

Sin and grace: Naught for noughts?

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Embarking on the noughts (2000–2009), Robert de Beaugrande and I are fellow travelers. I agree the key to progress is reworking langue and parole as a dialectic of system and process, and finding ways of exploring process that illuminate metastability (systemic inertia and dynamism—the problem of social semiotic change). In relation to this project I find it useful to draw on two key dimensions of systemic functional linguistics, the clines of *instantiation* and *realization* (Halliday and Matthiessen 1999). Instantiation involves the way we observe metastability—as apparent flux or inertia or something in between. Halliday’s analogy here is weather and climate; weather the capricious flux we experience day to day, climate the comforting inertia we try to use to plan. Critically, weather and climate are the same thing, looked at in different ways. And we can argue that weather changes climate, in ways that matter (global warming) and ways that don’t (like when we hear that today’s temperature is 26°, two degrees above average, which in fact changes that average, and we don’t fuss about the contradiction)—or that climate determines weather (since ‘it always rains in Melbourne’, and that kind of Sydneysiders’ overclaim).

Thus text interacts with system, among a cline of instantiation, including system (the generalized meaning potential of a language), register (sub-potentials characterized as registers and genres), text type (generalized instances—a set of texts if you will), text (the meanings afforded by an instance)—to which we should perhaps add at the end of the cline, following Robert, reading (the meaning taken from a text according to the subjectivity of the reader):

system	(generalized meaning potential)
register	(semantic sub-potential)
text type	(generalized actual)
text	(affording instance)
reading	(subjectified meaning)

Robert's point is that we can't understand the climate unless we study local weather. Amplifying this, I'd suggest that we be clearer about how we position data and generalizations along this cline, and work harder at finding ways of modeling inertia and flux right along the cline—since we need to show both where the system end is leaning and how the reading end is constrained—in order to understand how the dialectic of instantiation changes things fast enough to matter and slowly enough to keep us sane.

Realization, on the other hand, involves the way we model metastable systems—as abstract or concrete, or something in between. Linguists, quia linguists, typically get real by taking phonic substance as point of departure, and treating the rest of language and culture as layers of abstraction. In systemic functional linguistics, depth of abstraction is treated as metaredundancy—as patterns of patterns of patterns of ... (see Lemke 1995). Within language the strata focus on the syllable (phonology), clause (lexicogrammar) and text (discourse semantics); social context is modeled as field (institution), tenor (interaction) and mode (information flow), and sometimes in addition as genre (the system of social processes constraining immanent associations of field, mode, and tenor relations; Martin 1992, 1997, 1999):

genre	(immanent social processes)
register	(institution/interaction/information)
discourse semantics	(text-forming resources)
lexicogrammar	(clause-forming resources)
phonology	(syllable-forming resources/prosody)

Instantiation and realization are complementary dimensions in the model, so we can consider the relation of system to process at any level of abstraction. Robert didn't deal in detail with realization and what I want to do here is make some complementary suggestions about exploring language in use with this dimension in mind.

By way of pointing us forward in our exploration of system and process, Robert draws on corpus linguistics, particularly its well-automated dealings with collocation and colligation. I have no doubt that the collocational lexical perspective complements work on grammar as system in important ways, and that Halliday's notion of lexis as delicate grammar still has to be reconciled with this tradition. As for colligation, I expect we need to move from tagging syntagms to tagging structures (from class sequences like noun ^ noun or nominal ^ verbal to function frames like Actor ^ Process or Classifier ^ Thing) for significant progress to be made. The problem is of course that tagging functional frames is far harder to automate than tagging syntagms; we just don't have the parsers, and hand tagging is so slow. We have a software problem here, and we have to face

it to make it go away. In the meantime, semi-automated workbenches will have to serve, as we move beyond classes to functions and thus bring meaning into the scope of grammatical inquiry, just as collocation research has brought lexical meaning to bear.

So much for grammar; what about discourse? One thing that concerned me about Robert's exemplifications was that they didn't take us beyond the clause to deal with discourse semantic dependencies. In a journal like *Text*, this should perhaps be a central concern. Time to get our hands dirty. Consider example (1):

- (1) There is a sense, then, in which the demand for a total recollection of sins results in the unlimited extensions of discourse purporting to extract and convey one's successes and failures in accounting for past acts and desires. Accounting thus allows confession to become a self-sustaining machine for the reproduction not only of God's gifts of mercy but of 'sin' as well. For God's continued patronage—the signs of His mercy—requires a narrative of sins to act upon. The confessor who sits in lieu of an absent Father needs the penitent's stories, without which there can be no possibility of asserting and reasserting the economy of divine mercy. Without the lure of sin, the structure of authority implicit in this economy would never emerge. Confession was crucial because it produced a divided subject who was then made to internalise the Law's language. The penitent became 'the speaking subject who is also the subject of the statement' (Foucault 1980: 1:61). But confession was also important because it made for the ceaseless multiplication of narratives of sin through their ever-faulty accounting. In introducing the category of 'sin', confession converted the past into a discourse that was bound to the Law and its agents. In this way the accounting and recounting of the past generated the complicitous movement between sin and grace. [Rafael 1988]

I'm sure collocation and colligation would have a lot to say about data of this kind, whether working with a span of 80 or 200 characters or more. The lexis and grammar of post-colonial discourse feels distinctive; and we could begin to systematize our feelings. But there is more going on. Rhetorical dependencies between sentences and ranking clauses for one thing, as the argument unfolds:

- i. There is a sense, *then* ...
- ii. Accounting *thus* ...
- iii. *For* ...
- iv.
- v.

- vi. Confession was crucial *because* it produced a divided subject who was *then* ...
- vii.
- viii. *But* confession was *also* important *because* ...
- ix. *In* introducing the category of 'sin' ...
- x. *In this way* ...

And identity dependencies, as participants are tracked:

God's—God's—His
 Confession—it
 confession—it
 narratives—their
 the Law—its

These two types of semantic interdependency interact at both the beginning and end of the text. At its beginning, resolving the identity of *the demand for a total recollection of sins* specifies the scope of the linker *then*, which on its own simply tells us that what preceded is causally connected to what follows (taking us back to *The Spanish demand is that nothing be held back in confession*; see example (1')).

[The Spanish demand is that nothing be held back in confession]—
 There is a sense, *then*, in which *the demand* for a total recollection of sins
 Similarly at the end of the text, resolving the identity of *the accounting and recounting of the past* specifies the scope of *this* in the linker *in this way*.
 Exploring further, for example through the taxonomy-oriented ideational dependencies (noting in particular the balance of semiotic and religious lexis) ...

narrative—stories—narratives—accounting—accounting—recounting
 demand—asserting—reasserting—speaking
 sins—successes—failures—mercy—sin—mercy—sins—mercy—sin—
 sin—sin—sin—grace
 God—God—confessor—Father—penitent—penitent
 etc.

... we should arrive at a schema naturalized by the text in which (i–iii) are elaborated by (iv–ix) which are in turn elaborated by (x); the function of confession is previewed, expanded upon, then distilled as *the complicitous movement between sin and grace*:

- (i) There is a sense, *then*, in which the demand for a total recollection of sins results in the unlimited extensions of discourse purporting to extract and convey one's successes and failures in accounting for past acts and desires. (ii) Accounting *thus* allows confession to become

a self-sustaining machine for the reproduction not only of God's gifts of mercy but of 'sin' as well. (iii) *For* God's continued patronage—the signs of His mercy—requires a narrative of sins to act upon.

(iv) The confessor who sits in lieu of an absent Father needs the penitent's stories, without which there can be no possibility of asserting and reasserting the economy of divine mercy. (v) Without the lure of sin, the structure of authority implicit in this economy would never emerge. (vi) Confession was crucial *because* it produced a divided subject who was *then* made to internalise the Law's language. (vii) The penitent became 'the speaking subject who is also the subject of the statement' (Foucault 1980: 1:61). (viii) *But* confession was *also* important *because* it made for the ceaseless multiplication of narratives of sin through their ever-faulty accounting. (ix) *In* introducing the category of 'sin', confession converted the past into a discourse that was bound to the Law and its agents.

(x) *In this way* the accounting and recounting of the past generated the complicitous movement between sin and grace.

This is just one small piece of texture in a longer phase of the third part of chapter 3 of Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism*, a treatise on translation and Christian conversion in the Philippines:

- 3. Conversion and the Demands of Confession 84
 The 'inadequacies' of Tagalog Conversion 84
 Reducing Native Bodies 87
 Confession and the Logic of Conversion 91

This longer phase opens with a transition from what preceded (*this internalisation* ...) to what ensues (*two interrelated procedures*); these 'procedures' are scaffolded as they appear by the linker *first*, and the phoric numerative *second*—and resolved through the identity of *the process of accounting and the discourse of interrogation*.

... This internalisation of an exterior hierarchy consists of TWO interrelated procedures: the accounting of past events and the reproduction of the discourse of interrogation contained in the confession manuals.

FIRST, the process of accounting. All confession manuals contain the unconditional demand that all sins be revealed ...

These considerations bring us to the SECOND moment in the interiorisation of hierarchy prescribed by confession: the reproduction of the discourse of interrogation ...

Many people find post-structuralist discourse hard to read. It is one of the most abstract discourses the technology of writing has enabled writers to evolve. But its rhetoric and the way it is textured through semantic dependencies of the kinds just reviewed subsumes the more familiar rhetoric of modernist discourse (Halliday 1998; Wignell 1998). The challenge for text analysts is to unveil this rhetoric, and explain just how the post-colonial discourse has superseded it. We didn't get far down that road here. Here's the text again, with some co-text, if knowledge about language and social context has a role to play in language learning, it should be easier going this time round.

(1') ... This internalisation of an exterior hierarchy consists of two inter-related procedures: the accounting of past events and the reproduction of the discourse of interrogation contained in the confession manuals.

First, the process of accounting. All confession manuals contain the unconditional demand that all sins be revealed ...

The Spanish demand is that nothing be held back in confession. One is to expend all that memory can hold in a discourse that will bring together both the self that recalls and that which is recalled. The present self that confronts the priest in confession is thus expected to have managed to control his or her past—to reduce it, as it were; to discursive submission. Whereas the examination of conscience requires the division of the self into one that knows the Law and seeks out the other self that deviates from it, a 'good confession' insists on the presentation of a self in total control of its past. It is in this sense that confessional discourse imposes on the individual penitent what Roland Barthes called a 'totalitarian economy' involving the complete recuperation and submission of the past to the present, and by extension of the penitent to the priest (Barthes 1976: 39–75).

Yet insofar as the ideal of a perfect accounting of sins also necessitated their recounting in a narrative, it was condemned to become a potentially infinite task. Given the limitations of memory, accounting 'engenders its own errors.' And the errors created by faulty accounting become further sins that have to be added to the original list. The very possibility of a correct accounting engenders an erroneous accounting, just as remembering one's sins would make no sense unless there existed the possibility of forgetting them. It is thus the guarantee of a faulty accounting of sins that makes conceivable the imperative for total recall. Barthes puts it more

succinctly: 'Accountancy has a mechanical advantage: for being the language of a language, it is able to support an infinite circularity of errors and of their accounting' (Barthes 1976: 70).

There is a sense, then, in which the demand for a total recollection of sins results in the unlimited extensions of discourse purporting to extract and convey one's successes and failures in accounting for past acts and desires. Accounting thus allows confession to become a self-sustaining machine for the reproduction not only of God's gifts of mercy but of 'sin' as well. For God's continued patronage—the signs of His mercy—requires a narrative of sins to act upon. The confessor who sits in lieu of an absent Father needs the penitent's stories, without which there can be no possibility of asserting and reasserting the economy of divine mercy. Without the lure of sin, the structure of authority implicit in this economy would never emerge. Confession was crucial because it produced a divided subject who was then made to internalise the Law's language. The penitent became 'the speaking subject who is also the subject of the statement' (Foucault 1980: 1:61). But confession was also important because it made for the ceaseless multiplication of narratives of sin through their ever-faulty accounting. In introducing the category of 'sin', confession converted the past into a discourse that was bound to the Law and its agents. In this way the accounting and recounting of the past generated the complicitous movement between sin and grace. [Rafael 1988: 101–103]

These considerations bring us to the second moment in the interiorisation of hierarchy prescribed by confession: the reproduction of the discourse of interrogation ...

My word count says wind down. My point here is that we need discourse semantic tagging, alongside lexicogrammatical analysis, in order to unpack the rhetorical contingencies whereby texts make meaning—including the meanings that make and re-make system. There is more to system than grammar;¹ it involves phonology/graphology and discourse semantics as well. Collocation and colligation, however richly conceived, will never tell us all we need to know. However much harder the tagging of discourse semantic dependencies may be to automate, I think we are in desperate need of more, systematic text analysis that goes beyond the clause without lapsing into informal explication de texte.

Elsewhere (Martin 1992) I suggest four major regions of discourse semantic analysis: identification (participant tracking); conjunction (logical connections of time, cause etc.); negotiation (speech function and

dialogue structure); and ideation (realization of taxonomies and activity sequences). It strikes me that research in systemic functional linguistics and the West-Coast functionalist tradition² has been converging around these regions for some years and that productive dialogue is now possible. I'm thinking here for example of Du Bois (1980), Mann and Thompson (1992) in relation to Halliday and Hasan (1976), Martin (1992); of Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson (1996) in relation to Coulthard (1992), Eggs and Slade (1997); of Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) in relation to Langacker (1987); see Table 1:

Table 1.

(Martin 1992)	West-Coast functionalism	Systemic functional linguistics
'identification'	identity (Du Bois 1980)	reference
'conjunction'	RST (Mann and Thompson 1992)	conjunction
'negotiation'	CA (Ochs et al. 1996)	exchange ^a
'ideation'	cognitive linguistics (Langacker)	ideational semantics

^aOur traditional focus on turn-taking needs to be enriched by work on evaluation—for example Biber's 'stance' in relation to systemic functional linguistic 'appraisal' (Hunston and Thompson 1999).

No doubt readers can make additional connections of their own. The critical thing is that discourse analysis include text analysis, not as a matter of form, but as the semantic foundation for discourse on discourse—the meta-readings we are trained to make.

The cline of abstraction I introduced earlier includes the social—as a pattern of meanings. As such it makes room for a language-based theory of social context, which enables linguists to participate in transdisciplinary projects as social semiotic practitioners. I think the time for productive interdisciplinary work is over—by which I mean projects in which linguists hand over to sociologists, anthropologists, critical theorists or whatever once they've worked through phonology, lexicogrammar and discourse semantics (or even before!). This doesn't encourage dialogue, since it means the linguists aren't taking responsibility for the social just as the social theorists aren't taking responsibility for language (cf. Schegloff 1996). We need overlapping intrusive expertise to move on,³ and this means pushing the cline of realization right through as many levels of abstraction as we can.

I have interpreted field, tenor, and mode (named register) as configurations of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning respectively; and interprets genre as co-patterning of register choices recurrently phased together in unfolding text (Martin 1992). Genre in such terms, as a pattern

(of a pattern of) linguistic choices corresponds to Biber's use of the term *text type* (cf. Biber 1995: 7–10). Biber reserves the term *genre* (later *register*) for 'folk' categorizations of discourse glossed in terms of social purpose, and packages his corpora for both analysis and interpretation in relation to such criteria, which he sees as language-external. As dialogue between Systemic Functional Linguistics and this great Northern Arizona tradition of corpus-based research unfolds, I would like to see a richer tagging system, including function structures and discourse semantic dependencies, developing in tandem with an ongoing repackaging of corpora based on genre and register as configurations of meaning. Initially, of course, the theory behind such packaging will depend on register and genre theory evolving out of intensive manual analysis of exemplary texts (Christie and Martin 1997); as automation facilitates analysis, this can be extended along the cline of instantiation through text types to registers. In the foreseeable future the need for Biber's distinction between text type and register/genre would hopefully disappear, as we arrive at a linguistically responsible characterization of language use as recurrent configurations of meaning. At this point linguistics will have arrived as a real player in the humanities and social sciences, with a linguistically materialized theory of social action—and the transdisciplinary dialogues we need can take off. But without richer tagging, and corpora packaged with respect to current best guesses about immanent genres, this isn't going to happen in the noughts.⁴

In short, I'm agreeing with Robert about instantiation—system and process in relation to genesis is what we're after; and I'm expanding Robert in relation to realization—we need to get beyond the clause, getting bigger and digging deeper towards a fuller spectrum of social linguistic analysis.⁵ Pursuing this, we have to be cautious of two things:

- i. getting trapped by automation, so that we only do what machines let us (e.g., collocation, colligation, text types based on words classes and syntagms, etc.);
- ii. getting mesmerised by scintillating grammarians proffering super-grammars, so that we put off discourse analysis because the super-grammars do so much more than we could ever have reasonably expected them to.⁶

Believe me when I say that I'm not slighting Biber, Sinclair, Halliday, and Matthiessen here; their work founds our future. But grammars like Halliday's, however rich from a grammarians' point of view, are barely enough when it comes to serving as one key meta-semiotic ratchet in the discourse analyst's tool-kit. As discourse analysts we have to put ourselves in position to bargain strongly with both grammarians and

software programmers. To grammarians we're saying, 'Fine; give us all you got; now, give us more; and by the way, when you run out of grammar, let us take over.' To programmers we're saying, 'OK; give us an interactive workbench for rich text analysis; automate what you can, and we'll do the rest by hand; and by the way, please build a program that can learn from our manual analysis and from our manual editing of your automations how to automate better and automate more!'

If we bargain well, we can move forward gracefully, wary of sins of omission (however technologically induced). Bargain badly and it will be naught for noughts. Robert to umpire. Us to choose.

Notes

1. Even where discourse semantics and phonology are given a place in analysis, promotion of grammar as the semogenic powerhouse of the system gives me pause (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 1999)—discourse analysts might not agree.
2. I take Fox 1987 as the exemplary West-Coast functionalist study, since it brings several discourse semantic regions (CA, RST and participant identification) to bear on the 'grammar' of text development; more generally, dialogue with systemic functional linguistics has been impeded by West-Coast aversion to theory building and their concern with discourse as an explanation for grammar, at the expense of developing grammars as (part of) an explanation for discourse (cf. Cumming and Ono 1997).
3. In Australia, for example, it's the teacher/linguists who have pushed our literacy work ahead on a transdisciplinary footing, not linguists working with teachers: Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Hasan and Williams 1996; Christie 1999.
4. What will happen is that we'll continue to be bogged down in commonsense chat about social context—at times referred to as ethnography (but not informed that I can see by social theory of any kind), at times reglossed as cognition (but not reconciled that I can see with Edelman's neo-Darwinian neurobiology; cf. Halliday 1995; Halliday and Matthiessen 1999; Matthiessen 1998 for discussion).
5. It's no use getting deeper without getting bigger, along the dated syntax, semantics and pragmatics cline, since in this tradition we never really escape the clause; text analysis gets pushed to the margins, as performance really, as Robert implies.
6. We have to be even more careful when the super-grammars are reglossed and presented as Semantics, as in Halliday and Matthiessen 1999, without really being recontextualized by either co-text or context (field); while their project may help to convince cognitivists that concepts can be alternatively mapped as meanings, it may not be promoting the discourse semantics we need to model language in social life.

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