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Hybridisation in Texts: Where Spoken and Written Language meet

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Abstract

This study emphasizes the possibility of exploring spoken texts in the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, a language theory and linguistic approach developed by M.A.K. Halliday in the early sixties. We analyse some text messages (SMS, whats app or messenger) received from undergraduate students who are preparing for a thesis under our supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Maîtrise* at the English Language Department, University of Abomey-Calavi. The claim is that by exploring the mode continuum of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) in those texts, it is possible to come to cogent conclusions about the linguistic features of such messages which are now becoming one of the major means of communication among teachers and students. The findings of this study show a hybridation of spoken and written language in communication and therefore, create a new position which can be located at the middle of the two poles (spoken and written) of the mode continuum.

Keywords : Systemic Functional Linguistics, mode, communication, written and spoken texts

Introduction

It is a truism to say that most of the works undertaken in SFL are definitely on written texts (either in literature or in specialised discourses). One can cite the groundbreaking work of Halliday (1971) on William Golding's novel *The Inheritors*. His ontological work in the article entitled "Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*" is a groundbreaking example in the field. This work poses the steps of how it is possible to enter the language use in literary work by just analysing and interpreting the syntactic and semantic patterns of the clauses used by the characters to be able to unveil some meanings encoded in the work.

One can also cite Koussouhon (2009) entitled "Reassessing the language of "Abikou" (John Pepper Clark, Wole Soyinka): A systemic functional analysis" where the focus has been on two written texts, "Abikou", two poems of the same title but by different authors, John Pepper Clark and Wole Soyinka. Other works in this field include Koussouhon & Amoussou (2013), Amoussou (2014), Koussouhon & Dossoumou (2015), Koussouhon & Koutchadé (2012), to mention but a few. This state of affairs may lead to many questions which may be for example, "Why do they stick to written texts ?" or "Do they lack the necessary knowledge about the main differences between written and spoken texts ?" If you share one of these

questions, you may not be totally right or you are simply wrong. Halliday (1971) have already provided a comprehensive definition of text. It reads: „... a text is a sociological event, a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are *exchanged*“ (p. 139). In other words, a text is unified sign systems that have meaning rather than isolated sentences that a teacher can jot down on the board. He excludes any ambiguity that may arouse from whether the text is spoken or written. He says: „texts are instances of linguistic interaction in which people actually engage: whatever is said, or written, in an operational context, as distinct from citational context like that of words in a dictionary“ (Halliday, 2007:179). This means that in SFL, a text must be considered as having either spoken or written features.

This study aims at bridging the gaps by offering the possibility of exploring the spoken dimension of language use in context and the various paradigms related to it in SFL. More exactly, we focus on what the analysis of mode, one of the register variables identified as the three elements of the context of situation, reveals about how hybridation of spoken and written language is materialised in text messages exchanged between the teachers and the students under their supervision.

Literature review and theoretical framework

In order to know and apprehend what SFL posits about spoken language, we think it is important to recall how this approach conceptualise language. In fact, if we consider language as a meaning potential, a resource available to human beings to make meaning, we see automatically that language is made of a higher level which not directly perceptible. This level is known as discourse-semantics level. The second level is related to the transformation of what we intend to mean into lexis and grammar. This second level is called lexico-grammar. So we move from meaning to wording. The last and not least stratum is phonetics and phonology. From wording, we move to phonemes and sounds. We can draw the following picture that illustrate the different strata of the language system.

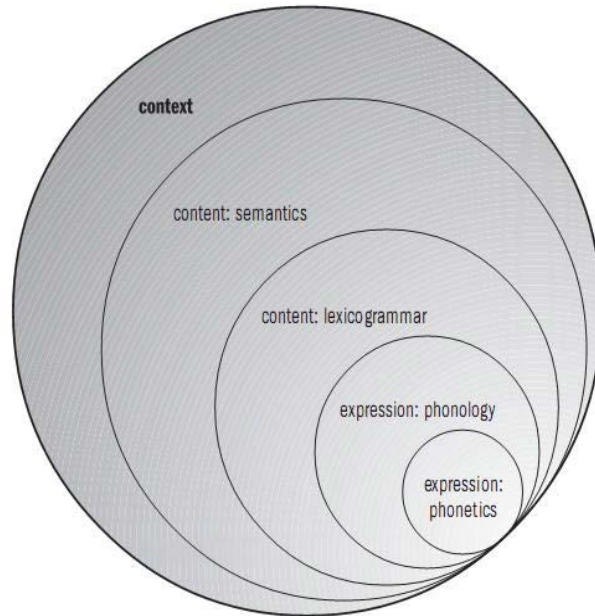


Figure 1 : stratification (Halliday, 2004 :25)

This quiet long recall aims at putting forward the possibility of analysing the issue of language use from the last stratum perspective : phonetics and phonology.

In addition to this consideration, it is important to emphasise that SFLists have always worked on spoken text. We would like to revisit two prominent pronouncements about spoken language. Halliday (2004) in *Spoken and written Language* and Eggins (2004) in *An Introduction to Systemic functional Linguistics* have worked to show what the differences between spoken and written text are and thereby offer a methodological approach to each pole.

For Halliday (2004), the analysis of natural speech is very rewarding in the sense that "What people actually say is very different from what they think they say ; and even more different from what they think they ought to say" (p. 34). This is less marked in written text. The study in this article finds its essence in Halliday's (2004) remark on modern communication when he supports that the distinction between spoken and written text is blurred with modern technology. He says : "Spoken and written English are both forms of English — otherwise you could not have all the mixed and intermediate forms that are evolving in electronic texts."

As far as Eggins is concerned, she illustrates the difference between spoken and written language by located them along the mode line. Mode is, in fact, the role that language itself plays as a commodity in the interpersonal dimension (tenor) and the experiential