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Systemic functional linguistics and social cognition: A theoretical approach to the relationship between language, society and culture

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Abstract

In this article, I argue in favor of strengthening the relationship between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Social Cognition in order to answer the following question: how could we extend the understanding of how linguistic choices are affected or complemented cognitively? I thus attempt to integrate the views introduced by SFL and Social Cognition by recognizing that the categories from the former, added to the principles of the latter, may lead researchers in linguistics — both theoretical and applied — to a broader field of comprehension which may have some impact on all ways of apprehending the social element. The study draws on categories proposed by SFL as well as the propositions of Social Cognition. I assume, therefore, that there are social, cultural, and cognitive reasons that, if integrated, impact discourse semantics in a manner that contributes positively to an effective communication. That is why a few elements from sociology — egological perspective, dialectic perspective of social reality, sociocultural memory — are used to explain aspects of the social construction of reality and to support the discussions undertaken, in addition to providing some input to answer the following questions: (1) what is the relationship between SFL and Social Cognition, and (2) what does this relationship imply for our analyses? These reflections point to the role of language in the construction of possible worlds on levels that permeate the situational and cultural contexts and indicate that social cognition is a condition for understanding the interrelationship between lexicogrammar and discourse semantics.

Keywords: *social cognition, systemic functional linguistics, society, culture, discourse*

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Системно-функциональная лингвистика и социальное познание: теоретический подход к взаимоотношению языка, общества и культуры

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Аннотация

В данной статье предлагается модель взаимодействия системно-функциональной лингвистики (СФЛ) и социального познания с целью ответа на вопрос, можем ли мы расширить понимание того, как языковой выбор подвергается когнитивному воздействию или дополнению. Таким образом, предпринята попытка интегрировать положения СФЛ и социального познания, полагая, что категории первой, добавленные к принципам второй, могут привести лингвистов — как теоретических, так и прикладных — к более широкой области понимания, которая может оказать определенное влияние на все способы восприятия социального элемента. Исследование опирается на категории, предложенные СФЛ, а также на положения социального познания. Делается предположение о том, что существуют социальные, культурные и когнитивные причины, которые в совокупности влияют на семантику дискурса и вносят положительный вклад в эффективную коммуникацию. Для объяснения аспектов социального конструирования реальности и поддержки проводимых дискуссий используются некоторые понятия социологии — эгологическая перспектива, диалектическая перспектива социальной реальности, социокультурная память. Они также помогают ответить на следующие вопросы: (1) какова связь между СФЛ и социальным познанием и (2) что эта связь подразумевает для нашего анализа. Данные размышления указывают на роль языка в конструировании возможных миров на уровнях, пронизывающих ситуативный и культурный контексты, и на то, что социальное познание является условием для понимания взаимосвязи лексической грамматики и дискурсивной семантики.

Ключевые слова: *социальное познание, системно-функциональная лингвистика, общество, культура, дискурс*

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1. Introduction

This article argues in favor of strengthening the relationship between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Social Cognition to answer the following question: how could we extend the understanding of how linguistic choices are affected or complemented cognitively? It aims to integrate perspectives from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Social Cognition by recognizing that the categories of the former, added to the principles of the latter, may change the

direction of research in linguistics — theoretical or applied, thus impacting all areas of society by offering a basis on which to clarify a range of topics and elements associated with the relationship between language, society, and culture in conjunction with a cognitive view. The ideas that instigated this text have increased since the end of the 2000s, with the first concerns being presented at the 4th Conference of the Latin American Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ALSFAL), which was held at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) in 2008 (see Carmo, 2008). Furthermore, it is important to highlight, in this sense, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to studies in socio-cognitive pragmatics (e.g. Bilá & Ivanova 2020, Kecskes 2010, 2016, and Senft 2014, 2020).

An approach that differs from the previously dominant paradigm — represented, for instance, by Noam Chomsky’s biological basis — does not primarily mean forgoing the relationship that can be established between an instrumentalizing perspective based on human communication, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and the social activities that one performs when knowingly incorporating/learning a linguistic repertoire, especially the situations attached to this repertoire.

This is not to advocate a closure, but a (re)opening of a space for reflection to think about an interface between SFL and the premises of Social Cognition. In other words, the basis of SFL does not exclude the possibility of considering lexicogrammar as constituted by and imbued with a Social Cognition that seeks to guarantee the mutual understanding of its forms in a given society and culture, thus featuring a large repertoire of possibilities that users can choose to employ, according to a certain context.

In this article, I will seek to guide categories proposed mainly by Halliday (1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, 2014) toward the propositions of Social Cognition, especially according to Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006), Smith & Semin (2004), and Garrido, Azevedo & Palma (2011). I will then reflect on the linguistic, social, and cultural relevance of this integration.

In order to organize these reflections, the text is divided into three sections: (1) Main principles and categories in Systemic Functional Linguistics; (2) Main principles and categories in Social Cognition; and (3) Mind, language, and society: the search for integration and the construction of a space for reflection, followed by final considerations and references.

2. Main principles and categories in Systemic Functional Linguistics

This section draws mostly on Halliday (1985a, 1985b, 1994), Halliday and Hasan (1976, 1993), Halliday & Matthiessen (1999, 2004, 2014), and Matthiessen & Halliday (2009). It also takes into account Eggins (2004), Fuzer & Cabral (2014), Lock (1996), Martin (1997, 2001, 2017), Martin et al. (1997), and Thompson (2014) as references in order to understand, consider, and review SFL.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was developed by the linguist Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (1925–2018) in order to become “an analysis-

synthesis of grammar based on the paradigmatic notion of choice, built upon the work of Saussure, Malinowski and Firth, Hjelmslev, the Prague School and American anthropologist linguists Boas, Sapir, Whorf; with J. R. Firth as the main inspiration” (Halliday 1985b: 30). Regarding its recognition as an important theory in language studies in general, Schleppegrell (2012: 21) claims that this is due to the fact that “SFL recognizes the powerful role language plays in our lives and sees meaning-making as a process through which language shapes, and is shaped by, the contexts in which it is used”. Fuzer & Cabral (2014) explain that SFL is not only systemic, as it sees language as networks of linguistic systems that are interconnected to provide resources for the construction of meanings and for doing things in the world, but also functional, as it explains grammatical structures in relation to meaning, that is, with regard to the functions of language performed in and by texts.

This approach sees language as functional by perceiving it as a means of constructing meanings, thus being concerned with the impact that it may have on the context. The perception of language use from a socio-semiotic perspective focuses on meaning as constituted by the choices that produce social meanings.

Halliday (2015: 19) explains that “in any one semiotic event, many ‘moments’ of choice will be activated across many locations within the total architecture of the language”. Meanwhile, Bache (2015: 73) understands “choices in text production as ‘communicatively motivated’ (...) *as motivated means to a communicative end.*” Thus, Fontaine (2015: 113) draws attention to the fact that choice as selection is “a recursive process in the language system as the selection of semantic options,” and, therefore, choice is perceived as a complex function.

For SFL, language is a social and cultural product that presupposes attitudes, values, experiences, and behaviors, for example, as it derives from the necessity of satisfying the needs of those who make use of the linguistic system. SFL is concerned with how language is structured for use, so its point of view is based on the idea of interaction, of communication between those who make use of the linguistic system for different propositions, in different contexts and situations. As Martin (2017: 54) summarizes: “SFL has evolved as a theory of language foregrounding paradigmatic relations as the basic organizing principle of both theory and description.” SFL thus shifted the focus to the functional aspect of language through what are called *metafunctions*, which are *ideational* (subdivided into *experiential* and *logical*), *interpersonal*, and *textual*. These metafunctions are based, respectively, on the perception that language is used (1) to organize, understand, and express ways of perceiving the world from our own perspective, in the sense of our way of seeing what surrounds us and of doing things (ideational metafunction); (2) to participate in communicative events with other people, in order to allow the reciprocal expression and understanding of our feelings, attitudes, judgments, and status (interpersonal metafunction); and (3), finally, to organize information in oral or written texts, in order to enable its understanding, in a cohesive and also coherent way (textual metafunction).

Such a way of thinking requires one to rethink the status of the clause, as each metafunction focuses on a different view: the ideational metafunction views it as representation; the interpersonal as an exchange; and the textual as a message. This way of seeing the clause, in turn, has a direct impact on the way of perceiving lexicogrammar, since it imposes seeing the linguistic forms also in a particular way, that is, within interactional, social, and cultural propositions, to the extent that relationships are established in social practices. That is why language and the social context need to be seen as semiotic levels that complement each other and are integrated. In other words, it is, above all, a socio-semiotic perspective to understand how we produce and interpret the semantic unit that we call text. This means that the basic functions of language are specifically related to the micro and macro contexts in which language itself is used, being closely linked with the social context by “making sense of our experience, and acting out our social relationships” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014: 30).

This relationship evokes concepts and analytical categories that seek to explain the *social context*, dividing it into the *situation context*, which is linked to the concept of *register* and is studied in terms of the variables *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode*; and the *cultural context*, which is linked to the concept of genres. These two contexts combined generate and allow human action/activity in a given society and culture. Such variables in the *register* impact the constitution of genres, as they motivate linguistic choices within the genre. *Field* refers to what takes place, that is, the topic and nature of social action; *Tenor* concerns the participants in the interaction, those who take part in the communicational act; and *Mode* refers to the expectations that each participant has, what each one expects from language in a certain situation.

Thompson (2014) views Register as varying according to use and explains that one only uses configurations of recognizable linguistic resources in certain contexts. This leads him to define genre as a summation of the Register plus a proposition that makes it possible to recognize what the interlocutors are doing through language and how they organize the linguistic event to successfully complete the proposition. It is in this context of greater use of language that the lexicogrammar of language is allocated, because it provides the overall number of possible choices according to rules that are systematically and functionally connected to the communicative needs of those who use the system. Lexicogrammar is, therefore, a source for the production of meanings. For SFL, these choices are made in terms of systems connecting to metafunctions and to their corresponding register variables. The ideational metafunction is linked to the Field and is carried out through the transitivity system. The Interpersonal relationship concerns the Tenor variable and is realized through the systems of Mood and Modality; and, finally, the textual metafunction concerns the Mode variable, which is realized through the theme-rheme structure and the system of information.

The ideational metafunction is based on the fact that the clause can model experience and, therefore, reality would be shaped/made through Processes (verbs

in Traditional Grammar). Thus, the approach to experience must be made from the category of transitivity. Halliday (1985a, 1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, 2014) recognize three main types of processes: (1) *Material*, (2) *Mental*, and (3) *Relational*; and three minor types: (a) *Behavioral*, (b) *Verbal*, and (c) *Existential*. The three latter ones are considered processes bordering the main ones; therefore, they share characteristics from both sets. If one assumes a certain ambivalence that even makes it difficult to classify these procedural categories, since it arises from the characteristics of two other processes, the Behavioral would be between the Material and the Mental, the Verbal between the Mental and the Relational, and the Existential between the Relational and the Material. These processes evoke a specific type of participant. The Material process would evoke an *Actor* and/or a *Goal*, a *Beneficiary*, a *Scope/Range*, a *Recipient*, a *Client*, and sometimes an *Attribute*; the Mental process, a *Senser* and a *Phenomenon*; the Relational process, a *possessor* and a *possessed*, a *Token* and a *Value (identifier and identified)* or a *Carrier* and *Attribute*; the *Behavioral* process, a *Behaver*; the *Verbal* process, a *Sayer* and *Verbiage* — sometimes a *Receiver* or a *Target*; and the *Existential* process, an *Existent* (see Halliday 1985a, 1994, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, 2014). Circumstances could occur freely in all types of clauses, regardless of the process.

For Halliday (1985a, 1985b, 1994) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, 2014), within the interpersonal metafunction, during Mode analysis, the researcher would stick to two main categories: the *Subject*, whom the speaker wants to become responsible for the value of proposition, and the *Finite*, which expresses the Deicticity of the process in relation to the speaker and the now (past, present, and future), and the judgment of the Speaker (*Modality*: Probability, Usuality, Obligation, and *Inclination*: high, medium, or low). What remains after the analysis of the Subject and the Finite is called *Residue*. In terms of Polarity, the Modality should be analyzed as a *Modulation*, which is related to the area of meaning between yes and no, including both yes and no.

The main category of analysis in the textual metafunction is the *theme-rheme* sequence. The *theme* is the starting point of the sentence and extends to the first element that has a function in transitivity, while the *rheme* is, *roughly speaking*, the information that remains after the theme has been removed. From the point of view of an information system, one can work towards two other remaining concepts from the Prague School: the *Given* and the *New*, which are analyzed from the tonal group emitted by the speaker, with the new component coming at the end and or not coming with any data component. Another category of this metafunction concerns textual cohesion, whether grammatical or lexical (see Halliday & Hasan 1976).

Furthermore, with regard to the textual metafunction, complex clauses are also addressed using two systems: Tactical and Logical-Semantic. Understood as two organizational axes, the former is constructed by two types of interdependence: *paratactic* and *hypotactic*. The relationship is established between elements of the same status (*paratactic*) or unequal status (*hypotactic*), as one element changes the

other. In the latter case — a *Logical-Semantic system* — the relations established between the elements of a complex clause occur by means of either *expansion* or *projection*. Through *expansion*, one clause can expand another, while through *projection*, one clause projects itself onto the other, thus functioning as a representation introduced by the transitivity of an element in the clause to which it is linked within a clause complex. Matthiessen & Teruya (2024) presented a thoroughly updated review of SFL.

3. Main principles and categories in Social Cognition

This section seeks to integrate the general principles and categories of what has been called *Social Cognition*, adopting mainly the position of Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006), who explain that Social Cognition is a branch of Social Psychology and has, in recent times, terminologically supplanted this nomenclature in use. To begin, the major problem pointed out is that Social Psychology is not always well viewed due to its sweeping principles originating from disciplines that are considered unreliable: Psychology and Sociology. Garrido, Azevedo & Palma (2011: 27) summarize that “Social Cognition emerged in the mid-70s as a generic conceptual approach to understand and explain how people make sense of themselves and of others and how such perceptions explain, predict and shape their social behavior.” However, studies such as those by Smith & Semin (2004) highlight the value of Social Cognition as a way to integrate other approaches that focus on emotional, motivational, and bodily constraints, as well as the situational effects on cognition itself, understood as the fundamental regulatory elements of that cognition, rather than additional sources of information to be processed. Therefore, when one thinks about SFL and its proposal for the production of a grammar that addresses human experience, one thinks that it productively encompasses thinking about the relationship between language, society, and culture, which provides inputs for understanding the regulation not only of linguistic behavior, but also of experiencing and producing meaning in society. It thus constitutes a socio-semiotic approach that can make use of what Social Cognition proposes.

Even from the perspective of the so-called “individual,” cognition itself can and should be thought of as a dialectical space of cultural apprehension, which is, in turn, seen as a factor of development, since language itself is part of it as a sign and as more than an instrument for interaction. It is through language that culture in general and experiences are exchanged. This already displaces the conventional way of perceiving culture, which can only be learned dialectically, even though it is continuously (re)articulated by the individual due to the social context, which requires collective thinking and group interaction.

The main argument of Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006) in support of Social Cognition rests on the fact that the reconciliation and integration of the individual and society can result in a more profound, reflective, and dynamic understanding of human experience. The authors demonstrate the contributions of

three major approaches that influenced the development of this field: the Theory of Social Identity, the Theory of Social Representations, and Discursive Psychology. These approaches are pertinent due to their emphasis on the social aspect, which facilitates the attainment of socio-interactive objectives through the formation of social groups that share common representations of the world, thereby unifying them. This represents a departure from other orientations within cognitive approaches that employ divergent methodologies in addressing this subject. These approaches may utilize analytical principles such as conscious and unconscious concepts, which appear to be superfluous when attempting to establish a connection between Social Cognition and SFL.

Cleeremans (2001) points out that characterizing conscious processes is one of the most important goals in cognitive psychology, but he also highlights the difficulty of exploring the nature of consciousness, whether in the functional approach to the brain in neuronal terms, the behavioral approach, or through computational resources, when cognition is considered to be linked to the dichotomous concepts of conscious and unconscious. Therefore, the author reviews experimental works in order to question the extent to which cognition can occur unconsciously. The author concludes that the study of the differences between conscious and unconscious processes is an area of Cognitive Neuroscience and that, from this point of view, what is called the unconscious process may be better characterized as the indirect effects of the conscious process itself.

Kayes (2002), from an educational point of view, discusses ways to analyze and perceive the role of experience in learning management. To do so, he revises the concept of experience to more clearly consider its relationship to the personal and social elements (tacit or explicit) of knowledge itself. Starting with a theoretical reconceptualization that considers several previous theories about the subject, he then defines experience within the context of language and social action. According to a large portion of the literature in learning management, learning is involved in the processes of action, reflection, and experience. Thus, learning involves an interactive game between two interdependent dimensions of knowledge, acquisition and transformation, which require an individual to dialectically solve this game in the form of competition, that is, in a tension involved in the acquisition of knowledge itself: apprehension (concrete experience) *versus* understanding (abstract conceptualization). Soon, new experiences will be added to those which the individual has already undergone, especially in environments where competition will have an impact on the professional construction of the individual.

Although one must keep in mind that, due to different orientations, there does not seem to be any consensus on this topic, the relevant literature tends to think of cognition as something usually considered from certain processes involving specific cognitive factors such as attention, perception, memory, reasoning, judgment, imagination, thought, and language. Greco (2002) defines perception as an input of sensory impression into consciousness. Perception itself can also be understood from the interactional point of view, since it involves what is present in

the environment, because what gives input does not originate, a priori, in the individual, but in the way that an experience is absorbed and reactivated whenever something even partially recognizable happens once again. Therefore, according to Magill (1984), we must understand perception not as a condition, but as a capacity for knowledge and an interpretation of the stimulation that enters the information processing system. This is what makes us use attention mechanisms to keep these stimuli in order to provide us with recognizable forms of the situations experienced, and one can compare them at other times. These must be kept in memory, from which one will access the acquired knowledge. When one processes new information, one will then be able to reason, think, or imagine if this or that knowledge/experience matches a certain situation, society, and culture, thus enabling one to make decisions, make choices, and act according to what one considers most appropriate. This is marked in lexical-grammatical choices, in accordance with the provisions of Systemic Functional Linguistics. As Godinho et al. (1999) alert us, one should not understand memory only as a place where one stores something, but as a human faculty of organization and separation of information and stimuli that one receives. Thus, one can always see it from an interactional and (re)articulatory point of view of knowledge and lived experiences.

The idea of social cognition has been used to try to understand how people think of themselves as members of a group and to consider society, culture, and the world itself. Ultimately, it seeks to describe different ways of selection, interpretation, and memory, so as to provide and use social information to make judgments, choices, and decisions. A constitutive social cognition would also directly impact the language choices one makes when interacting, as one makes a selection in the lexicogrammar that best conveys one's experiences to others. When one grasps something and realizes the best way to externalize it, one moves one's experiential knowledge, which provides one with informative material about the environment in which one lives, and, through social cognition, one searches for registers to make communication viable. From there, one moves to the social context and selects the linguistic material for the externalization of one's experience.

Just as one acquires a repertoire of linguistic structures with potential significance, from which, through choices, one gives functionality to the linguistic system, one also needs to acquire a repertoire of situations that have to do with the attitudes one should/can take when faced with them. In other words, there are two types of acquisition: a linguistic one, through which, in the production of meaning, in the articulation of lexicogrammar, one conveys experiences, interacts, and organizes one's texts (oral or written, in the form of textual-discursive genres); and another one, of different situations, that one would keep according to sociocultural standards, which would appear in other moments and environments in order to be recognized, (re)articulated, and/or (re)produced and/or modified contextually. There is one repertoire represented in lexicogrammar and another represented in the

form of what is here called social cognition. This means that the interaction/communication would be linked to a “systemic-functional cognitivism.”

As Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006) explain, several theories have contributed to highlighting, in different ways, the categories used by Cognitive Science, no longer focusing on the idea of an individual mind but rather on the nature of cognition. It is in this direction that the main analytical categories of Social Psychology began to migrate. While these categories were initially understood as indisputable and perceived directly through physical and intra-individual characteristics, they are now increasingly seen as interchangeable and negotiated both socially and culturally. Thus, these categories are legitimized insofar as they are articulated in society, but they start from worldviews present in social cognition. If there are stereotyped categories, such as “black,” “obese,” or “disabled,” among others, it is because, in some way, they are in dialogue with a superordinate category, as highlighted by the theory of Social Cognition.

According to Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006), the concepts of schema, category, and stereotype are central to Social Cognition in order to understand how people make sense of the social world in a systematic and organized way. At first seen as cognitive structures in experimental research, schemas/prototypes, social role schemas, self-schemas, and scripts have recently been researched not with models of social perception, but through more pragmatic approaches in order to highlight the oriented and motivated nature of thought itself. In this context, Social Representations Theory considers these concepts as a set of systems of meanings that are modeled culturally, historically and politically, while Discursive Psychology views them as topics of conversation, that is, as a social practice externalized through language from the choices made by the interacting individuals.

Another important concept is *attitude*, because “attitudes are general evaluations that people make of people, places, objects and issues” (Loewenhaupt & Iglesias 2018: 280). In traditional approaches to social cognition, attitude is a stable cognitive structure that assesses an object, person, or issue. However, this concept has different connotations: in (1) the Functional Approach, attitudes are markers of social identity that include the group as a whole and influence behaviors; in (2) Social Representations Theory, attitudes are reinstated as characteristics arising from interaction and dialogue; — and in (3) Discursive Psychology, attitudes are understood as evaluative practices that have an impact on interaction. Such a reanalysis has also been performed regarding the social motivation of attributions, which were previously seen as implicit and constructed by the individual in daily life. For Social Identity Theory, there are sets of attributions that people make based on group identification and intergroup relationships, such as class, ethnicity, social gender, and religion, for example. For Social Representations Theory, attributions are not perceptual or individual cognitive judgments, but systems of cultural meanings modeled collectively. Finally, for Cognitive Psychology, attributions originate in discursive practices and therefore need to be studied in light of social

interaction. This is the reason why Social Cognition, as it is asserted today, approaches prejudice, for example, not as an authoritarian personality but rather as something brought about by a social orientation that aims to be dominant in relation to others. Fiske & Taylor (1991: 13) draw attention to the fact of

a fully engaged thinker who has multiple cognitive strategies available and chooses among them based on goals, motives, and needs: sometimes the motivated tactician chooses wisely, in the interests of adaptability and accuracy, and sometimes the motivated tactician chooses defensively, in the interests of speed or self-esteem.

As Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue (2006: 384) conclude, research on cognition is based on different levels, namely: intraindividual, interindividual, intergroup, and collective. Although it is clear that, on the intra-individual level, it is not possible to approximate Social Cognition and SFL, on other levels, with an orientation towards the meaning and function of language in the construction of social relations, it does seem possible to relate them through reflection on the assumptions of the theories previously discussed, as explored in the next section. Recent research, such as that of Gladkova & Larina (2018), Bilá & Ivanova (2020), and Eslami, Larina & Pashmforoosh (2023), demonstrates the importance of approaches that focus on the relationship between language, society, and culture, as well as the proposal undertaken here, which will be developed in the following section.

4. Mind, language and society: The search for integration and the construction of a space for reflection

As previously mentioned, in an attempt at integration, this paper starts from studies of the social nuance of SFL, as demonstrated in Martin et al. (1997) and Gouveia (2006). Gouveia (2006) points out that Halliday sought a dialogue with Noam Chomsky, proposing a form of linguistics concerned with “a linguistics of consumable knowledge,” that is, a linguistics that was instrumental as opposed to genetic, the latter of which restricted our grammars and their combinatorial rules. He thus shows that the orientation of a functional grammar is social rather than biological. However, in terms of attitude, faced with the choices made among the possibilities offered by the system, the guarantee of success among interlocutors could/should be connected to a social cognition in the following sense: a choice in the linguistic system made by the speaker will depend on his/her probable aims — which is still a mental aspect, although it is more related to the non-arbitrariness of the use of the forms and the effects of the meaning produced. For its part, the meaning is related to the performative aspect of its organization in the sense that speakers need, at the very least, to anticipate the likely interpretation that their interlocutors may make of their choices in propositional terms.

From a functionalist perspective, Dik (1989) asserts, for instance, that the language system and the use of language are interconnected but distinct, since

interaction between people is extremely complex and calls into question any simplistic or definite response about what is involved in verbal exchange or about the probable/possible greater relevance of any constituent elements in that process. He thus rejects a description of language in which participants can only be perceived and understood within the interaction situation, which is itself determined socio-culturally. This involves a mobilization of elements from different spheres. In verbal interaction, between the probable intention of the addressee speaker and the interpretation by the recipient listener, there is a linguistic expression that must be understood as mediation, as a grammar of the language viewed as something emerging from this situation, as pointed out by Hopper (1988, 2012). Dik (1989) explains that linguistic expression is a function of three interconnected elements: (1) the speaker's intention, (2) pragmatic information, and (3) the speaker's anticipation of the listener's interpretation. This interpretation, for its part, would already be a function (1) of linguistic expression, (2) pragmatic information, and (3) conjectures about the speaker's intentions, as well as the listener's operations during the interaction.

For this reason, the relevance of social cognition can be recovered, albeit in SFL, in the contexts of situation and culture, because these operations must also be performed by the interlocutor. That is, social cognition starts from the principle that interlocutors have command of the linguistic system — as a system of choices — and therefore will be able to understand the proposition made, because they know the lexicogrammar of language in its performative aspect. It can thus be deduced that there are expectations for the choice and for the specific use of a form of expression. There must be a whole recognizable social and cultural conjuncture — social cognition — that can, in the search for and anticipation of the probable “intentions” or communicative aims of the speaker, try to “guarantee” the mutual understanding of the proposition. In other words, there are expectations, based on a group or collective knowledge. Unlike an egological perspective such as that of Schütz (1979), which is centered on the “I” and not exactly on the intentionality of that “I,” as Searle (2000) observes, there is only one social reality because of the shared knowledge that constructs the figure of the “we,” the “collective us,” a society and an organized culture. General knowledge shared across different spheres of society, such as science, and knowledge coming from common sense both influence and are shaped by social reality, as we can see in the work of Berger & Luckmann (1973). Therefore, this knowledge should be part of thought, imagination, and sociocultural memory, that is, of social cognition. Beyond a polarized perception that distinguishes the self and the social, there is a dialectic that is constructing what we call social reality, in which every constituent element is closely interrelated in the construction of the meaning of linguistic forms and of the greater sense, which has been constructed situationally and culturally in the text, understood in a broader sense.

It is not only a question of a social context divided into a context of culture and situation, but also of social cognition, which is responsible for the social repertoire,

in addition to cultural and situational exchanges that enable inter-cultural exchanges and seek to ensure the effectiveness of such exchanges by evaluating the chance of a minimum supply of expectations generated through possible/probable intentions of the speakers and the knowledge of the listeners who should be able to understand them in the process of decoding the text. This text is produced from the lexical-grammatical (or other) choices made by the ones who use the possibilities that the linguistic (or semiotic) system provides for the production of meaning. It should therefore be noted that what we have are effects of meaning coming from these choices, and social cognition which makes something recognizable and potentially significant, such that the idea of “intention” or “intentionality” can only be presumed.

Both Berger & Luckmann (1973) and Halliday (1978) use the construction metaphor to talk about the representative capacity of language. The former seeks to show language as a construction of symbolic representation and the latter as a construction of meanings and therefore a semiotic construct. It is important to note that Berger & Luckmann (1973) consider reality from the interactional perspective, because they start from the relationship established with the other, which is why they affirm that it — reality — is previously apprehended and objectified. Thus, based on the Metafunctions proposed by the Systemic Functional model, lexicogrammar would move this knowledge according to the communicative aims of the individual who makes use of the system. The representative potential of the language in use would then be respected, both in its referential and in its metaphorical use pointed out by Halliday (1978). The success of the interaction depends on these operations, and we argue that it is necessary not only to have a social context — divided into a situational and cultural context — but also a social cognition, so as to ensure that the lexicogrammar is taken as a gateway for the dialectical transfer of this shared knowledge that is essential for the constitution of reality, society, and culture.

What is referred to here as Social Cognition is a dialectical assumption about the dynamics present in discourse semantics, since investing something lexicogrammatically implies the production of meaning, particularly of recognizable sociocultural and cognitive meaning in a certain society and culture. The attempt to include social cognition in the universe of discourse semantics requires such an adaptation, as illustrated in the model in Figure 1.

Halliday & Matthiessen (1999) have already proposed a debate within Cognitive Science by affirming that cognition is not thought but meaning, since the mental “map” is a semiotic map. Cognition is thus considered to be a way of talking about language while lexicogrammar would be a form of construction and modeling of social cognition and the knowledge pertinent to it. From both our point of view and that of the aforementioned authors, although grammar creates a clear distinction between cognition and desire (*desideration*) on the one hand, and between perception and emotion on the other (see Halliday & Matthiessen 1999: 139), it still seems relevant, as the authors themselves indicate, to forge a dialogue with theories

of cognition that can be aligned with LSF. A certain dialogue is proposed here, one that is open to new reflections and encouraging contributions.

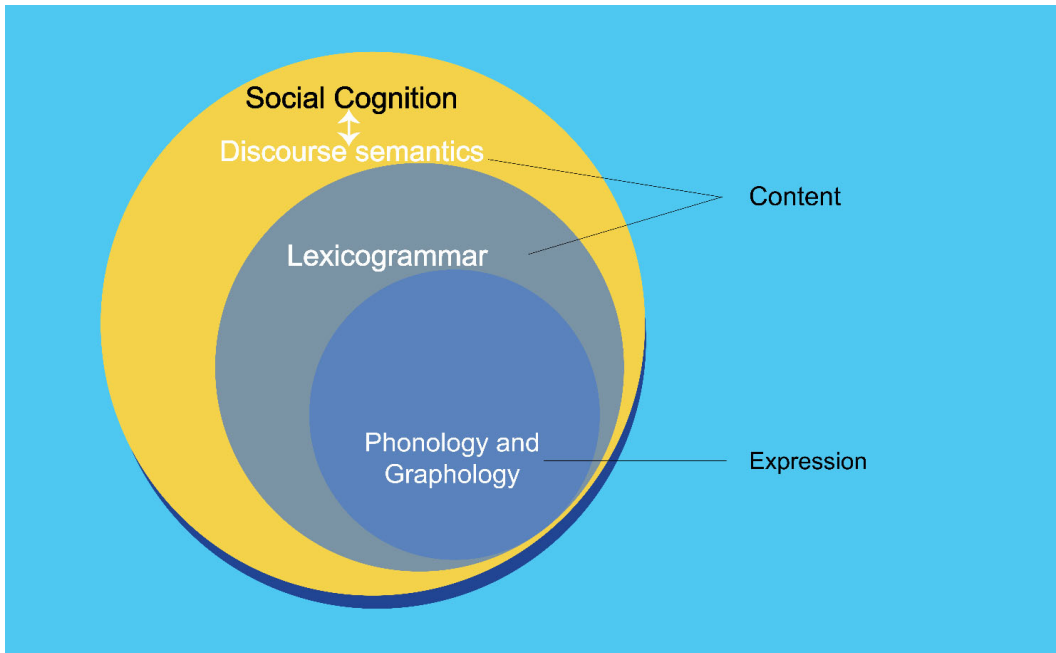


Figure 1. Discourse Semantics with the Inclusion of Social Cognition
Based on: Martin (1997: 6).

Halliday & Matthiessen (2014: 27) claim that “the system of a language is ‘instantiated’ in the form of text,” the instantiation itself being tied to the possible choices offered by the language system. In this sense, it is relevant to introduce the contributions of Vian Júnior (2009) when he asserts that instantiation is a dialectical process and is considered to be the manifestation of the linguistic system in the text, thus presenting the prerogative of constructing and reconstructing the meaning potentials of a given culture. According to Gouveia (2009), the text itself is an instantiation of the system and it is possible to visualize its functioning in a network by examining what has been instantiated. For Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), as an artifact, the text needs to be seen as a product of human interaction that leads to an investigative activity which seeks to know how it means what it means and why.

What we have presented is a way to expand the discussion around our interpretation of Halliday’s (1978) proposal to understand language as a code imbued with the potentialities of both *behavior* and *meaning*. This constitutes a point of reflection on how the means of expression are also connected to the human organism, both with regard to what it *can do* in interaction with others, and in terms of the creative and transformative potential of language, based on what structures *can mean*. These structures, according to Metafunctions, would be permeated by the attributive and attitudinal potential required by situations and contexts, thus

turning language into a form of social action. This understanding could connect the categories of Social Cognition explained in the previous section to those proposed by SFL, without, however, opposing a perspective based on meaning constructed within the interaction. We would continue to perceive the use of language from a socio-semiotic perspective, defining meaning as constituted by the choices that produce meanings, adding that there would be a repertoire not only of lexicogrammatical choices, but also of situations and attitudes demanded by the social context and the effects of the meaning produced, with neither theory diminishing the other nor asymmetric relations of power existing between them, but rather a productive dialogue fostering research and debates between the perspectives.

To conclude and outline these reflections, the following model in Figure 2 is a possible summary of what has been discussed here thus far:

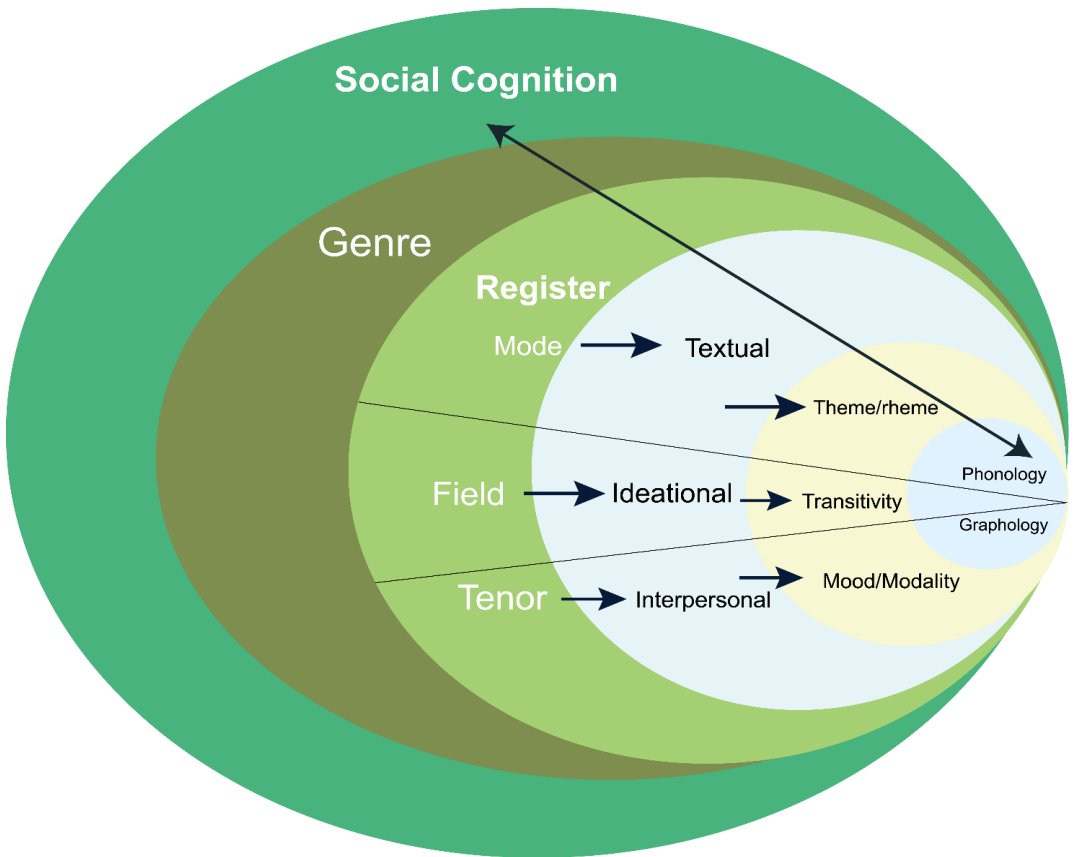


Figure 2. Systemic Model with the Insertion of Social Cognition

Based on: Martin (1997).

This model, which is simply an adjustment of what has already become traditional and canonical in SFL, is intended to demonstrate that Social Cognition would pervade all levels examined by SFL, thus making it possible to meet

communicative expectations within social interaction processes, such as understanding genre (cultural context), whose different approaches always point to ritualized situations and their nature as social actions with recognizable configurations; register and its variables (situational context); and the Metafunctions, which have a direct impact on expected attitudes based on the understanding of lexicogrammar in terms of its potential for meaning.

To exemplify the proposed integration, we will use a short exchange that we witnessed after a discussion between two children playing on the street, and compare it with another case taken from the social network Instagram.

Situation 1. It was a Sunday afternoon, near a sports court in the district of Águas Gerais, São João del-Rei, Minas Gerais, Brazil. Several children were playing and two of them, approximately 4 to 6 years old, had an argument. They will be designated by the fictitious names João and Carlos, in the dialogue reproduced below.

João: *Me dá a bola!* [Give me the ball!]

Carlos: *Não!* [No!]

João: *Me dá ela!* [Give it to me!]

Carlos: *Não dou!* [No, I won't]

João: *Me dá!* [Give it to me!]

Carlos: *Preto! Engole ela então!* [Blackie! Swallow it then!]

After that, João starts crying a lot, leaves the place, and screams for his mother using the following structure: João: *Manhê! O Carlos me xingou de preto.* [Mommy! João called me blackie]. The structure consists of Vocative (*Manhê*), Behaver (*O João*), Target (*me*), Behavior process (*xingou*), and Attribute (*de preto*). Here we have a common lexical selection for children. What particularly stands out is the selection of the word *preto/blackie*, which introduces a different hue. Carlos is a white boy and João is a black boy, which places the entire focus of the argument and the result of Carlos' lexical selection under analysis when he uses the clause with a behavioral process (*engole/swallow*): Carlos — as a behaver — has a linguistically marked prejudiced attitude towards João's blackness. However, João also demonstrates prejudice towards himself when choosing the process and perceiving his blackness as something negative, as evident in the attribute used and, therefore, understood and classified as an insult. The prejudice of both is thereby ideationally marked. In terms of structure, beginning a clause with a vocative is prototypical, but it is possible to go beyond this observation. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), vocatives occur frequently and exhibit great mobility, but they are not part of the Mood or the Residue. They do, however, appear in the structure as interaction, because both vocatives and expletives are features of casual dialogues to reinforce the “you-and-me.”

From this point on, one could move into Social Cognition, as there is already something beyond, something connected with situational, social, and cultural aspects. First, there is the affective relationship between mothers and children, which leads children to tend to call their mothers first in different situations.

Second, there are socio-historical aspects that guide the views of both Carlos and João, who see the condition of being black as negative. That which belongs to the sphere of experience, which is linguistically marked in the lexicogrammar, goes beyond both poles of the conversation and leads to the same social apprehension of blackness due to a long history of slavery, devaluation, and racism that, more than social and cultural behaviors, are part of the collective memory reverberating at different levels of the national subconscious, thus acting subliminally and guiding ways of acting and thinking. Therefore, it is part of social cognition as an expansion of the level of discourse semantics. It is not just a linguistic, social, or cultural issue, but something that retrieves a history that is in the memory not only of Brazilians, but of all the countries that suffered from slavery, whose tentacles remain in the mind, both individually and collectively.

This also concerns one's lexicogrammatical choices, which directly impact the way one chooses to express oneself. It involves an expansion in the way of seeing the organization of thought and experience in society. Linguistic aspects under the socio-semiotic lens of SFL point to the attitudes of individuals by highlighting their situational, social, and cultural orientation. Within the approach presented here, one can think of linguistic categories as indicators of linguistic and sociocultural behaviors arising from Social Cognition, as an expansion of discourse semantics itself. These categories serve as gateways to attitudinal sources, which can be accessed in different ways and informed by constructs and psychological factors stored in memory that influence people's lexicogrammatical and behavioral choices within social dynamics. For sake of comparison, let us analyze a comment published on the internet.¹

(1) Eu não sou racista, aliás, (2) eu não tenho preconceitos. [I'm not racist, in fact, I am not prejudiced] (3) Mas cada vez que aprontam uma dessas comigo, (4) nasce 1% de barreira contra PRETOS em mim. [But every time they do something like that to me, a 1% barrier against BLACKIES is born in me] (5) E estavam num carro importado, (6) certo que é roubado. [And they were in an imported car, it's surely stolen] (7) Acabei de ser quase atropelada por um casal de negros. [I just almost got run over by a black couple] (8) Depois vocês falam (9) que é racismo, (10) mas TINHA QUE SER, né? [Then you all say it's racism, but THEY HAD TO BE [BLACK], right?]

The structure consists of Carrier (*Eu*) Polarity (*não*) Relational process (*sou*) Attribute (*racista*), Connective (*aliás*), Possessor (*eu*) Polarity (*no*) Relational process (*tenho*) Possessed (*preconceitos*). Connective (*Mas cada vez que*) Material process (*aprontam*) Scope (*uma dessas comigo*), Material process (*nasce*) Actor (*1% de barreira*) Circumstance (*contra PRETOS*) Circumstance (*em mim*). Connective (*E*) Relational process (*estavam*) Circumstance (*num carro importado*), Circumstance (*certo que*) Material process (*é roubado*). Material process (*Acabei*

¹ Available at: <https://m.g1.globo.com/rs/rio-grande-do-sul/noticia/2013/08/comentarios-de-estudante-do-rs-contranegros-revoltam-redes-sociais.html>. Accessed Jan. 17, 2025.

de ser [polarity *quase*] *atropelada*) Actor (*por um casal de negros*). Connective (*Depois*) Sayer (*vocês*) Verbal process (*falam*) Connective (*que*) Relational process (*é*) Identifier (*racismo*), Connective (*mas*) Relational process (*TINHA QUE SER*), Conversational mark (*né*)?

Here, we have a comment that can only be understood as part of previous argumentation, anchored in shared forms of thinking (Social Cognition): skin color is the starting point for racial evaluation, especially from the perspective of differentiation and a presumed superiority of whoever posted it. Prejudice occurs in the language, demonstrating a hostile attitude, because the targets of the comment belong to a socially devalued group with a history of disrespect constructed and stored in Social Cognition, thus shaping attitudes and creating hierarchization, exclusion, and discrimination based on an external physical marker. The denial presupposes the opposite — (1) and (2), which is reinforced by (3) and (4). There is also an aporophobic perception in (5) and (6). The description of what happened (7), followed by a simulation of interactive dialogue in (8) and (9), summarizes an extremely racist speech uttered in Brazil — (10) “só podia ser coisa de preto”/ “It could only be a black thing”, as indicated in the deontic modality *TINHA QUE SER*.

Social Cognition is responsible for shaping and outlining the world via a perception that is dialectically signaled and constructed in and through language, thus creating a false idea of normality and a premise of naturalized, alleged inferiority/superiority in social relations. Social Cognition is an element that guarantees social cohesion around certain ideas, although this cohesion is controversial and questionable when compared to other perceptual possibilities and other worldviews. It derives from social standards established in racial relations that generate prejudice and exclusion, thus being sources of discrimination. It mainly guides forms of thinking and beliefs that are signaled in language by lexicogrammatical choices, in the dialectic that occurs between language, action, and thought in social dynamics. The research questions featured in this text are centered on what the relationship between SFL and Social Cognition is and what this relationship implies for these analyses. Social Cognition is an element that guarantees social cohesion around certain ideas, ways of thinking, and constructions of the world. It is based on an original cohesion in a naturalized and alleged normality constructed from social standards, thus resulting in prejudice. It mainly guides forms of thinking and beliefs that are signaled in language by lexicogrammatical choices. This implies that one must include Social Cognition in one’s analyses in order to reach a limbic layer that is no less important than the materiality of linguistics constructed through lexicogrammar. The relationship highlighted here also entails a different perspective of SFL in its paradigmatic view of language by viewing it as a network of options offered to the speaker/listener to satisfy communicative needs, thus expanding the way in which one learns, creates, and knows the world through the meaning in linguistic and semiotic sources.

5. Final considerations

The previous section is one way to expand the discussion around an interpretation of Halliday's (1978) proposal to understand language as a code, imbued with potentialities of both *behavior* and *meaning*. Just as the interface between *behavior* and *meaning* can introduce another form of dialogue to theoretical and applied language researchers, the broader social and educational environments can make use of it to transform the school environment into a research laboratory that has interindividual, intergroup, or collective relationships as its objects of study. This could impact the social and cultural relations both within and outside the boundaries of the school, due to its ability to shed light on the most likely reasons for disputes and asymmetries observed in the socio-cultural context, in addition to suggesting mechanisms and means to combat the many forms of inequality and exclusion, which often end up costly to society.

Such an integration could also aid in the development not only of the understanding of the role of language in society and culture, but also of agency, understood by Zabaleta (2005: 117) as “a change strategy to generate changes and transformations in the self and the environment.” It could lead to entering the universe of attitudes, those general evaluations that people make of themselves, of other people, and of places, objects, and issues. As Loewenhaupt & Iglesias (2018) explain, attitudes are the result of an implicit cognition, in which different types of prejudice reside, thus generating, for example, discrimination, with prejudice being a predictor of behavior indicated by different semiotic ways of constructing meaning, such as language. Social Cognition is more than a neurobiological process that enables human beings to properly interpret social signs and present appropriate responses to them, as Butman & Allegri (2001) propose. It is a sociocultural dimension of memory connected to the discourse semantics that has in language a dynamic, dialectical, and dialogical signaling element for the construction of meaning in the world.

Individual and collective, subjective and intersubjective aspects are dialectically present in the space of Social Cognition. If this were not the case, one would give an exaggerated importance to individual and subjective aspects, which, before being constituted as isolated actions, are co-constructed. What is expected from this article is not a definitive answer, but an extensive and fruitful dialogue about the aspects involved in the use of language and how productive it can be to examine its use from the perspective of the intersection between different approaches dedicated to its study.

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