Context, register and genre:
Implications for language education

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Abstract: This paper explores, from a systemic functional linguistics perspective, the relation among the concepts of 'context', 'register' (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 2004) 'genre' (Martin, 1992, 1997, 2000) and language education. The reason for exploring these concepts is their connection with two notions that have a direct bearing on language teaching/learning: the appropriateness of linguistic forms to achieve specific communicative purposes (linked to the paradigm of analysing language in use) and the relation between text and context. To illustrate and apply the SFL theoretical and analytical resources presented, an exemplar of a reader's letter published by Newsweek magazine is analysed. It is suggested that a functional perspective on language teaching/learning helps students build systematic links between contextual and linguistic parameters when using language, a goal which is facilitated by SFL's view of language as "sets of related choices or options, each of which is called a system" (Painter, 2001: 176). In other words, the notions of register and genre can be used to make students aware of the sociocultural features of the text-type that is being taught and of which linguistic choices are more likely to be made in its textualization, as well as to help teachers "to identify and focus on whatever aspect of language in use the learner needs most help with" (Painter, 2001: 178).

Key Words: SFL, context, register, genre, reader's letter.

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Contexto, registro e gênero: Implicações para o ensino de línguas

Resumo: O objetivo desse artigo é explorar, da perspectiva da linguística sistêmico-funcional (LSF), a relação entre os conceitos de 'contexto', 'registro' (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 2004) e 'gênero' (Martin, 1992, 1997, 2000) e o ensino/aprendizagem de línguas. Esses conceitos foram selecionados para discussão devido a sua conexão com duas noções que têm um impacto direto no ensino/aprendizagem de línguas: a adequação das formas linguísticas para alcançar propósitos comunicativos específicos (ligadas ao paradigma de análise da linguagem em uso) e a relação entre texto e contexto. Como forma de ilustrar e aplicar os recursos teóricos e metodológicos selecionados da LSF, nesse ensaio eu analiso um exemplar de uma carta do leitor publicada na revista *Newsweek*. Meu argumento é que a perspectiva funcional aplicada ao ensino/aprendizagem de línguas pode auxiliar os aprendizes a construir ligações sistemáticas entre parâmetros contextuais e linguísticos ao usarem a linguagem, um objetivo que é facilitado pela visão sistêmica de linguagem como "conjuntos relacionados de escolhas e opções, cada uma delas chamada de sistema" (Painter, 2001: 176). Em outras palavras, os conceitos de registro e de gênero podem ser usados para concientizar os aprendizes sobre as características socioculturais do gênero que está sendo ensinado, assim como sobre as escolhas linguísticas mais frequentes na textualização desse gênero, além de auxiliar os professores a "identificar e focalizar os aspectos da linguagem em uso com os quais o aprendiz tem mais dificuldade" (Painter, 2001: 178).

Palavras-Chave: LSF, contexto, registro, gênero, carta do leitor.

Contexto, registro y género: Implicaciones para la enseñanza de idiomas

Resumen: El objetivo de este trabajo es explorar, desde la perspectiva de la Lingüística Sistémico-Funcional (LSF), la relación entre los conceptos de contexto, registro (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 2004) y género (Martin, 1992, 1997, 2000) y la enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas. Estos conceptos fueron elegidos para el debate debido a su relación con dos conceptos que tienen un impacto directo sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas: la adecuación de las formas lingüísticas para alcanzar determinados propósitos comunicativos (en relación con el paradigma de análisis del lenguaje en uso) y la relación entre el texto y el contexto. Con el fin de ilustrar y aplicar los recursos teóricos y metodológicos seleccionados de la LSF, en este ensayo se analiza un examplar de una carta de lector publicada en Newsweek. Mi argumento es que el enfoque funcional aplicado a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas puede ayudar a los estudiantes a construir vínculos sistemáticos entre los parámetros lingüísticos y contextuales en el uso de la lengua, un objetivo que se ve facilitado por la visión sistémica de la lengua como "conjuntos relacionados de elecciones y opciones, cada una llamada de sistema" (Painter, 2001: 176). En otras palabras, los conceptos de registro y de género pueden ser utilizados para concientizar a los aprendices de las características socio-culturales del género que se imparte, así como de las elecciones lingüísticas más frecuentes en la textualización de este género, además de ayudar a los maestros a "identificar y se centrar en aquellos aspectos del lenguaje en uso con los cuales el alumno tiene más dificultades" (Painter, 2001:178).

Palabras Clave: LSF, contexto, registro, género, carta de lector.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore, from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the relation between the concepts of 'context', 'register' (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Halliday, 2004) genre (Martin, 1992, 1997, 2000) and language education. The reason for exploring these concepts is their connection with two notions that have a direct bearing on language teaching/learning: the appropriateness of linguistic forms to achieve specific communicative purposes (linked to the paradigm of analysing language in use) and the relation between text and context.

In pedagogical terms, my goal is to present and discuss theoretical and analytical resources produced within a discursive-functional perspective that may be used to ground the work with genres (including the issues of text production and reception), both by EFL/ESL[1] teachers and students and by language researchers. To do so, the paper is organized in the following sections: 1) 'Systemic functional linguistics and language education', where I present some basic theoretical constructs from SFL (such as the notions of metafunctions, context of situation and register) and their implications for the teaching/learning of languages, in particular second/foreign languages; 2) 'Context, register and genre: Martin's perspective', which introduces Martin's approach to genre analysis, strongly influenced by SFL and by the notions of context and register; 2.1.) 'An analysis of a reader's letter according to Martin's proposal', where I analyse the register choices and the schematic structure of a particular genre, a reader's letter to a magazine; 3) 'Implications of context, register and genre in language education,' which tries to combine the SF notions of context of situation and register and Martin's view of genre in terms of their implications for FL/SL teaching; and 'Concluding remarks.'

1. Systemic functional linguistics and language education

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday (1978), is both a theory of language and a methodology for analysing texts and their contexts of use. Due to its dual nature, SFL aims to explain how individuals use language and how language is structured for its different usages (Eggins, 1994). By adopting a multifunctional view of language, that is, that language is as it is to accomplish certain social functions, SFL divides the meanings realized by language into three types: 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual' meanings. According to this perspective, language is seen as 'systemic' because it consists of a set of choice systems, in which each system provides the speaker/writer with a variety of ways to express their intended meaning, and it is 'functional' because it serves functional purposes. The functional aspects of language are simultaneously expressed in the three types of meaning mentioned above.

Ideational meanings are related to the way language is used to represent our experiences of the physical, the psychological and the social world. These meanings are realized through the 'system of transitivity', which is represented by 'a process' (realized by a verbal group), 'the participants' involved (realized by nominal groups) and their 'circunstances' (usually realized by adverbial groups).

'Interpersonal meanings' are realized by the 'systems of mood' and 'modality'. Mood is related to the exchange of information and of goods and services. Modality, on the other hand, is the relationship established between the text's author and her/his representations –**what the au**thor commits her/himself to in terms of the truth and the necessity of the text assertions.

'Textual meanings' have to do with the way the text is organized in relation to its context and its message. The clause seen as a message projects textual meanings through the 'system of Theme/Rheme', which is related to the message's point of departure (Theme) and its continuity (Rheme) in the clauses' syntactic organization.

A textual analysis based on the systemic-functional approach points out micro-textual evidence of specific social practices, allowing the discourse analyst, among other things, to uncover the hidden interests of writers/speakers and of their texts.

According to Lock (1996), in terms of language education, the systemic functional perspective does not focus on the distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical linguistic forms, but rather on the appropriateness of each lexico-gramatical choice for a particular communicative purpose in a particular social context. As the author points out, "the primary concern [of systemic functional linguistics] is with the functions of structures and their constituents and with their meanings in context" (Lock, 1996: 1).

Learning a second or foreign language involves a considerable amount of time and dedication, and the learners expect, as a payoff from their efforts, to develop the ability to communicate effectively with other speakers or writers of the new language. To do so, learners need a grammatical description of the language that goes beyond listing forms and structures and includes a description of the available linguistic resources and of how they are used in social interactions. Systemic functional linguistics is particularly adequate for such a task since it conceives:

> "The grammar of a language as a resource for making and exchanging meanings. A functional grammar is therefore the kind of grammar most likely to have useful things to say to language learners and teachers" (Lock, 1996: 3).

Since SFL is interested in explaining how people use language in everyday life and how language is structured according to its different forms of usage, the notion of context is central to the

systemic functional approach. Following this line, the next section discusses the notion of context and its role in the environment of second or foreing language teaching/learning.

1.2. The notion of 'context' in language teaching/learning

From a systemic point of view, language can only be understood in relation to its environment of use, and this premise is particularly evident in the language classroom, where both spoken and written texts should not be interpreted in isolation from their contexts of production and circulation. According to SFL, the environment of language seen as texts –specific texts and their component parts– is the context of situation, whereas the environment of language seen as a system –its lexical items and grammatical categories– is the context of culture (Halliday, 1978). The main contention in SFL is that the contextual and linguistic elements of a text are in a systemic relationship to one another. Choices in the distinct metafunctions 'create' the context of a text, at the same time that the register elements activate different areas of semantics and grammar. Halliday (1978) argues for the importance of the context in language education based on the unique role played by language in the learning process, in which language functions as 'substance' (learning a language, be it L1 or a foreign language), as 'instrument' (learning through language, which applies to all fields of knowledge and to all educational levels), and as 'object' (learning about language: grammar, genres, registers, word formation, etc.). In Halliday's (1978: 1) words:

> "If the context is theorized in linguistic terms as another stratum in the organization of language itself, this enables us to model its variation and complexity, taking account of the differing situational contexts for different levels and kinds of teaching/learning activities, as well as the processes and the institutions of education and the different cultures within which this are located."

But if all kinds of learning are mediated through language, what is the specific role of language in language education? According to Halliday (1978), the answer is that in the environment of language teaching/learning there is an inseparable relationship between language as medium of learning (as in developing oral proficiency, for instance), and language as the substance of what is being taught/learned, as in the process of teaching/learning second or foreign languages, the mother tongue, reading and writing, grammar, etc. In a functional vein, what is distinctive about language education is its permanent focus in the context, a context which is outside of language itself (Halliday, 1978). In the next sub-sections I will explore the systemic notions of situational and cultural contexts in language education, especially in what concerns the teaching/learning of second and foreign languages.

1.3. The context of situation

In second/foreign language classes, the issue of context is a particularly complex one, since the general feeling is that, in a classroom, language functions somehow out of its 'natural', 'real' enviroments of use, such as was the case in traditional methods of language teaching. Before the emergence of communicative approaches to second/foreign language education, traditional textbooks relied on single sentences or even words presented in isolation, out of context. Even the 'situational approach, developed in the 1950s and 1960s (Hornby, 1954; Frisby, 1957; Pittman, 1963) as a result of an interest of certain linguists in the role of context, and which tried to present texts and activities within recognizable situational settings (e.g. 'at the post office', 'at the airport', 'at the restaurant'), made use of 'ready-made' sentences, contrary to "the basic notion of [language] functioning in a context of situation" (Halliday, 1978: 10). However, from a social perspective of language use and language teaching/learning, the main problem with this pre-communicative approach was the fact that it equated context with setting. As Halliday (1978: 10) points out, "the context of situation is a theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located", and consists of three components: the main social activity taking place, the people involved in it (plus the way they relate to one another), and the roles and functions of the text within this social activity –known technically in systemic functional linguistics as 'field', tenor and mode. The setting, on the other hand, consists immediate of the linguistic event material environment (in a sales encounter, for example, the setting is the shop or company where the event is taking place), and can be seen as a manifestation of the context, but not as the context of situation itself.

The fact that the actual settings for texts used in second or foreing language education are not the post office, the airport or a shop, but the classroom, is evidence of the inherent contradiction in language teaching/learning between the setting of the activities 'performed' in the classroom and the actual context of situation for the discourse of a language class. However, even the immediate classroom situation is only part of the picture. Beyond it we have the 'real' social situations in which the students will have to use their new linguistic skills, in settings as diverse as the workplace, the university, the Internet, etc.

In order to solve the contextual contradiction pointed out above, communicative approaches have tried to move beyond the classroom environment to explore the social situations the students have to participate in, including not only the settings of linguistic events but also the social processes that make up everyday social interactions. By exploring both the setting and the context of situation, communicative approaches work with a notion of text as 'language that is effective in relation to the social activity and the interpersonal relationships', exploring situational settings not as mere material aspects of texts but as locations where social processes

of production, exchange and circulation take place, and where interpersonal relationships are enacted (Halliday, 1978).

Beyond the context of situation lies the context of culture, composed of social processes mediated by language. In terms of language education, culture and situation should not be seen as "two things, but rather the same thing seen from two different depths of observation" (Halliday, 1978: 16). The culture is the total potential of situation types –in discursive terms, it provides the potential of linguistic resources that can be used in each text produced in each particular situation. In the classroom environment, at the same time that the text instantiates the register, which realizes the context of situation, the potential that lies behind each text –a discursive potential built by teachers and students for exploring language– realizes and construes a context of culture for language learning.

But this view of culture is different from what is commonly understood in language education as "teaching language, teaching culture" (Halliday, 1978: 17). As Halliday remarks:

> "When we talk of the cultural context for language education, we have to go beyond the popular notion of culture as something defined solely by one's ethnic origins. All of us participate in many simultaneous cultures; and language education is the principal means by which we learn to do so" (1978:17).

Applying the functional notion of cultural context to genre theories, we could say that Halliday's (1978) concept of context of culture is similar to Swales (1990) concept of 'discourse community', according to which discourse operates within conventions defined by communities, be they academic disciplines or social groups. To operate as orderly sites of linguistic and social interaction, discourse communities are characterized by certain traits that also apertain to what Halliday calls different 'social cultures':

• a broadly agreed set of common public goals;
• mechanisms of intercommunication among its members;
• participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback;
• use and possession of one or more genres in the communicative utterance of its aims;
• some specific lexis (specialized terminology, acronyms);
• a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

In short, Halliday's (1978) suggestion is that, in the scope of language education, we interpret 'culture' from a linguistic viewpoint: just as in language education the term 'language' does not mean the whole, abstract concept of 'English' or 'French' or 'Chinese', but a particular variety of a language, such as commercial Chinese, academic French, or beginner's literacy in

English, the cultural context for language teaching/learning should not be seen as:

'English culture' or 'western culture' in general, but something much more specific: the cultural context in language education practice is "a context for language, a system of meanings that is realized in language and hence can be construed in language" (Halliday, 1978: 18).

As far as language educational contexts are concerned, texts realize what Lemke (1990) calls 'activity structures', i.e., the situational contexts in which discourse sequences occur. According to Lemke (1990: 198) "an activity structure is defined as a socially recognizable sequence of actions," and the types of situation that make up the overall context of situation for learning (e.g. a foreign language) can be realized by different modes of discourse, such as teacher-student dialogue, group work, pair work, teacher monologue, etc.

In the language classroom, the teacher knows the field –he/she has already built the meaning potential of language education, and for him/her the texts used are instantiations of this underlying system. The students, on the other hand, have to construe the meaning potential that composes the context of culture from the texts used in the classroom (and elsewhere). The system, according to Lemke, is made up of 'thematic patterns', 'shared patterns of semantic relationships' which can be instantiated in different situations and in various ways. The thematic patterns realize underlying 'thematic formations', 'the webs of semantic relationships' that compose the context of culture for a particular field, such as language education. Thus, the context of culture for any educational activity includes the system of meanings relevant to that particular discipline.

To sum up, language plays a three-fold role in language education: in linguistic terms, it is the 'substance' of what is being learned, it is what we have to master in order to perform; in extra-linguistic terms, it is the 'instrument' through which we learn, and in that sense it constitutes a resource for learning; and in 'metalinguistic' terms it is the object of learning, the content we have to learn about. According to Halliday (1978), what unites these aspects of language education is that learners are expected, through a contact with language as substance, instrument and object, to create a system, a meaning potential, from the instantiations of language (texts) they are exposed to. And the key to this transformation is the context of situation, that is, "the coherent pattern of activities from which the discourse gains its relevance" (Halliday, 1978: 22). And it is also from the context of situation that the language learner will be able to construe a higher level system –the context of culture. In language education, learners have to make predictions in two ways: to predict the text from the context, and to predict the context from the text, and this poses a particular difficulty to second or foreing language learners who are still unfamiliar with the total pattern of the new language: they have to learn from

texts produced in a language they have little experience of. In Halliday's (1978: 23) words, in language education

> "The learner has to (1) process and produce text; (2) relate it to, and construe from it, the context of situation; (3) build up the potential that lies behind this text and others like it; and (4) relate it to, and construe from it, the context of culture that lies behind that situation and others like it. These are not different components of the process, with separate activities attatched to them; they are different perspectives on a single, unitary process."

2. Context, register and genre: Martin's perspective

Martin's teleological perspective (1992, 1997, 2000) on genre analysis is grounded on systemic functional linguistics. In his perspective genre is defined as:

> "A system structured in parts, with specific means to specific ends. Considering that teleology sees "the world as a system of relationships between means and ends" [Novo Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa], the stages through which a text is structured lead the user to a concluding point, and the text can be seen by the speaker/listener as incomplete if this conclusion is not reached." (Vian Jr & Lima-Lopes, 2005: 29)

As I have pointed out above, functional linguists put great emphasis on the relationship between language and context. The main contention here is that it is impossible to understand the meaning of what someone has said or written without knowing something about the context surrounding the text. And the opposite is also true: if we can understand what our interlocutor writes or says, we can also draw conclusions about the context of situation (Martin, 2001). The relation between language and context is one of 'realization': the text 'realizes' the situation and the linguistic system 'realizes' the culture. We must keep in mind, however, that we are referring to a semiotic and not a material relationship, that is, not a relationship of cause and effect but of semiotic construal –the culture is construed by systems of linguistic choice, while the situation is construed by patterns of language use (Halliday, 1978).

The uses of language and the diverse social contexts are interrelated and realize each other. The organization of language and of its contexts of use is functional, that is, it serves the three linguistic metafunctions mentioned before: ideational, interpersonal and textual. In that line, Martin's teleological perspective on genre, grounded on a systemic-functional view of language, employs the Hallidayan's constructs of register and metafunctions. However, Martin's proposal discusses and advances the concepts of genre and register, looking not only at the context of situation, but also at the context of culture, where, according to the author, genres are located. About the notion of context of culture in Martin's work, Vian Jr. and Lima-Lopes state that:

"The study of the context of culture involves the observation of how a language is struc-
tured for use. To do so, we have to investigate authentic and complete interactions that
will allow us to observe how people "use language to achieve culturally motivated goals"
(Eggins, 1994: 25), which is done through the analysis of different genres. When analysing
the context of culture, we should try to describe how the interaction's general purpose
leads us to organize a text in stages, since it is not possible to convey all the meanings
simultaneously. A genre, thus, is structured in stages, as Martin proposes (1992: 505), and
consists of a social process oriented towards a goal –teleologically oriented, therefore-
organized and realized by the register." (2005: 31-32)

In Martin's view (2001), register and genre are semiotic systems distinct from other semiotic
systems such as language, music, dance, images, etc, in the sense that register and genre
are kinds of 'parasites'. That is, they do not have a phonology of their own, and the only way
they can create meaning is by using words and structures from the semiotic system we call
language, a system able to generate its own meanings without making use of resources from
another one.

In short, register corresponds to the context of situation, and genre to the context of culture.
For Martin (2001: 155), "a genre is a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speak-
ers engage as members of our culture". Virtually everything we do involves some kind of genre.
Language, in that sense, functions as the fonology of register, and both register and language
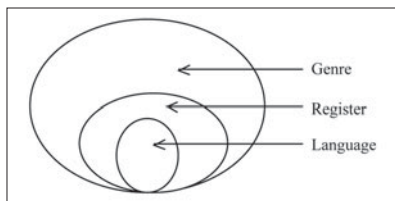function as the fonology of genre, as we can see in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Language, register and genre (Martin, 2001: 156).

As the three register variables (field, tenor and mode) do not have their own forms of expres-
sion (words or structures), they have to make use of the lexico-grammatical structures from
language, and this is done in two ways: first, by making certain linguistic choices much more
likely than others, so that when we read or hear a text certain patterns start to emerge in a
non-random way, in what Martin calls 'probabilistic realization': "these patterns represent

a particular register choice telling us it's there" (Martin, 2001: 157). Second, the register categories take over a small number of linguistic choices as their own, in what Martin calls 'indexical realization', that is, certain linguistic choices, once made by the text producer, lead the hearer/reader to immediately identify the register in which the text is being produced. However, linguistic realizations should not be taken as register variables. Field, tenor and mode are register categories, whereas lexico-grammatical items are linguistic categories through which register is realized.

Genres, like registers, need language to be realized. Genres create meaning by shaping the register variables –by conditioning the way field (what is going on in a given situational context), tenor (how people relate to one another within this situated event) and mode (the medium and the channel chosen for communication during the event) are combined in recurrent forms in a certain culture (Martin, 2001).

The combination of the register variables and the linguistic choices made within each of these variables seems to progress in stages, generating a goal-oriented structure that characterizes genres. As Martin (2001) points out, the register variables change according to our communicative goals, and this is exactly what the concept of genre tries to explain: how we do things in our daily lives in culturally specific ways (e.g. how a class, a medical appointment, a job interview, an informal conversation or a research paper are developed and carried out).

Like register, genre is realized both in probabilistic and indexical ways. Martin (2001) uses narrative to illustrate this point: two of the most famous indexical forms in narrative genres are the opening 'once upon a time' and the closing 'and they lived happily ever after'. When we hear these *clichês*, we immediately know which genre we are dealing with. Probabilistic realizations are also relevant in narratives. The Orientation (Labov & Waletsky, 1967), which introduces the characters and locates the story in time and space, tends to include relational clauses ("Once upon a time there was ....", "She/he was ....", "the little house was ..."), with their accompaning circumstances. The Complication, which answers the question "What happened then?", tends to include a series of material processes ("She did this and then she did that ..."), leading to something unexpected –a crisis. This is followed by the Resolution ("What finally happened?"), which presents similar forms to those found in the Complication until the problem is solved. Finally, the narrator(s) might make comments on the point of her/his narrative, in what Labov and Waletsky (1967) called Coda, often by using a demonstrative pronoun such as 'this' combined with an expression of attitude to refer to the story itself (E.g. "That was really scary"). We have to keep in mind, though, that these patterns are not monolithic or closed, they can be adapted by the text producer according to her/his interests. As Martin (2001: 162) points out:

> "Since both genre and register are realised for the most part probabilistically, they allow the individual considerable freedom in determining just how they are to be realized. The patterns of selection by which we recognise a genre, or some field, mode or tenor, are distributed throughout a text; there are only a few local constraints."

In spite of the freedom we have as speakers/writers, we cannot ignore the notions of register and genre in the process of text production. As text producers, we must provide our hearer/reader with enough clues about the register and the genre so that she/he can make sense of our text, and we can achieve our communicative purpose. According to Martin (2001), it might sound like an obvious truth to say that it is impossible to write without first knowing the language, but it is also true that we cannot write if we do not control the systems of genre and register.

2.1. An analysis of a reader's letter according to Martin's proposal

As a way of demonstrating Martin's proposal to genre analysis and of suggesting ways of applying it to the teaching/learning of English, I have selected and analysed an examplar of a reader's letter published in Newsweek[2] magazine, 11-18 May 2009, Latin American edition (Figure 2).

Figure 3 below shows the semantic and lexico-grammatical realizations of the register variables in this reader's letter.
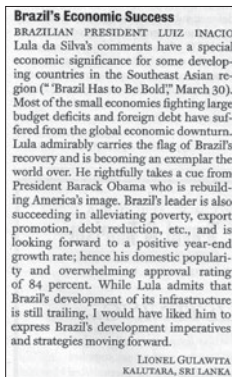

Brazil's Economic Success

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT LUIZ INACIO Lula da Silva's comments have a special economic significance for some developing countries in the Southeast Asian region (" 'Brazil Has to Be Bold'," March 30). Most of the small economies fighting large budget deficits and foreign debt have suffered from the global economic downturn. Lula admirably carries the flag of Brazil's recovery and is becoming an exemplar the world over. He rightfully takes a cue from President Barack Obama who is rebuilding America's image. Brazil's leader is also succeeding in alleviating poverty, export promotion, debt reduction, etc., and is looking forward to a positive year-end growth rate; hence his domestic popularity and overwhelming approval rating of 84 percent. While Lula admits that Brazil's development of its infrastructure is still trailing, I would have liked him to express Brazil's development imperatives and strategies moving forward.

LIONEL GULAWITA
KALUTARA, SRI LANKA

Figure 2. Reader's letter (Newsweek, 11-18 May 2009).

CONTEXT OF SITUATION Contextual feature	SEMANTICS Linguistic metafunctions	LEXICO-GRAMMAR Clause level
Field Comments on the statements made by president Lula in the article "Brazil has to be bold", previously published on Newsweek.	Ideational meanings Positive criticism of Lula's policies and public actions	Transitivity structures Material processes Lula admirably **carries the flag** of Brazil's recovery [...] Lula rightfully **takes a cue** from President Barak Obama [...] Brazil's leader **is** also **succeeding** in alleviating [...] Brazil's development of its infrastructure **is still trailing [...]** Relational process Lula **is becoming** an examplar Attributes **an examplar** the world over. a **positive** year-end growth rate domestic **popularity** and **overwhelming** approaval rating of 84 percent Circunstances Lula **admirably** carries the flag Lula **rightfully** takes a cue
Tenor Writer expresses his positive evaluation of president Lula's economic policies and of his actions towards strengthning Brazil's international image. Intended readership is unseen and unknown (supposedly maganize's readers and magazine editorial staff). Maximum social distance.	Interpersonal meanings Positive evaluation of Lula's policies and media interactions. Argumentation/ persuasion: Less doubt, more authority. Less emphasis, less authority.	Modality structures Absence of modal markers Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's comments **have** a special significance Modulation **I would have liked** him [Lula] to express Brazil's development imperatives and strategies moving forward.

Mode	Textual meanings	Thematic structure
Constitutive role of language; argumentation/ persuasion to create a positive picture of president Lula's economic policies and media interaction. Graphic channel; written medium, produced to be read silently.	Logical organization of pieces of evidence to support positive evaluation	**Additive conjunction** Brazil's leader is **also** succeeding in alleviating poverty, export promotion, debt reduction, etc. **Causal conjunction** [Lula] is looking forward to a positive year-end growth rate; **hence** his domestic popularity and overwhelming approaval rating of 84 percent.
	Concluding remark based on previously presented evidence.	**Adversative conjunction** **While** Lula admits that Brazil's development of its infrastructure is still trailing, I would have liked him to express Brazil's development imperatives and strategies moving forward.

Figure 3. Semantic and lexico-grammatical realizations in a reader's letter to Newsweek magazine.

According to some researchers (Silva, 1997; Pompílio, 2002; Simoni, 2004), the reader's letter is a sub-type of the genre 'letter'. Thus, as a sub-type, the reader's letter presents some particular features, especially if we consider its readership range, its circulation or even its distinct format in relation to a 'regular' letter (which contains elements such as greeting and address, absent from a reader's letter).

We could say, then, that the genre 'letter' gave rise to other types of letter, and these variations, in their turn, gave rise to new sub-genres. In that line, Corrêa (2008) considers the reader's letter as a sub-genre of the genre 'letter to the editor', which includes all the letters sent to a publication, selected and edited by the editor in charge of the letters' section. As Cardoso (2005: 75) explains,

> "[...] the name "letter to the editor" has a lot to say about this particular genre. First of all, it is a letter actually sent to the editor of a magazine or newspaper [...] It must be pointed out, however, that the letter is sent to the editor, and not especifically to the individual who occupies that position. The editor of a publication has, among her/ his responsibilities, to coordinate the work and select what is to be published, following the publication's editorial line."

As the person in charge of selecting, editing and publishing the readers' letters, the editor can be seen as a senior member of this discourse community (Swales, 1990). This way, s/he is re-

sponsible for the form this social activity takes, that is, s/he is a main participant in the process of typifying this genre (Bazerman, 2005).

For instance, the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, in its stylesheet, describes its editorial policy concerning the selection, editing and responses to readers' letters:

> **Letter -** Every letter received by Folha should be published or answered. The reader who addresses the newspaper deserves a quick and individualized response. No letter should be excluded from publication for criticising the newspaper or members of its editorial staff. In some cases, the letter should be sent to the Newsroom Director, who will decide if the newspaper should print a public answer.
>
> Folha daily publishes a letters' section where readers express their opinions. This section should publish a reasonable sample of the distinct opinion trends presented by the letters received, according to the principle of pluralism that guides the newspaper's editorial line. The newspaper has the right to select the relevant parts of the letters, so that the highest possible number of them can be published.
>
> Occasional language mistakes should be corrected. Debates between readers are encouraged, but their letters should be short. Readers must be informed, through a note published daily, of the criteria for the publication of readers' letters.

For analytical purposes, I am using Corrêa's (2008) classification of readers' letter. The author, after analysing 49 letters published in 2007 in *Folha de S. Paulo*, concluded that the genre presented several textualizations, goals and referents, and these more or less stable occurrences were interpreted as variations from the readers' letter. The following sub-types were identified:

a) letter to the newspaper/magazine or to a member of its staff with compliments or criticisms;

b) letter to another reader with questionings or support;

c) letter to society criticising some form of behaviour;

d) letter to a person(s) involved in a fact, with positive ou negative comments;

e) letter to the newspaper/magazine' readers with explanations about a previouly published text.

In terms of genre, the letter selected for this paper falls into the fourth type of Corrêa's (2008) typology of readers' letter, 'letter to a person(s) involved in a fact, with positive or negative comments', and consists of comments made by a reader on statements made by Brazil's president Luis Inácio Lula da Silva in an article previously published by Newsweek. Figure 4 below

shows the letter's schematic structure. The complete 'Letters' section from the 11-18 May 2009 edition of Newsweek can be found in the appendix:

Stages[3] in the genre "letter to a person(s) involved in a fact, with positive or negative comments"	Lexico-grammatical realization
Stage I Identifying the text	*Brazil's economic success*
Stage II Pointing out a fact [in the present case, comments made by president Lula in an article previously published in Newsweek]	Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's comments have a special significance for some developing countries in the Southeast Asian region ("Brazil has to be bold", March 30)
Stage III Making positive or negative comments about the fact	Most of the small economies fighting large budget deficits and foreign debt have suffered from the global economic downturn. Lula admirably carries the flag of Brazil's recovery and is becoming an examplar the world over. He rightfully takes a cue from President Barak Obama who is rebuilding America's image. Brazil's leader is also succeeding in alleviating poverty, export promotion, debt reduction, etc., and is looking forward to a positive year-end growth rate; hence his domestic popularity and overwhelming approaval rating of 84 percent. While Lula admits that Brazil's development of its infrastructure is still trailing, I would have liked him to express Brazil's development imperatives and strategies moving forward.
Stage IV= Providing data to identify the letter's author	Lionel Gulawita Kalutara, Sri Lanka

Figure 4. Schematic structure of the newspaper/magazine genre "Letter to a person(s) involved in a fact, with positive or negative comments" (adapted from Corrêa, 2008).

Both the micro-analysis of the register variables and the macro-analysis of the schematic structure of a reader's letter illustrated above can be applied in the English language classroom as a way of exploring and practicing this particular genre's linguistic and rhetorical traits. One

possible classroom application of the SF approach to genre analysis presented here is a four-week activity involving the reception/production of readers' letter such as the ones published in Newsweek. After initially discussing the magazine, its editorial line, the letters it publishes, and the genre 'reader's letter' as a social activity, each week the students would select an article (each student would make her/his own selection) from that week's edition of Newsweek to write a reader's response to (which could be done as homework). A different student would be appointed 'letters editor' each week, and would select, edit and organize, from the texts produced by his/her fellow students, six or seven letters which would compose the next week's edition of the group's 'readers letter' (the editor would not produce a letter him/herself). The selected letters would be discussed by teacher and students, during the following week, in terms of both form and content, including the lexico-grammatical choices made by the different writers within the register variables and their appropriateness to the context of situation, as well as the schematic organization of the letters and its effectiveness to achieve the text's communicational purpose. After the four-week period, the set of letters produced by the class would compose a corpus which could then be used to analyse and discuss the evolution of the activity and the results obtained in terms of helping the students to acquire a metaknowledge about the relation between text and context.

One advantage of using this framework for text analysis is that textual choice is always interpreted in reference to contextual framing. Systemic/functional grammar and genre analysis offer the possibility of looking at texts in their social context so that ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings are connected to features of context such as the overall function of the text and the relationship between reader and writer (Wallace, 1999).

3. Implications of context, register and genre to language education

As I have argued above, genres are conceived as resources that allow us to operate in society and to achieve social goals (Martin, 2000). From this perspective, we could say that a culture is composed of the totality of its staged and purposeful activities or social processes. Genres are functional because their overall pattern is not random or arbitrary: each genre is as it is because its structure has proved effective to achieve its purpose(s). In this sense, the structure is a facilitating convention: "the text has identifiable parts precisely because these steps enable the interactants to achieve the social purpose" (Painter, 2001: 170).

In short, genres, like language, are functional, i.e. their structure serves social purposes, especially that of enabling subjects and institutions to interact socially. In that sense, genres that function to persuade and inform are resources for social inclusion and tools for social change -

it is through learning and mastering such genres that individuals and organizations can produce a social impact (Painter, 2001).

From a functional perspective on language, the concept of genre can be valuable for second/ foreign language teachers because it provides a basis for a curriculum oriented to socially grounded, purposeful language activities. But in order to approapriate the socially effective genres that 'inform and persuade', students have to construe a linguistic system flexible enough to be adapted to the different occurrences of any genre, a task that can be made easier with the concept of register. A central theoretical point here is not simply that every text realizes three different aspects of its situational context, but that this is so "because particular areas of the language system are sensitive to particular aspects of the context" (Painter, 2001: 176). In other words, situational contexts are impacted by the overall language and cultural system, but the overall system is also influenced by local aspects of discursive events.

Therefore, a functional perspective on language teaching/learning seeks to help students to build systematic links between contextual and linguistic parameters when using language, a goal which is facilitated by SFL's view of language as "sets of related choices or options, each of which is called a system" (Painter, 2001: 176). Options within the various systems (e.g. mood options such as declarative, interrogative or imperative) will have implications on the lexico-grammatical structure of the text. According to Painter (2001), it is the functional relations between sociocultural processes and generic structure, and between the register variables and the metafunctional components of the linguistic system, that makes the notions of genre and register useful for language education. The notions of register and genre can be used to make students aware of the sociocultural features of the text-type that is being taught and of which linguistic choices are more likely to be made in its textualization, as well as to help teachers "to identify and focus on whatever aspect of language in use the learner needs most help with" (Painter, 2001:178).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to Martin, the issues related to the social aspects of genres and to the linguistic patterns linked to specific genres remain unresolved within the field of genre studies. The author sees genres as flexible structures influenced by the social interactions in which they are used, and social interactions as singular events due to the genres used and to the linguistics choices at the level of register (Vian Jr & Lima-Lopes, 2005). In this sense, register is the element that mediates the instantiation of a genre, leaving in the text structure specific traces of the situation in which it occurred (Eggins, 1994).

From this perspective, genre is seen as one of the levels of context, and the context of culture as the backdrop to the interaction, "constituting a semiotic potential [for social interactions]" (Vian Jr & Lima-Lopes, 2005: 35). The organization of semiotic plans proposed by Martin, based on a similar model presented by Halliday, is reflected in the choices made at the level of the context of situation (register) and materialized in language, since genre and register are abstract notions. This way:

> "The context of culture (genre) should be seen as a more general and more abstract plan than the context of situation (register). As a consequence, while a genre is instantiated through language, this realization is mediated through the realization of the register" (Vian Jr & Lima-Lopes, 2005: 35).

To sum up, one of the main contentions of this paper is that we cannot fully understand a text if we do not know something about its context. As social beings, all our interactional contexts are social, and involve people doing things with their lives (field), interacting with others (tenor) and using some communicational channel and abstraction to do so (mode). Furthermore, our social contexts involve people participating in staged, goal-oriented activities (genres). The register variables of field, tenor and mode represent the attempt of the school of systemic functional linguistics to understand and explain the distinct situational contexts in which we operate and interact. The discussions about genre represent a more recent attempt from researchers from the same linguistic school to explore the context of culture, especially in terms of language teaching/learning. Referring to the relevance of the notions of context, register and genre to language education, Christie (2004: 34-35) states that:

> "A great deal has been accomplished in the space of a few years in developing a theory of language in education drawing on SFL theory. [...] The theory of register and genre gives us a principled way to identify different text types or genres and to explain their significance to young learners. [...] The fact that more work remains to be done in developing pedagogic accounts of the grammar for the use of students indicates that we have reached a new milestone in the unfolding and development of the theory. The challenge is, as always, considerable, but the intellectual resources to do the work are certainly available. The basis for development of improved models of grammar for teaching to students in school is available, and the research in determining what should be taught at what ages across the years of schooling has begun. As has always been true in the SF tradition, the work will be undertaken in partnership between theoretical and applied linguistics, for the dialogue between the two has been the source of much of the productiveness of the SFL tradition."

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NOTES

[1] Even though the expressions ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) refer to distinct situations in terms of the teaching/learning of English, with important conceptual and pedagogical differences, as these differences are not the focus of the present work, the two terms will be used interchangeably here.

[2] Newsweek is a weekly American magazine which covers world events. It is published both in the US and in several other continents and countries around the globe, including Brazil.

[3] Following Swales' (1990) socio-rhetorical proposal to genre analysis, Corrêa (2008) uses the term 'move' to refer to the distinct sections that compose a genre and which allow it to achieve its communicative purpose. However, I am using the term 'stage' instead, as this is the term used by Martin to refer to the parts that compose a text's schematic structure.

APPENDIX

Letters

Is the Asian Century Upon Us?

THE FUNDAMENTAL REASON FOR THE resilience shown during the current economic downturn by nations like India and China is their disciplined approach to saving, investment and spending habits ("Asia Rising," March 30). Need-based buying rather than stark consumerism is the hallmark of the booming Indian middle class, which is still spending around 60 percent of the GDP. The Indian economy is not insulated from global trends, but better regulation and wise management have stood it in good stead in trying times. During about two and a half decades of Indian liberalization and reform processes, we have had our share of policy failures and crisis created by stock market swindlers and scamsters, yet economic development proceeded at a brisk pace. There was some concern when one of the best private sector banks in India came under a cloud of subprime exposure soon after the bubble burst in the United States. However, it emerged from the crisis because of sound financial backup ensured by the regulatory system. It is true that when exports fall our domestic consumption levels go up in order to prop up production. While adopting various fiscal measures and laying stress on infrastructural growth will boost domestic consumption, Asian nations can't do without exports. The solution lies in creating more liberal conditions for exports in order to seize opportunities when the trends start reversing.

R. K. SUDAN
JAMMU, INDIA

COUNTRIES SUCH AS INDIA AND CHINA are floating in the waters of recession while the West is sinking because the Asian countries have traditionally saved money for the proverbial rainy day. People in the West have simply afforded unwanted luxuries on borrowed money and are today mired in monetary misery.

K. CHIDANAND KUMAR
BANGALORE, INDIA

PREMIER WEN JIABAO HAS EXPRESSED in powerful language his unreserved concern over the fate of Chinese assets in the United States. The West should not be unduly concerned by such unprecedented assertion. As human history attests, good fortune does not favor all people all of the time. Fortune tends to rotate its favoritism; different people at different times. Perhaps it is China's turn to flex its muscle and call the shots in this century. This shouldn't be alarming, as it follows the golden rule of nature, the way of Tao.

T. B. TEE AND MUNTI DANN
PENANG, MALAYSIA

Outraged and Railing

MICHAEL KAZIN'S "DON'T LET THE 'BIG Men' Win," March 30) is a comfortable read about the most uncomfortable crisis of our time: a time when populism is treated by many as a dirty word. To those who say "This is just because of AIG," I say, "It's not about AIG!" As Kazin points out, it's

MAIL CALL

Asian Ego Rising

Many readers took our cover story on how the global crisis is accelerating the rise of China and India against the West ("Asia Rising," March 30) as proof of Asian virtues—a lesson in the wisdom of saving. Said one, "Asian countries have traditionally saved money for the proverbial rainy day."

about way more than AIG. The rage is a volcano that did not develop and erupt overnight. It's part of a pattern of excess, overindulgence and corruption going back to Enron. The expedient thing to do now is not only to manage the books, but to manage public sentiment. And for this we must demand responsibility from the media. Today, the blogosphere dwarfs TV, radio and periodicals for good or for ill. I'm in a country where doctors, lawyers and CEOs don't usually flaunt megahouses or treasure chests. I ask, why not? Most people say, with a giggle of discomfort, "Because that would be embarrassing." I remember a time when we Americans would say that.

KATHLEEN T. SCOTT
AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

ROBERT J. SAMUELSON, IN QUOTING economist Joseph Schumpeter, mentions the two basic capitalist values necessary for economic success: self-enrichment and taking risks ("Rage Could End Up Hurting Us," March 30). CEOs and entrepreneurs are driven by the former. Whereas capitalism originally meant taking personal risk, nowadays it means taking risks for somebody else (savers, investors, mortgage-takers). As long as CEOs can hope for bonuses and as long as running a company into ruin is rewarded with a golden handshake, capitalism will not be able to raise the wealth for society that it otherwise could.

THOMAS HEUSSER
SCHORNDORF, GERMANY

ELIOT SPITZER'S PRINCIPLED GUIDE TO the intersection between government and the market ("Making Up for Years of Neglect," March 30) and his recent CNN television interview with NEWSWEEK's Fareed Zakaria make it evident that he's a fine thinker who would be an asset to President Barack Obama's assembly of problem solvers. We, Asians, on the other side of the cultural divide, have always found it quaint, amusing even, that the country with arguably one of the world's largest sex industries pillories otherwise quite brilliant managers for their sexual peccadilloes. I hope that other very American trait, to forgive and forget, will kick in soon and permit Eliot Spitzer to return where he belongs—to a responsible role in government.

STANLEY PINTO
BANGALORE, INDIA

SO, ACCORDING TO EVAN THOMAS and John Barry, ethics are now "The Enemy of the Good" (March 30). They are not—even if evading taxes is so common among politicians that administration jobs go unfilled on Capitol Hill. Thomas and Barry seem to feel that only $140,000 in back taxes is a mere trifle, but for most of us that's a lot of money. I applaud President Obama for his commitment to clean hands at the top. America also used to be famous for its social conscience. I've been transplanted to Scandinavia, where we can really talk about oppressive taxes. My acquaintances back home in Arizona tend to

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shake their heads in disbelief, both at our taxes, but also about the fact that universities are free, and that there's good universal health care. Obama wants to improve American health care and education. Is anyone actually opposed to these goals? The high-rolling tax evaders are insured and have been to good schools. Are they really the best and the brightest? Raising taxes to a level still far below Scandinavia's is the obvious way to implement the new administration's realistic and needed goals, and it doesn't hurt anywhere near as much as untreated illness, or cost as much as ignorance. It is not the typical American way, but Barack Obama is not a typical man to show the way.

FRANCES FISCHER
SVENDBORG, DENMARK

Brazil's Economic Success

BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT LUIZ INACIO Lula da Silva's comments have a special economic significance for some developing countries in the Southeast Asian region (" 'Brazil Has to Be Bold'," March 30). Most of the small economies fighting large budget deficits and foreign debt have suffered from the global economic downturn. Lula admirably carries the flag of Brazil's recovery and is becoming an exemplar the world over. He rightfully takes a cue from President Barack Obama who is rebuilding America's image. Brazil's leader is also succeeding in alleviating poverty, export promotion, debt reduction, etc., and is looking forward to a positive year-end growth rate; hence his domestic popularity and overwhelming approval rating of 84 percent. While Lula admits that Brazil's development of its infrastructure is still trailing, I would have liked him to express Brazil's development imperatives and strategies moving forward.

LIONEL GULAWITA
KALUTARA, SRI LANKA

As Saudi Arabia Looks to the Future

AS A SAUDI CITIZEN, I WAS HEARTENED by the fact that NEWSWEEK concluded what many of us in the Kingdom have been experiencing in the past few years: King Abdullah's reform process is vital, serious and well paced within the Saudi context ("The Monarch Who Declared His Own Revolution," March 30). However, the imbalance in your article is quite apparent when one notices the demeaning manner in which you refer to one of this country's most accomplished men "the Interior minister Prince Naif." What is even more painful is the utter failure to mention that with the blessing and encouragement of his brother King Abdullah, he was the

mastermind behind what you termed the "Aggressive efforts by the Saudi security forces 'that' led to the death or capture of most Al Qaeda leaders and operatives." Even more painful is your failure to mention that he is the man directly responsible for what former CIA chief Michael Hayden has aptly described as "the world's most effective counter-radicalization programs." Your reference to King Abdullah's attitude toward his fellow Arab leaders is both insensitive and imprecise. Everyone who has dealt with King Abdullah knows all too well how respectful he is even toward those with whom he differs. His belief in the "simple Arab and Islamic values" as you have correctly stated shields him from having such a negative attitude. I am afraid that King Abdullah's frank and open style is sometimes misunderstood even by people who should know better. We need to understand others, and listening to or quoting the spinners does not serve this quest.

KHALID ALSAEED
RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

CHRISTOPHER DICKEY'S FASCINATING article on King Abdullah's approach to circumventing or eliminating the stringent rules prescribed by the Wahhabi elements of state, which suppress women's rights, is reminiscent of King Faisal's actions prior to his assassination in 1975. I was employed by the Saudi government as clinical laboratory director of the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre in Riyahd during this period. As part of my responsibilities I spent the early morning hours checking out the computer system that controlled our analytical instrumentation. Early on, I would see this distinguished gentleman walking among the computers, located below ground level, fingering his prayer beads and praying. I soon learned it was His Majesty King Faisal and, in time, developed the courage to say "Good morning, Your Majesty." After another week or two King Faisal asked me my name and what I was doing. Still later, we conversed with one another on a regular basis. I vividly recall during one of our conversations him telling me that he realized the Kingdom must commence removing the restrictions on the rights of women otherwise there would be a revolution and, if there was to be a revolution, he wanted it to start in the Royal Palace. Unfortunately, six weeks later he was dead. I am convinced if King Faisal had lived and continued to carry out his agenda, Saudi Arabia would be far different than it is today.

OTTO W. WENDEL
YOUNG HARRIS, GEORGIA