From System to Text and from Text to Context: Systemic Functional Linguistics as a Corpus-based Contextual Approach

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“… in fact, we can claim quite confidently that there can be no comprehensive scientific linguistics without parole, and no study of parole without context: a viable linguistics needs to incorporate both.” (Hasan, 2009, p. 168)

This presentation aims to provide some theoretical and empirical support for a major construct in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that the language system cannot be studied without reference to the text; and that the text cannot be studied without reference to the system on the one hand and to the context on the other. For this purpose, I will overview the SFL notions of system, text, context, semantics and lexicogrammar; and the relations of instantiation, realization and stratification. Then, I will show these relations at work through reporting the findings of two empirical studies (Sellami-Baklouti, 2011; 2013), where I show by the application of a probabilistic approach to a corpus of research article abstracts (RAA) how contextual factors related to genre and register activate different lexicogrammatical choices at the level of the logical metafunction, namely the clause complex. I will end up discussing the relevance of this contextual approach to a multilingual contrastive perspective.

Works Cited