9

Genres and Registers of Discourse

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Definition and Delimitation of Topic

This chapter introduces register and genre theory (R&GT), a label which can be applied to a range of linguistic approaches to discourse which seek to theorise how discourses, or texts,[1] are like and unlike each other, and why. The kinds of questions R&GT ask can be outlined by comparing the following texts:

Text 1

Although the term postmodern had been in cultural circulation since the 1870s, it is only in the 1960s that we see the beginnings of what is now understood as postmodernism. In the work of Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler we encounter the celebration of what Sontag calls a 'new sensibility', a new pluralism following the supposed collapse of the distinction between high and popular culture. It is a sensibility in revolt against the normalising function of modernism; its rebellion is an attack on the canonisation of modernism's rebellion, an attack on modernism's official status as the high culture of the modern capitalist world. What these critics oppose is not so much the project of modernism as its canonisation in the museum and the academy

Text 2

Most of this stuff I can't really comment on because I don't understand a word of it. If I understand 2% I think I'm doing pretty well . . . Post Modernism is a big fad in intellectual life right now. It's intriguing as an intellectual phenomenon. I don't think there's much in the way of intellectual substance to it. It offers people a device to be careerist, and go to conferences and get cushy jobs and write a lot of articles and be very wealthy and live in big hotels, and keep totally disengaged from any human activity that matters, and meanwhile be more radical than thou.

As register and genre theorists, our concern when confronted with these two texts is to describe and explain both how the texts are alike and how they are different. The similarities in this case are confined to topic: both texts are 'about' the intellectual movement which has come to be known as

postmodernism. The linguistic evidence of this similarity is in the use of the key lexical item: *postmodernism*.

The differences between the texts, however, are more marked than their similarities. In non-technical terms, we could describe text 1 as 'heavier' or more formal, more technical, and more factual than Text 2, which sounds more chatty, accessible, and opinionated. The first step in an R&G analysis would be to *describe* the linguistic patterns (words and structures) in the two texts which created such different effects. There are three main areas of difference between the texts: the degree of formality of the language used, the amount of attitude/evaluation expressed by the text-producer, and the background knowledge drawn on in the texts. In text 1, for example, we find:

Textual formality

(a) Use of standard unabbreviated syntax.
(b) No references to the writer.
(c) Thematic prominence (first position in the clause) given to the concept of postmodernism or to generic groups of participants: for example, *Although* the term postmodern; *it is a sensibility*; *these critics*.
(d) Frequent use of embedding, where units of clause structure are filled by elements which are themselves clauses; for example, *what is now understood as postmodernism*; *the celebration of what Sontag calls a 'new sensibility'*; *What these critics oppose*.
(e) Lexically dense noun phrase structures with heavy post-modification: for example, *a sensibility in revolt against the normalising function of modernism; an attack on the canonisation of modernism's rebellion; an attack on modernism's official status as the high culture of the modern capitalist world*.
(f) Nominalized vocabulary (action meanings expressed as nouns): *circulation, beginnings, work, celebration, sensibility, pluralism, collapse, distinction, revolt, rebellion, canonisation, attack*.
(g) Use of 'elevated' vocabulary: *sensibility, the project of modernism, the academy*.

Expression of attitude

(a) Sparse use of minimizing or intensifying adverbs: *only in the 1960s*.
(b) Sparse and oblique use of attitudinally loaded vocabulary: *the supposed collapse*.

Assumed knowledge

(a) Use of terms which have specialized technical meanings within academe: *pluralism, high and popular culture, canonisation, modernism, capitalist*.
(b) References to scholars without biographical details being presented: *Sontag, Fiedler*.

Text 2, on the other hand, displays the following patterns:

Textual formality

(a) Frequent references to the writer, who is grammatically the subject: for example, *I can't really comment on; I don't think.*

(b) Thematic position filled either by the writer (*I don't think there's much in . . . it*) or simple unnominalized noun phrases naming postmodernism: *most of this stuff, it.*

(c) Use of contractions and idioms: for example, *can't, don't, understand a word of it.*

(d) Low level of nominalization: *activity.*

(e) Frequent use of action verbs: *go to conferences, get cushy jobs, write a lot of articles.*

Expression of attitude

(a) Frequent use of intensifying or minimizing adverbs: *really, pretty, very, totally, more.*

(b) Frequent use of attitudinally loaded lexical items ('snarl' words): *stuff, fad, intriguing, device, cushy, radical.*

Assumed knowledge

(a) Rather than technical lexis, everyday vocabulary is used: *stuff, people, cushy, a lot of.*

(b) Indirect reference to the Bible: *more radical than thou.*

Note that to complete this first step of R&G analysis, the specification of language differences, we need to be able to draw on a detailed description of grammatical and discourse patterns in English.

The second step in an R&G analysis is to try to *explain* the linguistic differences enumerated in the first step. One obvious explanation for the differences is that each text must have happened in a very different social context. And of course that is true: text 1 comes from a textbook, and so occurs in a written, academic context; text 2 is an excerpt from a public speech, a face-to-face encounter with a generalist audience.[2]

Our explanation has highlighted a very important observation about text: that each text appears to carry with it some influences from the context in which it was produced. Context, we could say, gets 'into' text by influencing the words and structures that text-producers use.

We can push our explanation further by trying to specify just what dimensions of social context appear to have an impact on the language of texts. With texts 1 and 2 we can note that choices of vocabulary and structure are influenced by three main contextual dimensions. Firstly, the difference in the formality between the texts can be related to the degree of feedback that was possible between the text-producer and his audience, the principal contrast being between spoken and written situations. If we analysed a large sample of written language and compared that with a

large sample of spoken language, we would find differences similar to those we have noted for texts 1 and 2: written language will use fewer personal references, greater nominalized vocabulary, fewer action verbs, with meanings packed densely into complex noun phrases. We refer to this dimension of the context as the *mode*.

Our second cluster of linguistic differences (the absence/presence of attitudinal and evaluative choices) relates to the roles being played by each text-producer: in text 1 the role taken on by the writer is that of 'educator' and in text 2 it is that of 'social commentator/radical critic'. The language of the texts illustrates the discourse roles to which these social roles give access: social critics express attitudes and judgements, while educators (in our culture) must limit their expression of attitude or express it in disguised ways. This role dimension of context is referred to as the *tenor* of a situation.

Finally, the contrast between technical and everyday vocabulary can be related to the degree of familiarity with the topic that each text-producer is assuming in his audience. As we saw above, this is expressed partly through the choice of words which have very precise, technical meanings within the field of the textbook (cultural studies). Assumed knowledge is also realized through the 'other contexts and other texts' to which the audience is assumed to have access: in the first text, the audience is assumed to know who Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler are, whereas in the second text, the only assumed shared text is that of the Bible. Thus, both technicality of lexis and sources of intertextual references are significant indicators of what we call the *field* of the discourse.

Thus, we can find in the immediate situational contexts dimensions which help to explain why each text uses the linguistic patterns that it does. The analysis of these two texts has demonstrated that linguistic differences between texts can be correlated with differences in the contexts in which the texts were produced.

It is significant that we identified not just one, but several, clusters of patterns that differentiated the texts. Similarly, we identified not just one, but several contextual dimensions that had 'got into' the texts. This plurality suggests that a text is the weaving together simultaneously of several different strands of meanings. If we ask, for example, what text 1 'is about' (that is, what it means), we need to recognize that it is about more than one thing at a time. On the one hand, the text makes meanings about a reality (what postmodernism is, who was involved in its development, etc.). But these *ideational* meanings are not the only meanings the text is making. In addition, the text is also saying something about the writer's attitudes to his topic and his role relationship with his readers. These are the *interpersonal* meanings of the text. Finally, through its strand of *textual* meanings, the text is saying something about how it is organized as a linguistic event (that is, that it is a written text, and should be read as such).

It is these notions of the strands of meanings in text, and their correlation with contextual dimensions, that give approaches to R&GT

their two common themes. Firstly, they focus on the detailed *analysis* of variation in linguistic features of discourse: that is, there is explicit, ideally quantifiable, specification of lexical, grammatical and semantic patterns in text. Secondly, R&GT approaches seek to *explain* linguistic variation by reference to variation in context: that is, explicit links are made between features of the discourse and critical variables of the social and cultural context in which the discourse is enacted. *Register and genre* are the technical concepts employed to explain the meaning and function of variation between texts.

The concept of *register* is a theoretical explanation of the common-sense observation that we use language differently in different situations. More technically, contextual dimensions can be seen to impact on language by making certain meanings, and their linguistic expressions, more likely than others. We can say that context places certain meanings 'at risk'. The notion of 'at risk' can be demonstrated initially with the example of meals. When it comes to what to eat, those of us in the affluent West are generally faced with options to choose among. But dimensions of the mealtime context, principally what time of day it is and who we will be eating the meal with, will make certain choices more or less likely. Thus, if it is morning and you are in your ordinary domestic context, you are more likely to reach for the cereal and toast than to whip up a quick pavlova or put a chicken in the oven to roast. This relationship is probabilistic rather than deterministic: while certain foods are more likely to be chosen than others given the context, there is nothing to stop you from eating roast chicken and pavlova for breakfast if you so decide.

Similarly with language, key dimensions of the social context (such as whether the interactants can see and hear each other or not, whether they share the same background knowledge, and whether they have strong attitudes to express) will make certain meanings more likely to be made. Thus, in face-to-face context most university lecturers are more likely to begin their classes with 'Well, now today we're going to have a look at some ideas about an intellectual movement that's come to be called post-modernism', whereas they are more likely to begin Chapter 1 of a textbook with 'In this book it will be suggested that the intellectual movement known as postmodernism'. However, again the relationship is probabilistic not deterministic: some lecturers do in fact begin their face-to-face encounters with students by announcing that 'It will be suggested in this lecture that the intellectual movement known as postmodernism', making linguistic choices that the flagging interest of their students might suggest to them are more appropriate in a different context.

Theorizing the language/context relationship (just what dimensions of context matter to text, and how context gets 'into' text) is a central concern of register theorists. In subsequent sections we review formulations that range from the relatively 'weak' position of ethnographers such as Hymes (1972; 1974), who posit that a rather disparate number of dimensions of context have an *impact* on text, to the 'strong' position, associated with
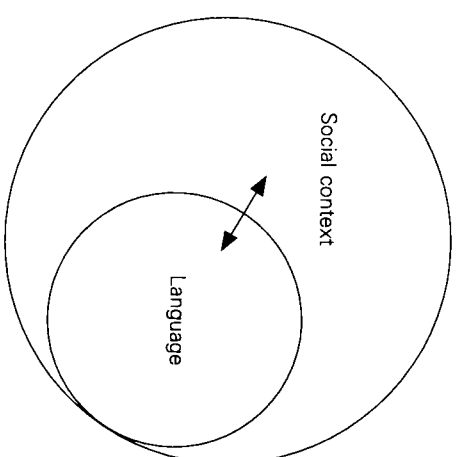
Figure 9.1 *Register theory: relating language to context*

social semiotic approaches (for example, Halliday, 1978; 1985a) which claim that texts are in fact the *realization* of a finite and very limited number of critical contextual dimensions. It is the interactive nature of this realizational relationship between social context and language that will be developed throughout this chapter, as we gradually elaborate on the simple model captured in Figure 9.1.

Given that texts are semantically multidimensional (are making more than one meaning at a time), discourse analysts need also to offer an explanation of the coherence most texts achieve. If we return to texts 1 and 2, we can note that one of the devices which helps to weave the three strands of meanings together into a coherent whole is the writer's use of the cohesive resources of the language. Choices of demonstrative articles and pronouns which co-refer to participants (people, places, things) introduced by noun phrases earlier in the text (for example, *it, these critics*), and the use of conjunctions to stamp logical relations between parts of the text (*although, if*), give the texts *cohesion* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Martin, 1992). But a further significant device which enables each text to function as a semantic unit comes from the *generic structure* being enacted by the texts.

For in addition to register variation, texts may also exhibit variation in terms of *genre*. The term 'genre' is most familiar as it is used in traditional literary studies, where it refers to 'types of literary productions', with short stories, poems, novels, and plays being the principal different genres recognized, each genre in turn being sub-classified so that we have the range of genres we might find in a bookshop (spy novels, crime novels, romance novels, etc.) or in an anthology (ballads, epics, lyrics, etc.). The use of genre as a concept in R&GT differs from this traditional use in two

important respects. Firstly, linguistic definitions of genre draw on Russian literary theorist Bakhtin's (1986) identification of speech genres as 'relatively stable types' of interactive utterances. This broadens genre to include everyday as well as literary genres, in both written and spoken modes. Thus, a transactional encounter such as buying meat at the butcher's is a genre, as is a recipe in a magazine or a staff meeting in the workplace. Secondly, linguists define genres functionally in terms of their social purpose. Thus, different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture.

Genre provides further explanation of the differences between texts 1 and 2. While text 1 is fulfilling the cultural purpose of 'delivering social commentary', or perhaps more accurately 'stirring'. We can see these differences of purpose reflected both in the way the texts achieve coherence and in the way each text unfolds dynamically. Thus, in the way the types of meanings of the text co-occur we recognize a pattern typical of a particular genre. With text 1, for example, we recognize that to write in an objective way about a technical topic taking on the role of educator is quite consistent with the cultural task of 'making a textbook'. We also recognize a text's genre by the sequence of functionally distinct stages or steps through which it unfolds. In text 1 the writer moves us through the stages: date the term, give direct definition from early source, unpack and elaborate on definition, and summarize early uses of term. Text 2, on the other hand, has very different stages: it begins with a stage of personal difficulties with concept, then offers a definition, followed by a dismissal of concept, and justification of dismissal. Each text is in turn an excerpt only, taken from complete texts which have clearly different staging structures: text 1 is from Chapter 7 of a text which stages its content by moving chronologically through different academic movements, culturally a very familiar staging structure for a textbook.

Thus, the major linguistic reflex of differences in purpose is the staging structure by which a text unfolds. Genre theory suggests that texts which are doing different jobs in the culture will unfold in different ways, working through different stages or steps. Again, this relationship between context and text is theorized as probabilistic, not deterministic: an interactant setting out to achieve a particular cultural goal is most likely to initiate a text of a particular genre, and that text is most likely to unfold in a particular way – but the potential for alternatives is inherent in the dialogic relationship between language and context.

R&GT is, then, a theory of functional variation: of how texts are different, and the contextual motivations for those differences. A useful R&GT is one that will allow for both textual *prediction* and contextual *deduction*. That is, given a description of the context, it should be possible to predict the meanings that will be at risk and the linguistic features likely to be used to encode them. Alternatively, given a text, it should be possible

to deduce the context in which it·was produced, as the linguistic features selected in a text will encode contextual dimensions, both of its immediate context of production and of its generic identity, what task the text is achieving in the culture.

For prediction and deduction to be possible, analysts must be able to relate categories of context to the detailed specification of language patterns. That is, R&GT must provide a methodology for textual analysis, *and* it must provide an account of how situational and cultural context are expressed systematically in language choices. Thus, a fully developed R&G theory involves both a detailed account of language, *and* a theory of context and the relationship between context and language.

In this chapter we will concentrate on outlining the systemic functional approach to register and genre analysis. The systemic approach not only provides a detailed description of the functions and structures of English (cf. Halliday, 1985b), but goes further and relates the contextual dimensions of register to the semantic and grammatical organization of language itself. This results in a coherent, functional explanation of why particular dimensions of context are important and others not. Similarly, the systemic approach has been developing detailed specifications of the staging structures and realization features of different genres, as well as accounts of how genres can relate to and evolve into other genres, thus providing replicable and functionally motivated accounts of different genres in our culture.

A further dimension of the systemic approach which space allows us only to touch on briefly in this chapter is that it takes contextual explanation one step further, by recognizing that the differences between texts are also the reflection of a more abstract contextual dimension that we could call *ideology*. Ideology refers to the positions of power, the political biases and assumptions that all social interactants bring with them to their texts. Thus, while text 1 tacitly takes up and supports the positions of academic ideology (seeking to trace development of the concept, withholding personal opinion, etc.), text 2 introduces an ideology of humanistic morality. In each case, the ideological perspectives have functional motivations: they tell us something about the interests of the text-producers. Thus, the text-producer in text 1 wants us to recognize him as a good teacher, and so adheres to traditional academic ideology, whereas in text 2 the speaker's interests are served by debunking the 'myths' of an academic movement which may represent a challenge to his own preferred perspective.

At this point we will look briefly at the work of linguists who have worked on modelling social context.

Brief History

Within the various European traditions, the most influential body of work on register³ stems from what we might refer to as 'British contextualism'

(Monaghan, 1979). This work was influenced by the anthropologist Malinowski and his discussions of meaning in context. For Malinowski (1923; 1935), this included the more 'immediate' context of situation of an utterance and the more 'global' context of culture. These ideas inspired Firth (1957a; 1957b) to build context into his model of language (alongside grammar, morphology, lexis, phonology and phonetics). Firth (1957b/1968: 176–7) outlined a provisional schema for application to 'typical repetitive events in the social process':

1 The participants: persons, personalities and relevant features of these.
   (a) The verbal action of the participants.
   (b) The non-verbal action of the participants.
2 The relevant objects and non-verbal and non-personal events.
3 The effect of the verbal action.

Firth's students and their colleagues developed this framework in various directions. Halliday's reworking of the schema is outlined below (taken from Halliday, 1985a/1989: 12; for closely related neo-Firthian schemata see Ellis and Ure, 1969; Gregory, 1967; Gregory and Carroll, 1978; Ure and Ellis, 1977):

1 *Field, the social action*: what is happening, the nature of the social action that is taking place: what it is that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component.

2 *Tenor, the role structure*: who is taking part, the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved.

3 *Mode, the symbolic organization*: what part language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in the situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like.

One of the attractions of this particular model of context for Halliday's theory is that it fits nicely with his model of the organization of language itself. Beginning in the 1950s, his work on Chinese and, later, English grammar led him to the observation that choices for meaning are organized into three main components, which he refers to as *ideational, interpersonal* and *textual* metafunctions. As previewed in the first section, the ideational metafunction is concerned with mapping the 'reality' of the world around us (who's doing what to whom, when, where, why, how). The interpersonal metafunction is concerned with organizing the social reality of people we interact with (by making statements, asking questions, giving commands;

Table 9.1 *The functional organization of language in relation to categories for analysing context*

Metafunction (organization of language)	Register (organization of context)
Interpersonal meaning (resources for interacting)	Tenor (role structure)
Ideational meaning (resources for building content)	Field (social action)
Textual meaning (resources for organizing texts)	Mode (symbolic organization)

saying how sure we are; saying how we feel about things). The third metafunction, the textual, is concerned with organizing ideational and interpersonal meanings into texts that are coherent and relevant to their context (what we put first, what last; how we introduce characters and keep track of them with pronouns; what we leave implicit and what we spell out).

Halliday (for example, 1978) makes the important point that a model of language of this kind can be 'naturally' related to the organization of context, with ideational meaning used to construct field (the social action), interpersonal meaning used to negotiate tenor (the role structure) and textual meaning used to develop mode (symbolic organization). This resonance between the functional organization of meaning in language and Halliday's model of context is outlined in Table 9.1. As far as we know, British contextualism is the only tradition that suggests this kind of direct correlation between the functional organization of language and the organization of context. Ghadessy (1988; 1993) provides useful collections of studies within this general framework. For illustrative work on one specific register (scientific English), see Halliday and Martin (1993).

Among the American traditions, the most comparable work is that evolving out of the anthropological linguistics inspired by Sapir and Whorf (Hymes and Fought, 1981). Schiffrin (1994), in her introduction to American discourse analysis, surveys this work under the heading of 'ethnography of communication' (see also Saville-Troike, 1982).[4] The best known schema for analysing context deriving from this tradition is Hymes's (1972) SPEAKING grid (Table 9.2). A grid of this kind would function as a kind of ethnographer's check-list, as they observe the ways in which speakers make sense of what counts as a communicative event. This knowledge about how to communicate was glossed by Hymes (for example, 1974) as *communicative competence*. One of the best known studies in this tradition is that of Heath (1983), who studied communicative events involving literacy in an Appalachian community.

Within the various European traditions, a major strand of work on genre staging[5] again derives from British contextualism (Monaghan, 1979). Mitchell (1957) is the classic Firthian study and examines the language of

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Table 9.2 *Hymes's SPEAKING grid for the analysis of the components of communicative events*

S	Setting	Physical circumstances
	Scene	Subjective definition of an occasion
P	Participants	Speaker/sender/addressor
		Bearer/receiver/audience/addressee
E	Ends	Purposes and goals
		Outcomes
A	Act sequence	Message form and content
K	Key	Tone, manner
I	Instrumentalities	Channel (verbal, non-verbal, physical)
		Forms of speech drawn from community repertoire
N	Norms of interaction and interpretation	Specific properties attached to speaking
		Interpretation of norms within cultural belief system
G	Genre	Textual categories

buying and selling in the Moroccan marketplace. His analysis involved setting up text structures of the following kind for market auction and market transaction contexts (in the formula, ^ stands for the typical sequence of realization, although Mitchell notes that some variability and overlap is found):

Market auction
Auctioneer's Opening ^ Investigation of Object of Sale ^ Bidding ^ Conclusion

Market transaction
Salutation ^ Enquiry as to Object of Sale ^ Investigation of Object of Sale ^ Bargaining ^ Conclusion

The most exemplary 'neo-Firthian' study is Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) analysis of classroom discourse. The distinctive feature of this study is its attempt to build up generic structure, beginning with the smallest units of analysis, the act, and proceeding through moves, exchanges and transactions to the largest unit, the lesson. Developments in this tradition are surveyed in Coulthard and Montgomery (1981) and Coulthard (1992).

Australian work on genre staging was initially inspired by Hasan (1977; 1984; 1985; Halliday and Hasan, 1980). Hasan introduces the notion of *generic structure potential* to generalize the range of staging possibilities associated with a particular genre. Her analysis of staging in service encounters and nursery tales is outlined below, along with a key interpreting the structural conventions in the formula:

Service encounter
[(Greeting)] (Sale Initiation) ^] [(Sale Enquiry,) {Sale Request ^ Sale Compliance}, ^ Sale ^] Purchase ^ Purchase Closure (^Finis)

Nursery tale
[(#Placement# ^) Initiating Event, ^] Sequent Event, ^ Final Event [^ (Finale) (Moral)]

Key
(X)	optionality
X ^ Y	sequence
X Y	order
[X Y]	domain of order
X,	iteration
[X ^ Y],	enclosed elements proportionately iterative
#X# Y	enclosed element interspersed/included in Y

Among the American traditions, the most comparable work[6] is that developed by variation theorists, particularly Labov (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972). Work on narrative of personal experience has been particularly influential. Labov and Waletzky's analysis is outlined below, making use of the conventions introduced above:

Narrative of personal experience
(Abstract) ^ [(#Orientation#) ^ Complication] ^ [#Evaluation# ^ Resolution] ^ (Coda)

For further discussion of narrative genres, see Ochs in Chapter 7 of this volume.

Current State of Theories

The previous section outlined similarities and differences in approaches to register and genre analysis within European and American traditions. In this section we will concentrate on presenting recent developments to the European approach, mainly from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics.[7]

As noted above, Halliday's approach to register emphasizes systematic links between the organization of language and the organization of context. The relationship between the language components (the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions) and context variables (field, tenor and mode) is termed *realization*. Read from the perspective of context, realization refers to the way in which different types of field, tenor and mode condition ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning; read from the perspective of language, realization refers to the way in which different ideational, interpersonal and textual choices construct different types of field, tenor and mode. This relationship is outlined in Figure 9.2, which maps metafunctions onto the model of language (the inner circle) and social context (the outer circle) presented in Figure 9.1.

When applying this model, systemic linguists typically draw on Halliday's (1985b) detailed functional-semantic description of the grammar of English
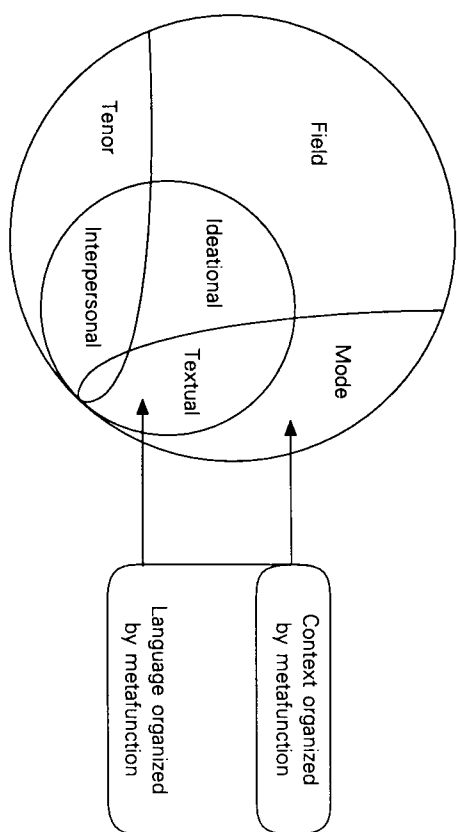
Table 9.3 *Relationship between context, strata, and systems in the systemic functional model*

Context	Register variable	Type of meaning 'at risk'	Language	
			Discourse-semantic patterns (cohesion)	Lexico-grammatical patterns
Field	Ideational		Lexical cohesion Conjunctive relations	Transitivity (case) Logico-semantic relations (taxis)
Tenor	Interpersonal		Speech function Exchange structure	Mood, modality, vocation, attitude
Mode	Textual		Reference (participant tracking)	Theme, Information structure Nominalization

Figure 9.2 *Context and language in the systemic functional model*

Language organized by metafunction

Context organized by metafunction

and Halliday and Hasan's (1976) and Martin's (1992) work on cohesion and discourse analysis. Some of the variables typically considered are outlined in Table 9.3.

As a result of applying these delicate descriptions of language systems to a range of texts, new ways of characterizing field, mode and tenor variables have evolved. Martin (1992) for example offers a description of the mode of a situation in terms of two distance continua: (1) a continuum of spatial distance, referring to the amount of immediate feedback available between interactants in a discourse, and (2) a continuum of experiential distance, referring to the distance between language and the event in which it is
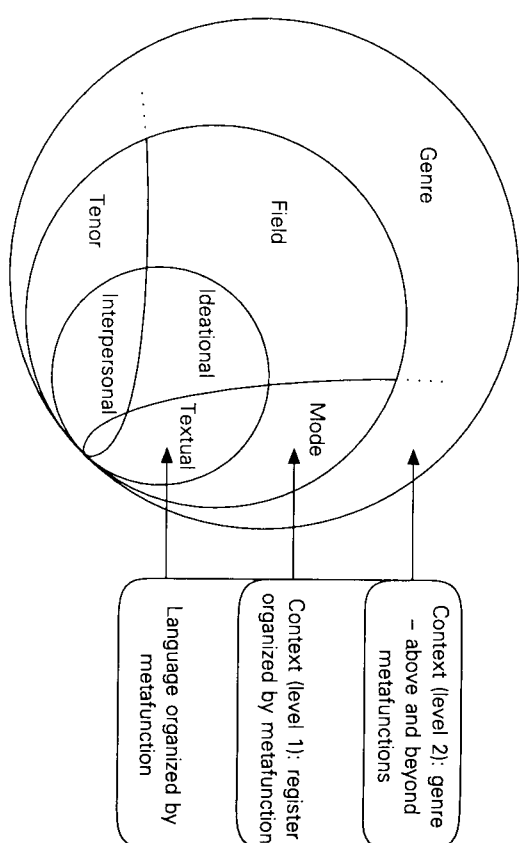
Figure 9.3 *Genre in relation to register and language*

Context (level 2): genre – above and beyond metafunctions

Context (level 1): register organized by metafunction

Language organized by metafunction

involved (that is, whether language is accompanying or constituting the interactive event). Poynton (1985) offers a clarification of tenor as involving three continua of (1) power (ranging from equal to unequal), (2) frequency of contact (ranging from frequent to occasional), and (3) degree of affective involvement (ranging from high to low). Work on the register variable of field has concentrated on exploring the differences between contexts ranging from 'everyday/common-sense' to 'technical/specialized' (Halliday and Martin, 1993; Chapter 9; Rose et al., 1992). For examples of register analysis using the tools outlined in Table 9.3, see Halliday, 1985b/1994: Appendix 1; Eggins, 1994: Chapter 10; Martin, 1992).

Another major step in the development of a model of context along these lines has been the suggestion by Martin and colleagues (for example, Ventola, 1987; Martin, 1992) that two layers of context are needed – with a new level of genre posited above and beyond the field, mode and tenor register variables described above. Analysis at this level has concentrated on making explicit just which combinations of field, tenor and mode variables a culture enables, and how these are mapped out as staged, goal-oriented social processes. A great deal of this research has been pursued in educational contexts where it has formed the basis of Australia's distinctive genre-based literacy programs (Christie, 1991a; 1991b; 1994; Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Hagan et al., 1993; Hasan and Williams, 1996; Martin, 1993). An outline of this stratified model of context is presented in Figure 9.3, which adds the level genre to the model outlined in Figure 9.2.

The following section provides an illustration of how this model of language and context is used in text analysis.

Analysis

To demonstrate the application of R&GT, we will compare and contrast the following two texts, taken from the first two pages of a booklet about dog obedience training provided free to residents by an inner-city council:[8]

Text 3: Introduction

(1a)All dogs are, by instinct, pack animals (b)and must have a leader – (c)as the dog's owner that should be you. (2a)To earn your dog's respect (b)you must possess or develop the leadership qualities of authority, consistency, kindness and patience. (3a)You must instil confidence (b)and be firm but never harsh. (4a)He will from time to time test your leadership, (b)so you must make sure from the beginning (c)that you are consistent. (5a)Dogs are like people (b)in that if you do not earn their respect (c)you will get very little in return (d)and this is where problems can arise.

(6a)As the dog's trainer you must have fundamental training knowledge and the ability to impart that knowledge to your dog. (7a)To achieve this (b)simply follow the home training method as set out in this booklet.

(8a)Dogs are the only animals that have complete affinity with people. (9a)They will give unconditional devotion and loyalty. (10a)They will protect you and your family, (b)asking nothing in return except responsible leadership and perhaps the occasional beef bone as a much coveted addition to their diet. (11a)A dog cannot reason as a human does (b)but they are highly intelligent. (12a)It is the dog owner's responsibility to teach him acceptable social behaviour. (13a)Your dog's acute senses and desire to please make the training process extremely simple. (14a)Dogs also have an excellent memory (b)which is a great help.

(15a)Dogs have a limited understanding of vocabulary – (b)so don't waste words. (16a)Each command must be a single syllable if possible (b)and be accompanied by the dog's name, (c)which should also be of a single syllable for preference, (c)or reduced to a single syllable for training. (17a. . .)For example, (b)for the purposes of the program we will call our dog 'Sam') (. . .17a)the commands would be 'Sam Sit', 'Sam Down', 'Sam Stay'. (18a)Every command must be completed. (19a)If you command your dog to sit, (b)he must sit. (20a)Then he must be dismissed with a consistent, permanent word such as 'Relax'. (21a)This sequence is important, (b)the dog must know (c)that a lesson is only finished with your permission.

(22a)By following this program, (b)not only will you enjoy the rewards of a more responsive and controllable dog, (c)but you will build a lasting trust and friendship that otherwise may not have transpired.

Text 4: Message from Council

(1a)Marrickville Council believes (b)that the education of dog owners about their responsibilities is preferable to prosecutions and fines. (2a)To that end

the Council endorses all efforts to make dog owners aware of the Laws regarding their dog and the reason behind them. (3a)To assist in promoting increased dog awareness, (b)Council is supplying this booklet (c)as a tool for dog owners to become better equipped in the day-to-day management and care of their pet.

(4a)Dogs should be taught social behaviour at the earliest opportunity (b)so that they do not interfere with the quality of life of your neighbours and the general public.

(5a)Council is receiving an ever increasing number of reports of wandering dogs and barking dog incidents. (6a. . .)For the safety and protection of all, dogs, both large and small, (b)as well as those considered tame by their owners, (. . .6a)must be kept restricted to the confines of your property and (c)when in public places, (. . .6a)under effective control by means of a chain, cord or leash.

(7a)Another growing problem is animal faeces in public areas. (8a)There is a never ending outcry from residents (b)about dogs littering their front lawns and nature strips with faeces. (9a)Parks, foreshores and other public places are areas where people want to relax and enjoy life (b)and they should not have to tolerate dog droppings on their shoes or their children's hands. (10a)It is crucial that dog owners be aware of their responsibility to remove dog droppings in public areas.

(11a)The Council is hopeful (b)that by making dog owners aware of their responsibilities (c)and making it possible for them to undertake effective training of their dogs in their own homes, (d)the public will enjoy better facilities. (12a)Council Rangers are patrolling (b)and 'on-the-spot' Penalty Notices will be issued to owners who neglect their responsibilities.

Both texts seek to persuade readers to comply with a directive, and yet they do so in very different ways. Technically, the texts are from the same genre (directive), but exhibit variation in register (field, tenor, mode). We will now briefly explain the linguistic features which realize these contextual dimensions, and suggest reasons for the differences between the texts.

Our justification for claiming that both texts are directives comes from an analysis of generic structure in each text, for which we draw on Iedema's (1995, 1997) analysis of administrative texts. The directive or regulatory purpose of text 3 is achieved principally through the obligatory stage of command. To identify the command stage we refer to Halliday's (1985b/ 1994: 341ff) notion of *grammatical metaphor*, where he distinguishes *con-gruent* and *metaphorical* grammatical realizations of semantic choices. With metaphorical realizations there is a tension between meanings and word-ings. For example, with indirect speech acts there is a mismatch between grammar and discourse function (such as the use of modalized interroga-tives to realize commands). With congruent realizations the meanings match the wordings. For example, the most congruent grammatical form in

Table 9.4 *Schematic structure stages in text 3*

Functionally labelled stages of schematic structure	Clause domain	Purpose of stage	Key linguistic realizations
Enablement 1: facilitation	1–6	To explain one aspect of what is necessary if you are to successfully follow the command	Relational ('be') processes describing dogs as generic class; modulations of obligation
Command	7	To state the core directive motivating the text	Direct imperative; purpose clause (*to achieve this*)
Legitimization 1: reason	8–14	To justify compliance by explaining the nature of dogs	Positive evaluative lexis (*affinity, devotion, loyalty, desire to please*); dogs as Subject/Theme
Enablement 2: command specification	15–21	To clarify how to follow the method	'Dogs' Subject in relational processes describing their abilities; reader as Subject in clauses with modulations of obligation
Legitimization 2: purpose	22	To reinforce positive outcomes of following training method	Cause–consequence logical relations: positive lexis (*rewards, trust, friendship*); contrastive relation to negated situation (that otherwise may not have transpired)

Table 9.5 *Schematic structure stages in text 4*

Functionally labelled stages of schematic structure	Clause domain	Purpose of stage	Key linguistic realizations
Enablement 1: orientation	1–3	To orient the reader to the purpose of the text	Thematizing of Council as agents in promoting/ supplying information; sets up lexis of 'awareness', 'punishment' (*prosecutions/ fines*)
Command	4	To direct readers to control their dogs' behaviour	Modulated declarative; purpose clause of justification
Legitimization 1: reason 1	5–6	To offer a first reason for compliance with the command: so their dogs don't roam around wild	Modulated declarative, with nominalized abstracts (*safety and protection*) in purpose circumstance; manner circumstance (*by means of*)
Legitimization 2: reason 2	7–10	To offer a second reason for compliance: so dogs don't poo everywhere	Thematizing of argument structure: (*another . . . problem*); modulated declaratives (*should not, it is crucial that*)
Legitimization 3: threat	11–12	To inform readers of sanctions associated with non-compliance	Lexis of punishment (*penalty, neglect*); manner clause (*by making dog owners aware*); institutionalized modulation (*responsibilities*)

which to realize the semantic act 'command' is the imperative. In text 3 the command is realized in paragraph 2: *To achieve this simply follow the home training method as set out in this booklet.* This direct imperative is the most congruent realization of the directive purpose of the text (of course, reinforcing meanings of obligation associated with this command stage are expressed prosodically throughout the text; imperatives and declaratives modulated with *must* occur in all paragraphs except the last). The other paragraphs of the text support this obligatory stage in two ways: either with enablements, stages which provide necessary information or procedures for the achievement of the command; or with legitimizations, which offer incentives and justifications for complying. Table 9.4 summarizes these stages as they appear in text 3.

We can state the schematic structure of text 3 in linear form as follows:

Enablement 1 ^ Command ^ Legitimization 1^ Enablement 2 ^ Legitimization 2

Despite its very different 'tone', text 4 is also a directive text. The core command is expressed in the text in clause 4a: *Dogs should be taught social behaviour at the earliest opportunity.* The realization of this command involves two types of grammatical metaphor. One is interpersonal metaphor, that is tension in the relationship between speech act and clause mood; here the use of a modulated declarative rather than an imperative clause. The other is ideational metaphor, that is incongruence in the realization of actions and doings, typically their nominalization; so for example what has to be taught is the abstract concept *social behaviour*. A more congruent realization of this command involves unpacking the noun *behaviour* into its congruent process form (*to behave*), and as a consequence inserting the readers as elided actors, as in *You must teach your dogs to behave socially* (more congruently: *Teach your dogs to behave socially*).

Table 9.6 *Register variables in texts 3 and 4*

Register variable	Text 3	Text 4
Field: social action	Positive attributes/nature of dogs and rewards for owners	Negative dog behaviours and institutional punishments
Mode: symbolic organization	Lower experiential and interpersonal distance (closer to spoken language)	High experiential and interpersonal distance (written language)
Tenor: role structure	Power difference constructed on expertise: writers assert knowledge of dogs	Power difference constructed on institutional identity: power to punish is with the writers

Again, as with text 3, the command is supported by both enablement and legitimizations giving reasons, with an additional stage of threat occurring at the end of the text. The stages are summarized in Table 9.5.

Expressed linearly, the schematic structure of text 4 is:

Enablement 1 ^ Command ^ Legitimization 1 ^ Legitimization 2 ^ Legitimization 3

While the texts share the common stages of command, enablement and legitimization, text 3 shows a preference for enablements (a positive stage), while text 4 orients more to providing justifications for compliance, with the negative threat stage standing in contrast to text 3's positive enticement in the final enablement. This positive/negative distinction is also realized within the support stages. In text 3 support for the command stage is drawn from two sources: (1) ideas about dogs (their limitations and their positive responsive behaviour) and (2) implications for dog owners (as needing to display leadership). In a congruent form, then, text 3 is arguing: *you need to train your dog because this is what dogs are like!* In text 4, on the other hand, the supports for the command stage are largely negative: the enumeration of the problems dogs cause, and the punishments dog owners face for non-compliance. The message of text 4, then, is: *train your dogs – or else!*

These differences in the way dog owners are positioned to comply with the directives are encoded in different values for each of the register variables, as summarized in Table 9.6.

We will now briefly review the major linguistic patterns which realize these register differences.

Field

Differences in field are realized through both transitivity selections and lexical choices. In text 3, 'dogs' are the most frequent participants, and

their natures are described through relational ('being') processes which describe or define them (1a, 5a, 8a, 11b), or possessive processes which enumerate their attributes (8a, 14a, 15a).

Dog owners are encoded both as needing certain attributes, in (2b)*you must possess or develop the leadership qualities of authority, consistency, kindness and patience;* and as actors in verbal and action processes, in (7b)*simply follow the home training method as set out in this booklet,* (19a)*If you command your dog to sit.*

In text 4, the major participant is the Council, which is represented as involved in several processes of consciousness: (1a)*Marrickville Council believes,* (11a)*The Council is hopeful.* The Council is also encoded as a benevolent actor: it *endorses, assists, supplies* and *receives.* By contrast, members of the Council's jurisdiction act only very obliquely, as the implied sources of the reports in (5a)*Council is receiving an ever increasing number of reports of wandering dogs and barking dog incidents;* as circumstantial to an existential process in (8a)*There is a never ending outcry from residents;* or as an amorphous group of 'people' in (9a)*Parks, foreshores and other public places are areas where people want to relax and enjoy life.*

Dog owners appear either as indirect participants (in prepositional phrases), as in (6a. . .)*For the safety and protection of all, dogs, both large and small,* (5b)*as well as those considered tame by their owners;* or as people who act as a result of initiative from Council, for example they *become better equipped* or are *made aware.*

The apparent 'topic' of the text, *dogs,* never occur as the 'active' participants in any major clauses, only featuring once as actors in a non-finite dependent clause: (8a)*There is a never ending outcry from residents* (5b)*about dogs littering their front lawns and nature strips with faeces.* At other times dogs appear in the texts even less directly, through nominalized references to *dog droppings.* Thus dogs are encoded as non-initiatory, but under the control (and responsibility) of their owners.

The repeated reference to dog owners' *awareness* (3a, 11b) is an interesting strategy by which the regulative function of the text becomes disguised: rather than the text appearing to be about telling dog owners what to do, it becomes a text which merely helps dog owners to *think* about a problem. This allows the coercive and punitive role of the Council to be encoded very obliquely.

The main semantic domains developed by each text are seen through the lexical relations. In text 3 the main lexical strings are: (1) personal qualities (*leadership qualities, consistency, kindness, patience, confidence, respect*); and (2) control (*authority, firm, harsh, training, method, program, command, permission*). In text 4 the main lexical strings are: (1) awareness (*education, make aware, better equipped*); (2) control methods (*prosecution, fines, Laws, management, safety, protection, restricted, confines, control, responsibility, training, Penalty Notices, neglect, responsibilities*). While the strings in text 3 construe the relevant field as that of dog training, the strings in text 4 recontextualize dog training as an aspect of bureaucratic regulation.

Tenor

Differences in tenor are realized through (1) mood and (2) Subject choice. In text 3, the command function of the text is realized either congruently through direct imperatives (such as 7b, 15b), or through modulated declaratives (2b, 3a, 18a, 20a). The serial repetition of these command speech acts in which 'you', the reader, is Subject, enacts in a very direct way the power/status difference between writers and readers. High certainty modalities in text 3 (4a, 9a, 10a) encode the writers' position as experts.

In text 4, however, interpersonal metaphor is used to 'bury' the commands and displace the intended addressee (you, the reader), through modulated declaratives in which *dogs* are made subject and their owners either ellipsed or grammatically demoted to possessive pronoun status:

(4a)*Dogs should be taught social behaviour at the earliest opportunity* (b)*so that they do not interfere with the quality of life of your neighbours and the general public;*

(6a.,)*For the safety and protection of all, dogs, both large and small . . . must be kept restricted to the confines of your property . . .*

The most frequent Subject in text 4, however, is the institutional entity, *the Council,* source of the directive. Assertions of obligation are encoded indirectly, as for example in: (10a)*It is crucial that dog owners be aware of their responsibility to remove dog droppings in public areas.* Congruently: *Remove your dog droppings!*

Mode

Differences in mode are realized through (1) nominalization and (2) Theme choice. The nominalizations in text 3 concern the qualities possessed by dogs (*affinity, desire to please*) and (good) dog owners (*leadership, authority), consistency, kindness, patience, confidence, training knowledge, training method, responsibility,* etc.). These nominalizations tend to construe specific types of behaviour as desirable qualities of the pet/owner relationship. The nominalizations in text 4 include: *education, responsibilities, prosecutions, fines, efforts, increased dog awareness, management, care, social behaviour, reports, barking dog incidents, safety, protection, confines, control.* These nominalizations tend to construe various aspects of the management process as institutional entities. One effect of these nominalizations is to increase the lexical density of the text (a higher proportion of the words are content-carrying rather than grammatical). Nominalizations also 'dress up' rather prosaic events in language more appropriate to constructing institutional authority. Thus, instead of saying that 'people complain frequently about other people's dogs barking', the text refers to *barking dog incidents.* In addition, the ideational nominalizations work closely with the interpersonal incongruence noted above to enable the writers to construct

distance between themselves and readers, as well as between themselves and the concrete events dealt with in the text. These effects can be demonstrated by a congruent rewrite of paragraph 4:

Residents complain all the time that dogs shit on their front lawns and nature strips. People want to relax in parks, foreshores and other public places, but other people let their dogs shit there. Dogs should not shit there because then people get dog shit on their shoes and their kids pick it up in their hands. When your dog shits in a public place, you must clean it up.

Patterns of theme choice further support the dogs versus institution focus. Text 3 presents the dogs and the addressees as Theme most frequently and uses no marked Themes at all, while in text 4 the Council dominates as Theme.

While the positioning of dependent clauses as Theme in both texts is a realization of their written mode, the lower nominalization and more repetitive Theme in text 3 lessen both the interpersonal and experiential distance between reader and writers. Combined with the tenor choices discussed above, these features make the text sound more 'spoken' than text 4, which employs textual and interpersonal resources to maintain authoritarian distance.

To sum up this abbreviated genre and register analysis, we might conclude that text 3 directs by providing dog owners with some friendly advice about their beloved pet, whereas text 4 directs by constraining dog owners as rational subjects of reasoned bureaucratic control.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have explained how R&GT views text, and therefore the lexical, grammatical and semantic choices which constitute it, as both encoding and construing the different layers of context in which the text was enacted. The terms *register* (context of situation) and *genre* (context of culture) identify the two major layers of context which have an impact on text, and are therefore the two main dimensions of variation between texts. Within the approach outlined here, register and genre variation are two realizational planes in a social semiotic view of text. This view is inherently dialogic and interactive: text is both the realization of types of context, and the enactment of what matters to cultural members in situations. Just as texts are not neutral encodings of a natural reality but semiotic constructions of socially constructed meanings, so the task of R&GT is not merely the description of linguistic variation between texts. It must also involve analysts in exposing and explaining how texts serve divergent interests in the discursive construction of social life – including the interests of the discourse analysts themselves.

Recommended Reading

Bakhtin (1986), Cranny-Francis (1990): Bakhtin's paper is a good introduction to his thinking, which has been extremely influential in contemporary critical theory; Cranny-Francis exemplifies a social and historical orientation with respect to the evolution of feminist genre fiction. For further reading in the area of critical discourse analysis and register/genre theory, see Halliday (1978), Bernstein (1990), Fairclough (1992), Fuller (forthcoming), Kress (1985), Kress and Hodge (1988), Thibault (1991), Iedema and Eggins (1997); the area of language and gender is foregrounded in Poynton (1993), Iedema and Eggins (1997); for the extension of R&GT to the analysis of other semiotic domains, see Kress and van Leeuwen (1990), O'Toole (1994).

Bazerman (1988), Swales (1990): Bazerman's discussion of Newton's writing is an excellent introduction to rhetorical approaches to genre, complementing in interesting ways Halliday and Martin (1993). Swales extends this work in his detailed study of scientific research articles. See also Bhatia, 1993.

Biber (1988), Labov (1972): Biber's book is a good introduction to quantitative approaches to register analysis, and complements Halliday's (1985c) qualitative analysis of mode. The Labov paper is his well-known study of the narrative of personal experience genre. For examples of quantitative studies based on systemic functional text analysis, see Eggins (1982), Horvath (1985). For recent work on probabilistic grammar see Halliday (1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1993).

Heath (1983), Schiffrin (1994): Heath provides an excellent example of ethnographic approaches to speech events. Schiffrin places this study within a spectrum of mainstream American approaches to discourse.

Mitchell (1957), Halliday and Hasan (1980), Halliday (1985c), Halliday and Martin (1993): Mitchell's paper is the outstanding example of Firthian approaches to context. Halliday and Hasan introduce systemic functional perspectives on register and generic structure. Halliday focuses on mode, while Halliday and Martin gather together a series of studies on the register and genres of scientific English. For collections of systemic-based register and genre studies, see Ghadessy (1988; 1993); for detailed work on casual conversation see Eggins and Slade (1997); for a closely related approach to register see Leckie-Tarry (1995).

Eggins (1994), Martin (1992), Matthiessen and Bateman (1991), Ventola (1987): Eggins provides a clear introduction to recent Australian perspectives on register and genre in relation to functional grammar. Martin develops discourse semantics as an interface between functional grammar and work on register and genre. Matthiessen and Bateman provide an introduction to systemic linguistics in a computational context, including consideration of less synoptic approaches to register issues (see also Bateman, 1989; Bateman and Paris, 1991; Paris, 1993). Ventola applies this model in an in-depth study of service encounters. See also Iedema et al., 1994 on media discourse. For recent developments in this tradition see Christie and Martin (1997).

Notes

1   For further discussion of the definition and identification of text in a systemic approach, see Halliday and Hasan (1976; 1980/1985: 10–11), Eggins (1994).

2   Text 1 is taken from Storey (1993: 155). Text 2 is from a speech by Professor Noam Chomsky (1995: 3).

3   In order to simplify the discussion, we will pass over the important work of the Prague School (see Garvin, 1964; Vachek, 1966); recently, their work on 'intellectualization' (see Havránek in Garvin, 1964) has been influential in Philippines' language planning (for example, Gonzalez, 1988).

4   Schiffrin (1994) explores the work of Gumperz and Goffman in a related chapter on 'interactional sociolinguistics'; Brown and Levinson's (1987) work in this tradition has been extremely influential.

5   There is of course a considerable body of relevant 'continental' work on narrative staging, including Barthes (1966), Propp (1968) (see Chapter 7 of this volume); Toolan (1988) provides an excellent overview.

6   For relevant tagmemic work on genre structure see Pike (1967; 1982), Pike and Pike (1983); and for important analysis of relationships among genres see Longacre (1974; 1976).

7   For a general introduction to systemic functional linguistics, see Eggins (1994). For a more detailed discussion and exemplification of points outlined in this section, see Halliday (1985b), Martin (1992).

8   Source: *Dogs: Non Aggressive Basic Obedience Training*, a booklet provided by Marrickville Council, Sydney, Australia, 1995, pp. 1, 2. Text 3 written by B.F. and S. Daly. Text 4 written by an unidentified council employee. Text is divided into ranking clauses.

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10

Discourse Semiotics

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Definition and Delimitation of the Field

The common-sense notion that language is *the* medium of representation and communication is still deeply entrenched in Western literate societies. It is common sense both in theory and in the lives of our everyday. In the humanities nothing matches the prestige of the academic disciplines founded on language or concerned with its investigation. They resist even now considering non-language materials as essential sources and materials for their activities.

Over the last two decades or so this common sense has come under sustained attack from two sources, one theoretical and one empirical. The former originated in the broad field of postmodernism, with the writings of Jacques Derrida (1976) particularly important. Feminist theory has launched a sustained attack on 'logocentrism', as a major effect of and support for the structures of patriarchy. The name of Julia Kristeva (1980) figures prominently here. The second has come from everyday communicational practices; it is simply the case that the communicational and representational landscape, the *semiotic landscape,* has changed in far-reaching ways over the last 40 years or so in the so-called developed countries. The visual is now much more prominent as a form of communication than it has been for several centuries, in the so-called developed world at least. This change is having effects on the forms and characteristics of texts. Not only is written language less in the centre of this new landscape, and less central as a means of communication, but the change is producing texts which are strongly *multi-modal.* That is, producers of texts are making greater and more deliberate use of *a range of representational and communicational modes* which co-occur within the one text. One effect of this change is that it has become impossible to read texts reliably by paying attention to written language alone: it exists as one representational element in a text which is always multi-modal, and it has to be read in conjunction with all the other semiotic modes of that text.

Multi-modality is not a new phenomenon; it has always been the case that a text was realized through a number of modes of representation