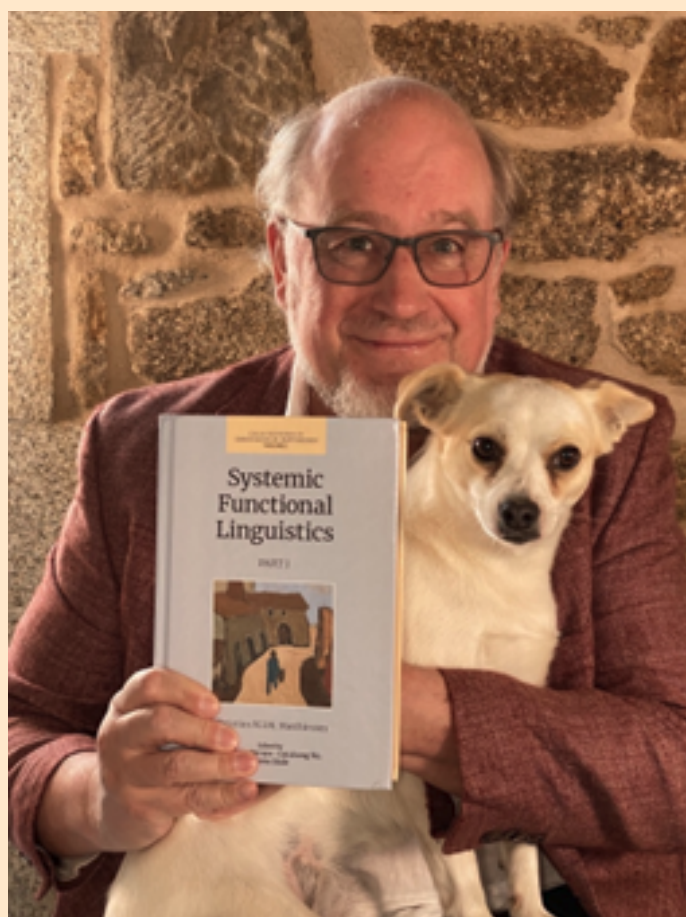


MÁSTER EN LINGÜÍSTICA INGLESA:
NUEVAS APLICACIONES Y
COMUNICACIÓN INTERNACIONAL

TWO LECTURES ON SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen



Aula Histórica Américo Castro
Facultad de Filología
Monday, 23rd October 2023
16:00-19:00 h



MÁSTER EN LINGÜÍSTICA INGLESA: NUEVAS APLICACIONES Y
COMUNICACIÓN INTERNACIONAL

Speaker: Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen
FUNCAP research group

**Lecture 1: Invitation to Systemic Functional Linguistics — as a resource
for describing English and other particular languages**

Aula Histórica Américo Castro (16:00-17:30 h)

In this talk, I will present Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a resource for “doing linguistics” (e.g. Halliday, 1976, 1994; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2009; Bednarek & Martin, 2010; Thompson et al., 2019; Matthiessen, 2021; Matthiessen et al., 2022; Matthiessen & Teruya, 2023; Wang & Ma, in press). I will locate SFL within the currents of linguistics since the middle of the 20th century, identifying traits that it has in common with other functional theories of language and characteristics that make it a unique contribution to general linguistics (and applied linguistics) — including within the broad categories of “usage-based theories” and the “functional-cognitive space”.

These distinctive characteristics include the primacy given to the paradigmatic axis, with language conceptualized as a meaning potential represented by system networks (e.g. Halliday, 1966; Matthiessen, 2023, and the foregrounding of the metafunctional organization of language; and also, more abstractly, the development and positioning of SFL as an applicable kind of linguistics (e.g. Halliday, 2008; Matthiessen, 2012, 2014; Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022), overcoming the chasm between theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics that has kept expanding since the 1960s.

Against this background, I will sketch the systemic functional “architecture” of (modern, as opposed to archaic, and by another evolutionary step backwards in time proto-) language in context (e.g. Matthiessen, 2007), showing how language is theorized as a resource for making meaning — a meaning potential (e.g. Halliday, 1973). The architecture is relational in nature: the meaning potential of

language is represented as a multidimensional semiotic space defined by semiotic dimensions defined by different kinds of relations, both global ones (the hierarchy of stratification, the spectrum of metafunction, the cline of instantiation) and local ones (axis and rank).

Taking a step back, I will indicate how this architecture characterizes language as a higher-order semiotic system contrasting with primary semiotic systems within semiotic systems as the highest order of system within an ordered typology of systems: semiotic system > social systems > biological systems > physical systems. (I will note the complementary interpretation of semiotic systems as cognitive systems; cf. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2006, and also Matthiessen, 2020, in press.)

Having sketched the theoretical “architecture” of language, I will highlight how it can be used as a **resource** in pursuing different activities in linguistics. I will focus on the description of particular languages — descriptions that are comprehensive, meaning-oriented, text-based and thus also applicable in nature, using the systemic functional description of English as an illustration (e.g. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Matthiessen, 1995) since I am presenting this talk to a Masters programme in “English Linguistics” — but with a reference to the systemic functional description of Spanish (e.g. Lavid, Arús & Zamorano-Mansilla, 2010).

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Lecture 2: Towards Systemic Functional Contrastive Linguistics

Aula Histórica Américo Castro (18:00-19:00 h)

In this talk, I will suggest some fundamental aspects of **an approach to contrastive linguistics informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**. Over six decades ago, Lado (1957) introduced contrastive analysis as an approach supporting language teachers, and a number of studies of different pairs of languages followed with the similar aim of helping L2 language teachers predict or at least anticipate and diagnose problems L2 learners would have due to “interference” from their mother tongue. (The term “contrastive linguistics” had been introduced earlier by B.L. Whorf¹.) Lado’s approach was based essentially on US structuralist linguistics as it had been formulated by the middle of the 20th century. As an essential tool in L2 education, it went out of fashion, being replaced by error analysis, interlingua, and other concerns. However, on the one hand, linguists have continued to undertake contrastive studies (cf. e.g. Enghels, Defranq & Jansegers, 2020; and with Chinese as the frame of reference in relation to “Western” languages, Wenguo & Mun, 2014) — the journal *Languages in Contrast* having been established around a quarter of a century ago, such studies now increasingly based on parallel or comparable corpora, often but not always in the context of translation studies (Hansen-Schirra, Neumann & Steiner, 2012; Lavid-López, Maíz-Arévalo & Zamorano-Mansilla, 2021); in SFL, examples include Teich (1999), Lavid (2000), Arús (2003), Lavid, Arús-Hita & Zamorano-Mansilla (2010). On the other hand, thanks to theoretical and descriptive developments, the conditions for effective rich and revealing contrastive analysis are now much better than they were six to seven decades ago.

Here I will ask what **contrastive linguistics grounded in SFL** can contribute to the engagement with two or more languages to address a variety of needs. The concern with language comparison and contrast is part of the conception of what linguistic theory must cover, and predates the full-blown development of SFL (e.g.

¹ Whorf (1956: 240) writes: “Much progress has been made in classifying the languages of earth into genetic families, each having descended from a single precursor, and in tracing such developments through time. The result is called comparative linguistics. Of even greater importance for the future technology of thought is what might be called “contrastive linguistics.” This plots the outstanding differences among tongues — in grammar, logic, and general analysis of experience.”

Halliday, 1957, 1959-60; Ellis, 1966; cf. also Ellis, 1987). And as SFL has developed since the mid 1960s, it has become a more powerful resource for doing contrastive linguistics — all ultimately deriving from the conception of language as a resource for making meaning, meaning potential (e.g. Halliday, 1973, 1977). Fundamental aspects include:

- The organization of the resource for making meaning, the meaning potential, in terms of the paradigmatic axis of language, this being treated as primary with syntagmatic patterns derived by means of realization statement: this enables us to contrast languages not only structurally but also systemically, and allows us to identify systemic congruences between languages even where structural realizations are very different.
- The meaning potential of language is organized into simultaneous metafunctional modes of meaning (ideational: logical & experiential, interpersonal and textual), so we can contrast languages variably in terms of systems belonging to different metafunctions.
- The lexicogrammar of the content plane of language is extended along the cline of delicacy from the grammatical zone via a grammatico-lexical zone (explored under the heading of “constructions” in various versions of construction grammar) to the lexical zone, so we can contrast languages in terms of the cline of delicacy, identifying similarities and differences with respect to where they “lexicogrammatized” different domains of meaning.
- Language is extended along the cline of instantiation from the potential pole (the system of language: the meaning potential) to the instance pole (texts: successive acts of meaning), with intermediated patterns characterized as registers (subsystems of language) or text types, so we can contrast languages at different regions along the cline of instantiation, and empirical research has highlighted the importance of register-based comparison (e.g. Teich, 1999; Lavid, 2000).
- When we compare two or more languages, we rely on comprehensive systemic functional descriptions of each language, and to highlight similarities and differences, we can characterize them by means of the notion of a multilingual meaning potential represented by multilingual

system networks (e.g. Bateman, Matthiessen & Zeng, 1999; Matthiessen, 2015, 2018).

Just as when we study translations (typically focussing on sets of texts located at the instance pole of the cline of instantiation), we can use the semiotic dimensions to explore the **environments of contrast** (cf. Matthiessen, 2001). Thus we can contrast two or more languages locally or more globally; but the general principle is that the contrastive account will be more informative, the greater the environments we frame it in terms of.

I will discuss a selection of these different fundamental aspects, and give examples from various sources, including a study of the translation of clauses of motion and saying from English to Spanish in narratives (cf. Matthiessen, Arús-Hita & Teruya, 2021).

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