Packaging with Purpose:
A Textual Analysis *for* Effective Doctoral Writing

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Outline

1. Introductions (5)
2. Meta-language (5)
3. Systemic Functional Linguistics (20)
4. Application to the PhD (30)

*Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

1. Introductions

Critiquing the Post-Match Interview

An appraisal analysis of the language of AFL footballers and ABC journalists

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Completed as partial requirement for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

Faculty of Arts
Deakin University
Melbourne

November 2002

The Language of Well-Being

David Luke Caldwell

BA(Hons), BTeach(Prim.)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Deakin University

March 2006

THE RHETORIC OF RAP:
A SOCIAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF
KANYE WEST

David Luke Caldwell

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Linguistics
The University of Sydney
September 2010

2. **Meta**-language: a language about language

2. Meta-language

- How much metalanguage do you know?
- Can you talk about how language works?
- And can you effectively apply this to your academic writing?
- **Why is meta-language important?**

2. **Meta**-language

We argue that grammar is a useful tool for helping doctoral researchers make their writing more coherent, engaging and clear. But to do this work as supervisors, we need a metalanguage, a language for talking about language.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 89)

2. Meta-language

- We need meta-language to bring to consciousness the building blocks (**grammar**) that constitute what works, or does not work, for a given text, e.g. PhD dissertation.

- We need a meta-language that foregrounds blocks that matter: move beyond **form** (what do my blocks look like?, e.g. spelling) to **function** (what are my blocks doing/meaning, **in a given context** [discipline, discourse community, culture])?

- Our meta-language needs to derive from a theory of language that has a sound theorization of the building blocks, and how they function within a given (con)text.

3. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Genre, Register, Metafunctions, Field, etc.

The Teaching Learning Cycle, Genre Pedagogy, Accelerated Literacy, etc.

Systemic Functional Linguistics = SFL = Functional Linguistics

Functional Grammar = SF Grammar = SFG = New Grammar
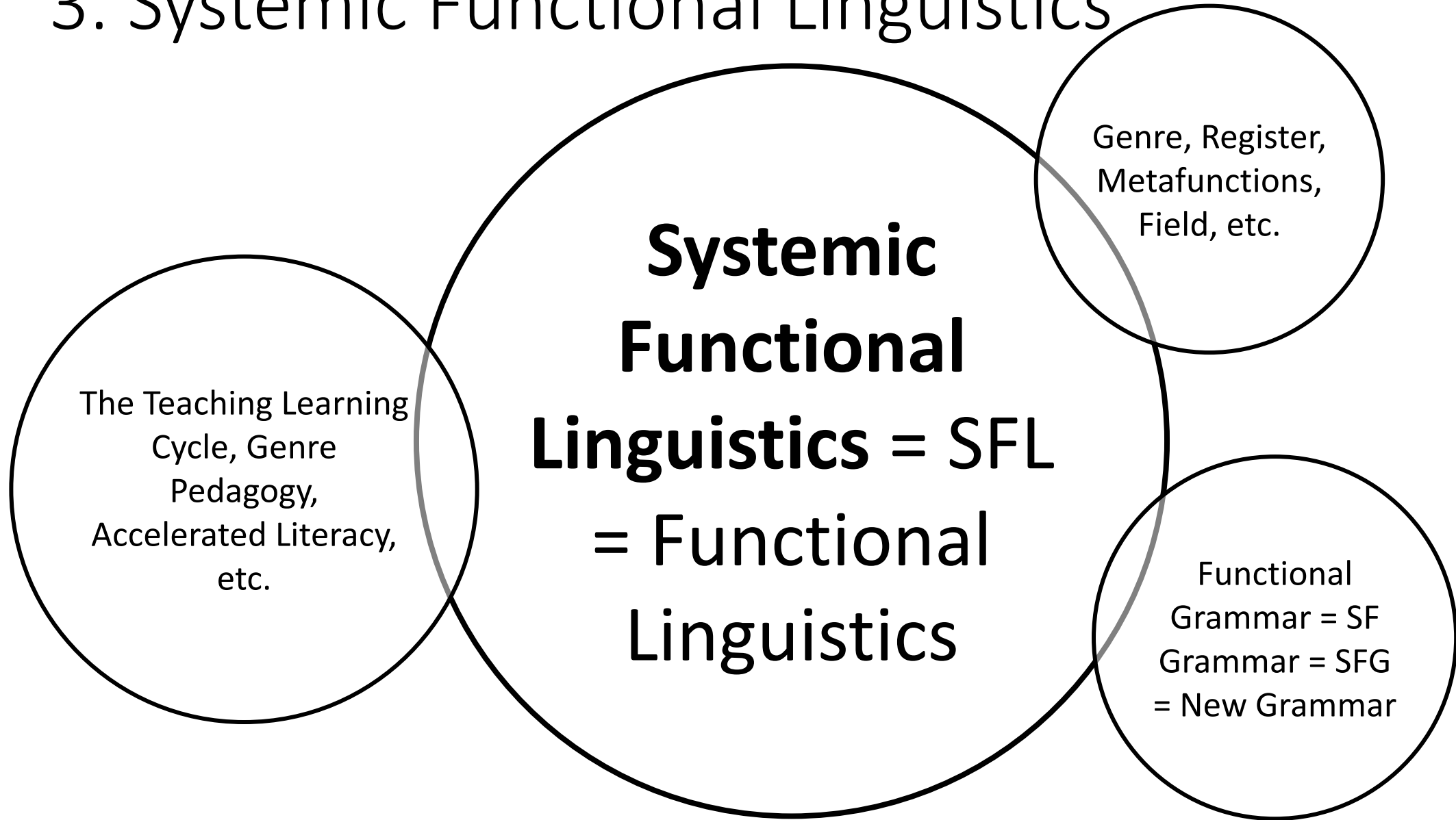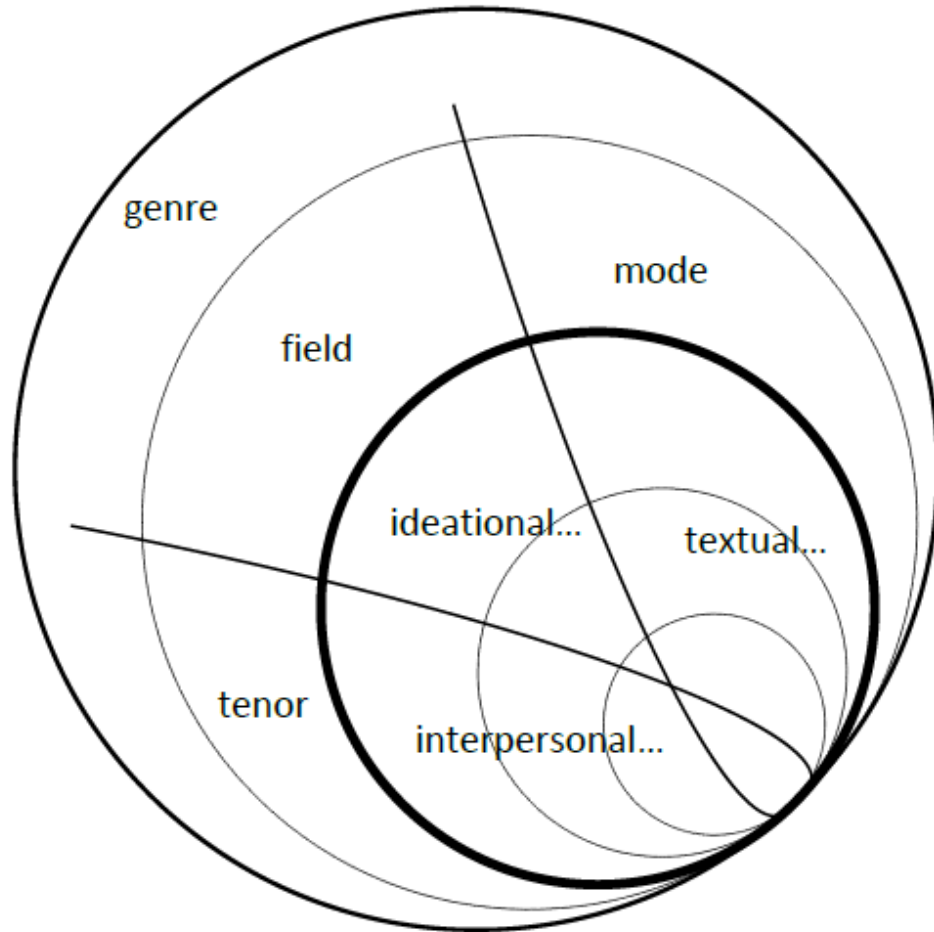
3. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Three key features of SFL:

- **Theorized** model of language; supported by research evidence.
- Meta-language that is **functional**, c.f. with traditional grammar.
- Model of language that foregrounds **context**: genre and register.

2. SFL: theorized

3. SFL: theorized

Volume 9 in the Collected Works of M. A. K. Halliday

Language and
Education

M. A. K. Halliday

Edited by Jonathan J. Webster
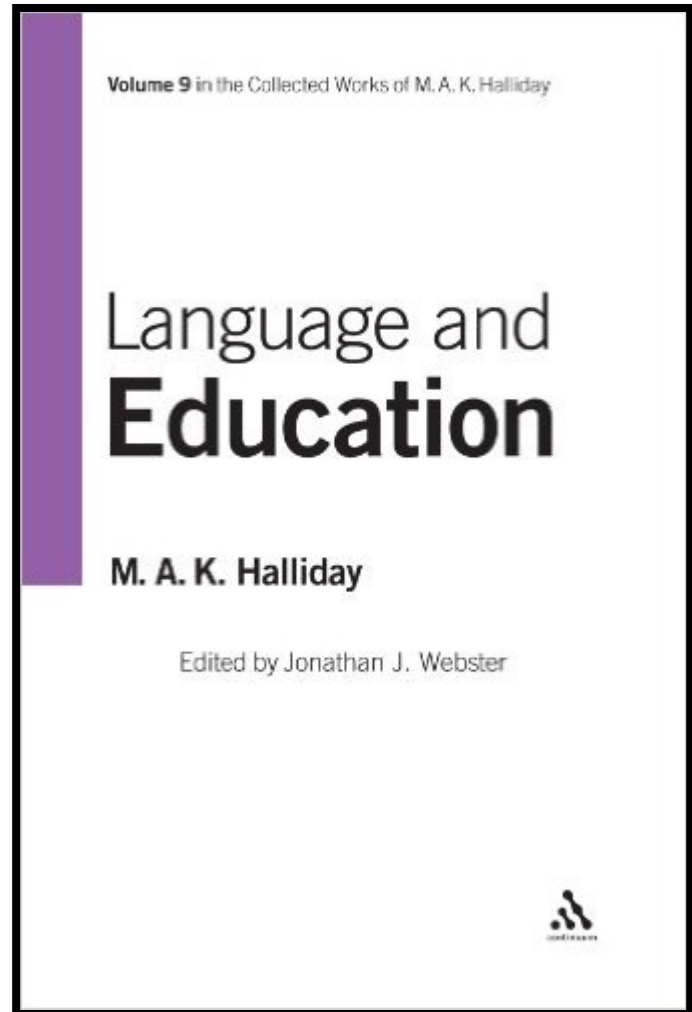
3. SFL: functional

Our approach is based on the systemic functional grammar developed by the social semiotic linguistic Michael Halliday (1985). A systemic approach to grammar differs from the traditional, prescriptive grammars many of us learned at school and those populist 'new' grammars on the bestseller list. It asks functional questions about how people use language and how language is organised to make meaning.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 90)

3. SFL: functional

In terms of its *form*, **a clause/sentence** can be described as a group of words containing a verb. In terms of its *meaning,* one way of thinking about a clause/sentence is that **it represents a slice of experience** involving a process, participants in that process, and the circumstances surrounding the process.

(Derewianka and Jones 2012, p. 277)

3. SFL: functional

3. SFL: functional

She hits the ball in Rutherglen Lane

2. SFL: functional

Traditional Approach/Grammar

She	hits	the	ball	in	Rutherglen Lane
Noun	Verb	Determiner	Noun	Preposition	Noun

3. SFL: functional

Functional Approach/Grammar

She	hits	the ball	in Rutherglen Lane
Participant (Who is taking part?)	**Process** (What's happening?)	**Participant** (What is taking part?)	**Circumstance** (When, where, etc.)

3. SFL: functional

Functional Approach/Grammar

hits
Process (What's happening?)

3. SFL: functional

Functional Approach/Grammar

She	*hits*
Participant (Who is taking part?)	**Process** (What's happening?)

3. SFL: functional

Functional Approach/Grammar

She	hits	the ball
Participant (Who is taking part?)	**Process** (What's happening?)	**Participant** (What is taking part?)

3. SFL: functional

Functional Approach/Grammar

She	hits	the ball	in Rutherglen Lane
Participant (Who is taking part?)	**Process** (What's happening?)	**Participant** (What is taking part?)	**Circumstance** (When, where, etc.)

3. SFL: context

genre

mode

field

ideational...

textual...

tenor

interpersonal...

3. SFL: context

Doctoral writers are often given generic advice which could be given to anybody about a piece of writing... It is not linked to any discipline or to a reader who needs prose written in this way.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 90)

3. SFL: context

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3. SFL: context

- Genre is classifying texts according to their 'social purpose'.
- Ask the question: 'what is the purpose of this text'? Is it **to entertain, to recount, to instruct, to inform,** etc.
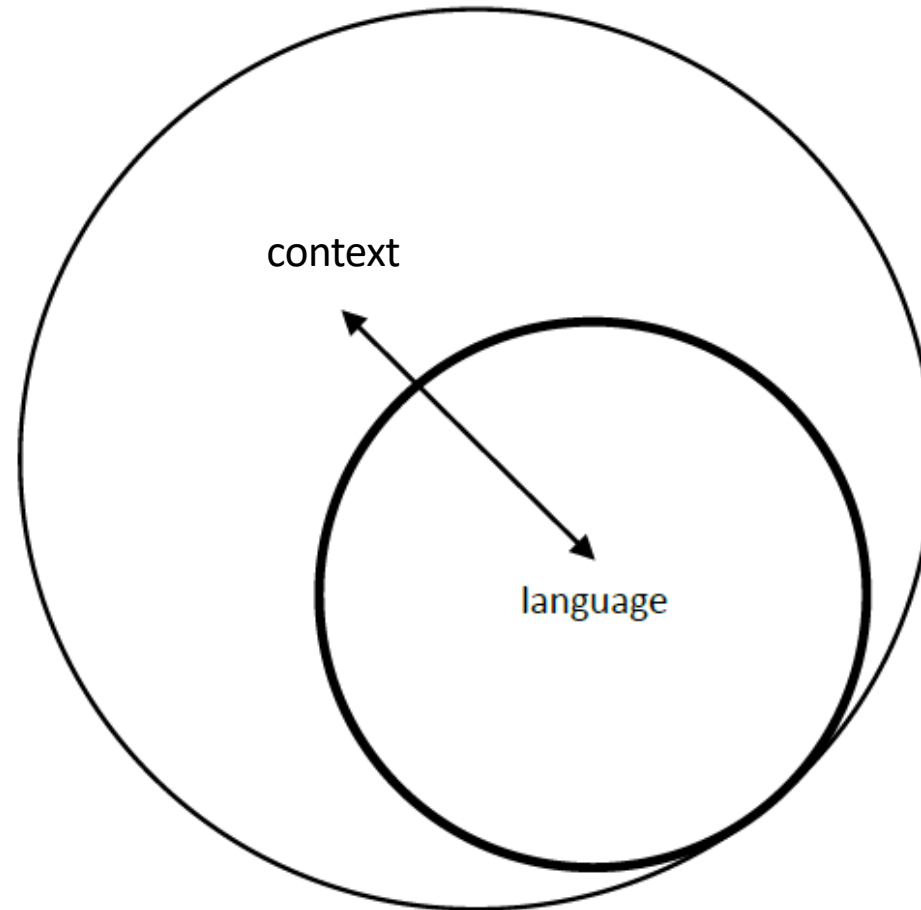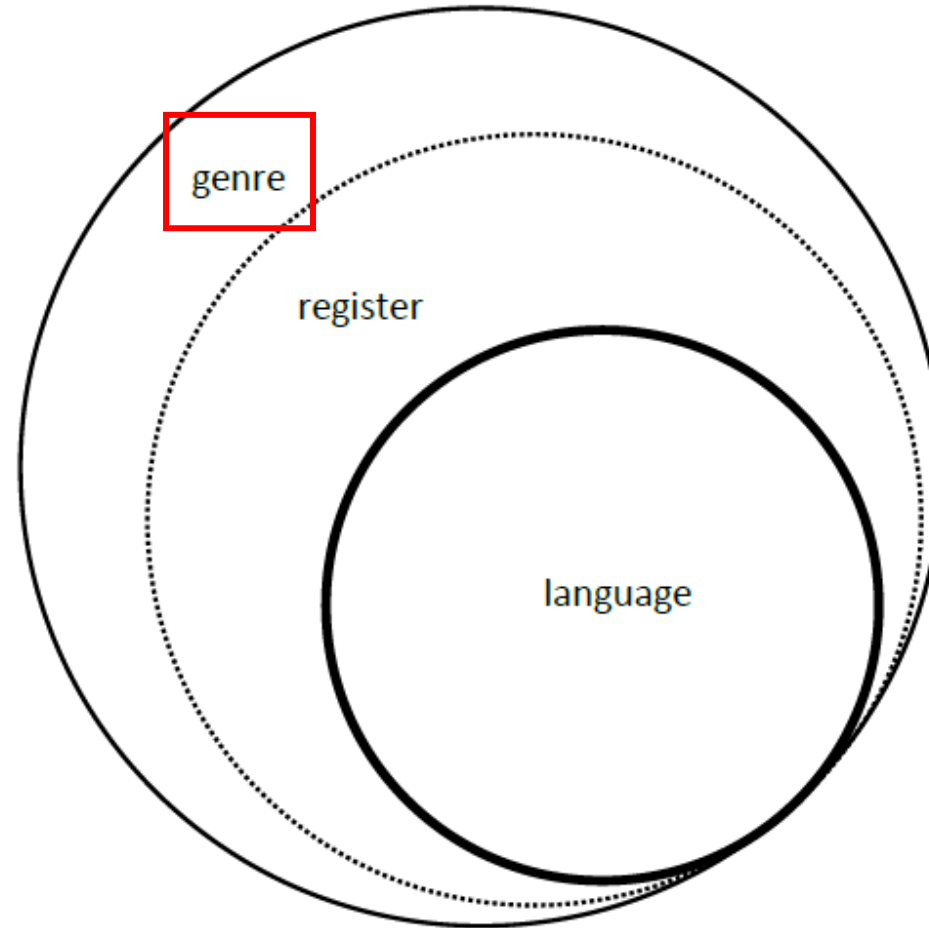- Genres are **staged**, goal-oriented social practices that have evolved to enable us to 'get stuff done' in our respective discourse communities.
- Genre in SFL is **not** the same as genre in a 'literary' sense (e.g. drama, horror, romance, Westerns, etc.).
- In order for genres to 'get stuff done' (to instruct, to entertain, etc.), each genre has its own unique set of language patterns (grammar) to achieve that purpose; **genre shapes our language choices (building blocks, grammar)**.

3. SFL: context
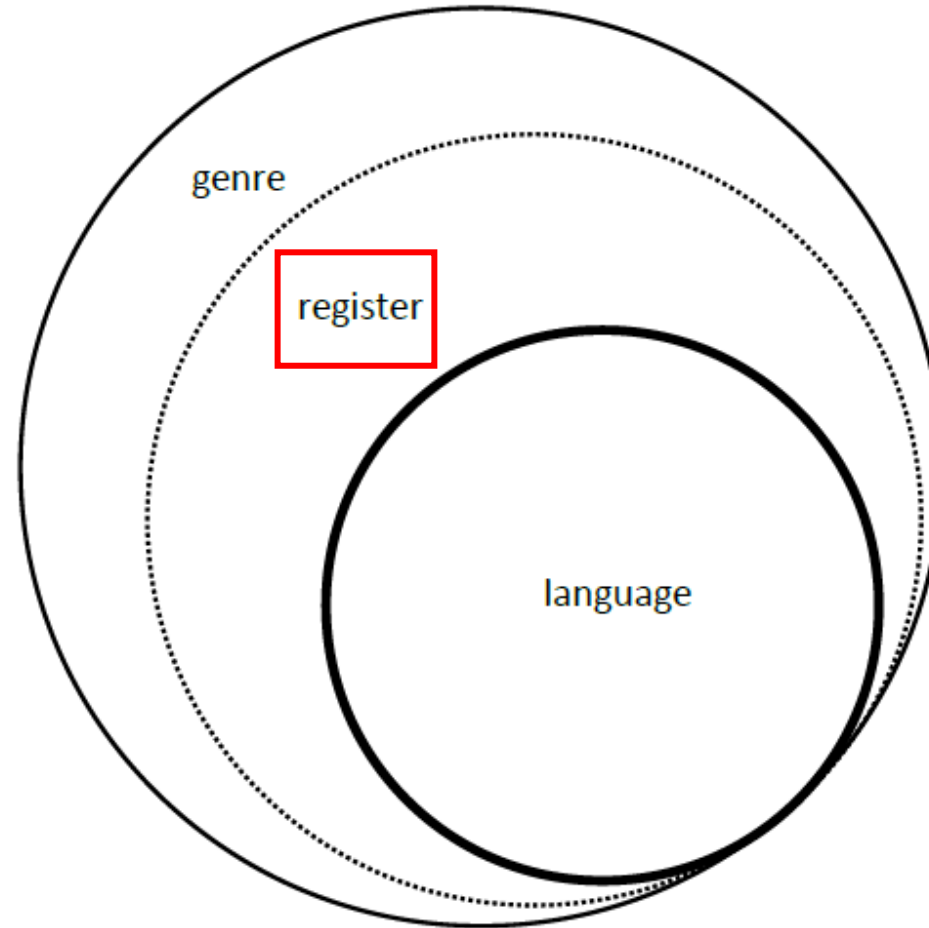
3. SFL: context
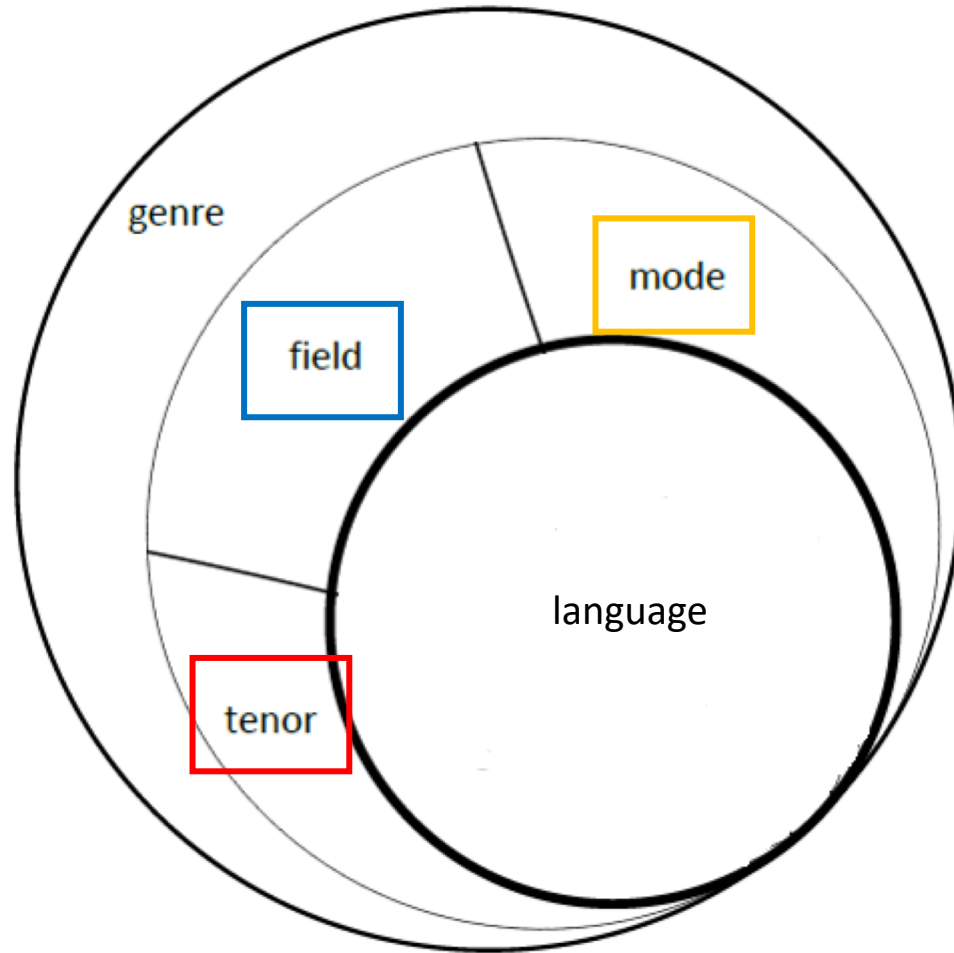
3. SFL: context

- Register = immediate context of situation of a given text.
- There are **three** elements (parts, variables, factors…) to the immediate context of situation:
- Field: *what* is the topic/theme?; *what* is happening?
- Tenor: *who* is talking part? What are the roles and relationships between producer and receiver (e.g. teacher to student cf. friend to friend)?
- Mode: *how* is language produced? Is it spoken, written, multimodal; is it immediate (e.g. face-to-face) or delayed (e.g. e-mail)?
- Along with genre, **register shapes our language choices**.

3. SFL: context
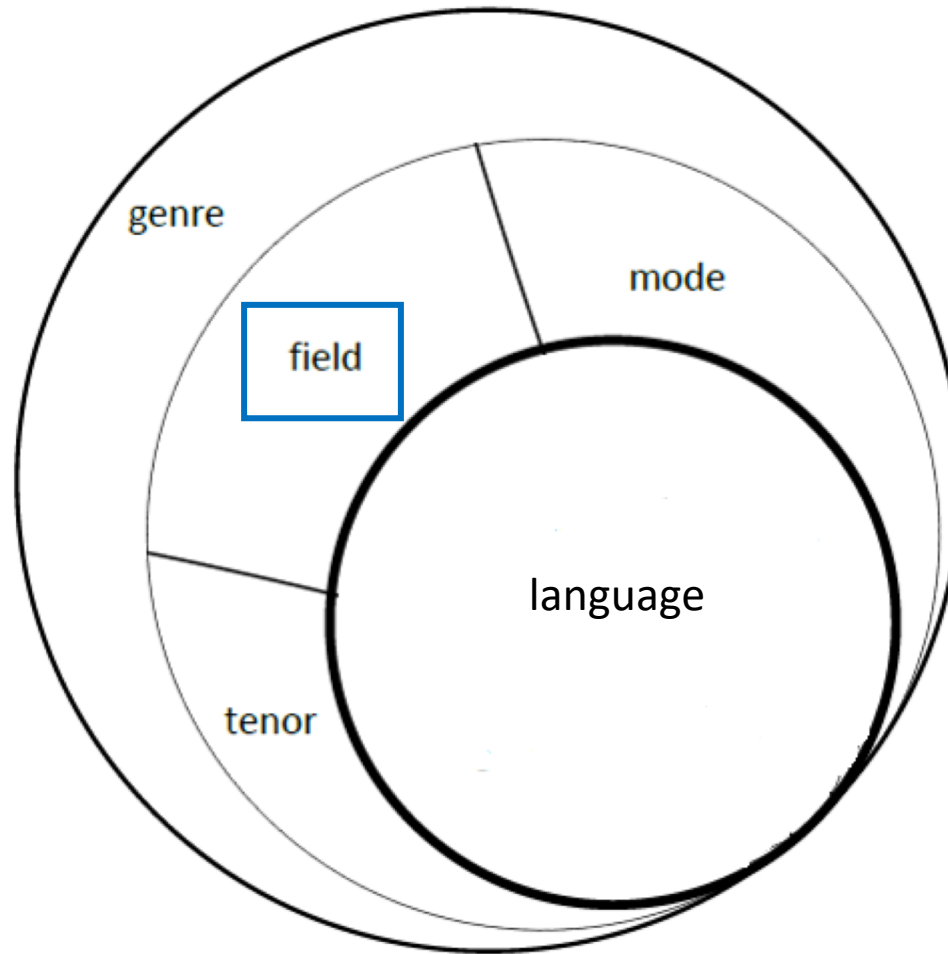
Commonsense
- everyday, story world
- simple connections

Specialized
- technical world
- complex connections

3. SFL: context

Informal
- equal power
- frequent contact, high solidarity

Formal
- unequal power
- infrequent contact, limited solidarity

3. SFL: context

Spoken
- language as action
- interactive and spontaneous

Written
- language as reflection
- monologic, final draft

4. Application to the PhD

Chapter 6

A linguistic toolkit for supervisors

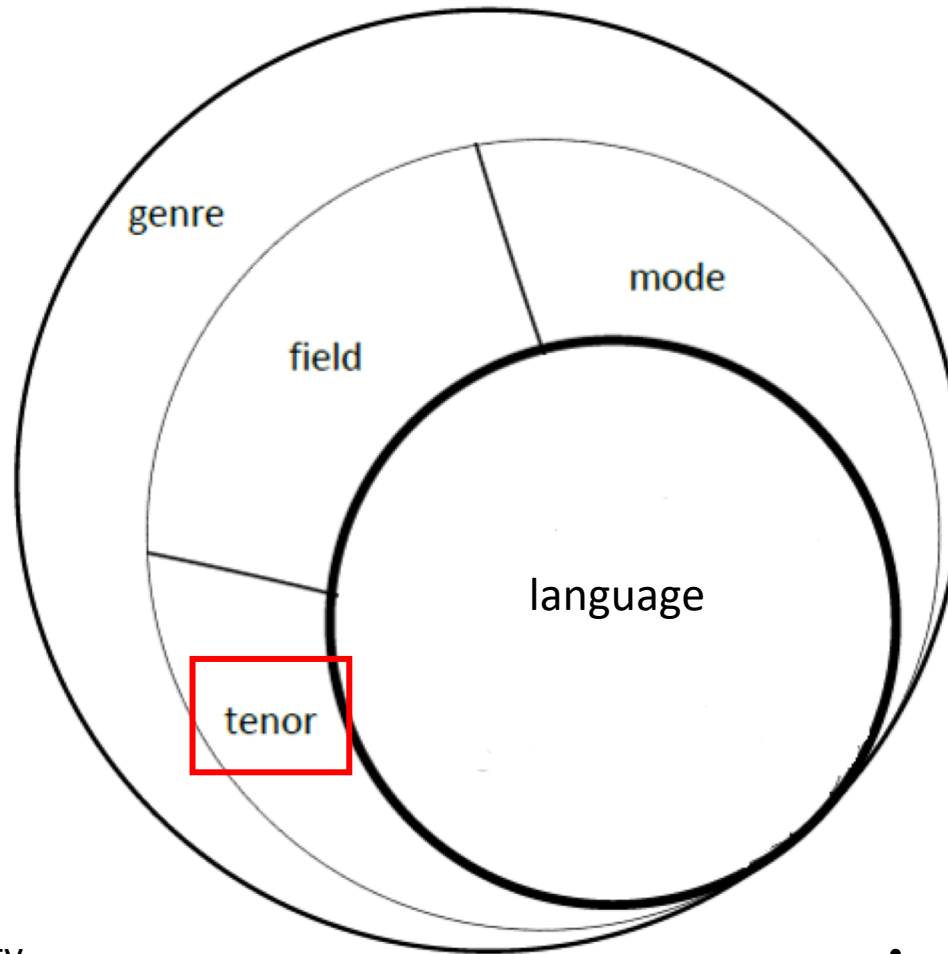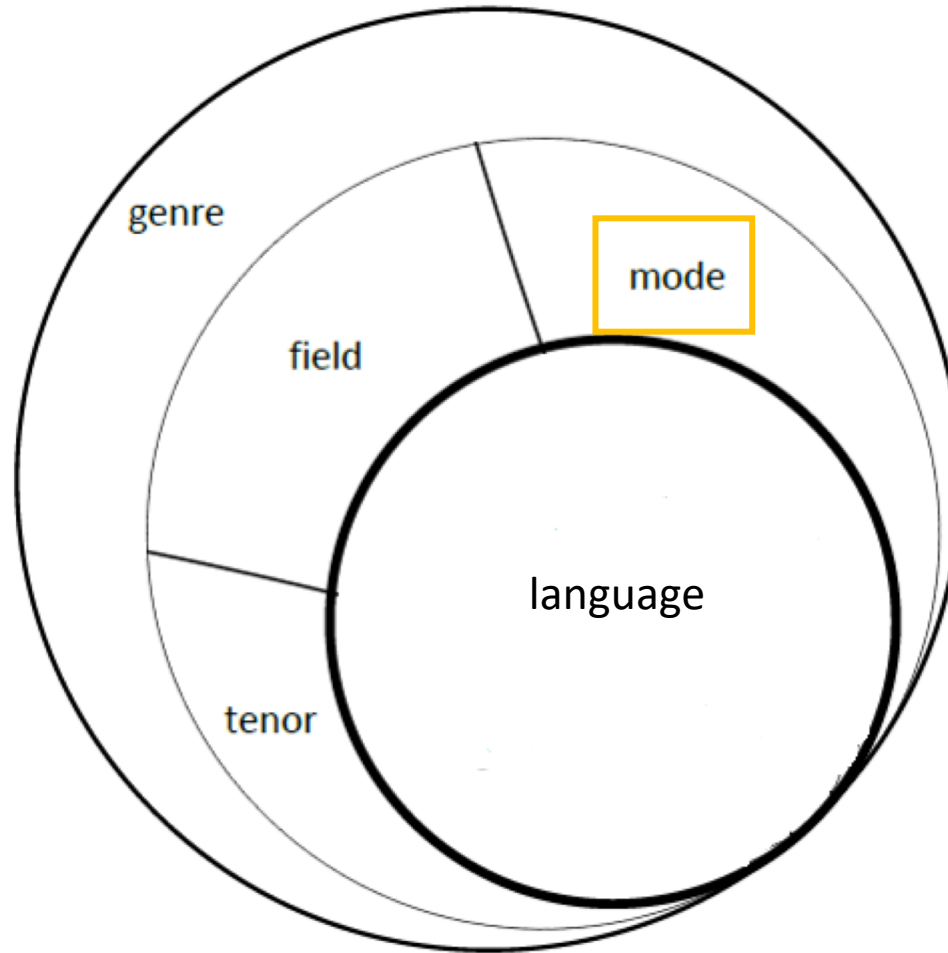In this chapter we introduce a linguistic toolkit for supervisors. We argue that grammar is a useful tool for helping doctoral researchers make their writing more coherent, engaging and clear. But to do this work as supervisors, we need a meta-language, a language for talking about language. We need a set of tools for doing archaeological work – for digging into doctoral writing, to see how it works and how it may be remade to work more effectively.

Supervisors know when doctoral writing is unsatisfactory. It is more difficult to pinpoint the difficulty or propose a strategy for making changes. Written comments such as 'this passage needs more focus' or 'try to be sharper in your argument' are imprecise. They provide little information about what action writers might take to improve their writing. It is in the spirit of helping supervisors provide more specific guidance for revision that we write this chapter.

Complaints about student writing are often couched in terms of 'poor grammar' or a failure to control the conventions of standard English dialect. Issues of appropriateness are often confused with issues of correctness. So we want to clarify at the start what we mean by grammar and how our approach differs from more traditional grammars which focus on etiquette and rules.

A functional approach to grammar

Grammars are never neutral. They always presuppose a view about how to represent and shape experience based on a set of ways of categorizing the world. Terry Threadgold (1997) argues that there is nothing scientific or absolute about a grammar; it is just a set of categories which we use to impose structure and meaning on language. Grammar is not 'in people's heads', it is not a psychological reality and people do not actually produce language by following rules. Grammar is an attempt to describe, after the fact, some of the regularities that can be observed in the language which people produce. But the way grammars do this is always inexact and a matter of compromise, loaded with the preconceptions of the linguists who construct the grammar.

Our approach is based on the systemic functional grammar developed by the social semiotic linguist Michael Halliday (1985). A systemic approach to language

From: Kamler, B. & Thompson (2014). Helping Doctoral Students to Write: Pedagogies of Supervision (2ne Ed). New York: Routledge

Building cohesion "old before new" "back to front"

4. Application to the PhD

4. Application to the PhD

words, words...

text

grammar:
clause/sentence

4. Application to the PhD

4. Application to the PhD
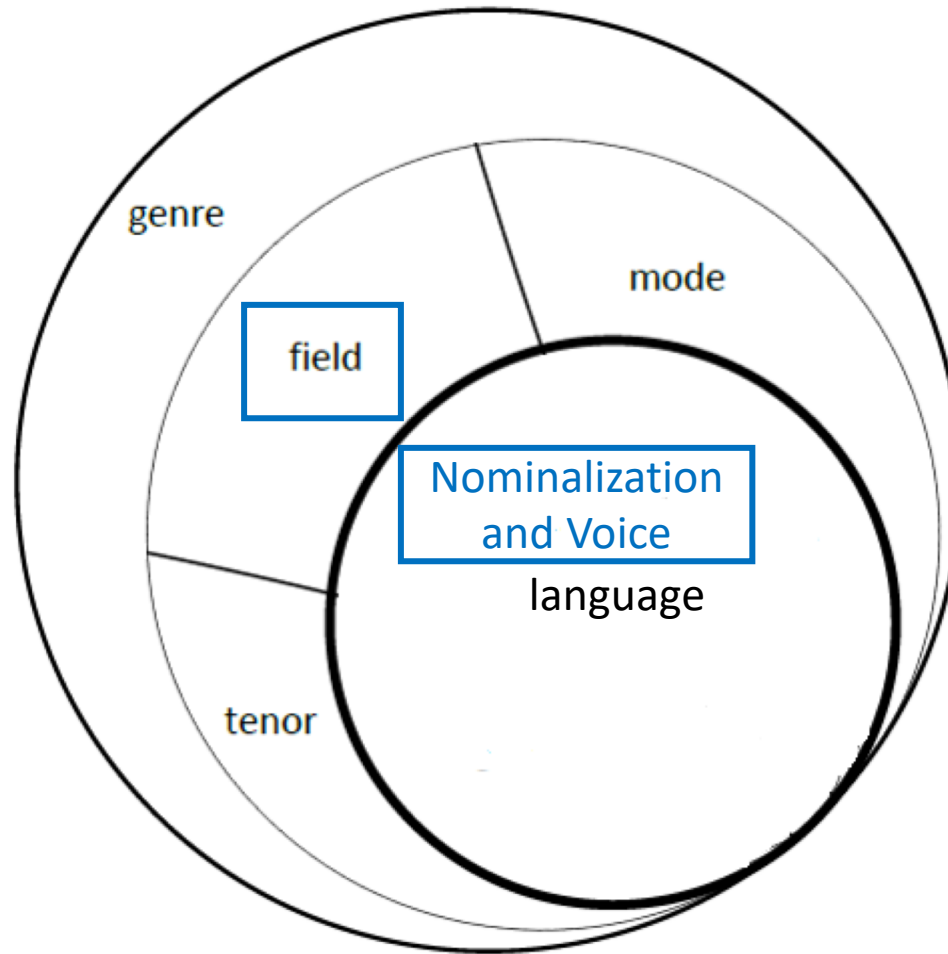
4. Application to the PhD

- To be clear: we are not doing Nominalization, Active cf. Passive and Modality.

- We are exclusively doing Theme 101. See Kamler and Thompson (2004, p. 105-112).

- NB: now that you understand the theory better, you can see that the authors selected systems from each of the main functions of language, according to SFL theory.

4. Application to the PhD

Commonsense
- everyday, story world
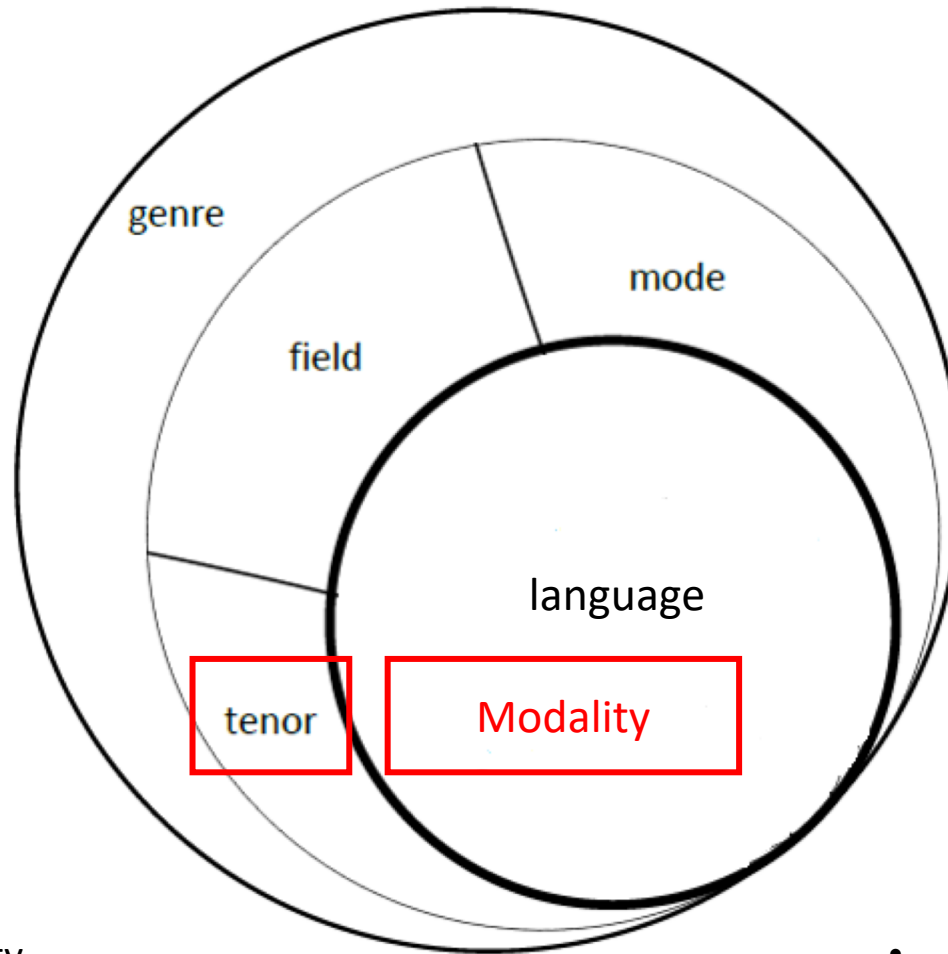- simple connections

Specialized
- technical world
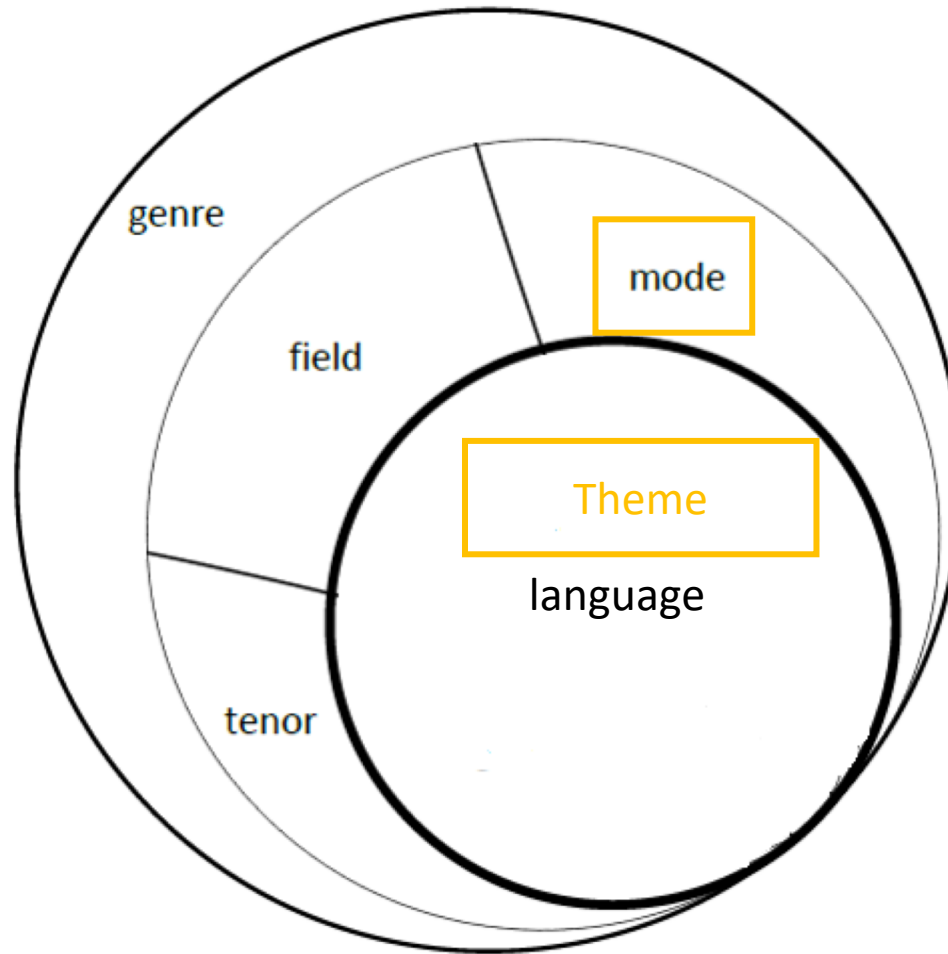- complex connections

4. Application to the PhD

Informal
- equal power
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Formal
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4. Application to the PhD

Spoken
- language as action
- interactive and spontaneous

Written
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- monologic, final draft

4. Application to the PhD

Theme analysis can help supervisors pinpoint why some doctoral writing seems to miss the point or wander about. When Barbara reads drafts that seem disconnected or somehow incoherent, one of her first strategies is to look at how sentences begin. What does the writer put first? What meanings do they foreground? She takes her pencil and circles those words or phrases that come at the start of the clause – before the verb, in order to see if there is any pattern across sentences.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 106)

4. Application to the PhD

- We are going to do two analyses:

1. A Theme analysis of de-contextualized texts: for practice.

2. A 'think aloud' Theme analysis of PhD writing. My PhD thesis: *The Rhetoric of Rap: A social Semiotic Analysis of Kanye West*.

*NB: see Kamler and Thompson (2014) for excellent examples.

4. Application to the PhD

Theme analysis is a tool which can help supervisors identify which meanings students make more prominent and which they bury or ignore… Linguistically, Theme is the staring point of the sentence or clause. It is what the clause is going to be about.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 105)

4. Application to the PhD

- We are going to analyse and compare two texts for their Theme.
- **Text 1: Information report genre**; its social purpose is 'to inform'.
- **Text 2: Explanation genre**; its social purpose is 'to explain'.
- The **register** for both texts is:
    - Field (what is the text about?): water/rain (non-technical)
    - Tenor (who is taking part/role-relations?): formal
    - Mode (how is the text put together?): written

4. Application to the PhD

While speech can have rapid shifts in Theme because it is dynamic and unplanned, sudden shifts work less successfully in writing. They disrupt the flow and confuse the reader... Why did the focus shift so suddenly? What's the point? Supervisors can identify disjointed texts, but don't necessarily know how to show the students the problem... There **is no formula** for what comes first in a clause, but there are tangible effects on a text, its coherence and its method of development. Getting doctoral researchers to **experiment** with Theme makes them more conscious of available choices. The capacity to make choices, in turn, gives them greater agency as writers.

(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 112)

4. Application to the PhD

With explanation and discussion, supervisors can guide students to look for patterns in Theme in their dissertation writing and try alternatives. Theme analysis becomes a useful and concrete pedagogical tool for the production of a more persuasive argument... Theme also has a profound influence on the coherence of a text. Repetition is a common strategy used in doctoral writing. A text with little or no repetition will seem disconnected. However, a text in which Theme never varies will not only be boring to read or listen to, but indicates a text that is going nowhere.

<div align="right">(Kamler and Thompson 2014, p. 107-106)</div>

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4. Application to the PhD: **Advice**

- Get out your highlighters and have a go!
- Don't try for 100% accuracy; it is not a grammar test
- **It *is* what it *isn't***; experiment with deleting, inserting, etc.
- Read your analysis in context: what is the purpose of this section of the PhD?
- The grammar of Theme is more than enough to really improve the PhD thesis, especially if the text is 'hard to follow'
- Soft eyes ;)

Thank you ;)
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