

CONSTRUING HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

There are three strands of meanings believed to be communicated in every single utterance uttered by a speaker Hallidays (1994). This article, therefore, tries to explain how a speaker's inner or outer world of experience, one of the three strands of meaning, is interpersonally negotiated. The metalanguage used to construe an interaction with language will be explained in detail. A sample analysis is also provided to accompany the construal of how interpersonal interaction with language occurs.

Key words: *metafunctions, interpersonal meaning, interaction with language, role in exchange.*

Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a resource for making meanings. According to Hallidays (1994), there are three strands of meanings communicated in every single utterance uttered by a speaker. They are known as experiential or ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning. When someone says "I love you, Baby", he or she actually communicates what he or she feels at the time of speaking to an interlocutor. The expression construes the speaker's mental world of affectionate feeling, which he or she intends to maintain. The speaker also interpersonally communicates his or her minimal social distance to the interlocutor by affirming it and by mentioning the affectionate vocative "baby". The last meaning the speaker communicates through the expression is that he or she tries to organize his or her mental world of affectionate feeling and his or her verbalized minimal distance and affectionate vocative "baby" into a spoken discourse and in an affectionate manner.

Interpersonal meanings cover the type of interaction taking place and the kind of commodity being exchanged, and the way speakers taking a position in their messages. Roles in exchange and the commodity being exchanged are significant factors in an interaction with language. They can display the interpersonal meanings of the semantic level of language which are realized in the wordings of the lexicogrammatical level. The role in exchange and the commodity being exchanged can be diagrammed as in Figure 1 below.

Role in Exchange	Commodity exchanged	
	Goods & Services	Information
Giving	<p>Offer (realized as polar interrogative, imperative, declarative, declarative + tag)</p> <p>Would you like this teapot? An interlocutor may accept or reject</p>	<p>Statement (realized as declarative)</p> <p>He's giving her the teapot. An interlocutor may acknowledge or contradict</p>
Demanding	<p>Command (realized as imperative, polar and wh-interrogative, declarative)</p> <p>Give me that teapot. An interlocutor may undertake (comply with) or refuse</p>	<p>Question (realized as polar and wh-interrogative)</p> <p>What is he giving her? An interlocutor may answer or disclaim</p>

Figure 1: An exchange of goods and services or Information (Eggins, 1994)

Under Speech Theory the decision of whether an utterance is an offer, a statement, a request or a question could be traced by identifying the condition underlying the production and understanding of an utterance (Schiffrin, 1994). A question is identified as a speaker's intent and desired outcome, the conditions of which indicate (1) its **Propositional content** in the form of any proposition or propositional function, (2) its **Preparatory**, that is (a) the speaker does not know the answer (b) it is not obvious to both the speaker and hearer that hearer will provide the information at that time without being asked, (3) its **Sincerity**, that is the speaker wants the information, (4) its **Essential**, that is the utterance is counted as an attempt to elicit the information from the hearer. The utterance "Where does he live?" fulfills the four conditions that it is labeled as a question, thus, it demands information.

A request is identified as directive, imperative and may employ such performative verbs as *request, order, warn, tell*, etc. The conditions are as follows: (1) **Propositional content** relates to the future act of the hearer, (2) **Preparatory**, that is the hearer is able to do an action or the speaker believes that the hearer is able to do an action (b) It is not obvious to both the speaker and the hearer that the hearer will do an action in the normal course of event of his own accord, (3) **Sincerity**, that is the speaker wants the hearer to do an action, (4) **Essential**, that is the utterance is counted as an attempt to get the hearer to do an action. The utterance "Betty, you left the door open and it is so noisy inside" can fulfill the above four conditions that it is labeled as a request, thus, it demands goods or services.

An Offer is identified as a commissive, to which the speaker proposes a future act for the hearer. The conditions to be fulfilled are as follows: (1) **Propositional content**, that is a

commitment of a future act of the speaker, (2) **Preparatory**, the speaker doesn't know if the hearer wants an action, (3) **Sincerity**, the speaker is committed to do action for the hearer, (4) **Essential**, the utterance is counted as a commitment of the speaker to do an action. The utterance "Would you like some candies?" fulfills the four conditions of an offer and, therefore, labeled as an offer, thus, it gives goods or services.

A statement is identified as a speaker's intent to provide information. The conditions are as follows: (1) **Propositional content** in the form of any proposition or propositional function, (2) **Preparatory**, that is (a) the speaker knows what to say (b) it is not obvious of whether the hearer will acknowledge or contradict, (3) **Sincerity**, that is the speaker shares some knowledge or information with the hearer, (4) **Essential**, that is the utterance is counted as an attempt to share knowledge or information with the hearer. The utterance "This is a big problem to him" fulfills the above four conditions that it is labeled as a statement, thus, it gives information.

Metalanguage for Describing Interaction with Language

There are several grammatical terms which are used as the metalanguage for describing interaction with language. They are **finite, subject, mood, modal finite, polarity, residue, predicator, complement, adjunct, vocative, person, declarative mood, interrogative mood, and imperative mood.**

Two grammatical features that carry the main burden of interaction with language are the SUBJECT and FINITE. Subject is realized by a nominal group upon which the speaker rests his case in exchanges of information, and the one responsible for insuring that the action is or is not carried out in exchanges of goods and service. Finite, on the other hand, is the focus for the expression of interaction with language and is part of the verbal group which expresses TENSE—a **sign of time**, MODALITY—a **sign of the speaker's opinion**, and POLARITY. Subject and Finite combine to make the MOOD of the clause.

Next is PREDICATOR (telling what's doing, happening or being) is the rest of the verbal group and is the basis of predication or validation of the rest of the clause.

The circumstances in the experiential meaning of a clause which are added on to the interpersonal meaning as ADJUNCTS are as follows:

1. **Circumstantial Adjuncts** which answer the questions *how, when, where, by whom*;
2. **Conjunctive Adjuncts** which have textual function: *for instance, anyway, moreover, therefore, meanwhile, nevertheless*;
3. **Comment Adjuncts** or **Evaluative Comments** which express the speaker's comment on what he or she is saying: *frankly, apparently, hopefully, to my surprise, unfortunately*

Meanwhile, COMPLEMENTS, which answer the question *what, to whom, did what*, and have the potential to be subjects, are nominal groups acting to complete the argument set up in the clause. RESIDUE is part of the clause which consists of predicator, complement(s) and adjunct(s).

Furthermore, VOCATIVE, direct address in spoken language, and PERSON, the interactants (speaker and addressee) are the extra elements in the interpersonal description.

Mood Adjunct is another type of adjunct but falls within Mood system. They are as follows:

1. of polarity and modality

- polarity: *not, yes, no, so*
- probability: *probably possibly, certainly, perhaps, maybe*
- usuality: *usually, sometimes, always, never, ever, seldom, rarely*
- readiness: *willingly, readily, gladly, certainly, easily*
- obligation: *definitely, absolutely, possibly, at all cost, by all means*

2. of temporality

- time: *yet, still, already, once, soon, just*
- typically: *occasionally, generally, regularly, mainly*

3. of mood

- obviousness: *of course, surely, obviously, clearly*
- intensity: *just, simply, merely, only, even, actually, really*
- degree: *quite, almost, nearly, scarcely, hardly, absolutely, totally, utterly, entirely, completely*
- comment: *hopefully, unfortunately, apparently*

Commentary of Interpersonal Interaction with Language

In order to understand and participate in an interaction with language people need to know some linguistic knowledge. They are explained as follows:

1. **Agentive or societal role** : roles of the participants
2. **Power and status** : equal or hierarchic, temporary or permanent
3. **Social distance** : minimal or maximal, interact on a familiar and frequent basis or on a formality and objectivity in a text
4. **Appraisal motifs** : interpersonal resources concerned with authorial attitude, social evaluation and the positioning of both reader and authorial voice which includes:
 - a. **Engagement** : negotiating monoglossic or heteroglossic

diversity, thus negotiating proposition or proposal (*perhaps, it seems, he says, I declare, however, obviously*)

- b. Attitude** :
 - Affect : +/- emotional response (*like, fear*)
 - Judgment : evaluation of human behavior (*corruptly, skillfully*)
 - Appreciation : evaluation of entities (*beautiful, striking*)
- c. Graduation** :
 - Force : raising and lowering intensity (graded)
 - Implicit (*adore, love, like*)
 - Explicit (*slightly, somewhat, really*)
 - Focus : sharpening and softening (non graded)
 - Sharpen (*a true friend*)
 - Soften (*kind'v, sort'v, as good as*)

Butt (2000 and 2001)

Construing an Interpersonal Interaction with Language

Below is a step by step analysis to construe an interpersonal interaction with language. The selected text is segmented into its unit of analysis, thus, clauses which are then put into their mood patterns. In this article the writer selects "Letter to the Editor" (Heaton and Methold, 1979) as a text of which the interpersonal interaction with language is to be construed.

1. Text: LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Bus Services

Dear Sir,

I have to travel everyday from So Uk Road to the Airport. Two buses travel along this route: the 49 and the 16. However, by the time the number 16 bus reaches So Uk Road it is always full, so it is of no use to me. This leaves the 49, which sometimes has empty seats on it.

The timetable states that there are buses from So Uk Road to the Airport every ten minutes. If this is so, why do I have to wait half an hour for a bus nearly everyday?

The regulations state that if there are empty seats on a bus, the bus must stop at every stop where people are waiting. Why is it that half-empty buses go straight past me when I am standing at the bus stop?

The regulations state that no bus may carry more than 40 seated passengers and 20 standing passengers. Yesterday I was the first to get off the bus when it reached the Airport. I counted the other passengers as they got off. There were 129 of them.

Clearly printed on the back of every bus is a sign that says 'Maximum speed: 50 m.p.h.' The distance from So Uk Road to Kai Tak is 10 m. On Saturday morning a 49 bus travelled this distance in 10 minutes, at an average speed of 60 m.p.h. At times it must have done at least 80 or even 90 m.p.h.

It is obvious that our bus companies have no respect for the regulations or consideration for their passengers. Can nothing be done about this?

Yours,
Weary traveler

2. Segmenting the text into clause complexes and clauses

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

- C1 Minor Bus Services
C2 Minor Dear Sir,
C3 Major I have to travel everyday from So Uk Road to the Airport.
C4 Major Two buses travel along this route: the 49 and the 16.
CC1
C5 Major However, by the time the number 16 bus reaches So Uk Road
C6 Major it is always full,
C7 Major so it is of no use to me.
CC2
C8 Major This leaves the 49,
C9 Major which sometimes has empty seats on it.
CC3
C10 Major The timetable states
C11 Major that there are buses from So Uk Road to the Airport every ten minutes.
CC4
C12 Major If this is so,
C13 Major why do I have to wait half an hour for a bus nearly everyday?
CC5
C14 Major The regulations state
C15 Major that if there are empty seats on a bus,
C16 Major the bus must stop at every stop
C17 Major where people are waiting.
CC6
C18 Major Why do half-empty buses go straight past me
C19 Major when I am standing at the bus stop?
CC7
C20 Major The regulations state
C21 Major that no bus may carry more than 40 seated passengers and 20 standing passengers.
CC8
C22 Major Yesterday I was the first to get off the bus
C23 Major when it reached the Airport.
CC9
C24 Major I counted the other passengers
C25 Major as they got off.
C26 Major There were 129 of them.
CC10
C27 Major Clearly printed on the back of every bus is a sign
C28 Major that says 'Maximum speed: 50 m.p.h.'
C29 Major The distance from So Uk Road to Kai Tak is 10 m.
C30 Major On Saturday morning a 49 bus travelled this distance in 10 minutes, at an average speed of 60 m.p.h.
C31 Major At times it must have done at least 80 or even 90 m.p.h.

CC11

C32 Major It is obvious

C33 Major that our bus companies have no respect for the regulations or consideration for their passengers.

C34 Major Can nothing be done about this?

C35 Minor Yours,

C36 Minor Weary traveller

3. Putting the clauses into their mood patterns

C1 Minor Bus Services

C2 Minor Dear Sir,

C3 Decl

<i>I</i>	<i>have to</i>	<i>travel</i>	<i>Everyday; from So Uk Road to the Airport.</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Circ; Circ
Mood		Residue	

C4 Decl

<i>Two buses</i>	<i>travel</i>	<i>along this route: the 49 and the 16.</i>
Sbj	Finite	Circ
Mood		Residue

CC1

C5 Decl

<i>However, by the time</i>	<i>the number 16 bus</i>	<i>reaches</i>	<i>So Uk Road</i>
Conj Adj; Circ	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue	

C6 Decl

<i>it</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>always</i>	<i>full,</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Mood Adj
Mood		Residue	Residue

C7 Decl

<i>so</i>	<i>It</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>of no use to me.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue	

CC2

C8 Decl

<i>This</i>	<i>leaves</i>	<i>the 49,</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

C9 Decl

<i>which;</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>empty seats</i>	<i>on it.</i>
Conj Adj	Mood Adj	Finite	Complement	Circ
Mood		Residue		

CC3

C10 Decl

<i>The timetable</i>	<i>states</i>
Sbj	Predicator

Mood	Residue
------	---------

C11 Decl

<i>that</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>buses</i>	<i>from So Uk Road to the Airport; every ten minutes.</i>
Conj Adj	Circ	Predicator	Finite	Sbj
Mood			Residue	

CC4

C12 Decl

<i>If</i>	<i>this</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>so,</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood			Residue

C13 Interr

<i>why</i>	<i>do;</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>have to</i>	<i>wait</i>	<i>half an hour for a bus nearly everyday?</i>
Circ	Finite	Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Circ
Mood				Residue	

CC5

C14 Decl

<i>The regulations</i>	<i>state</i>
Sbj	Predicator
Mood	
Residue	

C15 Decl

<i>that; if</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>empty seats</i>	<i>on a bus,</i>
Conj Adj; Conj Adj	Circ	Predicator	Finite	Sbj
Mood			Residue	

16 Decl

<i>the bus</i>	<i>must</i>	<i>stop</i>	<i>at every stop</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Circ
Mood		Residue	

C17 Decl

<i>where</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>are</i>	<i>waiting.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood			Residue

CC6

C18 interr

<i>Why</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>half-empty buses</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>straight past me</i>
Circ	Finite	Sbj	Predicator	Circ
Mood				Residue

C19 Decl

<i>when</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>standing</i>	<i>at the bus stop?</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Circ
Mood			Residue	

CC7**C20 Decl**

<i>The regulations</i>	<i>state</i>	
Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

C21 Decl

<i>that</i>	<i>no bus</i>	<i>may</i>	<i>carry</i>	<i>more than 40 seated passengers and 20 standing passengers.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Complement
Mood			Residue	

CC8**C22 Decl**

<i>Yesterday</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>the first to get off the bus</i>
Circ	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue	

C23 Decl

<i>When</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>reached</i>	<i>the Airport.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue	

CC9**C24 Decl**

<i>I</i>	<i>counted</i>	<i>the other passengers</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

C25 Decl

<i>As</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>got off.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite
Mood		Residue

C26 Decl

<i>There</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>129 of them.</i>
Circ	Predicator	Sbj
Residue		Mood

CC10**C27 Decl**

<i>Clearly printed on the back of every bus</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>a sign</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

C28 Decl

<i>that</i>	<i>says</i>	<i>'Maximum speed: 50 m.p.h.'</i>
Conj Adj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue

C29 Decl

<i>The distance from So Uk Road to Kai Tak</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>10 m.</i>
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Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Complement
Mood		Residue	

C30 Decl

<i>On Saturday morning</i>	<i>a 49 bus</i>	<i>travelled</i>	<i>this distance in 10 minutes, at an average speed of 60 m.p.h.</i>
Circ Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Residue	

C31 Decl

<i>At times</i>	<i>It</i>	<i>must have</i>	<i>done</i>	<i>at least 80 or even 90 m.p.h.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator	Circ Adj
Mood		Residue		

CC11

C32 Decl

<i>It</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>obvious</i>
Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Complement
Mood		Residue

C33 Decl

<i>that</i>	<i>our bus companies</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>no respect for the regulations or consideration for their passengers.</i>
Conj Adj	Sbj	Finite	Predicator
Mood		Complement	
Mood		Residue	

C34 Interr

<i>Can</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>be done</i>	<i>about this?</i>
Finite	Sbj	Predicator	Complement
Mood		Residue	

C35 Minor Yours,

C36 Minor Weary traveller

4. Speech Function

NO	Mood Type	F
1	Declarative (positive)	26
2	Declarative (negative)	3
3	Wh Interrogative	2
4	Polar Interrogative	1
		32

5. Mood Elements

NO	Mood elements	F
1	Finite do	2
2	Finite have to	2
3	Finite must	2
4	Finite can	1
5	Finite may	1
6	Finite be	2
7	Mood Adj sometimes	1

8	Mood adj always	1
9	Fuse/congruent/conflated Finate	23
		35

6. Contextual Description of Interpersonal Interaction with Language

The interpersonal interaction with language occurred in the text could be construed as follows: (1) the agentive or societal roles of the interpersonal interaction are the bus service officer and a weary traveler. It is indicated by the addressee's vocative *dear sir*, and the addresser a *weary traveler* in the letter to the editor. (2) The status is unequal because the addresser demands information and services from the addressee. The addresser thought that he could not provide any information and services himself but the addressee can. The addresser's requests are found in such clauses as *Why do half-empty buses go straight past me...? Why do I have to wait half an hour for a bus nearly everyday? Can nothing be done about this?* (3) The social distance is maximal as both the bus service officer and the traveler haven't met before. The addresser's use of vocative *dear sir* proves its maximal distance because in doing so the addresser wants to maintain his being polite and respect to the addressee. The addresser also tends to use fuse or congruent finites (23), some proverbs *do* in his question, and some *be* to indicate what is still going on, and modalization *may*, *can* and *have to* as his type of intermediacy, though he also uses modulation *must* to indicate strong points. The weary traveler selects positive declaratives as the mood type in order to disseminate his complaint. (4) The addresser uses his own vocative the *weary traveler* in order to show his negative appreciation upon himself that he can gain an emotional effect or response from the addressee.

Conclusion

Any interpersonal interaction with language can be construed under the theory of systemic functional linguistics. Some insight of role in exchange, speech act theory and the metalanguage for the construal of interpersonal interaction with language need to be understood.

A complete construal could be provided when the microlinguistic features and other related theory for describing interpersonal interaction with language are involved. A research proposal, then, needs to be devised.

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