

CHAPTER 4

Acting the part

Lexico-grammatical choices and contextual factors

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Abstract

It is generally argued in Systemic-Functional linguistics that each of the three contextual variables of field, mode and tenor primarily determines choices in a different metafunction. However, in practical text analysis the links between lexico-grammatical choices and contextual factors often appear to be more complex than this assumption would suggest. In this paper, I examine the extent to which one of the contextual variables can be seen as connected with systems from only one metafunction, concentrating on lexico-grammatical choices which seem to be related to the tenor of the context. I set out to show that the contextual roles of participants need to be invoked to explain not only choices from the interpersonal system of Mood, but also choices from the textual system of cohesion, and the use or non-use of nominalisation. On the basis of the analyses, I argue that the tenor of a context is construed by a combination of features in the register of the text rather than by interpersonal meanings alone, and that in general the links between context and metafunctions are best treated at the level of the configurations on each side rather than in terms of three separate pairs of links.

1. Introduction

A clear advantage of Systemic-Functional Grammar for anyone involved in the analysis of texts is that one of its central concerns is to draw explanatory links between lexico-grammatical choices in the text and the relevant contextual