

## Unit three: Contemporary approaches to linguistics

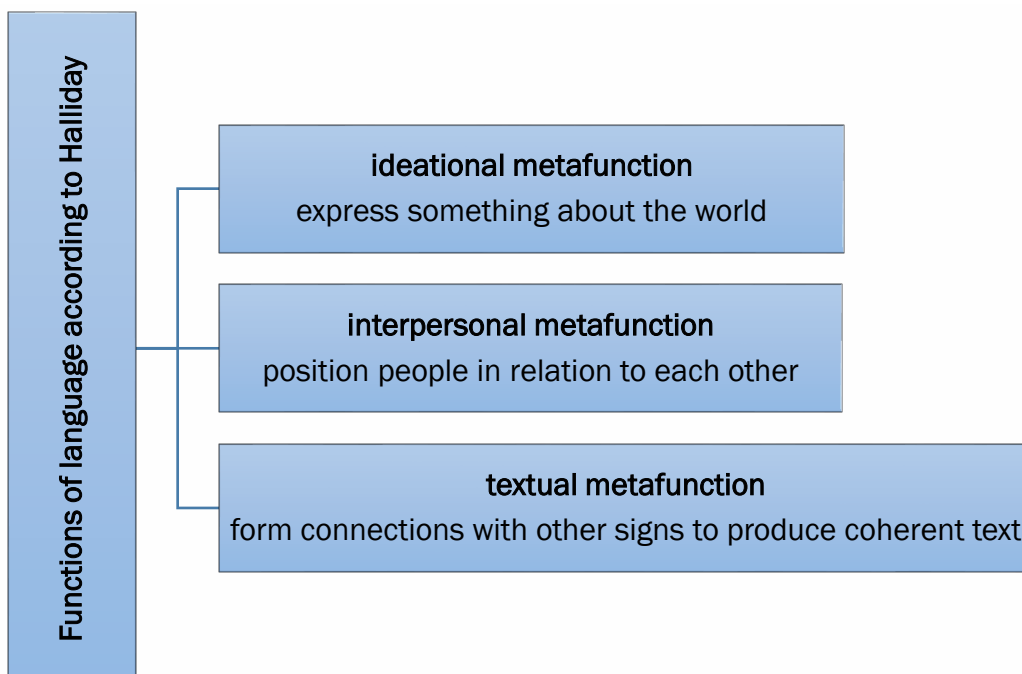
### Lesson 10: FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

#### 1. What is functional linguistics?

It is a linguistic approach is concerned with the function of language [what language does/ how it does it in a given context]. It contrasts with more formal approaches are concerned with formal structures from the phonemes to the sentence. Functional linguistics is concerned with deriving grammatical, syntactic and textual structures from the language uses. Its pioneers are the British linguist, J. R. Firth and Prague School of linguists. Based on the work of Firth, Systemic Functional Linguistics is notably the work of Michael Halliday. Systemic-Functional Linguistics is a theory of language which is based on the notion of language function and the syntactic structure of language. Systemic functional linguistics considers language as a system. "systemic" is related to the system networks used in the description of the lexico-grammar of human languages.

#### 2. Functions of language according to Halliday

In *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978) Michael Halliday proposes that the semiotic resources of language are shaped by how people use them to make meaning, emphasising the social functions they are put to.



#### 3. Communicative function of language

Halliday states that language is the study of how people exchange meanings through the use of language. **For example:** the boy ate the bread in the kitchen.

- **Statements**.... the boy is eating the bread.

- **Commands...** eat the bread!
- **Questions...** is the boy eating the bread???

**Explanation:**

Language is used for much more than representing states of affairs. It is used in all kinds of verbal social interactions: asking questions, giving commands, making promises, expressing wishes, etc. These different uses are known as speech acts (Searle 1969). Functional approaches take a strongly discourse-oriented view of language. Halliday maintains that the ultimate explanations of linguistic phenomena are to be found in language use. Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to these needs

**4. Formal vs functional approaches**

Those linguists who believe language as system of communication and take the communicative functions of language to be important for its analysis. Formalists consider the communicative functions of language to be irrelevant to its analysis, following Chomsky. All functionalists agree that language is a system of forms for conveying meaning in communication and therefore that in order to understand it, it is necessary to investigate the interaction of structure, meaning and communicative function