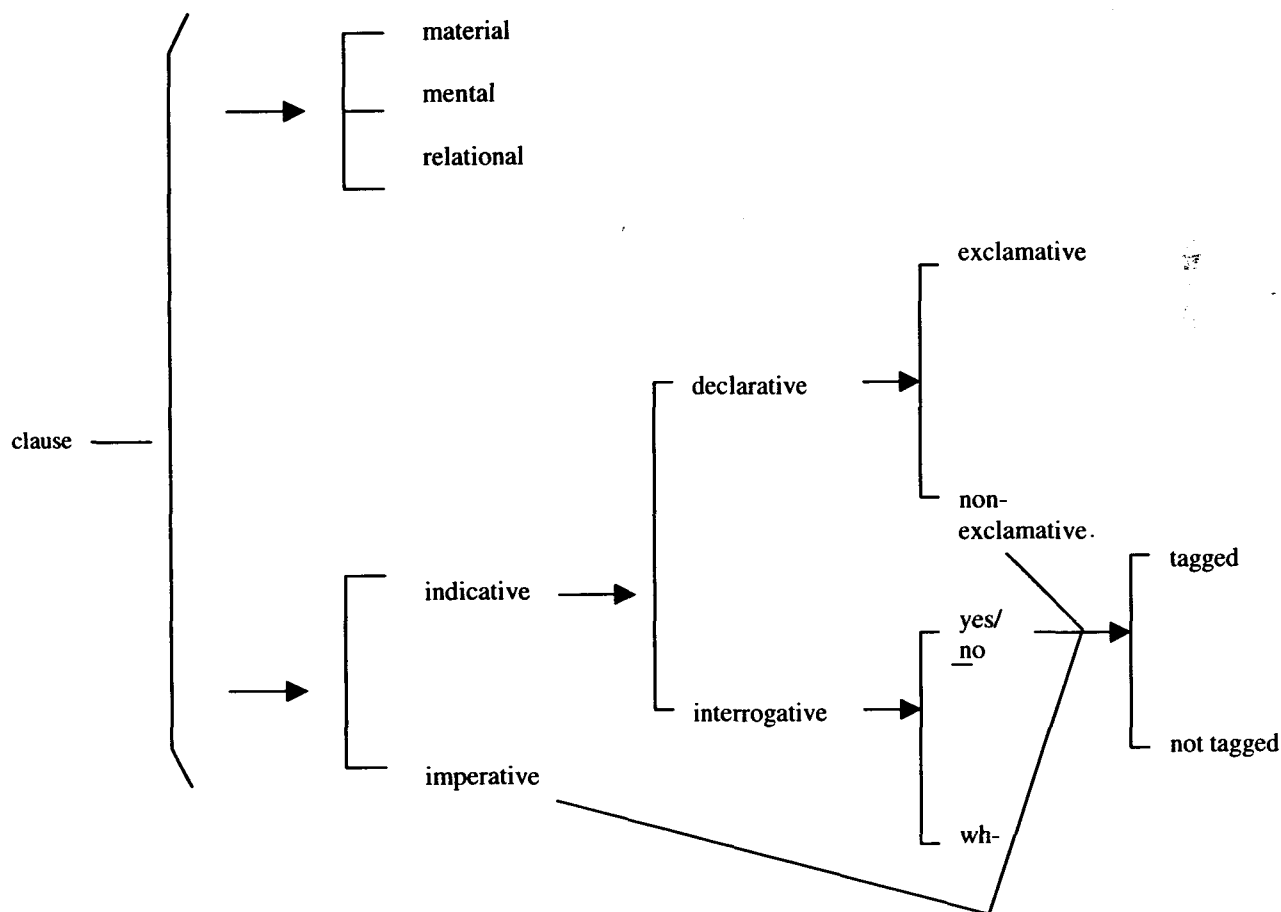
In the environment of interrogative, that is, where a clause “has” the feature interrogative, there exists the potential of choosing between the features polar (construing typically demand for confirmation: *is it?* Or *isn’t it?*) or nonpolar (typically construing demand for information: *Why/ Where/ When did you?*). To say that the level of meaning has tripartite systemic organization is to maintain also that the choice of options in one system is relatively independent of choices in the other two: the choice of polar v. nonpolar from the system of MOOD is not constrained by the choice of transitive v. intransitive from the system of TRANSITIVITY. (Are you going?, Did you see him?, Where did you go?, Whom did you see?) (Hasan, 1993:89)

Hasan further points out the crucial nature of language as a system rather than regarding ‘isolated individual elements of wording and meaning’. For example, systemic linguists:

instead of being concerned with a specific meaning, for example statement, we are concerned with a system of meaning, for example speech role exchange, whose specific terms are statement, question, command, acceptance, etc., amongst others. Similarly, the concern is not with an isolated entry in the lexicon such as *pain*, but with the systems of the lexicon as significant resources; nor are we concerned with specific structures such as declarative clauses, but rather with the mood system as a whole. (Hasan, 1993:90)

A system network is like a map; it shows the potential pathways through the inter-related options of the particular system. An example of a system network, of the Mood system, can be seen in figure 2.7. The square brackets set up the choices as alternatives i.e. *or* whereas the brace means that speakers must choose from both systems i.e. *and*.

**Figure 2.7: A (partial) network for English MOOD**



(taken from Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 1997:15)

See Matthiessen (1995) for more comprehensive coverage of systems networks.

## 2.10 Potential, instance and instantiation

Having considered both text and system, the notion of instantiation can now be discussed. Instantiation as the relation between text and system has already been introduced. Instantiation can be seen as the cline between the overall systemic potential of language and the text or the instance of the potential (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1977) which gives us 'a semiotic space-time' (Matthiessen, 1993:229). From the outset it must

be emphasised that the system and text are not independent objects, but rather they are the same things seen from different perspectives. Halliday gives a helpful analogy of the climate and weather to clarify this point. The term *weather* is used to look at the phenomenon close up, and the same phenomena seen from a distance is regarded as *climate*. Halliday states that:

The weather goes on around us all the time; it is the actual instances of temperature and precipitation and air movement that you can see and hear and feel. The climate is the potential that lies behind all these things; it is the weather seen from a distance, by an observer standing some way off in time. So of course there is a continuum from one to the other; there is no way of deciding when a 'long-term weather pattern' becomes a "temporary condition of the climate", or when "climatic variation" becomes merely "changes in the weather". (Halliday, 1991:8)

This example illustrates the instance as *text* and the meteorological *system* that lies behind it, that establishes and explains it. As Matthiessen and Halliday point out:

Text is meaningful only because it is the instantiation of a systemic potential: this is what we mean by saying that speaker and listener must share a "command of the language" – an UNCONSCIOUS awareness of the interstratal patterns (how forms of wording realize meaning and are realized in sound) and of the topology of each stratum (how what is said contrasts with what might have been said but was not). By the same token, our concept of system is valid only because it is instantiated in text: each instance keeps alive the potential, on the one hand reinforcing it and on the other hand challenging and changing it. This dialectic of text and system is what we understand by a living language. (1997:34)

It needs to be stressed that the system is probabilistic, that, for example, when the interpersonal category of mood is spoken of in terms of choice between declarative and interrogative it indicates choice with 'a certain degree of probability attached' (Matthiessen and Halliday 1997:34). Thus, each instance of an indicative clause 'infinitesimally perturbs the probabilities' (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997:34).

In the present study, the social network, which describes the relational ties of the participants, can be seen as the potential and the exchanges, or transcribed and analysed texts, as instances of that potential. The social network is the tool used to model the social order and Halliday's notion of the cline of instantiation allows us to examine how

the system, the social order or here the social network, engenders and at the same time provides explanation for it. Sections 2.13.3. and 2.14.4. below looks at how social networks can be defined in SFL terms. First though a look at composition, the final vector that this overview set out to explore.

## 2.11 Composition

Composition is the stratal architecture that is arranged by rank. That is to say that the units in each strata are ordered into a hierarchy according to their constituency relation, a 'hierarchy of organic wholes and their parts' (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997:28). For example, the highest rank in the grammar is usually taken as the clause complex and this is followed by the clause, followed by groups and phrases. Next is word and finally, the lowest is morpheme rank. The organizing principle of constituency is that 'units of different rank construe patterns of different kinds' (Halliday, 1994:15). Rankshifting (a unit doing service at a lower rank) allows us to make to make our world both less and more complex and abstract at the same time:

It makes the overall system simpler precisely because it is factored or partitioned into subsystems that are relatively independent of one another and interact through preselection rather than 'wiring' in a system network. Each subsystem thus has its own domain of responsibility. It makes the overall system more powerful because since each subsystem has its own domain of responsibility, the different subsystems are in principle freely variable with respect to one another so that the overall potential of the lexicogrammatical system is the total intersection of all possible features within all subsystems. This total intersection is, in fact, infinite since, when a system is ranked ...its potential can expand through rankshift: for example, a clause can serve as if it were a group or a word, thus opening up the full clausal subsystem at group or word rank. (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997:29)

It is also within the composition vector that expansion of linguistic potential is possible via nominalization and metaphorical realization.

To conclude this outline of the organisation of the linguistic system along the four



vectors we can see that they construct the overall semiotic space in which language in context is located. Although he only deals with the first three of the four vectors, the words of Matthiessen are employed to concisely sums up this semiotic space:

The language in context complex is organized globally along the dimensions of stratification (orders of symbolic abstraction related by realization), metafunctional diversification (modes of meaning), and potentiality (the dimension from potential to instantial through instantiation – from system to text...). This yields a set of stratal subsystems – context and, within language, semantics, lexicogrammar, and phonology/graphology. Each stratal subsystem manifests the same basic dimensions of organization. (Matthiessen, 1993:225)

## 2.12 Towards register

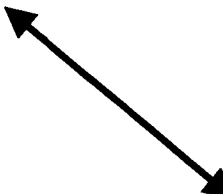
It has been stressed that both context of situation and language are functionally diversified. This has led to a finding that certain linguistic patterns correspond to different patterns in the environment of the text. That is to say there is a systematic correlation between the context of situation and the functional organization of the semantic system. Recall that there are three register variables, namely field, tenor and mode. Now it is possible to introduce the notion that each of the metafunctions, the meaning potentials, tends to be activated by a particular situational variable. Thus, field tends to be realized by ideational meanings, tenor by interpersonal meanings and mode by textual meanings.

Figure 2.8 shows the realization relation between context of situation and the metafunctions. For instance, the particular linguistic features of, say tenor, i.e., the linguistic choices of, for example, subject position and speech function encoding the personal relationships are recognizable as reflecting the tenor. Stated in more precise SFL terminology, ‘the tenor is expressed through the interpersonal function in the semantics’ Halliday and Hasan, 1985:25). Further, as Hasan points out, given the meaning of the term realization, there will have to be a dual perspective: we have to look

at ‘how do metafunctions construe contexts? And how do contexts activate – or in other words how is the nature of linguistic meaning explained?’ (Hasan, 1995:221).

Figure 2.9. expands this to summarise the function of the grammatical systems and also to highlight the different reality construing nature of the different metafunctions.

**Figure 2.8: Text-context relation of realization**

<b>SITUATION:</b> Features of the context	realised by	<b>TEXT:</b> Functional component of semantic system
Field (what is going on)		Experiential meanings (transitivity)
Tenor (who are taking part)		Interpersonal meanings (mood, modality etc.)
Mode (role assigned to language)		Textual meanings (theme, cohesion etc.)

(modified from Halliday and Hasan, 1985:26)

**Figure 2.9: Context, metafunction and grammar**

<b>Contextual variable</b>	<b>Metafunction</b>	<b>‘reality construal’</b>	<b>Grammatical system</b>
Field	ideational	reality	Transitivity
Tenor	interpersonal	social reality	Mood
Mode	textual	semiotic reality	Theme

(adapted from Christie and Unsworth, 2000:9)

### 2.12.1 Contextual configuration

The tendency for correlation between the three parameters of context and the metafunctions has become known as the CMH (context metafunction hypothesis). The configuration of choices of field, tenor and mode makes up a specific set of values, or contextual configuration, which in turn realizes the parameters of context of situation. Selections from these parameters are realized by variation in the linguistic system, by register (see section 2.13. below). A contextual configuration, a tendency or drift to a specific set of meanings, 'is like a chemical solution, where each factor affects the meaning of the others' (Hasan, 1995:231). The 'values the contextual variable configure', are important in making one instance of interaction at once the same and different from another (Hasan, 1995:231). Contextual configurations, or CCs, are 'intersections of different field, tenor and mode values' (Matthiessen, 1993:236) and due to the fact that it is the semantic strata which is the 'interlevel' between context and the linguistic system, they are to be seen in the first instance as semantic varieties. A commitment to a given combination or CC will necessarily narrow the parameter options remaining available, the choices 'attract or repel' (Hasan, 1995:233) those available in other parameters. Hasan goes on to say:

The choice of a certain social relation is a predictor of the range of choices at risk so far as social activities are concerned; the combination of social relation and social process is a good predictor of the range of options available in the part language can be made to play. (1995:233)

Each situation will be unique. But, they can be seen to fall into situation types categorised by their contextual configurations, that is to say, situations with similar contextual configurations will tend to activate similar features of the linguistic system. For example, similar features of the field will activate similar experiential meanings. Likewise similar features of the tenor will activate similar interpersonal meanings, and the same applies to the textual meanings being activated by features of the mode.

Earlier the notion of predicting meaning in everyday life was introduced. In a given situation it is possible to predict or infer the 'kinds of meaning that are likely to be foregrounded in that particular situation' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:38). Now it can be seen that it is (unconscious) knowledge of the configuration, or value, of the contextual variables, which allows inferences about the type of language that will be chosen. Similarly, from the text itself we can predict the context. If we hear, for example, '*add the eggs one at a time, beat well in between*' – that can only come from a cookery recipe; there is no other plausible context for it' (Halliday and Hasan, 1985:38).

The predictability of which variety of situational factors determines which selections in the linguistic system is not a new concept. Firth outlined the situation when he described everyday conversation as a:

roughly prescribed social ritual, in which you generally say what the other fellow expects you, one way or the other, to say. The moment a conversation is started, whatever is said is a determining condition for what, in any reasonable expectation, may follow. What you say raises the threshold against most of the language of your companion, and leaves only a limited opening for a certain likely range of responses. This sort of thing is an aspect of what I have called contextual elimination. There is a positive force in what you say in a given situation, and there is also the negative force of elimination both in the events and circumstances of the situation and in the words employed, which are of course events in the situation. (Firth, 1957:32)

Halliday sees that, as communicators, we tend to have a tendency to predict situations, we have a 'well-formed sense of register, an awareness of the semantic design of any given social context, and of the areas of meaning that are likely to be explored' (Halliday, 1984:8).

## 2.13 Register

It was Firth who introduced the notion of ‘restricted languages’ as serving a circumscribed field of experience (1957) and this has been seen to lead to the development of register in modern SFL. Register is a theoretical abstraction that allows us to examine the way language varies consistently according to use, to relate language to context. ‘It is an aspect of a separate dimension of organization, that of functional variation’ (Matthiessen, 1993:221) and this functional variety may be seen as ‘the configurations and combinations of choices of meaning which make up a recognizable semantic domain’ (Halliday, 1984:8).

Stratification, metafunctional diversification and potentiality have all been shown to help define the semiotic space of language in context. Register also reflects ‘one fundamental aspect of the overall organization of language in context’ (Matthiessen, 1993:225). In the present study, the notions of language and register are crucial, and, as Matthiessen points out, in a stratified system such as SFL ‘the contextual significance of both language and register is built into the theory at the very foundation’ (1993:251).

Halliday exemplifies the specialized uses of language in different relatively ‘closed’ situations with the game of bridge where the language of bidding can be seen as a system of meaning potential, a range of options that are open to the player (1973). He goes on to say ‘it is a linguistic system: there is a set of options in terms of the others – the system includes not merely the option of saying “four hearts” but also the specification of when it is appropriate’ (Halliday, 1973:346). Games, like recipes, weather reports etc. are examples of Firth’s ‘restricted languages’ introduced above. (And see also de Beaugrande’s example of the language of illegal pool-hall betting in

Florida, 1993:23).

More open examples of situation types, or registers, include buying and selling, telephone conversations and a visit to the doctors. The language in these situations is not totally restricted, 'the transactional meanings are not closed, but nevertheless there are certain definable patterns, certain options which typically come into play' (Halliday, 1973:347). Whilst it is obvious that we can indulge in casual conversation with the doctor, these 'extra-contextual' instances of language do 'not at all disturb the point' (Halliday, 1973:347). In her description of the nursery tale as a genre, Hasan illuminates the possibility of stating the structure potential, or generic structure potential, of this type of text, outlining the obligatory and optional elements and the order in which they can occur. (See for example, Hasan, 1996d).

Varieties in language can be either dialectal or diatypic. This research is interested, not in variety according to the user, which involves different ways of saying the same thing with variation in phonetics, phonology and sometimes grammar. Rather, its concern lies with variety determined by situation type as ways of saying different things and differing in semantics and grammar (Halliday, 1978). Register, unlike dialectic variation or code, increases the meaning potential, it expands the semiotic space. And it is in the context of situation that we find 'the locus of the significance or value given to registers' (Matthiessen, 1993:226). Register variation has no higher-level constant, its functional diversification is within its context of situation rather than being a realization of a higher, cultural level.

It has previously been stated that a given selection of contextual variables of field, tenor

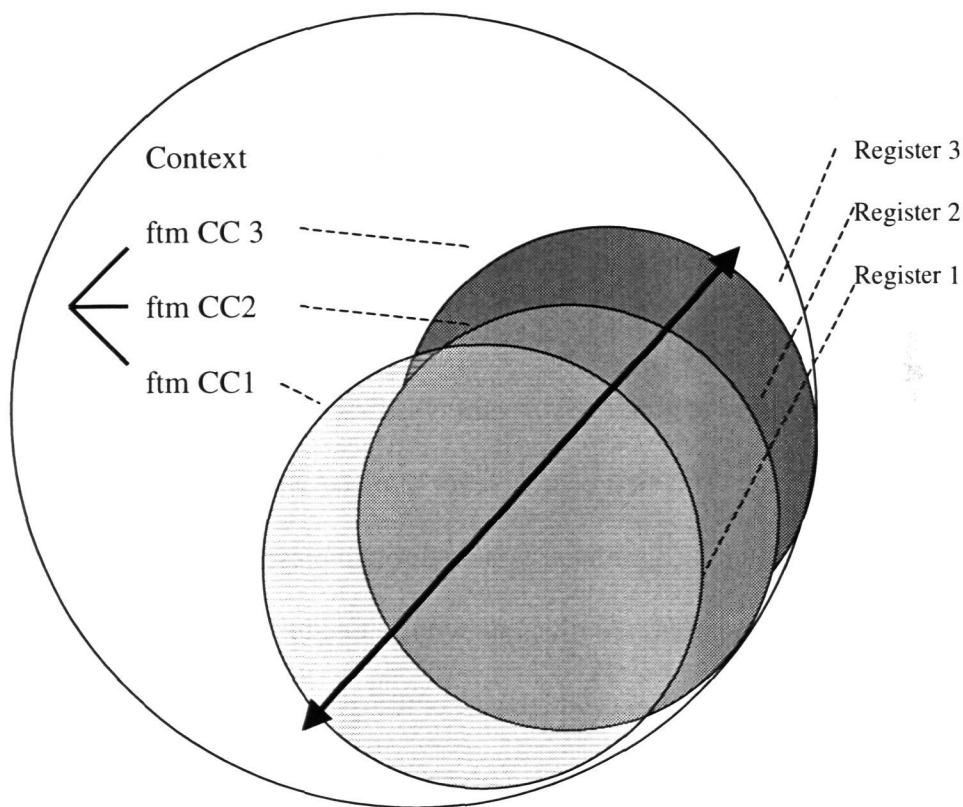
and mode, a particular contextual configuration, will correspond to a register. And, as Matthiessen stresses, the context of situation has, like other stratal systems, both system and structure, it is both 'paradigmatically and syntagmatically organized' (Matthiessen, 1993:237). Figure 2.10. shows context of situation characterized by contextual configurations and corresponding registers.

As suggested earlier, register variety is first apparent in the semantics due to stratal positioning. This first content level 'projects a registerial image or view onto the generalized lexicogrammar system through preselection' (Matthiessen, 1993:258). Matthiessen goes on to illustrate with an example of 'recipe grammar' where preselection highlights which part of the overall potential can be activated, or 'lifted out' of the full grammar, by such a given register. A simple example, it shows, that, in probabilistic terms, interrogatives score 0 in the language of recipes. (For more detail, and also for a detailed account of how the variation within language is to be specified and his reasons for preference of a means of interpretation as 'partitioned multi-register system with a common core', see Matthiessen, 1993:258).

### **2.13.1 Register, potential and change**

Semiotic history or semohistory locates register variation in time and it is here, therefore, we can start to look at change. There are three kinds of semiotic history. Logogenesis, ontogenesis and phylogenesis 'embody different time scales – that of the text, that of the individual, and that of the species (Matthiessen, 1993:265).

**Figure 2.10: Contextual configurations and register**



(taken from Mattiessen, 1993:237)

Semohistory, or ‘text history’, is the instantiation of the system as a text, a unique instance to be seen in relation to other instances that have similar contexts:

At any given point in the unfolding, it is a record of the text’s past and it is the resource out of which the future can be selected. The text instantiates the potential of the register system and in the course of doing so it thus creates its own instantial system. If we adopt a probabilistic interpretation, we can see that the difference between the potential and the instantial is one of time-depth, just as the difference between today’s weather and this region’s climate...The instantial system is by nature transient; but repeated instantiations may change the registerial system itself and thus the general linguistic system: new aspects of the system emerge in the text. (Mattiessen, 1993:267)

Potential and instantiation, we have already seen, are interdependent or mutually delimitating. The relation between the two is a ‘cline with a complementarity perspective’ (Hasan, 1996b:30). As Halliday points out:

The context for the meaning potential – for language as a system – is the context of

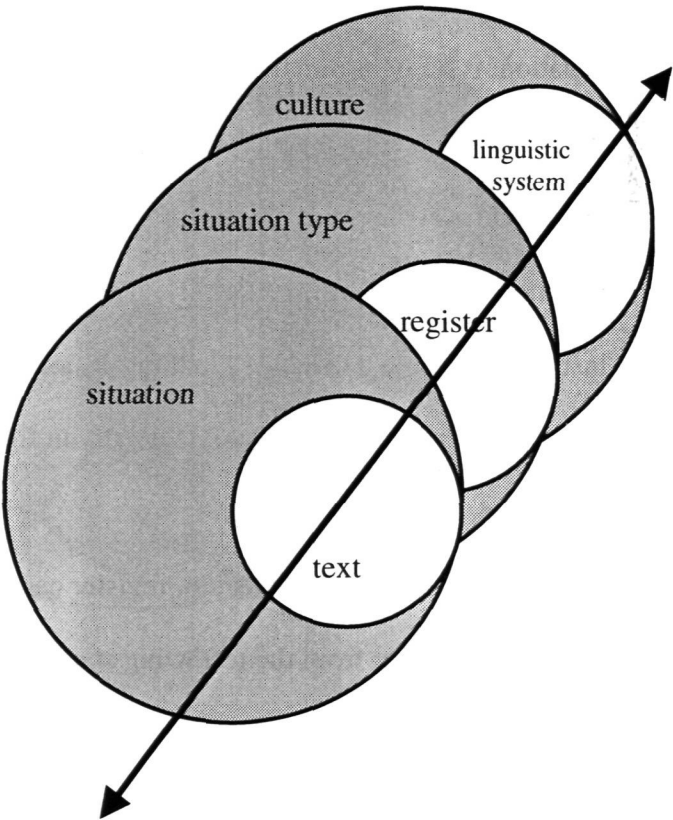


culture...The context for the particular instances – for language as processes of text - is the context of situation. And just as a piece of text is an instance of language, so a situation is an instance of culture. So there is a proportion here. The context for an instance of language (text) is an instance of culture (situation). And the context for the system that lies behind each text (language) is the system which lies behind each situation – namely, the culture. (Halliday, 1991:7)

When register, a variety of the linguistic system accessed from a particular context of situation, is brought into the picture, it can be seen that, from point of view of the instantial, register is ‘a generalization about recurrent patterns across instances; and looked at from the point of view of the general potential, it is variation within this potential’ (Matthiessen, 1993:271). The two views, from close up – looking at the instance - or from a distance - looking at potentiality and register variation from the overall system are shown diagrammatically in figures 2.11 and 2.12.

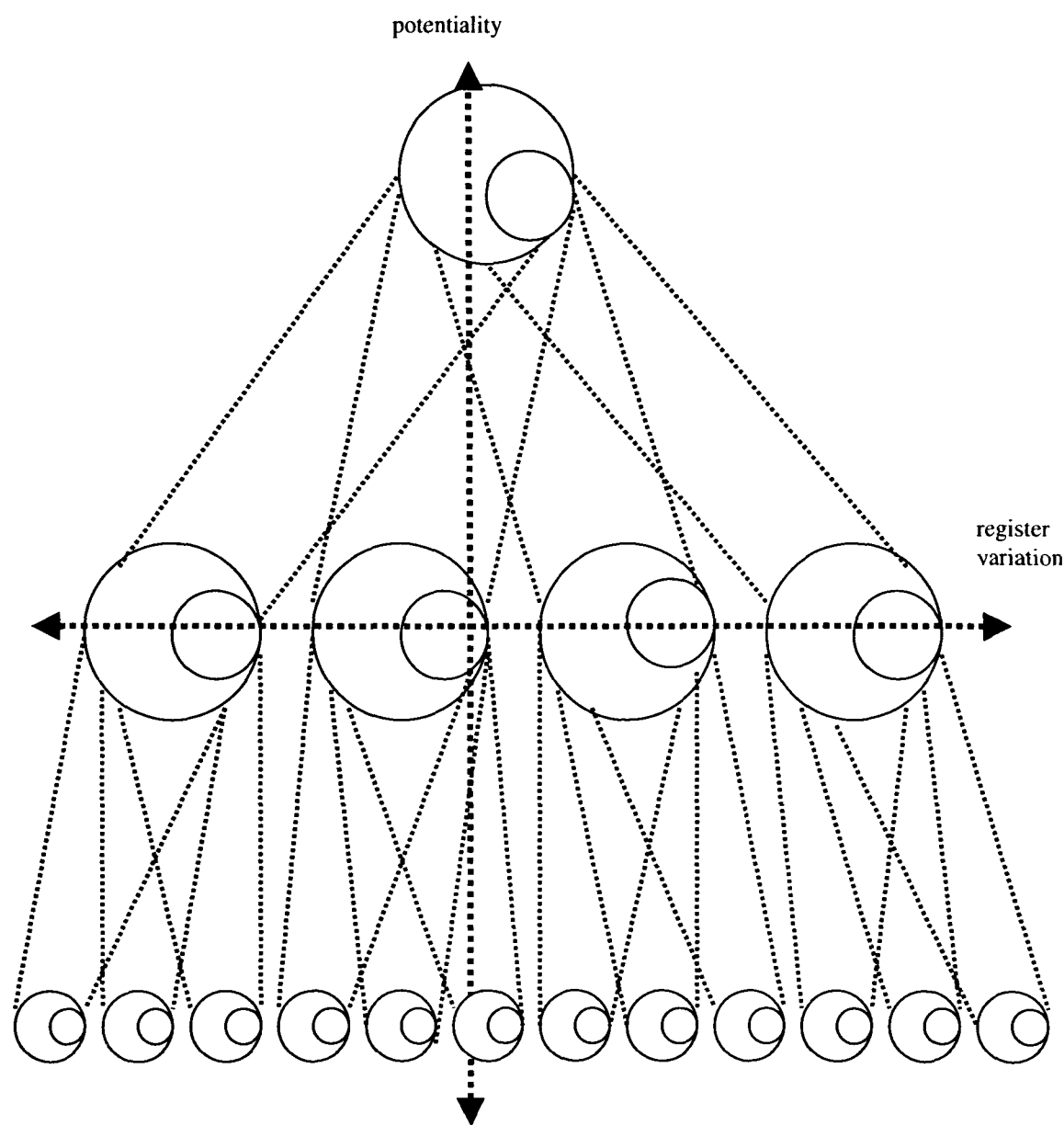
As Matthiessen (1993) points out, register can be looked at from several different angles. It can be looked at from the following standpoints: stratal slicing; metafunctional slicing; delicacy slicing; axial slicing; potentiality slicing and semohistoric slicing. Matthiessen stresses that the purpose of each research must be the primary guide in the choice of stance from which to examine the register(s) under consideration. The Pagewood Island study in effect takes a ‘metafunctional slice through the system’ (Matthiessen, 1993:277) allowing for a description that takes the analyst from the lexicogrammar through the semantics and out to the context. A metafunctional standpoint then permits a multistratal stance and serves as a starting point for looking out from the grammar and being able to say things about the social. This is particularly important in the present study where the social network mapping of the social can be mapped onto the register.

**Figure 2.11: Register and situation type along the dimension of long-term potentiality**



(taken from Matthiessen, 1993:272)

**Figure 2.12: Register variation within general potential**



(taken from Matthiessen, 1993:273)

### 2.13.2 Register and genre

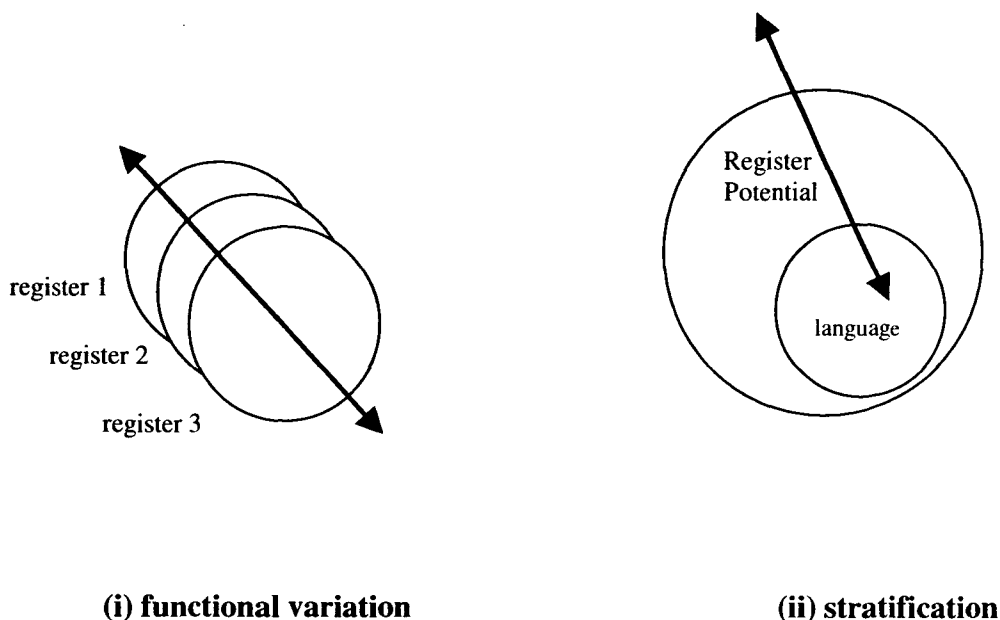
A point of departure for this present research is that the relationship between context of culture and context of situation is one of potentiality (see section 2.7.3. above).

However, as introduced briefly above, it is possible to regard the context of culture-context of situation relationship as a stratified system where culture is realized by situation type. This stratified system, or genre model, devised by Martin is a way of modelling variation that sees register as the context of situation and introduces a new strata of genre. It allows for a close inspection of ideology which is seen in its contextual plane as a connotative semiotic, that is to say, one that is parasitic on other semiotics, that 'take over another semiotic system as their expression form' (Martin, 1986:226). The relationship, as stated earlier, is theorized as one of realization, Martin's model finding ideology, genre, register and language in a relationship of realization. This inclusion of a further strata in which to locate genre may be seen to have led to an unnecessary separation of language and culture, a division that has implications for the relationship between context and language. Furthermore, Hasan highlights that, like Firth, Halliday sees context of situation as simply an extension of a category already in use (context) and that is integrated into the system by the concept of realization. Hasan goes on to point out that the theoretical framework of Martin's notion of a connotative semiotic may need revision. Hasan, in her critique of theoretical issues arising from Martin's work states that the stance taken by Martin (and others, e.g. Ventola):

moves the whole issue of text structure and its activation from active, feeling, reacting participants co-engaged in some interaction to given forms of talk that represent the way things are done in our culture, as if culture is unchanging and as if the participants are simply preprogrammed. (Hasan, 1995:283)

Figure 2.13. indicates the alternative modellings of register.

**Figure 2.13: Register as separate dimensions of variation or as stratified model**



(taken from Matthiessen, 1993:232)

### 2.13.3 Register and social networks

The Pagewood Island study is interested in how we manipulate our social personalities. Persons, seen as ‘constellations of personalities or social roles’ (Matthiessen, 1993:241) will utilise their different ‘registerial repertoires’ (defined by Matthiessen (1993:241) as ‘range of registers that a person has learned to use in appropriate contexts’) to exploit relationships and to gain access to power and control in situations.

When register is looked at from the speaker’s angle, from ‘the point of view of users of the system – in the sense of persons and groups of persons’ (Matthiessen, 1993:240) it is possible to see the relevance of register for the present study which examines the person in his social network.

As Matthiessen states:

The system is what a person can do and any instance of selection from the system is what a person does. Consequently, we can construe a person in terms of his/her systemic potential and acts of selection from that potential. And this then also becomes a way of construing persons as social roles in terms of variation within the overall system and of relating persons to groups, again in terms of variation. From this point of view, the significance of a register relates to groups and the social roles that make them up. On the one hand, it may be deployed in an institutional group such as those doing science or business characterized by a particular ideology. On the other hand, it will be part of the repertoire that shapes a person relative to various social groups. (Matthiessen, 1993:240)

#### **2.13.4 Social network as register**

The present study employs the notion of social networks and the Hallidayan SFL framework in its examination of language and social order. This section defines the social network in systemic terms and outlines how systemic linguists are beginning to see the effectiveness of looking to situational variables to discuss social networks or speech fellowships. Recall that for this study the terms speech fellowship and social network are considered synonymous. The social network concept is discussed in detail elsewhere (see chapters 3, 4 and 5).

We begin with Firth who saw persons operating within a number of restricted languages. He saw persons as a 'cluster of personalities' being members of 'a bond of fellowship based on the sharing of a truly common experience' (Firth, 1957:186). Firth emphasises the crucial role of speech fellowship in the following:

Allow me to misapply to speech and language Rousseau's famous sentence "Man is born free and is everywhere in chains". The bonds of family, neighbourhood, class, occupation, country and religion are knit by speech and language. We take eagerly to the magic of language because only by apprenticeship to it can we be admitted to association, fellowship, and community in our social organization which ministers to our needs and gives us what we want or what we deserve. The emphasis is on society and fellowship, in which man may find his personality. (Firth, 1957:185)

Butt sees a restricted language as 'the set of meanings demanded by a specific social network' (2000a:37) and points out that a register may be seen as 'a functional variety

with its own speech fellowship' (2000a:37). He further emphasises the importance of developing 'the role of social network theory into the register...specifications of systemic functional linguistics' (2000a:41).

Where social network is seen in terms of context of situation, it can be viewed as situation type or register. The relationships that constitute the network, the women's relational ties, are the situation type and their linguistic output is register. This concept now allows insights into how participants' linguistic choices are functionally motivated in relation to the contextual demands in a given situation. The relations within the network can be seen to account for the linguistic traits of the speakers and lead to seeing how a particular register with a particular set of tenor relationships will determine what speakers can and cannot say. As Butt (2000b:321) points out, the study of a social network and its restricted language takes us back to Firth and his emphasis on managing the actual observable context itself.

The Pagewood Island study then maps the social network that the four women participants contract when they come together onto the systemic functional notion of register or situation type. Here social network is defined in terms of the behavioural potential of the four women. The network constitutes the options that are available to its members. Their linguistic options are constrained and shaped by the network and at the same time the roles and relationships are continually negotiated and re-negotiated thus shaping the network itself. In effect, the semantic system is the social configuration. And this leads to the notion of shaped by and shaping which allows for talk in terms of the women not only creating the social world of their network, but at the same time this social world is being construed by the network.

Social networks are concerned with roles and relationships, and language plays a vital part in constructing these. SFL regards language as constituting meaning making behaviour. And this suggests that a systematic examination of the patterns of language choices made by members of a speech fellowship will constitute the relationships, will enact the interpersonal relations of the members of the network, language becoming the realization of the network structure.

Each time these women get together their relationships can be defined in terms of the context of situation. Each exchange can be seen in terms of the field, tenor and mode of the discourse. The women all have multiple relationships, they are all enmeshed in a series of social networks. This is important since an individual must maintain and rely on many forms of support, they must secure many relational ties in different networks to gain access to the provision of all types of support needed. The Pagewood Island network is one way that these women get support for their mothering and domestic spheres. When one of the women, Holly for example, meets with other friends she is transacting within a different situation type, gaining and giving support in different spheres of her social universe. That is to say that she is negotiating her social space within a different speech fellowship. What we have in the particular Pagewood Island network that is the focus of this study, is a mapping of one situation type, a mapping of the complex flow of resources that occur when the four members of this particular social network transact with each other. This mapping then constitutes a registerial instance of the total context of culture. Put another way, the two exchanges that are linguistically analysed represent textual instantiations of this register.

These two instances are instances of the total behaviour potential of the network. And

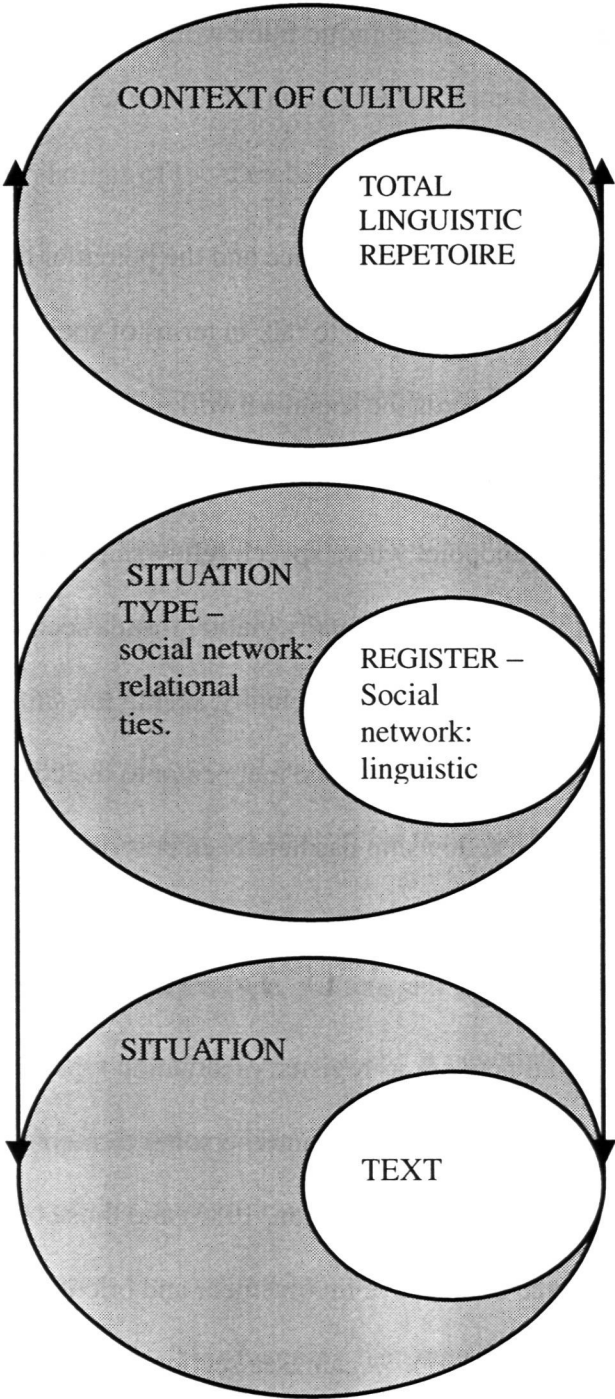


the total combination of potential, the set of total options of situation-types that the four women could transact within, is taken to be their context of culture. Social networks are diagrammatically located within the semiotic framework along the dimension of potentiality in figure 2.14.

Recall that the relationship between the instance and the potential lies on a cline of potentiality. This means that it is possible to talk in terms of social network from different viewpoints. In other words the social network is both the register and culture of the participants. The relationship of potentiality allows for social networks to be viewed from an instantial standpoint where speech fellowships can be defined as the situation in which a text is embedded. Equally viable, from a second standpoint social network can be mapped onto situation type. Finally, seeing the situation type as an instance of the culture, social network may be mapped onto the context of culture. As figure 2.14. indicates, speech fellowship has here been described in registerial terms as situation type.

As introduced above, social network as register, or situation type, will be realized by tenor-related factors, and be concerned with interpersonal elements such as the concept of minimal and maximal social distance (Hasan, 1985) and those of status relations, frequency of contact, degree of affective involvement and orientation to affiliation as outlined by Eggins and Slade (1997). Again, see section 4.7.1. for how these criteria have been incorporated into the index by which the level of integration of the participants in the Pagewood Island network has been measured.

Figure 2.14: Social network's location in semiotic space



Section 2.10. above introduced the notion of probability attached to the system in SFL. The system network is based on the probability of options being utilised; it is based on the number of transactions that choose each option. In SFL the system, for example, the mood system gives us the possible mood selections available to speakers. The SFL model allows us to take many instances of these options and to build up a picture of the social. Similarly, looked at from an SFL perspective, the social network concept can be seen to be a mapping of the flow of meaning. This present study aims to not only accumulate instances to begin to build up the social construction of the participants, but also to present a portrayal of the social landscape in terms of the social network analysis. This, it is hoped, will enhance and further ground the SFL analysis.

When speech fellowship or network is described in terms of register it also becomes a useful tool to look at change. We can begin to see how changes in the speech fellowship correspond to changes in the patterns of linguistic choices speakers make. And how the pressures of a particular network may constrain linguistic behaviour.

Register is then crucial to a study such as the present one, where textual patterns 'construe social patterns and as they change, social patterns also change. The correlation can be seen as a complex dialectic with mutual influences' (Matthiessen, 1993:251). Register has been developed into a valuable tool for linguistic inquiry and this study hopes to reveal how social network as register can help ground observations about the nature of language and the member's construal of their social reality.

To conclude this section, and highlight the crucial nature of register, the words of Matthiessen are added. Matthiessen sees language as 'the assemblage of locations along

the dimension of register variation’ and comments that from the other point of view register:

is an aspect of a mode of organization that expands the overall semiotic space: that mode of organization is *a new way of making meanings by giving contextual value to variation in the linguistic system*. That is, in addition to the system itself being used to make meaning, variations in the system also create meaning. At the same time, each register embodies a kind of constraint on what meanings are likely to be made. (1993:231)

## 2.14 Summary

SFL is not concerned with rules constraining what we can and cannot say, with grammar as a set of rules specifying the grammatical structures, but rather with grammar as a means for people to interact with each other. Grammar is a resource that locates language as a social semiotic that shapes and is shaped by the social universe of interacting persons.

A major premise running through this thesis is the importance of language and context. Another crucial point that I hope to have brought out is the nature of the creative aspect of language as a meaning potential. As Halliday and Matthiessen state:

Language does not passively “reflect” or correspond to” some pre-existing reality. Language *constructs* reality; or rather, we, as human beings, construct reality in language. We do this through the metafunctional interplay of language and reflection: language both *enacts* interpersonal relationships and *construes* human experience. Thus the (speaking) subject, the multifaceted personae, the hierarchies and power structures that we call society are all created in language. Ideologies of class, gender, and the like are established and maintained – and also challenged – through the meaning potential of language. (1997:43)

SFL outlines the possible meanings that social man can make in his culture or social order. It offers a rich theory and a comprehensive set of tools to account for language, which allows us to map the sets of choices to throw light on the consistencies in linguistic behaviour. As Eggins points out:

What is distinctive to systemic linguistics is that it seeks to develop both a theory about language as social process AND an analytical methodology which permits the detailed systematic description of language patterns. (1994:23)

Hallidayan insights afford three perspectives on behavioural potential. It is possible to look toward the text, toward the linguistic system and toward the situation. Further, the tools of SFL offer us a motivated order that allow the linguist to generalise and make value judgements that are defensible through detailed linguistic evidence.

The discussion in the last part of this chapter began with this social semiotic nature of language and has led us, via an account of the language-context relationship through the notions of stratification, the metafunctions, instantiation etc, to context of situation and to a description of social networks in SFL terms. It has offered a brief sketch of the orientation of the Pagewood Island data in relation to the SFL model as a means of showing the need for a comprehensive overview of the theory. The SFL theory outlined here is employed to give an analytical framework for the linguistic analysis of this Pagewood Island data, to put on display Firth's 'magic of language' (1957:185). To make claims about the linguistic choices in terms of the role relationships of the interactants it is however to the social network that our attention needs to turn. Once the interactants are analysed within their network it becomes possible to see to what extent this analysis will allow statements about the relationship between these linguistic choices and the social network to be made. Further, when the social network perspective is adopted to give insightful information about the relationships of the participants, the two models together, SFL and social network, hope to provide a powerful means to put on show, to model, the linguistic and relational universe of the participants. Social networks or speech fellowships are then the topic of the next chapter.