

Dynamism as a component of the linguist's toolkit: A case study with the use of *clear* in political discourse

Ben Clarke (University of Portsmouth)

In this paper, I aim to demonstrate how the dynamic qualities of language use can aid the practice of discourse description (Firth, 1951: 123). In order to do so, I distinguish a number of types of dynamism according to the size and function of the linguistic environment and its 'constituents' as these are made relevant by the act of dynamism in question: *intra-clausal* (akin to Firbaš's (1992) 'communicative dynamism'), *inter-clausal – intra-textual* (wide-span collocation, cohesion, Daneš's (1974) 'thematic progression', Fries's (1995) 'method of development', Matthiessen's (2002) 'logogenesis', etc.), and synchronic and diachronic *inter-textual* types. This approach generalises across various and sometimes disparate language phenomena which may be recognised as 'dynamic'; that is, in contrast to Firbaš's (1992) definition of dynamism as attainment of communicative purpose served by those elements which, in terms of information flow, push the message forward the most – here a looser definition of dynamism is preferred along the lines of "a matter of the varying degrees to which different parts of some use of language contribute to acts of meaning-making" (Clarke & Arus, 2016: 1). As method, this – I will argue – keeps the eye of the discourse analyst sensitive to how meaning is construed in text – much as is achieved by shunting between language strata and their corresponding methods and units of analysis (e.g. Clarke, 2016).

Throughout, points are illustrated by reference to a study of the use of the adjective lexeme 'clear' in political discourse in the United Kingdom. This work shows 'clear' increases diachronically over a recent time period in language texts with a political subject-matter, owing to a small number of emergent senses of its use. These senses are determined by observing lexicogrammatical and discourse patternings across text. It is speculated that their occurrence may, in turn, be explained (Fairclough, 1989) by considering practices of an intertextual and diachronic kind.

References

- Clarke, B.P. (2016) "'We're hearing from Reuters that...": The role of around-the-clock news media in the increased use of the present progressive with mental process type verbs'. In Gardener, S & Alsop, S. (eds.) *Systemic Functional Linguistics in the Digital Age*. Sheffield: Equinox, 68-84.
- Clarke, B.P. & Arus, J. (2016) 'Introduction: The dynamicity of communication below, around and above the clause'. *English Text Construction*, 9:1, 1-8.
- Daneš, F. (1974) 'Functional Sentence Perspective and the organisation of the text'. In Daneš, F. (ed.) *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Firbaš, J. (1992) *Functional Sentence Perspective in Written and Spoken Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Firth, J.R. (1951) 'Modes of meaning'. *Essays and Studies of the English Association*, 4, 123-149.

- Fries, P.H. (1995) 'Themes, methods of development, and texts'. In Hasan, R. & Fries, P.H. (eds.) *On Subject and Theme: A Discourse Functional Perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 317-359.
- Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. (2002). 'Lexicogrammar in discourse development: Logogenetic patterns of wording.' In Huang, G. & Wang, Z. (eds.) *Discourse and Language Functions*. Shanghai: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2-25.