Interpersonal meaning and the clause

Andersen, Thomas Hestbæk

Published in:
The Routledge Handbook of Systemic Functional Linguistics

DOI:
10.4324/9781315413891

Publication date:
2017

Document version:
Accepted manuscript

Document license:
Other

Citation for published version (APA):

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

Terms of use
This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark. Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving. If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

• You may download this work for personal use only.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim. Please direct all enquiries to puresupport@bib.sdu.dk
8. Interpersonal Meaning and the Clause

Thomas Hestbæk Andersen

The interpersonal metafunction represents “the idea that language can be used as a means of communicating information” (Halliday 1975, p. 21). The fundamental nature of any communication process is that of dialogue (cf. ibid., p. 31), hence the interpersonal resources of language designate “the area of the language in which choices are made which assign communication roles to the performer (whether speaker or writer) and to the addressee (whether listener or reader)” (Fawcett mimeo, p. 1). In this way, the interpersonal resources (both the lexicogrammatical and semantic resources) reflect and construe an intersubjective aspect of semiosis; as Halliday points out: “Meaning is intersubjective activity, not subjective” (Halliday 1992, p. 354; orig. emphasis).

Central to the systemic functional description of dialogue is Halliday’s notion of speech function (cf. section 8.1.1) and Fawcett’s somewhat corresponding notion of MOOD meaning (cf. section 8.2). The idea of speech functions (or MOOD meanings) is to some extent comparable to the idea of Sprachspiel in Wittgenstein’s thinking (cf. Wittgenstein 1958, § 7, § 10, § 23 and § 43) and to the idea of speech acts in Speech Act Theory (cf. Austin 1962 and Searle 1969); the latter comparison is also made by Taverniers, who states that the options in Halliday’s system for speech functions “define different types of speech acts” (Taverniers 2011, p. 1109). It should be noted, however, that where Speech Act Theory embraces a notion of intention, this is avoided by Halliday; Halliday is concerned with intersubjectively negotiated purposivity in using language, not with individual intention.

This chapter will take as its point of departure Halliday’s – or the IFG tradition’s – description of the interpersonal realm of language, and as a perspective it will introduce Fawcett’s – or the Cardiff grammar’s (CG) – description of interpersonal meaning (see Fawcett this volume). From the initial presentations of the IFG tradition’s and the CG’s descriptions, the chapter will proceed with a discussion of a number of problematic issues in both frameworks; the discussion will – similar to the weighing of the presentations – focus on Halliday’s description, but it will also be contrastive.

In the final part of the chapter, necessary reflections and clarifications for future work on the interpersonal meaning of the clause will be sketched out.

8.1 INTERPERSONAL MEANING AND THE CLAUSE IN THE IFG TRADITION

According to Halliday, the clause is “organized as an interactive event” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 134).
As an interactive event, the clause contributes to the development of an exchange (of meaning) between a speaker (or writer) and a listener (or reader). The notion of exchange is central in the IFG tradition’s description of the interpersonal metafunction, and as a broad, non-technical term, it covers a description of how the semantic system of speech functions is realised in the lexicogrammar by different clause types (and in phonology by different intonation contours). Different clause types in English are structured by different orderings of Subject and Finite. Subject and Finite together constitute the Mood element of the clause, and interpersonally speaking, this is the pivotal lexicogrammatical element.

8.1.1 The speech functions

The semantic taxonomy of speech functions contains four basic and primary speech functions, namely statement, question, command and offer. Their fundamental properties are shown in Table 8.1 (cf. Table 4-1 and 4-2 in Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 136-137), which also gives an example of each of the speech functions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role in exchange</th>
<th>Commodity exchanged</th>
<th>(a) goods-&amp;-services</th>
<th>(b) information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) giving</td>
<td>‘offer’</td>
<td>Shall I give you this teapot?</td>
<td>‘statement’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He’s giving her the teapot</td>
<td>He’s giving her the teapot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) demanding</td>
<td>‘command’</td>
<td>Give me that teapot!</td>
<td>‘question’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What is he giving her?</td>
<td>What is he giving her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Proposition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1: Basic speech functions and their properties

The table above combines two variables:

1. the nature of the commodity that is being exchanged, and
2. the roles that are defined by the exchange process (Halliday 1984, p. 11).

In a linguistic exchange we can position ourselves in one of two roles: either we can give something, or we can demand something (cf. (2) in the quotation), and this ‘something’ that we are giving or demanding can be either a semiotic commodity or a non-semiotic commodity (cf. (1) in the quotation). A semiotic commodity is labelled information, and non-semiotic commodities are labelled goods-&-services.

The notion of exchange is closely tied to the second variable, i.e. the positioning of the performer and the addressee in the roles of ‘giver’ or ‘demander’. Halliday and Matthiessen describe the role play in an exchange as follows:

The speaker is not only doing something himself; he is also requiring something of the listener. Typically, therefore, an ‘act’ of speaking is something that might more appropriately be called an interact: it is an exchange, in which giving implies receiving and demanding implies giving in response (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 135; original emphasis).
It follows that statement, question, offer and command are to be regarded as dialogically initiating speech functions, to which there are a number of possible and typical responses. The four basic speech functions and their respective sets of responses are shown in Table 8.2 (cf. Table 4-2 in ibid., p. 137).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech function</th>
<th>Expected response</th>
<th>Discretionary response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offer</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shall I give you this teapot?</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, please do!</td>
<td>No, thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Command</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give me that teapot!</td>
<td>Undertaking</td>
<td>Refusal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here you are</td>
<td>I won’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s giving her the teapot</td>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>Contradiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is he?</td>
<td>No, he isn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is he giving her?</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Disclaimer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A teapot</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2: Basic speech functions and their responses

8.1.1.2 The speech functions and mood types

The semantic taxonomy of speech functions (the system of SPEECH FUNCTION) is realised in the lexicogrammar by different mood types (: clause types) in the system of MOOD (and on the phonological level by their intonation contour (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 166-170)) in the following typical (congruent) way: (i) a statement is realised by a declarative clause, (ii) a question is realised by an interrogative clause (either a yes-no interrogative or a WH-interrogative), (iii) a command is realised by an imperative clause, and (iv) an offer is realised by an interrogative clause, where the Finite is formed by a modal verb (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 137, 146; Halliday 1984, p. 15, 20). It is debatable whether the offer indeed has a typical realisation. On the one hand, the examples in IFG seem to suggest this, and Hasan contributes significantly to an understanding of the lexicogrammar of offers in her *Offers in the making* (1985). On the other hand, in his *Lexicogrammatical Cartography*, Matthiessen largely avoids talking about the offer, and he states that “There is no special grammatical category for offers” (1995, p. 438). And in the section on grammatical metaphors of MOOD in *IFG*, there is no description of any congruent (or any metaphorical) realisations of the offer, i.e. there is no account of any typical (or atypical) realisations of the offer (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, section 10.4).

The declarative and the interrogative are types of indicative clauses, meaning that they are structured around the Mood element, which in English consists of Subject and Finite; they are structurally distinct from one another, since the declarative is characterised by the word order Subject before Finite, while the yes-no interrogative is characterised by the word order Finite before Subject. The WH-interrogative has the order of Subject before Finite, when the WH-element is the Subject, and Finite before Subject otherwise (cf. ibid., p. 143). The imperative is different from the indicative in that it does not necessarily involve a Mood element, i.e. a Subject and a Finite (this goes for the unmarked positive imperative, e.g. *look*);
however, there are forms of imperatives with a Mood element, e.g. *Don’t you look* (cf. ibid., p. 165), and the imperative is considered a mood type.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen the Finite:

> brings the proposition down to earth, so that it is something that can be argued about. (…) This can be done in one or two ways. One is by reference to the time of speaking; the other is by reference to the judgement of the speaker (…). In grammatical terms, the first is primary tense, the second is modality. (…) What these have in common is interpersonal deixis: that is, they locate the exchange within the semantic space that is opened up between speaker and listener (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 144; original emphasis).

The Subject is “responsible for the functioning of the clause as an interactive event” (ibid., p. 146), since it is said to carry “the modal responsibility: that is, responsibility for the validity of what is being predicated (stated, questioned, commanded or offered) in the clause” (ibid., p. 148; original emphasis).  

In addition to the three clause types of MOOD, Halliday and Matthiessen operate with minor clauses and exclamatives. Minor clauses have no verbal element and do not realise propositions or proposals but minor speech functions: “exclamations, calls, greetings and alarms” (ibid., p. 195). The description of the exclamative is very brief and primarily consists of a number of examples, and the exclamative is nowhere to be seen in the system network of MOOD (ibid., p. 162); in other words, its status is somewhat unclear in the IFG tradition.

An illustration of the speech functions at work and the way different speech functions are realised by different mood types with different (meanings of) Subject and Finite is provided by Halliday in his analysis and interpretation of “The ‘silver’ text” in his second edition of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Halliday 1994, p. 368-391).

**8.1.3 The speech functions and modality (and polarity)**

POLARITY and MODALITY are interconnected systems; the options in POLARITY (positive and negative) designate the extremes to which the options in MODALITY function as intermediate degrees. In other words, MODALITY construes “the region of uncertainty that lies between ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (ibid., p. 176); this is illustrated in Figure 8.1.
Figure 8.1: Polarity and modality

Any type of speech function can function with any of the two options in POLARITY. For MODALITY, the picture is different. The speech functions associated with the exchange of meaning (propositions), and the speech functions associated with the exchange of goods-&-services (proposals) connect with different types of modality, namely modalization (: probability and usuality) and modulation (: obligation and inclination), respectively (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, p. 177-178). Modality is realised in the Mood element of the clause, either through the Finite or through Mood Adjuncts.

8.2 INTERPERSONAL MEANING AND THE CLAUSE IN THE CG – A PERSPECTIVE

In the CG the linguistic domain of dialogue is called MOOD, which here designates the interpersonal strand of meaning. Polarity and validity (these cover roughly the same as polarity and modality in the IFG tradition) are two other, separate strands. MOOD “covers the roles of the interactants in the act of communication” (Fawcett forthcoming, p. 53; original emphasis). These roles – played out by the notions of the Performer and the Addressee – are grouped in two main areas of meaning; the first area is concerned with meanings that assign “communication roles in giving, seeking, confirming, etc, information about events” (Fawcett mimeo, p. 21; original emphasis). The second area covers meanings that assign communication roles “in proposals for events that are actions. (...) Any such meaning is termed (...) a proposal for action” (ibid., p. 21; original emphasis).

There are some 150 different MOOD meanings in the CG, and it is not possible to give a complete description of all of these in this chapter (see e.g. Fawcett mimeo for elaborate descriptions of MOOD). A small part of the total system network is presented in Fawcett this volume.

In the CG the different MOOD meanings (such as “information giver” and “information seeker”) are associated with different syntactic structures; in other words the various MOOD meanings are expressed on the level of form, primarily through the ordering of Subject, Operator and Main Verb. Subject, Operator and Main Verb are elements of the clause, and they do not have any meaning on their own (level) (see Fawcett this volume). What is significant for these elements in relation to the MOOD meanings is that the structure of the elements expresses different meanings; to exemplify with Fawcett’s words:
The major distinction at the level of form between an ‘information giver’ and an ‘information seeker’ is this: an ‘information giver’ has the structure of Subject + Main Verb (S M), (...) or Subject + Operator (S O), (...) whereas an ‘information seeker’ typically – but not always – has the structure O S (Fawcett mimeo, p. 22; original emphasis).

The options in the system of MOOD are associated with clauses that function as initiating moves in an exchange structure; an exchange structure is a sequencing and turn-changing structure (cf. Fawcett in print, chapter 8).

8.3 PROBLEMATIC ISSUES AND UNCERTAINTIES

In this section, I shall present a discussion of some ambiguities and problematic issues with the description of exchange in the IFG tradition, and I shall relate these to the description of MOOD in the CG tradition.

8.3.1 How many speech functions are there?

Halliday (1984) is key to understanding the IFG account of speech functions. Matthiessen calls the article “seminal” in his chronological overview of the developments in systemic functional linguistics (Matthiessen 2007, p. 522), and Fawcett describes it in the same way, while noting that the ideas presented in the article was first formulated in the mid 70’s (mimeo, p. 18). The article is seminal for a number of reasons. On a more abstract theoretical level, it provides a description of interstratal realisational relations between semantics and lexicogrammar, thereby emphasizing the need (as perceived by the IFG tradition) for a dual stratification of the content plane of language. As Taverniers (2011) shows, the introduction of an explicit semantic network (functioning on a higher level than lexicogrammatical networks) was an addition to Halliday’s earlier model of systemic functional linguistics, and in fact it marks a fundamental difference to the CG’s description of language, where we do not find a dual stratification of the content plane of language (cf. Fawcett mimeo, p. 19). On a more descriptive level, Halliday’s article provides the first account of the system of SPEECH FUNCTION (with the set of the four basic speech functions: statement, question, offer and command), we still today operate with in the IFG tradition.

Until Halliday’s 1984 article, what we have on speech functions in systemic functional linguistics are different sets of speech functions, which are more or less described in detail, and more or less transparently substantiated. In 1963, Halliday talks of “sentence functions”, which are motivated by the mood system in combination with the tone system, and he identifies the total set of sentence functions to be “statement, question, command, answer and exclamation” (1963, p. 255). Nearly the same set is posited in 1970, in a high-profile article in Lyons’ New Horizons in Linguistics, where Halliday en passant mentions the “basic “speech functions” of statement, question, response, command and exclamation” (Halliday 1970b, p. 189). Also in 1970, he presents a set of speech functions that are primarily argued for by
intonation patterns, i.e. the set is tied to the meanings of different tones. This set contains seven distinct speech functions, namely the four major speech functions statement, WH-question, yes/no question and command, and the three minor speech functions response, exclamation and call (Halliday 1970a, p. 26).

Apart from the facts that (i) the number and labelling of speech functions is inconsistent, and (ii) Halliday seems to express a kind of tentativeness to the status of his description since he at one point talks of sentence functions and at another puts the notion of speech function in quotation marks, two things should be noted in these early accounts of speech functions. First, there is no mention of the speech function offer. Secondly, the system for speech function is motivated by the system of MOOD, i.e. by clause syntax (cf. Halliday 1963, p. 254; 1970b, p. 189). It is likely that these two aspects are interwoven: there is no immediate syntactical motivation for four basic (or major) speech functions, hence no place for the offer, when the speech functions are to be argued for with the MOOD system that has only three basic clause types, i.e. declarative, interrogative and imperative, as its principal options.

The offer does not become part of the basic set of speech functions until Halliday's 1984-introduction of the two fundamental variables on which to build the taxonomy of speech functions, namely commodity and role. When combined, these two variables make it necessary to operate with four basic speech functions, and this makes way for the offer. This semantic approach, taking the variable of commodity and role as point of departure, causes the problem that four basic speech functions are to be realised by only three basic clause types in MOOD. It could be argued that this makes up for a fuzzy grammatical evidence for semantic categories, even though Hasan has contributed with a long and insightful defence for the offer (Hasan 1985), and even though Halliday has suggested the notion of grammatical metaphor (see Taverniers this volume) and thereby loosened the ties between the system of SPEECH FUNCTION and the system of MOOD).

This possible problematic issue is not at stake in the CG. Here, the MOOD meanings (at the level of meaning) are explicitly mapped onto syntax (at the level of form), i.e. onto different structures of (primarily) Subject and Operator. There is therefore no room for a difference between the number of MOOD meanings and the number of realising syntactical structures. And there is no need for concepts such as congruence and grammatical metaphor to explain MOOD (cf. Fawcett in print). A challenge to the CG regarding the question of how many MOOD meanings there are, is that it operates with in the area of 150 MOOD meanings (cf. Fawcett mimeo, p. 49-54); this, of course, provides for an incredibly rich resource for computer based analysis and generation, but it is a fairly immense network to get an overview of when doing manual text analysis. One could also argue that there is a limited degree of generalization in the network.
8.3.2 Are the system of SPEECH FUNCTION and the system of MOOD really semantic systems?

In the IFG tradition, it is not lucidly clear whether SPEECH FUNCTION is a semantic or a contextual system. In the CG, it is not clear how the allegedly semantic system of MOOD is related to context. So in different respects, the question naming this section is relevant when scrutinising both the IFG tradition and the CG.

In the figures and tables in IFG, Halliday and Matthiessen describe the speech functions as options in a semantic network, which are realised in lexicogrammar (cf. “Fig. 4-1” and “Table 4-1 in Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 136), and the figures show how the semantic system of SPEECH FUNCTION is organised (in part) in two subsystems, namely INITIATING ROLE (with the options give and demand) and COMMODITY (with the options information and goods-and-services). If we then look carefully at the prose accompanying the figure and table in question, the picture becomes blurred; in the body text, there are traces to suggest that one of the subsystems in SPEECH FUNCTION is more contextual than semantic: Halliday and Matthiessen state that the exchange of goods-&-services concerns “an object or an action”, i.e. “the exchange commodity is strictly nonverbal” (ibid., p. 135); if indeed goods-&-services are defined by a material difference, and not by a semiotic difference (cf. Thibault 1995, p. 71, 83), then it is hard to see goods-&-services as a semantic entity.

If we now compare the network for SPEECH FUNCTION in IFG with the system of dialogue on the level of social context in Halliday’s 1984-article, the plot thickens even more (see Steffensen 2008 for a discussion of this issue). The two networks are reproduced below.

![Diagram of SPEECH FUNCTION and dialogue systems](image)

*Figure 8.2: “The system of dialogue (a): level of social context – the ‘move’” from Halliday 1984, p. 12*
Figure 8.3: “The semantic system of SPEECH FUNCTION” from Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 136

Taking the fact aside that the subsystem ROLE ASSIGNMENT in the earlier network is split into the two subsystems of MOVE and INITIATING ROLE in the later network, the networks are identical. In other words, what in 1984 is regarded as a contextual system is in 2014 regarded as a semantic system. This stratal relocation is nowhere argued for by Halliday (or Matthiessen).

Halliday 1984 does not only seem inconsistent when compared to IFG. The article per se is also somewhat problematic: the commodity exchanged is treated both as a semantic and a contextual concept. This becomes apparent when we compare Fig. 1.13 and Fig. 1.14 in the article (reproduced below as Figure 8.4 and Figure 8.5), which are said to describe the ontogenesis of Nigel (on the late transition phase and on the threshold of adult language, respectively); in Figure 8.4 goods-&-services and information are elements of meaning, while they are part of the description of context in Figure 8.5. No explanation is provided in the body text to this apparent inconsistency.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function in context</th>
<th>Meaning (generalized system)</th>
<th>Realization (example)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatic (dialogue mode)</strong></td>
<td>‘I want goods &amp; services’</td>
<td>lunch back on table! play dada brush! plar ráo!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I want information: yes or no?’</td>
<td>thát very hot? tiny bird flew away did marmite hurt your lip?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mathetic (narrative mode)</strong></td>
<td>what you don’t know (alternative to shared experience) [interrogative]</td>
<td>goods lunch back on table services let me! let’s (let) you!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>what you know (expression of shared experience) [declarative]</td>
<td>lunch back on table services let me! let’s (let) you!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8.4: “Transition, late (1;10)” from Halliday 1984, p. 28*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function in context</th>
<th>Meaning (generalized system)</th>
<th>Realization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>demand goods- &amp; services</td>
<td>‘command’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘you/let’s’</td>
<td>suggestion (‘let’s...!’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘I want’</td>
<td>request for permission (‘I want to...!’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>request for object (‘I want...!’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(i) declarative or minor clause; rising tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demand information</td>
<td>‘question’ (rare)</td>
<td>information known to hearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give information</td>
<td>‘statement’</td>
<td>information not known to hearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>declarative; falling tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.5: “Incipient adult (2;0): Nigel on the threshold of the adult system of dialogue” from Halliday 1984, p. 30

In the CG, the network for MOOD is explicitly thought of as semantic, and for Fawcett it is a cardinal point to ‘push MOOD all the way to semantics’ (cf. Fawcett mimeo, p. 10). As described in section 8.2, this is done by positing a network with explicit semantic features (on the level of meaning) combined with syntactic...
realisations (on the level of form). From Fawcett’s point of view, Halliday’s network for MOOD is not semantic (ibid., p. 4), and Halliday’s (stratal) differentiation between a semantic network for speech functions and a lexicogrammatical network for MOOD is not necessary, since Fawcett maps syntax – i.e. what he sees as equivalent to Halliday’s MOOD – directly onto his MOOD meanings. Halliday’s stratal differentiation is at odds with what Fawcett calls “[t]he great beauty of the systemic functional approach to understanding (...) language”, namely “that the core component is A SINGLE, UNIFIED SYSTEM NETWORK OF MEANINGS” (ibid., p. 19; orig. emphasis). From a Hallidayan point of view, Fawcett’s approach is problematic since it loses sight of the relation between meaning and culture; Hasan puts it this way:

[Fawcett’s approach] removes the cultural base for meaning as postulated in Halliday’s SFL; instead for Fawcett, this base is replaced by cognition, or an individual’s belief system, which becomes the primary term in the game of human existence. Semantics in these two models is not the same thing; and mind in Fawcett’s model is not made semiotically (Hasan et al. 2007, p. 711).

Hasan’s critique is tantamount to saying that Fawcett’s system networks are not concerned with meaning in a (social) semiotic sense (even though he explicitly regards them as system networks for meaning), and his categories are more of a pragmatic (cf. Levinson 1983) or cognitive kind, maybe even posited on an a priori basis.

### 8.3.3 Why a distinction between information and goods-&-services?

Halliday’s notion of speech function has been used by many systemic functional scholars to describe communicative intent. It has been done with different emphasis on e.g. phonology (e.g. Halliday 1963, 1970a; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), clause structure (e.g. Halliday 1984; Matthiessen 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), discourse (e.g. Martin 1992), message semantics (e.g. Hasan 1985; 1996; see Moore this volume), and it has been done for a large number of languages (cf. Teruya et al. 2007). These accounts of speech function have been rich and proven valuable in a large number of applied contexts. Strikingly, though, no description has ever debated Halliday’s axiomatic distinction between role and commodity, comprising the distinction between information and goods-&-services; this distinction has simply been reiterated and taken for granted. Since these (interrelated) distinctions are fundamental – and since their description holds a number of uncertainties (cf. section 8.3.2) – it is reasonable to discuss them in further detail.

The variable describing the roles of the interlocutors in an exchange as giver or demander seems fairly unproblematic. In an exchange, two parties are necessary, and there is some directionality to the exchange, so it seems adequate to see the speaker as either giver or demander, and to see the listener as taking up a complementary, responding role; the speaker’s role as either giver or demander is also very clearly reflected in the way, the declarative, interrogative and imperative clause type realise the speaker’s role.
The other variable – the one describing the commodity, i.e. the variable with which Halliday distinguishes information from goods-&-services – seems more problematic. When Halliday introduces this variable, he simply states that

[t]he commodity may be either (a) goods-&-services or (b) information (cp. Ervin-Tripp 1964). (…) The distinction between information and goods-&-services is theoretically a very fundamental one (Halliday 1984, p. 11).

In other words, when introduced the only support for the distinction between information and goods-&-services is (i) a reference to work by Ervin-Tripp, and (ii) an unsubstantiated claim that the distinction is indeed theoretically very fundamental. The latter is posited without any references or further argumentation, so we are left to look at Ervin-Tripp’s work for support. Halliday refers to Ervin-Tripp’s article An Analysis of the Interaction of Language, Topic, and Listener, which scrutinises a number of key concepts in sociolinguistics. In the article’s description of “dyadic interactions” (cf. ibid., p. 88) we find wordings, which create a link to Halliday’s account of speech functions: Ervin-Tripp posits a number of interactions, among others “a. Requests for goods, services, or information” (ibid., p. 88) and “c. Offering information or interpretation” (ibid., p. 89). These formulations are the only parts in Ervin-Tripp’s article where we can find some sort of connection to Halliday’s work on speech functions; however this connection is only terminological, since Erwin-Tripp nowhere defines the terms, or groups “goods” together with “services”, or posits these terms as an opposition to “information”. Ervin-Tripp’s article may have served as inspiration for Halliday, but it hardly suffices as a theoretical substantiation of his distinction between information and goods-&-services.

A possible substantiation for the distinction between information and goods-&-services is ontogenesis, or to be more precise: Halliday’s case study of the ontogenesis of ‘Nigel’. This study is brought into the picture in some detail in Halliday 1984, and also in IFG, Halliday indicates that his account of ontogenesis can substantiate the distinction (cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 138; see also Davidse 1997). It is therefore appropriate (briefly) to look at Halliday’s description of ontogenesis in a search for the substantiation we are looking for.

According to Halliday, there are three phases in a child’s learning of his mother tongue (cf. Halliday 1973, 1978):

- In phase I the child develops a proto-language, which helps the child to express the following communicative functions: “instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative” (Halliday 1978, p. 71).

- Phase II is a transition phase, in which the child starts to combine the six communicative functions from phase I into two more general functions, namely the “pragmatic” and the “mathetic”. In phase II
The semiotic substance of the pragmatic/mathetic distinction, between language as doing and language as learning, has now been incorporated into the grammar, in the form of the functional distinction between interpersonal and ideational in the adult system (ibid., p. 72).

In addition to the interpersonal and the ideational metafunction, a third component appears in the language system in phase II, namely the textual metafunction, which helps to organise interpersonal and ideational meaning.

- When all three metafunctions are simultaneously in play, the child has learned its mother tongue and has entered phase III; this phase “consists in mastering the adult language. Phase III, of course, continues throughout life” (ibid., p. 72).

Halliday’s description of the phases of ontogenesis provides for an argument for the metafunctional hypothesis in the IFG tradition, i.e. for its three metafunctions, but it does not substantiate the distinction between information and goods-services. There is nothing in Halliday’s writing which suggests that “language as doing and language as learning” should be equal to a distinction between proposal and proposition, hence to the distinction between speech functions associated with goods-services and speech functions associated with information. If we add to this that Halliday uses information and goods-services as both semantic and contextual components in the sections of his 1984-article where he describes ontogenesis (cf. section 8.3.2), it becomes quite problematic to claim an ontogenetic support for the distinction between information and goods-services.

A further problematic issue with the distinction between information and goods-services is that the definition of goods-services seems incoherent with (maybe) the most fundamental of all definitions in systemic functional linguistics, namely the definition of meaning. In systemic functional linguistics ‘social’ equals ‘cultural’ (cf. Halliday & Hasan 1985, p. 4; Halliday 1984, p. 9), and systemic functional linguistics can be thought of as a ‘culture semiotics’ (social semiotics) in the sense that meaning is theorised as a superindividual, social concept (cf. Lemke 1995; see also Halliday’s use of Vygotsky in Halliday 1992); “[m]eaning is intersubjective activity, not subjective” (Halliday 1992: 354; orig. emphasis; cf. Halliday & Matthiessen 1999, p. 2), Halliday states, and culture is theorised as

an edifice of meanings – a semiotic construct. (...) [T]he formulation ‘language as social semiotic’ (...) means interpreting language within a sociocultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms (Halliday 1996, p. 89; cf. Halliday 1984, p. 8).

Culture is meaning, and “all activities are cultural”, van Leeuwen ascertains in his reading of Malinowski (2005, p. 74). In line with this, Halliday states that “reality is a social construct, [and] it can be constructed only through an exchange of meanings (Halliday 1978, p. 191). With such axiomatic ideas of meaning, it is paradoxical to operate with entities that have no meaning. In other words, it is problematic to operate with
the notion of goods-&-services, which are said to be “non-symbolic [things and] acts” (cf. Halliday 1989, p. 3); as non-symbolic entities, goods-&-services are not brought into being “through language (or perhaps other semiotic systems)” (Halliday 1984, p. 11), i.e. they are without meaning, since semiotic in the systemic functional theory means “having to do with meaning” (Halliday 1995, p. 198-199).

The idea of goods-&-services as entities without meaning is furthermore incoherent with the fact that this notion is part of the description of the clause as exchange; in an exchange

[the] non-linguistic physical acts are not (...) independent of the meaning potential of the lexicogrammatical form. They are a necessary and fully semiotic part of the total social act (Thibault 1995, p. 71).

In the CG there is no use of the dichotomy of information vs. goods-&-services. Instead there is a distinction between information and proposal for action. Butler argues that this distinction corresponds to Halliday’s distinction between information and goods-&-services (2003, p. 46), but the somewhat unsubstantiated notion of goods-&-services is (largely) avoided in the CG. How, then, does the CG substantiate its distinction between information and proposal for action, one could ask. This is not overtly addressed by Fawcett, so we are left to speculate. One possible inspiration for this distinction could be Austin’s distinction between constatives and performatives. If one compares Fawcett’s definitions and formulations with Austin’s (1962), there are some similarities, not least the fact that Austin describes How to do things with words, and MOOD with Fawcett’s words “expresses the meaning of WHAT WE ARE DOING THROUGH LANGUAGE” (Fawcett 2008, p. 52). Fawcett operates with information and action, while Austin talks about “saying” and “doing” (1962, p. 132), where the latter means “performing (...) an action” (ibid., p. 6). Actually, Fawcett himself notes an early influence by Speech Act Theory (mimeo, p. 17; cf. Butler 2003, p. 45).

8.4 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this section, I shall very briefly mention some reflections and necessary clarifications for future work on the interpersonal meaning of the clause.

First and foremost, the distinction between information and goods-&-services should be either substantiated or avoided. In an ontological setting where reality is a social construct (cf. section 8.3.3) it is hard to see how the distinction could be substantiated in a way that is theoretically coherent with the systemic functional definition of meaning. If one, albeit this theoretical issue, were to attempt substantiation, one would – for a starter – have to clarify that goods-&-services is not an ecological, material commodity but a semiotic construct, just as information is; if we uphold a contrast between ‘material’ and ‘semiotic’ as two orders of phenomena in our world, then this contrast is in the end semiotically made. This clarification leads to a number of questions: if both goods-&-services and
information are semiotic constructs, what then differentiates them? Most often (but not always, cf. e.g. Halliday 1978, p. 99), Halliday defines information as linguistic semiosis (cf. e.g. Halliday 1984, 1995), and this could possibly differentiate information from goods-&-services, which meanings are (also) constructed by semiotic systems other than language. This stance, however, opens up for a discussion of whether it is fruitful to uphold a distinction between linguistic semiosis and multisemiotic semiosis, when one brings multimodal theory (e.g. Kress 2010) and contemporary communication channels in to the picture. All in all, there are severe problems in upholding a distinction between information and goods-&-services. Now, if one avoided the distinction, an alternative way of mapping out speech functions could be found; this leads to the following reflections.

In relation to stratification it should be made clear as to which extent any description of speech functions is approached primarily from below (cf. the modelling of (the ideational part of) the semantic stratum in Halliday & Matthiessen 1999) or from above (cf. the current modelling in the IFG tradition, in the CG and in Martin’s work on discourse semantics); or maybe from both perspectives: one could consider a bidirectional approach, which would involve two steps: first, one could approach the speech functions from below and describe them as semantic interpretations of the various clause types, e.g. statement for declarative, question for interrogative and request for imperative. Second, one could – through analysis of dialogue – relate these rather general semantic interpretations of clause types, i.e. of grammatical structures, to actual contexts, whereby one could both determine their precise meaning (in the particular dialogue) and more generally map out subtypes; these would now be motivated from above, from contextual cues and semantic patterning. Such a bidirectional approach lends its rationale to Silverstein’s point that “a bidirectional dialectic constitutes the minimalest total linguistic fact” (Silverstein 1985, p. 257); a “bidirectional dialectic” is necessary, since “structure (...) ‘determines’ presupposable use-value” (ibid., p. 256), and since “structure (...) ‘is determined by’ entailing use-value” (ibid., p. 256). In relation to metafunctional diversity one could consider pursuing a multi-metafunctional perspective when describing speech functions. This means not only describing the interpersonal lexicogrammatical resources that realise each type of speech function (e.g. Subject and Finite) but also looking for resources from experiential lexicogrammar (e.g. volitional Process) and textual lexicogrammar (e.g. Subject Theme) (cf. Hasan 1985, Thibault & van Leeuwen 1996, p. 574-575; see also Martin’s notion of ‘coupling’ in Martin 2011).

REFERENCES:
It should be noted that the description of the interpersonal lexicogrammar covers English only. Descriptive categories such as Subject, Finite and clause types differ in function and form in different languages. See Teruya et al. 2007 for a presentation of MOOD in a number of languages (other than English). Halliday’s interpersonal definition of the Subject has been one of the most heavily criticized definitions in his language description (see e.g. Butler 2003, Fawcett 1999, 2008, Huddleston 1988, 1991, Hudson 1996 and Matthiessen & Martin 1991). Since the Subject is central to the way a clause construes interpersonal meaning, it is worthwhile to look into the critique.
In the CG, there is an explicit level of (and use of the word) syntax; the notion of syntax is largely avoided in the IFG tradition.