Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Linguistic Literacy: Theoretical Foundations and Contributions to Teaching

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ABSTRACT
This article aims to present a theoretical systematization between Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Literacy. The Theoretical Foundation is housed in Applied Linguistics. The research methodology is bibliographic, with a view to mobilizing knowledge from different areas of language studies. It is necessary to problematize the conceptions of Linguistic Literacy, in an attempt to create concepts more sensitive to the interdisciplinary posture of the postmodern era.

Keywords: literacy, systemic-functional linguistics, applied linguistics.

1 INTRODUCTION
In this article, we will review the theoretical assumptions of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (FSL), one of the most important currents of functionalist studies. For this, we base ourselves on the vision of Halliday (HALLIDAY, 1994; HALLIDAY; MATHIESSEN, 2004; HALLIDAY; MATHIESSEN, 2014; HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989) and his followers (EGGINS, 2004; THOMPSON, 2014) in order to clarify that the SFL is, in fact, a social theory of investigation that problematizes the use of language from grammar to discourse.

We also propose a relationship between SFL and linguistic literacy, as the systemic-functional approach believes that reflection on the use of grammatical mechanisms in the elaboration of the text can provide a more conscious and socially engaged writing.

In this sense, we return to the genesis of SFL, in the Australian context, where this approach is heavily used for issues related to education and language teaching, as the epigraph of this article shows.

Therefore, SFL understands grammar as a choice capable of diagnosing the social environment in which it operates. In this way, lexical-grammatical choices can lead the researcher to the discursive level of human language.
In addition to this Introduction, Final Considerations and References, this article is structured in the following sections: Systemic and Functional Principles: Briefly theorizing the SFL; Linguistic Literacy; Language and Context; and The Metafunctions of Language.

2 SYSTEMIC AND FUNCTIONAL PRINCIPLES: BRIEFLY THEORIZING THE SFL

It is not our interest, in this article, to make an exhaustive explanation about the definition of SFL. For more information, consult the works of Halliday (1994), Halliday and Mathiessen (2004; 2014), Eggins (2004) and others. What we will do now is a brief exposition of the main objectives of the systems-functional approach.

In this sense, we summarize that:

It is a theory that starts with meaning and not with form. Considering that the semantic unit is the text, its starting point (and not the sentence), it presents itself, therefore, as a theory of human communication. We then have two more important terms: text and semantic unit. Text that ranges from a gesture, a word, to an entire speech (BARBARA; MACEDO, 2009, p. 90).

According to the words above, the SFL is an approach that emphasizes the text\(^1\) as a central cell of analysis, I understand it as a social tool, since we produce constant texts at the moment of our daily interaction. Thus, the meaning contained in the text is, in fact, constructed between context, text and interlocutors. Thus, language is a mediating element between these three points, providing human interaction.

In this way, we say that language has a socio-semiotic nature and constructs meaning together with other social elements within a given social domain (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989).

Therefore, language is systemic, assuming that the interlocutor makes use of grammatical choices that act as a system capable of characterizing the context in which the text was produced, and it is functional, because it performs a certain social function at the time of interaction.

Another important point to understand the social nature of SFL is its interdisciplinary character. This is one of the characteristics that differentiates it from other currents of functionalist studies. In this regard, we say that “SFL enables the construction of research objects from the dialogue between theoretical knowledge originating from different disciplines or fields of knowledge, keeping the linguistic system at the center of the analysis performed” (SILVA; ESPÍNDOLA, 2013, p. 267).

We agree with Silva and Espíndola (2013), as we believe that an essentially social theory should propose dialogues with other areas of human knowledge, to make the research object even more complex. This makes the SFL a relevant alternative to studies on language teaching.

\(^1\) We will not expand on the concept of text in this article. However, we start from the principle that the definition of text implies both social dimensions, such as the question of context, and linguistic dimensions, as the notion of texture leads us to (EGGINS, 2004).
We understand that, in the school environment, as in any other social environment, language is shaped in the interactive situation to achieve communication. It is in this interaction that conflict is established, as the language user makes grammatical choices loaded with ideologies and power, which illustrates a conflict situation.

In the next section, we will talk a little about the SFL interface and linguistic literacy, as well as its possible contributions to language teaching.

3 LINGUISTIC LITERACY

The SFL has its origins in the field of English language teaching and learning in Australia. In Brazil, we still have few studies that focus on systemic theory as a motivating approach to teaching mother tongue from the early grades.

It is at the boundary between teaching practice and the grammatical description of languages that linguistic literacy can offer relevant contributions to a more conscious writing. We live in a graphocentric society in which writing determines social in/exclusion. In this sense, this modality of language becomes, every day, essential to the practice of human interaction. That way:

It is to imagine what would remain of society as we know it today without the written word. In developed societies, understandings of our world of ourselves are to a great extent results of our ways of creating and interpreting written texts (McCABE; WHITTAKER, 2006, p. 1).

The words transposed above prove that, due to the development of human society, writing is increasingly becoming necessary for man for his social interaction. Therefore, linguistic literacy is relevant in the current conjuncture of academic studies on writing, considering that it requires from the text producer a reflexive, critical and conscious posture in the management of grammatical resources.

Halliday and Hasan (2006) believe that linguistic literacy is of great value to studies on language teaching, given that knowledge about grammar can lead to more consistent writing. On the other hand, the authors also recognize that it is not an easy undertaking, as they believe it is “it’s much easier to teach about language than to teach language” (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 2006, p. 17).

We understand that this problem in language teaching also happens due to the little attention that studies in this field receive. It is necessary that we further problematize the role of linguistic structures in the process of writing different texts, complementing these studies with psychological and pedagogical theories, etc. (McCABE; WHITTAKER, 2006).

It is at this moment that the objectives of linguistic literacy seem to be confused with the proposals of the SFL, since the systemic-functional studies, being social by nature, seek precisely in the grammatical description a possibility of reflecting the language in a given interactive situation.
On this, Silva and Espíndola (2013) endorse that the SFL “is configured as a theory of reflection and action on different manifestations of language in contexts of use (p. 267).

The reflections mentioned by Silva and Espíndola (2013) converge with the idea of literacy, as they consist of better articulated and elaborate writing. This reflection on the language, through the analysis of the grammatical structures themselves, can occur, in the eyes of the SFL, through the grammatical knowledge that forms the clause groups, which, through successive combinations, constitute the text.

In the following section, we will discuss a little about language, in SFL, and the notion of context, pillars in the systemic-functional theory.

4 LANGUAGE AND CONTEXT

As we said earlier, in SFL, language is just one socio-semiotic element among many others that make up the social environment in which we live. Because it is, above all, a social phenomenon, language mediates diverse interactions in all domains of human relations.

Therefore, we say that it is a fertile field for investigations in the field of education, because it is through language that education is promoted and literacy is accomplished. In this regard, we agree with the following conception:

Language, then, is the medium for most of what we learn both inside and outside school settings and literacy is ‘not only one of the principal goals of education but also one of the principal means by which it is carried out (McCABE; WHITTAKER, 2006, p. 4).

The quote above leads us to the idea that the process of language signification is directly related to the social environment in which lexical-grammatical choices are made. This pragmatic character underlies studies in SFL, as this approach assumes that the context is a motivating sphere for the materialization of the text. We are talking about what is conventionally called context of culture and context of situation.

Let's look at the figure below:
The cultural context, initially studied by the anthropologist Malinowski, is represented by the largest circumference of Figure 1. It consists of the larger context of human relationships, where economic, social and ideological factors that permeate relationships between people are intertwined. Such relationships are mediated by different textual genres, that is, the cultural context is, in fact, the moment of genre choice. In that regard:

The context of culture determines the nature of the code. As a language is manifested through its texts, a culture is manifested through its situations; so by attending to text-m-situation a child construes the code, and by using the code to interpret text he construes the culture. Thus for the individual, the code engenders the culture; and this gives a powerful inertia to the transmission process (HALLIDAY, 1994, p. 14).

Also according to Figure 1, we observe that the context of situation is smaller, in relation to the context of culture, and adds linguistic factors in the choice of textual genre. In other words, it is about the context of the record, since it is the moment in which the materialization of the textual genre occurs through lexical-grammatical choices.

It is impossible to demarcate the exact scope of each context explained above, since they are socially constructed, that is, one survives in the other. What happens in the vast majority of academic research that explores this scope of the SFL is a delimitation motivated by methodological issues, which can facilitate the understanding and analysis of data.

In the context of situation, we find the so-called record variants: field, relation and mode. These, in turn, act concomitantly in the materialization of the text and give rise to the Metafunctions of Language, which will be briefly presented in the following section.
5 THE METAFUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

The Language Metafunctions are groups of meanings that have grammatical representation in the elaboration of texts. They allow the establishment of semantic relationships between systems and lexical-grammatical choices (Gouveia, 2009). In other words, Metafunctions are:

the basis for the analysis of how meanings are created and understood, because they allow the establishment of a relationship between functions, or meanings, and certain types of structure (Barbara; Macedo, 2009, p. 91).

Each register variant mentioned in the previous section gives rise to a Metafunction, which differently understands the role of prayer. To illustrate this assumption, the table below relates these variants to their respective Metafunctions. This is a schema taken from the work of Gouveia (2009):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>registry variables</th>
<th>metafunction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social action, subject matter, nature of action</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>ideational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of roles, people and their relationships in the communication situation</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The symbolic organization, the channel (speech or writing) and the rhetorical mode of language</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Textual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ideational Metafunction is centered on the field variable and conceives prayer as a way of representing the world. Grammatically, it is materialized through the Transitivity System, which is structured in the relationship between the clause terms process, participant and circumstance (Halliday, 1994; Halliday; Mathiesen, 2004).

The Interpersonal Metafunction, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship variant and understands the sentence as a mechanism of exchange between interlocutors. Therefore, it expresses the relationships manifested between speakers in a given social situation. For Barbara and Macedo (2009), this Metafunction shows “the degree of distance/proximity or power/solidarity that exists [between people], and the responsibility they assume for the message they convey, if they do so assertively/categorically, or not” (p. 100). Grammatically, it is materialized by the System of Mode and Modality.

Finally, the Textual Metafunction, centered on the mode variant, encompasses factors of coherence and cohesion responsible for promoting the production of a linguistic utterance with texture. From a grammatical point of view, this Metafunction is expressed through the Theme System, which consists of the relationship between Theme and Rheme and, consequently, in the study of clause as a message.

Although Language Metafunctions have their specificities, they all occur simultaneously at the moment of materialization of the record and contribute to the construction of meaning in the text.
6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we present an overview of the systemic-functional approach to language studies. The intention was to establish an interface between the SFL and the studies of linguistic literacy, which are relevant to the investigations carried out in the context of language teaching.

In this sense, we understand that reflection on grammatical aspects is fundamental for the development of the educational process, as well as for a better articulated writing (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 2006).

In short, we hope to have contributed to research on language literacy, given the Australian membership of the SFL. We aim, therefore, to encourage further investigations on the national scene, capable of contributing to the teaching of the mother tongue.

A differential characteristic of SFL is its dissemination among teaching professionals concerned with social issues and the central role of language in their daily lives and how the understanding of linguistic aspects can offer clues to understand the reality in which they are inserted (VIAN JR, 2013, p. 127).
REFERENCES


