Systemic Functional Grammar: Appraisal

Introduction

Appraisal theory is a further development of the Hallidayan framework to understand more fully the complex ways in which we express our personal views and react to the views of others. This is an area of study that is not fully captured by the existing systems within the framework (Mood-Residue, Transitivity, Theme-Rheme, and Clause-Complexing).

First things first. You'll be relieved to know that in appraisal analysis, there is no need to first divide up the text into ranking clauses. The unit of analysis here is not the ranking clause, but the entire text. Any word, word group, or part of a word group can be singled out as an example of appraisal. You will also be relieved to know that in many cases, there can be more than one possible answer. Analysis of appraisal is essentially interpretive, and the same text can be analysed very differently by different people.

Since appraisal is concerned with the expression of (and reaction to) personal views, it is part of the interpersonal metafunction of language. We are, then, exploring a resource of language that empowers us to say to our listeners "I hate functional grammar" (or physics, or biology, or golf), and so state our position on that issue. Our listeners can, of course, state their own position and add Manchester United to the list.

What are the resources in language that allow us to express such opinions about biology or Manchester United? There are three -- **attitude, graduation, and engagement.**

Attitude

Attitude is a resource of language that enables writers to express their attitude(s) towards people, events, and other phenomena. It is expressed through words of judgement, appreciation, or emotion. Graduation (force/focus) may apply here as well, as we shall see in some examples below.

Words of **judgement** evaluate human behaviour positively or negatively according to social norms. Do note that judgement involves only human behaviour, so don't make the mistake of including non-human entities.

My neighbour is a real nosey-parker.	["nosey-parker" also exemplifies negative force; "real" is an instance of sharp focus]
The bungling burglar lost a tooth when he missed his footing.	["bungling" also exemplifies negative force]
He distributed the sweets fairly.	

What, then, do we do with non-human entities? Ah ... we use **appreciation** instead. Words of appreciation evaluate non-living entities and phenomena according to, again, social norms:

Looking at people's underarm hair is a disgusting habit.	["disgusting" is itself a loaded word; it is an example of negative force]

What about words of **emotion**? These are realised by mental processes such as "love", "hate", "please", as well as nouns (e.g., "pain", "anguish", "fear") and adjectives (e.g., "sad", "happy", "proud") expressing various emotional states:

I admire your curly underarm hair. [mental process]

Your admiration is simply outrageous. [noun, adjective; "simply" is an instance of sharp focus]

Graduation

Through graduation, the message in the text is made more intense or less intense, or sharper or blurrer. When we make the message more or less intense, we are modifying the force of the message. On the other hand, when we sharpen or blur the message, we are modifying the focus of the message. Graduation, then, involves force and focus, and it may be helpful to think of it in terms of a slider where the force/focus of a word is scaled up or down (= increased or decreased) to create a certain effect.

Force

Let's start with force. Force has to do with the intensity of a word or expression. It can be raised or lowered by our choice of the following groups of words and expressions:

- Words with positive/negative meanings, including metaphors.

  - That angel / rascal is my tutor.
  - This is a heavenly / rotten day.
  - The prices shot through the roof / plunged.

- Repetition and synonymy, where the intensity is normally scaled up.

  - He tried and tried.
  - The durians were terrible, just awful.

- Intensifiers, including subjuncts, where the intensity is either scaled up or down.

  - Alvin was a little / very disoriented.
  - They are sometimes / always late.

- Disjuncts (or modal adjuncts), where the intensity is either scaled up or down.

  - He probably / clearly went home.

The raising or lowering of force, in other words, results in a change of meaning (positive to negative, possible to definite, etc) or intensity (less intense to more intense, etc). Here's a rule of thumb to help you along:

Force carries the idea of more-or-less (more positive, less intense, more definite, more emphatic, etc). It is usually, though not always, associated with gradable words (words that can be intensified) and words with positive or negative alternatives.

Here are further examples, this time involving negative and positive meanings:

Negative force	Positive force
He is a brat.	He is a highly-active child.
The team was thrashed.	The team put up a good fight but were no match for the highly-trained professionals.
He drove like a lunatic.	He drove in a curious way.

Focus

What about focus, then? Well, in focus, we are concerned with class membership, and we specify how strong or weak that membership is (to our mind). Through focus, we make the meaning of X either more precise (and so strengthen its membership of that class) or less precise (and so weaken its membership). Let's take the example of "friend". It can be modified as follows:

James is a true friend.	[sharp focus]
Gladys is a friend, kind'v.	[soft focus (or blurring)]

I'm sure you can detect a difference, no? The speaker has a set of characteristics in his or her mind about who counts as a friend. James fits the bill perfectly, but not Gladys -- well, this is not necessarily all bad; she could be the speaker's wife! As you can see, then, the use of "true" and "kind'v" serves a focusing function -- they tell us who gets included in the category of "friends". (Note that this is different from force, which serves to change the meaning or intensity in some way.)

Since normal human beings have two thumbs, here is another rule of thumb to help you along:

Focus carries the idea of (im)precision and deals with class membership -- how strongly or weakly an idea fits into its assigned class ("pure evil", "about the same as a diploma", etc). It is usually, though not always, associated with non-gradable words.

The noun "friend", for instance, is not gradable, at least, not to my knowledge. A few other examples of focus are given below. In each case, notice that the modified word -- "danger" (noun) and "means" (verb) -- are not normally considered gradable.

Engagement

Through engagement, the writer either affirms or distances himself/herself from what is written/spoken. It is dialogic in essence, where the speaker/writer "responds to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on" (Voloshinov 1995: 139). This can be achieved through the following ways:

Disclaim (I know this is uncomfortable, but let's just treat "disclaim" as the noun) -- the speaker/writer is at odds with, or does not agree fully with what someone else said or wrote. The act of disclaiming includes outright denials, counter-arguments, and concessions:

- It is alleged that men are apes.
- I deny that men are apes.
- I concede that men are apes.
- This can't be true.
- What is a "free" gift? Aren't all gifts free?

Proclamation -- where the speaker/writer subscribes to a particular position and, in some cases, rules out competing, alternative ones. The act of proclamation includes pronouncements of personal statements and endorsements of what someone else said. [In the literature, a division is made between endorsement and concurrence. I have avoided this distinction because it is not always easy to decide which is which.] You may also notice that the examples below includes comment adjuncts.

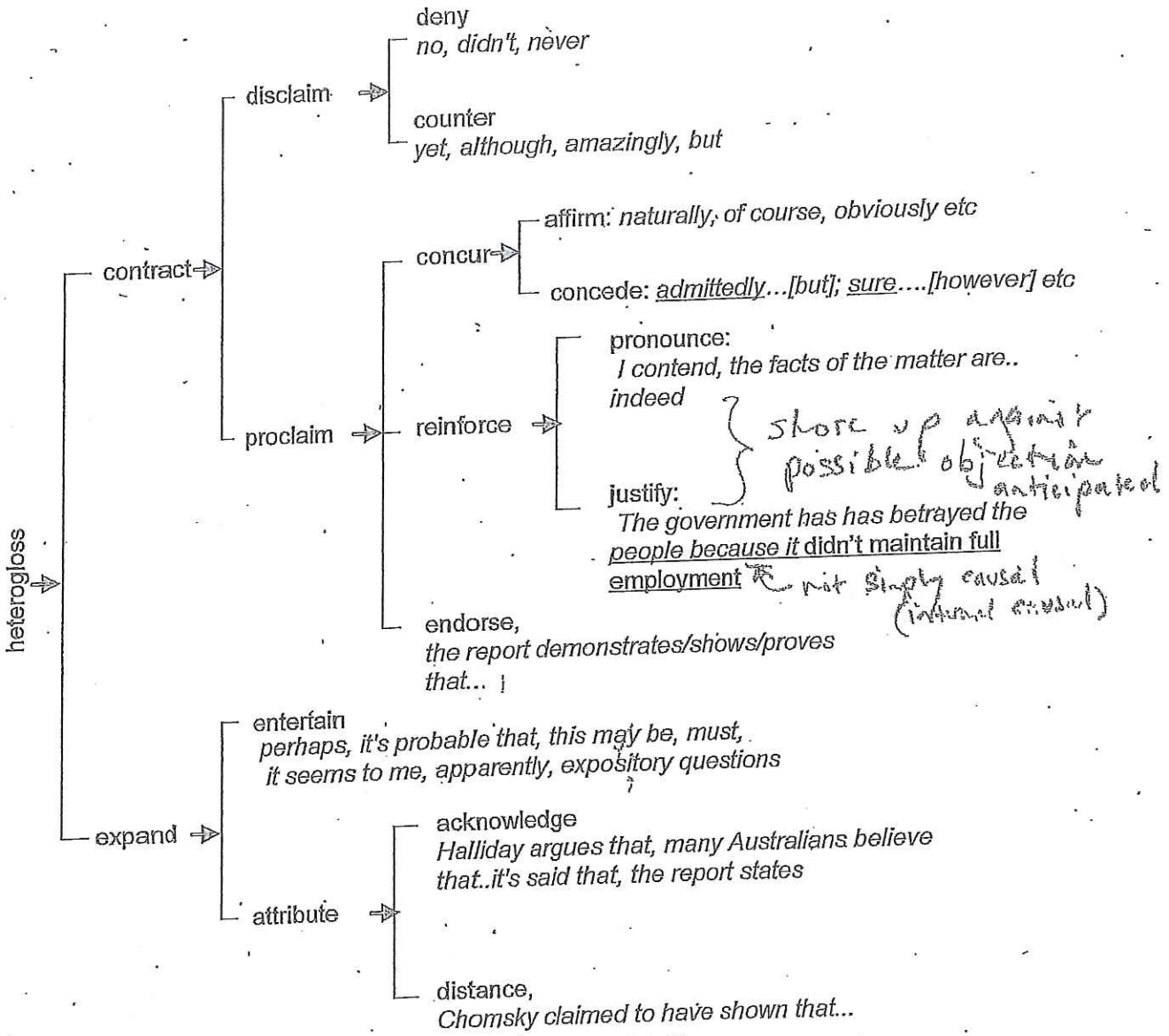
- I am compelled to conclude ...
- I argue / believe ...
- X has shown / has demonstrated that ...
- No one, of course, can kiss his/her own elbow.
- Personally / to my mind / in my opinion, ...
- Somewhere on this globe, every ten seconds, there is a woman giving birth to a child. She must be found and stopped. [Sam Levenson, 1911-1980]

Entertainment -- where a range of possibilities are acknowledged or entertained (hence, the label). This category includes modals and modal adjuncts of probability and usuality (e.g., "may", "probably", "likely"). The modal adjuncts can be further divided into modalisation ("how likely?") and modulation ("how obligatory or permissible?").

- The report suggests that ...
- It seems that ...
- It's possible that Alvin might just sing tonight.

Attribution -- which reports what someone else said or wrote. By doing so, the speaker/writer acknowledges that there are alternative positions (to his or her own position). Note that attributed segments can be disclaimed, proclaimed, and even entertained.

- She alleged that ... ["alleged" is also an instance of disclaim]
- They convincingly showed that research causes cancer in mice. ["showed" reflects proclamation (endorsement)]
- According to Rowan, comedians should have moles.



The Engagement system: heteroglossic options in more detail

The Appraisal System in Outline

Attitude + Engagement (later pages)

Positive or negative assessments by reference to emotion or systems of social norms and values.

> The new president's speech was elegant and well-woven, sounding a panoply of themes without seeming scattered. A man not known for his silver tongue, he delivered it with an uncharacteristic grace. (*New York Post*, Jan 21 2001 - Comment)

1. Affect (emotion)

Authorial (1st-person/authorial) versus non-Authorial (2nd-&-3rd person / observational) Affect

Observational

> Many students are outraged by what the Australian government has been doing to tertiary education in this country.

1st person

> I am discomforted by the government's plans for universities

2. Judgement (ethics/norms)

Assessments of human behaviour and character as to be positively or negatively regarded by reference to culturally-based systems of norms.

Inscribed - explicit

> You two guys are heroes.

Invoked (tokens) – via ideational material and often other indirect pointers to attitudinal value.

> The secret service agent stepping into the line of fire and took a bullet for the President.

Judgement: Social Sanction

Judgement by reference to systems of legality/illegality, morality/ immorality or politeness/impoliteness – that is to say, there is an assessment that rules of behaviour, more or less explicitly codified in the culture, have either been upheld or breached.

immoral, virtuous, lewd, sinful, lascivious, innocent, unjust, fair-minded, law-abiding, murderous, cruel, brutal, compassionate, caring, dishonest, honest, deceptive and fraudulent. . .

Judgement: Social esteem

Other values of JUDGEMENT involve evaluations by which the person judged will be lowered or raised in the esteem of their community, but which do not have the same legal, religious or moral implications as the first set.

- assessments of normality (*eccentric, maverick, conventional, traditional* etc),
- of competence/capacity (*skilled, genius, knowledgeable, stupid, dunce, brilliant, incompetent, powerful, feeble*)
- and of psychological disposition (*brave, cowardly, determined, obstinate, zealous, stubborn, committed, lazy* etc).

3. Appreciation (aesthetics/social value)

Assessments of objects, artefacts[1], processes, circumstances and states of affairs rather than of human behaviour/charecter. In some instances, however, human participants may also be 'APPRECIATED' – in cases where the assessment does not directly focus on the correctness or incorrectness of their behaviour.

> He is a really handsome young man.

The most obvious values of APPRECIATION are concerned with what is traditionally known as aesthetics, with positive or negative assessments of the form, appearance, construction, presentation or impact of objects and entities. For example,

> It [the E-type Jaguar] is a masterpiece of styling whose proportions are dramatic ...; its crisp details are in complete harmony with the broader outlines of the gorgeous general arrangement, and, symbolically, it evokes with exquisite eloquence all the ideas of speed, glamour and romance associated with travel.. (*The Independent*, Weekend Review: p.1 27/01/2001)

But also by reference other systems by which phenomena are valued socially – i.e. significance, harm benefit.

> Some parts of New York are extremely dangerous after midnight.
>
> The township of Port Augusta has a key role to play in South Australian tourism

An analytical complication

A complication – a connection with AFFECT (emotion).

Affect	Appreciation
That type of architecture bores me.	It's an extremely boring building.
I am disturbed by your moustache.	He's grown a deeply disturbing moustache.

Implicit versus Explicit Attitudinal Positioning

inscribed attitude:
skilfully, corruptly, lazily, bizarrely, expertly, honestly, kindly etc.

> The government has a very poor record on economic management, foolishly following the dictates of the World Bank.
>
> This was one of the most bizarre cults in a long history of bizarre Californian cults.
>
> He entered the room. The class rudely talked amongst themselves.
>
> So incompetent and disorganised is Edexel that two weeks ago it bungled and sent history and English papers to a maths tutor who was obviously not equipped or competent to mark them. Disturbingly, the board had still failed

[1] I use the term 'artefact' in a very general sense to include not only material objects which result from human industry but also works of art, texts, buildings and so on.

Appendix 1.

The Judgment system

Social Esteem	positive [admire]	negative [criticise]
normality (custom) 'is the person's behaviour unusual, special, customary?'	standard, everyday, average...; lucky, charmed...; fashionable, avant garde...	eccentric, odd, maverick...; unlucky, unfortunate...; dated, unfashionable ...
capacity 'is the person competent, capable?'	skilled, clever, insightful...; athletic, strong, powerful...; sane, together...	stupid, slow, simple-minded...; clumsy, weak, uncoordinated...; insane, neurotic...
tenacity (resolve) 'is the person dependable, well disposed?'	plucky, brave, heroic...; reliable, dependable...; indefatigable, resolute, persevering	cowardly, rash, despondent...; unreliable, undependable...; distracted, lazy, unfocussed...

Social Sanction	positive [praise]	negative [condemn]
veracity (truth). 'is the person honest?'	honest, truthful, credible...; authentic, genuine...; frank, direct ...;	deceitful, dishonest...; bogus, fake...; deceptive, obfuscatory...
propriety (ethics) 'is the person ethical, beyond reproach?'	good, moral, virtuous...; law abiding, fair, just...; caring, sensitive, considerate...	bad, immoral, lascivious...; corrupt, unjust, unfair...; cruel, mean, brutal, oppressive...

The Appreciation System

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
reaction: impact 'did it grab me?'	arresting, captivating, engaging... ; fascinating, exciting, moving... ; lively, dramatic, intense... ; remarkable, notable, sensational...	dull, boring, tedious... ; dry, ascetic, uninviting... ; flat, predictable, monotonous... ; unremarkable, pedestrian ...
reaction: quality 'did I like it?'	lovely, beautiful, splendid... ; appealing, enchanting, welcome...	plain, ugly, grotesque... ; repulsive, revolting, off-putting...
composition: balance 'did it hang together?"	balanced, harmonious, unified, symmetrical, proportioned... ; consistent, considered, logical... ; shapely, curvaceous, willowly...	unbalanced, discordant, irregular, uneven, flawed... ; contradictory, disorganised... ; shapeless, amorphous, distorted...
composition: complexity 'was it hard to follow?'	simple, pure, elegant... ; lucid, clear, precise... ; intricate, rich, detailed, precise...	ornate, extravagant, byzantine... ; arcane, unclear, woolly... ; plain, monolithic, simplistic...
valuation 'was it worthwhile?'	penetrating, profound, deep... ; innovative, original, creative... ; timely, long awaited, landmark... ; significant, foremost, leading, key...; inimitable, exceptional, unique... ;	shallow, reductive, insignificant... ; derivative, conventional, prosaic... ; dated, overdue, untimely... ; unimportant, dime-a-dozen, everyday, common... ;

	authentic, real, genuine... ; valuable, priceless, worthwhile... healthy, beneficial, safe....	fake, bogus, glitzy... ; worthless, shoddy, pricey... unhealthy, damaging, dangerous...

Appendix 2

NORMAN TEBBIT (with dinkus of Tebbit) *Mail on Sunday* Feb 4 2001, p 29

white on dark = Judgement

on colour = Appreciation

italics = Affect

10. Crocodile tears for the men of steel

11. THE closures and cut-backs at steelmaker Corus are a tragedy. My heart is with the steelworkers - shopfloor and boardroom alike.

12. Anyone who has seen white-hot liquid steel pouring out of vats or heard red-hot metal screaming as it is rolled, hammered and cut into shape, knows steelmaking is more than just a job. It has been one of our nation's most important industries for over a century..

13. We should not blame today's workforce. They have given Corus as loyal, productive, flexible workers. Nor should any blame be heaped on the management which turned the high-cost, low-quality, old British Steel Corporation into one of the world's finest, most productive steel makers.

14. There is too much steel being made. Changing technologies and new materials mean less steel in products like cars. Steelworks are closing all over America. They are in trouble in Europe, some surviving only on covert subsidy and the collapse of the euro.

15. Joining the euro would only lock us into that problem - not solve it. Daft decisions by the government to introduce new regulations and mad new taxes such as the Climate Control Levy, which penalises manufacturing by taxing energy, are not helpful. But when more of a product is being made than used something has to give.

16. The Prime Minister is not just angry. He is scared. Labour is in trouble in Wales. Families which voted Labour for generations are deserting him.

17. When Trade Secretary Stephen Byers says Corus should have consulted him he knows that, bound hand and foot by our masters in Brussels, he could have done nothing to help.

18. What he wanted was a delay - of about three months until after election day. Byers' temper tantrums were more about fear of losing his job than concern about steelworkers losing theirs.