

Couture, B. ed. **Functional Approach to Writing. Research Perspectives.** London: Frances Pinter, 1986. 271pp.

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This book comprises fourteen essays which examine the functions of writing in a variety of writing situations. Part 1 (Ch.1-3) offers functional descriptions of linguistic features in written texts which address academic, corporate and literary contexts. Part 2 (Ch.4-7) explores how language systems are presented and function in written texts. Part 3 (Ch.8-10) tests possible correlations between readers' judgments of writing quality and textual features. Part 4 (Ch.11-14) describes research that directly applies functional language theory to the teaching of writing. Most of the articles work within a Hallidayan Systemic grammar framework (e.g. Halliday 1985) and in fact the editor opens in the introduction with a justification of the socio-semiotic approach to discourse analysis.

This book contains some interesting essays which may help us understand better the (social) function of writing. For example the first essay (Ch.1) by Brown and Herndl examines the reasons why middle level executives in a corporation continued to use 'redundant' nominalizations despite their supervisors' advice not to, e.g.

make an observation	(instead of) observe
undertake an examination	(instead of) examine
provide an announcement	(instead of) announce

It turned out that these middle level executives were basically trying to reproduce the style of English that they perceived the top level executives used but in practice they used far more redundant nominalizations than the top level executives.

The essay by Jordan (Ch.2) sets out to test the claim by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 116) that **do so** is 'less frequent in all cases where the presupposing clause is structurally related to the presupposed one.' Jordan demonstrates that, contrary to

Halliday and Hasan's claim, **do so** occurs freely in many forms of close cohesion within a sentence.

The essay by Eiler (Ch.3) discusses how we can make heuristic generalizations regarding text design that in fact reflect actual writers' choices. She demonstrates from a particular variety of text - a lecture-chapter on physics - that its discourse functions can be identified by patterns of linguistic choice.

The essay by the editor, Couture, (Ch.4) defines effective textual ideation, i.e. the notion of presenting a 'good' idea in writing, in terms of a functional scale of linguistic features that promote it. The scale describes effective ideation as a function of linguistic choice, ranging from more elliptical to more explicit expression.

The essay by Brandt (Ch.5) uses text analysis from a sociosemantic perspective to uncover the links between the structure and processes of a text and the structure and processes of the larger social system in which that text participates. She demonstrates how patterns of text features directly relate to the conditions for meaning with which a writer has worked during the composing of a text.

The essay by Smith (Ch.6) deals with the discrepancy between textbook instruction on how writers should maintain a consistent tone and point of view and the actual practice by skilled writers of flouting this prescription.

The essay by Hoey and Winter (Ch.7) examines the interactive (between writer and reader) nature of written discourse which they claim is largely ignored by other linguists working in discourse analysis. The essay mainly revolves around clause relations and their inferential and explicit meaning. (This essay references a number of SIL linguists who have written on interclausal relations.)

The essay by Hartnett (Ch.8) makes a systematic analysis of how cohesion contributes to coherence in text. He suggests a reorganization of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy of cohesive devices into two subclasses: static and dynamic cohesion.

The essay by Hult (Ch.9) reports on a procedure for analyzing rhetorical frames in text to determine if frame development affects how readers' value a written discourse.

The essay by Peters (Ch.10) deals with the problem of communicating with an unknown or unidentifiable audience through writing, especially academic writing. The solution she suggests is to find the theme that relates to the field or subject matter of the discourse.

The essay by Bernhardt (Ch.11) applies the functional model of language to writing instruction. By 'functional model' of language B means Halliday's socio-semantic view of language. He asserts that function precedes form and function determines the choice of form. Applied to writing instruction this means that more attention should be given to the function than the form.

In essay 12 'Literacy and intonation' Davies begins by pointing out that stress and pitch (intonation) are essential (phonemic) features of spoken English and yet are only marginally represented in the writing system by commas, full-stops, question marks, etc. In fact intonation represents a key area of meaning in English which is only partially represented by the writing system. Consequently when we read (English) the problem is to identify the original meaning from the partial written representation. When reading aloud competent readers can usually identify fairly quickly when they have made a mistake and go back and correct it. The focus of this piece of research is to identify exactly how a person is able to identify the 'correct' meaning. It seems that 90% of reading English is educated guesswork! A very interesting article.

To digress this would be further evidence that reading and writing are two very different skills. Sampson (1985), for example, has suggested that the best kind of orthography for writing should be a fairly phonemic one, since in this process we concentrate more on the individual sounds of the language. For reading, however, he suggests that the best orthography is one that represents higher level units of meaning such as words or intonational phrase groups, for example the Chinese ideogram system would come close to representing the ideal orthographic system for reading. Sampson, in fact, maintains that the orthography of English is at present a happy compromise between the demands of the different reading and writing skills. On the one hand the English orthography represents the phonemes of English to a certain degree so it can be used for writing, but on the other hand, since it is such a poor representation (26 characters for 46 phonemes) of the English phoneme system each word (more or less) has to be learnt as a unit. So

when we read English we are reading word-units rather than phonemic-units. In fact we are forced to do this by the English orthography.

The final two essays (Ch.13-14) deal with teaching writing in schools.

#### **REFERENCES**

Halliday, M.A.K. 1985. **An introduction to functional grammar**. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. and R. Hasan 1976. **Cohesion in English**. London: Longman.

Sampson, G. 1985. **Writing systems**. London: Hutchinson.