



## Probing the Concept of Choice in the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics: A Critical Investigative Theoretical Approach

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**Abstract :** This article has attempted an investigative theoretical review of the concept of choice as a pivotal component in M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The particular motivation for this research work springs from the simultaneous incongruous recognition of the central role of choice in SFL and the scarcity of insightful literature on its nature and functioning. Taking from this observation, the reading of the ground-breaking works by various authors published under the title *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring choice* (Fontaine, Barlet and O'Grady, 2013) served as a major standpoint to browse through leading aspects of choice in SFL. Among such aspects are the meaning of Halliday's systemic functional theory, the concept of choice in SFL, an attempt of locating choice along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of meaning construction, the controversy over the conscious or unconscious pattern of choice in SFL, and the marking out of the contextual constraints to choice. While the article mostly takes a reviewing and explanatory perspective, it also includes a critical feed-in as far as the controversy on the consciousness or unconsciousness status of choice in SFL is concerned. Actually, while a large explanation tends to characterize choice as subconscious or unconscious, a deeper and more balanced investigation by Fawcett (2013:124) reveals the unsaid part of an ideological opposition between Chomsky and Halliday's perspectives on language and recognizes the cognitive feature of the choosing process.

**Keywords:** Systemic Functional Linguistics, the concept of choice, theoretical approach

**Sonder le concept de choix dans la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle hallidayenne : Une approche théorique d'investigation critique**

**Résumé :** Le présent article a esquissé une exploration théorique du concept du choix en tant que composante essentielle de la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle de M.A.K. Halliday. La motivation particulière de ce travail de recherche découle de la reconnaissance simultanée incongrue du rôle central du concept de choix dans la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle et de la rareté d'une littérature perspicace sur sa nature et son fonctionnement. Partant de ce constat, la lecture des travaux novateurs de divers auteurs publiés sous le titre *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring choice* par Fontaine, Barlet et O'Grady en 2013 a servi de point d'appui majeur pour explorer des aspects phares du choix dans cette théorie. Au nombre de ces aspects figurent le sens même de la linguistique systémique fonctionnelle de Halliday, le concept de choix dans la théorie, une tentative de fixation du concept de choix le long des axes paradigmatique et syntagmatique de la construction du sens, la controverse sur le statut conscient ou inconscient du choix et une esquisse de marquage des contraintes contextuelles du choix. Bien que l'article adopte une

perspective essentiellement récapitulative et explicative, il comporte également un apport critique en ce qui concerne la controverse du statut conscient ou inconscient du concept du choix. En effet, alors qu'une explication assez fournie tend à caractériser le choix comme subconscient ou inconscient, une exploration plus approfondie et plus équilibrée de Fawcett (2013 : 124) révèle le non-dit d'une contradiction idéologique entre Chomsky et Halliday sur le langage et reconnaît le caractère cognitif du processus du choix.

**Mots-clés** : Linguistique systémique fonctionnelle, le concept du choix, approche théorique

## Introduction

Systemic functional linguistics (henceforth SFL) is unique in its own right as a linguistic theory, as it shifts the study of language from form to content. The way members of a linguistic community use language as a system of signs for meaning construction (social semiotic) based on choice thus became a high rush scientific ground for the last fifty years, with M.A.K. Halliday holding the lead of the theory. However, in spite of its prominence in the SFL scaffolding, the concept did not receive the deserved scholarly attention. As Hasan (2013, 269) posits, "the continued use of common words in the realm of theory alters their semantic identity. Bache (2013, 73) acknowledges this gap as he informs that "while Halliday and other systemicists have made occasional comments on the nature of choice and on the implications of using this concept in SFL, no single published work seems to have dealt with this central theoretical issue in any great detail". In a corroborative gear, Fontaine (2013b) indicates that the basic tenet of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is that language is a system of choices, yet the very nature of choice is rarely considered. While the concept of choice has entered the taken-for-granted arena of SFL with the risk of it being overlooked, this work has been motivated by the need of exploring it, investigating it for more insight on what it is and how it works. Actually, managing the relationship between social context and linguistic aspects (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014) starts up a complex network in the mind of the speaker, regarding the specific types of register variables to use for an optimal communicative competence. What is the topic of a linguistic activity going to be (field)?, what are the relationships between the speaker/writer and the audience/readership? And how does this affect language use (tenor) and what specific role is language going to play (mode)? Sorting out all these sociolinguistic complexities in the deep structure and coming up with a final language semantic and syntactic makeup in the surface structure requires choosing on various strata for specific motivations. Choice thus appears, in the words of Fontaine (2013b) as the core mechanism for expressing meaning, by creating a contrast between what is chosen and what is not but could have been under different contextual parameters. Considering

therefore that meaning is not a haphazard matter, the concern rises as a query in this article as of why choice should be the option at all and the location where it should be applied in the structure of language as a semiotic system. In order to arrive at proven standpoints on these concerns, this paper seeks to understand the very nature of choice in the SFL apparatus and the way it functions to keep the systemic functional view of language working. Based on the definitional approach to Halliday's systemic functional theory and an explanatory endeavour on the concept of choice in SFL this paper has worked at locating choice along the axes of meaning construction. Attempting to set the balance relating to the controversy over the conscious or unconscious pattern of choice in SFL and marking out the contextual constraints to choice are part and parcel of the same quest of bringing insight in the place and working of choice in the SFL architecture.

In its methodological build, the motivation to carry out this theoretical investigation on choice springs mainly from my personal interest in the pervasive presence of the concept at all steps in systemic functional analysis as a scientific tool for text analysis. This interest was often confronted with the scarcity of literature produced by the proponents of the SFL theory on an insightful definitional and illustrative approach to the concept of choice. The opportunity to read Fontaine, Barlet and O'Grady's (2013) *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring choice* with twenty-two chiefly dedicated contributions to choice together with other textbooks on the SFL theory thus represented an occasion for a deep dive into seeking for more understanding. The subsequent step is the selection of the contributions on the rationale behind the SFL theory by Henrici (1981), the many different approaches to the concept of choice in SFL (Fawcett, 2013; Fontaine, 2013b; Halliday, 2013; Eggins, 2004), the functioning of the concept of choice along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes (Bache, 2013; Freddi, 2013; Halliday, 1978b; Matthiessen *et al.* 2010), the controversy over the conscious or unconscious pattern of choice and the contextual constraints imposed on choice (Crystal, 2008; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Berry, 2013). Whereas this article mostly adopted a reviewing and explanatory approach to the contributions to the concept of choice, it has also availed itself of taking some occasional critical standpoints, most particularly on the conscious or unconscious feature of choice and choosing on the paradigmatic axis of meaning mainly. Following the explanatory, illustrative and critical qualitative approach to these selected aspects, the work proceeds with a recapitulative discussion that sheds the light on the significance of the study and the answers to the research questions. In the process of achieving its objectives through specific answers to the research questions, this work develops through

three major sections as follows: an illustrative clarification of the SFL theory, a theoretical critical investigation of the concept of choice on various aspects of SFL and a recapitulative discussion.

## 2 - An illustrative clarification of the SFL theory

This section of the work covers the very meaning of Halliday’s systemic functional theory and an explanatory approach to the concept of choice in SFL

### 2.1 - The meaning of Halliday’s systemic functional theory

A thorough grasp of the concept of choice in SFL requires an insightful knowledge of the meaning therein loaded in the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics itself. Starting from the point of departure of linguistics which reads as the scientific [the data-based, rigorous and retrievable] study [search, investigation] of language, one might be left with blurred of taken-for-granted view with the “systemic” and “functional” entries in the appellation of the theory. Among these remaining two core characteristics of SFL, the “functional” part appears more easily understandable through the morphological analysis [Function + al]. Actually, this morphological distribution allows inferring that SFL approaches language not basically from the way it is made up [form] but rather most essentially from the perspective of what role it exists to play, which kind of social tool or instrument [function] it is. Tackling the “systemic” entry through the morphological distribution of [system + ic], one is brought to know that SFL scientifically investigates language from the standpoint of deciphering it as a system [a composite, a compound material] in the sense of the existence of a set of paradigms that requires a selection before meaning can be constructed effectively. A system is “a set of things of which one must be chosen” as Henrici (1981) puts it. Actually, the notion of language being a system invariably works in a pair of such a system being a semiotic one. Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols and signification. Semiotics thus focuses rather on what a specific sign is “saying” or meaning (the signified) than on what it is intrinsically (the signifier), per se. The following diagram is a mapped out representation of the definitional approach to the three foundational blocks of the systemic functional linguistics theoretical framework.

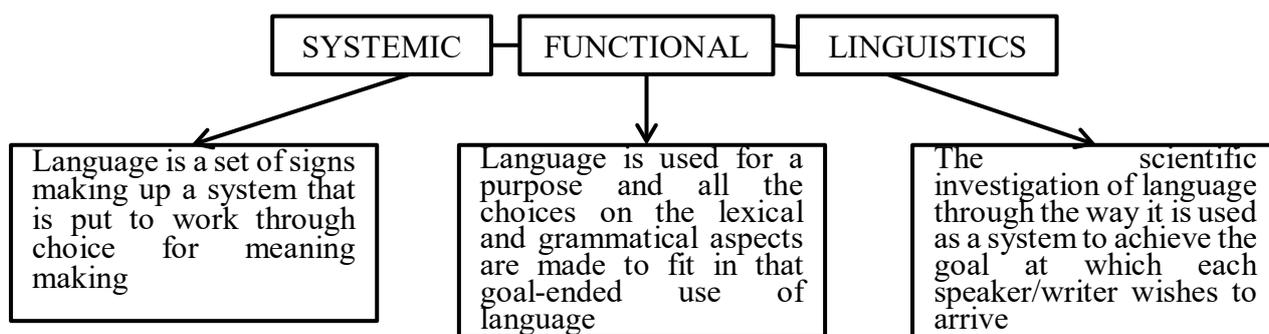
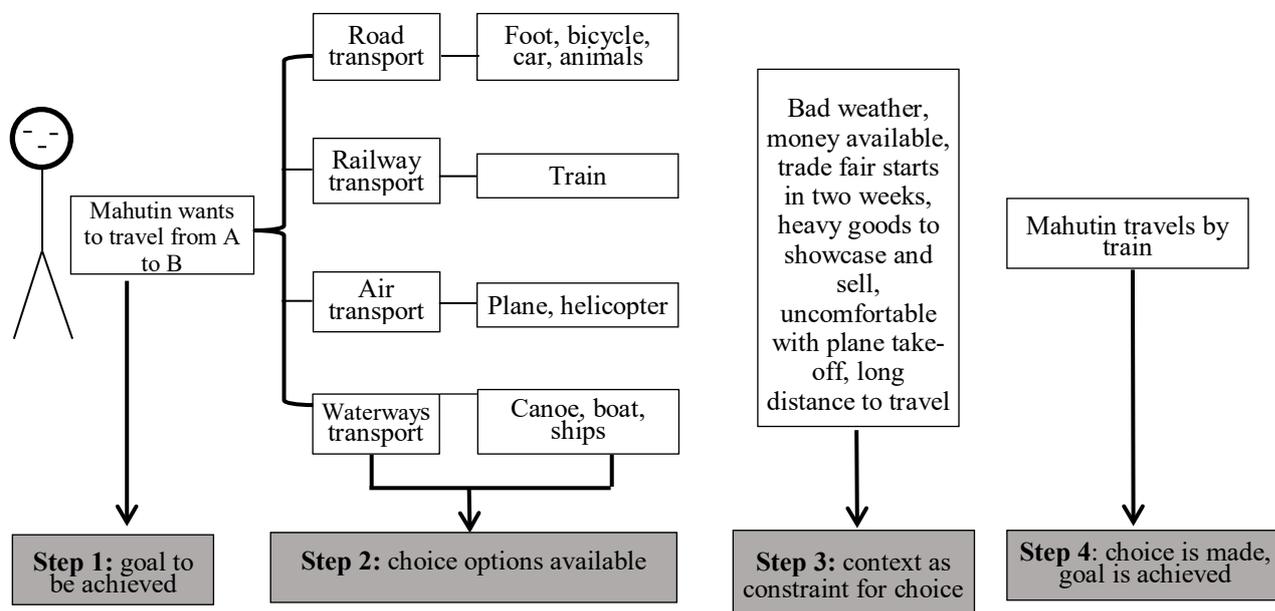


Diagram 1: Explanatory diagram on Systemic Functional Linguistics  
 Source: Myself

## 2.2 - *An explanatory approach to the concept of choice in SFL*

“All human activity involves choice: doing this rather than doing that. Semiotic activity involves semiotic choice: meaning this rather than meaning that” (Halliday, 2013). In Fawcett’s (2013, 119) view, grasping the concept of choice goes along with grasping three difficult aspects relating to (1) the meaning of the term choice and certain near-synonyms as an event or a process; (2) the relationship between choosing and deciding; and (3) the question of who or what does the choosing and/or deciding. In a conceptual and definitional approach, choice in SFL is a motivated selection, which is defined as: “those regularities that could not be rationally explained away as random, and whose effects in a semantic ensemble appear to constitute a convergence of diverse resources towards some recognisable end” Fontaine (2013b). As a way of making the concept much clearer, Fontaine (idem) furthers her view on choice in an illustrative gear by indicating that “the various potential meanings in language are represented as connected (or networked) systems, a representation of a set of options as one can notice in the traffic lights simple system of [red light for ‘STOP’] OR [amber light for ‘CAUTION’] OR [green light for ‘GO’]. This relevant pairing of language signs system (semiotic system) with that of traffic lights amplifies the motivated pattern of linguistic choice. In a pervasive and consistent way, the theory on the concept of choice functions along with the notion of networking with one choice entailing the following in a contextually and linguistically restrictive way. As Eggins (2004) puts it on this specific aspect of choice, “the distinctive feature of semiotic systems is that each choice in the system acquires its meanings against the back-ground of the other choices which could have been made”. By way of illustration, each sign means what it does because it does not mean what others do, because part of the meaning of a linguistic sign is in the oppositions it enters into, when crosschecked with others (Eggins, 2004).

In a tentative similitude with Eggins’ (idem) traffic lights illustration, this study proposes an invented real-life activity diagram reflecting the SFL meaning oriented choice concept within the semiotic system environment. The said diagram represents a business travel project by Mahutin (his/her name).



**Diagram 2:** Schematic illustration of the SFL meaning oriented and context constrained choice concept

**Source:** Myself

While reading through the above diagram, one notices that the achievement of the goal that is set in step 1 proceeds through the transport types choice available in step 2 under the context constraints in step 3. Reaching step 4 with the deliverance of the pre-set goal is thus conditioned by this process. Grasping this general functioning feature of choice within the SFL framework represents a forceful instrument that bridges the access to how it operates with some specific aspects of Halliday's theory.

### 3 - A theoretical critical investigation of the concept of choice on various aspects of SFL

Subsequently to the theoretical clarifications on the systemic functional framework, this work seeks to explore the way the concept of choice is applied at various levels of meaning construction and text analysis based on systemic functional patterns. This explorative endeavour covers mainly the location of choice along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of meaning construction, the controversy over the conscious or unconscious pattern of choice in SFL and the marking out of the contextual constraints to choice in SFL

### 3.1 - Locating choice along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of meaning construction

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) the notion of choice is fundamental (Bache, 2013). It is, as Freddi (2013, 56) and Malinowski (1923: 46) posit, the key to understanding the relation between the system (the code), the single instantiation (the text, a specific linguistic production) and a set of recurring practices (the register and the corpus). In Halliday's view of language as a purposeful social behaviour, the notion of choice is central as it is part and parcel of the meaning construction process at all levels. As he puts it, "by 'text' ...we understand a continuous process of semantic choice. Text is meaning and meaning is choice" (Halliday, 1978b:137 cited by Bache, 2013). The organisation of linguistic production (text) on both the paradigmatic (sets of options/alternatives within the same class) and syntagmatic (possibilities of structural agreements between elements of different classes) axes makes the question of the location of choice an interesting one for reasons of scientific accuracy. In this regard, Matthiessen *et al.* (2010:69), through a comment on Halliday's view provides forceful insights as follows:

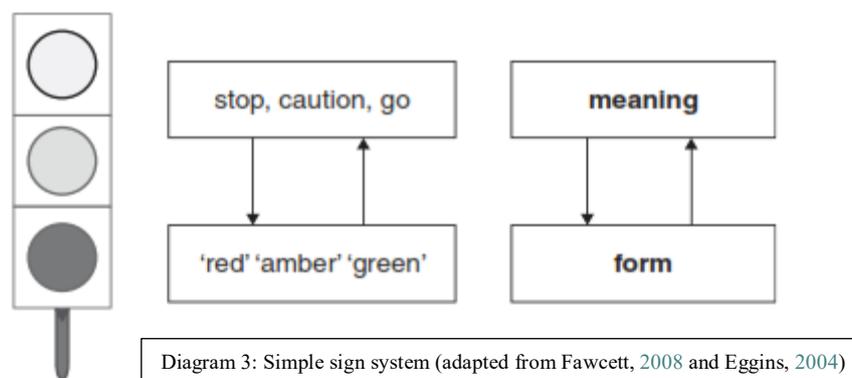
More specifically, Halliday sees choice as characterising the language system as this is conceptualised as a network where each node corresponds to alternatives, e.g. the system of Moods, the system of Nexuses, the system of Voice. As a consequence, grammar is organised into sets of often, though not always, binary oppositions. For example, the oppositions are between positive vs. negative Polarity, active vs. passive Voice, temporal vs. modal Finiteness, Quoting vs. Reporting, simple vs. complex Tense, etc. All these are mutually exclusive choices, therefore they identify as paradigms which, even in common usage, are understood as "a set of substitutional or oppositional relationships between members of the same class" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Grammar, that is modelled paradigmatically with paradigmatic organisation involving contrasts usually within the domain of the clause, and choice understood as "theoretical contrast in a system of options, that is choice equals option"

In this perspective, on the lexicogrammatical stratum of meaning construction, choice is more likely to be made along the paradigmatic axis, the axis of choice, in Eggin's (2004, 191) jargon (substitutive or associative elements) where the speaker/writer chooses a set of plausible alternatives among constituents belonging to the same class. Sahlgren (2006) confirms this as he indicates that "a paradigmatic use of context is arguably more linguistically sophisticated than a syntagmatic use of context, since a context window at least captures some rudimentary information about word order. As Eggins (*idem*) specifies, "Syntagmatic relations give structures: a sequence of ordered elements in linear arrangement. Paradigmatic relations, on the other hand, give

paradigms. A paradigm is a set of oppositions, or choices, in a particular context". In a contrastive manner, Freddi (2013) postulates that "choice can and should be extended beyond the paradigmatic relations to the syntagmatic axis of language". Although the probabilities for choice to be made on the syntagmatic axis are much lesser as it is more appropriately the axis of chain (Egins, 2004, 191), this is true particularly in the case of the Thematic structure of the clause. Actually, in such a case, with the foregrounding of Textual Metafunction, the clausal point of departure may shift from one constituent to another, depending on what the speaker/writer chooses to put first among the SFPCA (Subject ^ Finite ^ Predicator ^ Complement ^ Adjunct) constituents after Bloor and Bloor's (2004) model. Subsequently to tentatively locating on which meaning axis choice mostly fits, this work provides a clarification on the cognitive feature of choice in SFL.

### 3.2 - The controversy over the conscious or unconscious pattern of choice in SFL

In her book entitled *Analysing English Grammar: A systemic functional introduction*, Fontaine (2013a), citing Fawcett (2008) and Egins (2004) illustratively used the semiotic system of [red light for 'STOP'] OR [amber light for 'CAUTION'] OR [green light for 'GO'] of traffic lights firstly to illustrate the simultaneous existence of the three Metafunctions in language and secondly to foreground the process of choice.



In regard to this parallel, the layman, through common sense, takes it for granted that the choice/selection among the 'STOP', 'CAUTION', and 'GO' actions depending on which light is on, is a cognitive process of conscious thinking, no matter how swift and almost unnoticed it may be. Halliday (1995) thus recognises, in agreement with Saussure (1916/1959) and Firth (1957) that choice plays a paramount role in "the modelling of meaning as a function of context" (Fontaine, 2013b), which, this study posits, is an intended and conscious

achievement in the construction of discourse. The agency of the speaker/writer is thus established because “some of our key meaning choices may originate in action selections ‘outside’ language areas” [extra linguistic environment] because social context is the unique backdrop of language use. However, and much surprisingly, Matthiessen et al. (2010:69) rather view choice as an act: “selection (of an option in a system), which does not imply consciousness or intention as it is the case in an act of deciding.

As a part of the critical feed-in of this work, the principle of choice entails firstly the availability of more than one device and secondly, the possibility for the choosing agent to evaluate why one feature could be more appropriate in a given sociocultural context in order to achieve communicative purpose, which makes it compulsory to involve a communicating mind’ (Fawcett, 1980; Schiffren, 1987). Taking a matching tide with the perspective adopted in this work, Asp (1995) feeds in a forceful standpoint whereby he posits that “if we consider choice as meaning potential, we are left with “paradoxes of unconscious choice and unintentional agents”. Based on the view that speakers can be seen as agents of our discourse, she [Asp] uses evidence from neurolinguistic imaging, and concludes that speakers are “not only capable of, but continuously making, conscious choices in discourse”. From a corroborative perspective, relating to the agency of choice, Fawcett (2013) posits that “In an analysis of the transitivity of ‘choosing’ using the Cardiff Grammar procedure, the tests for Participant Roles (PRs) show that, in the ‘cognition’ Process of ‘choosing’, the PRs are an Agent-Cognisant and a Phenomenon – just as they are for ‘deciding’, ‘selecting’ and ‘opting for’. And a typical Agent-Cognisant is a human being”. In spite of this almost undebatable intended and conscious aspect of the choosing process, Halliday (2013) keeps both the conscious and unconscious (subconscious) postulates valid as he explains that :

Choosing to act, whether materially or semiotically, is typically a subconscious process. But it can always be brought into conscious attention and reflected on. Verbs such as *select*, *opt for* may suggest deliberate choosing. Choosing to mean is as natural as choosing to be or to do; but for writers, orators and teachers – and especially for actors and for translators – it is often guided, or at least modified, by design (p. 17).

Within the frame of its social semiotic perspective of language, SFL draws a line of a permanent cause-effect relationship between the ideological and sociocultural situations in which language is learnt and used and the choices in the system networks of the lexicogrammar. This involves the socially ingrained belief-systems of such language users, whereby choices are made in a

subconscious manner. Checking for the way context influences and constrains choice thus becomes an endeavour which is worth it.

### *3.3 - Marking out the contextual constraints to choice in SFL*

This section of the work aims to shed light on the specific significance of context within the frame of the SFL theory and most importantly the way choice is applied to it. As a social semiotics, the meaning allotted to the linguistic sign during text production springs from a sociocultural environment. In general linguistic terms, context is a construct referring to the features of the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used (Van Dijk, 1977; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Crystal, 2008). In Malinowski's (1946) approach, the study of any language used by a linguistic community must be carried out in conjunction with their culture and their environment, whence, the notions of context of culture and context of situation. However, in the hallidayan linguistics (SFL), context refers more specifically to an inter-level of language organization which relates linguistic form to extra linguistic situation which is thus equivalent to semantics.

In SFL parlance, "the 'context of situation', as the immediate relevant social context of the linguistic interaction, thus stands in an instantial relation to [the wider and more general concept of] 'context of culture' as the interrelation of semiotic systems that comprises the social system" (Halliday & Hasan, 1985:4). In other words, the systemic functional linguistics' theoretical framework sets more the focus on the context of situation as rendered in a specific linguistic production under analysis, while keeping the context of culture in the background as the potential of cultural imprint and "colouring" provider. However, this definitional and peculiar labelling of context in SFL still doesn't indicate the way choice is applied to it as in the case of the lexicogrammatical and semantic components of a text. Actually, in a related manner to its idiosyncratic consideration in SFL, contextual choices do not appear in a directly readable and/or audible pattern in text. Instead, it shows up through its imprints and "colouring", as it were, on the register variables (field, tenor, mode) as the expression of the culture and belief system of the speaker/writer. Actually, choices in extra linguistic context [context of culture instantiated in the context of situation] occur along the paradigmatic axis "in absentia" (Sahlgren, 2006) because the choice of one cultural pattern excludes the choice of the remaining substitutable entities of the same paradigm which are thus kept in the background. In this regard, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004:133) suggest that:

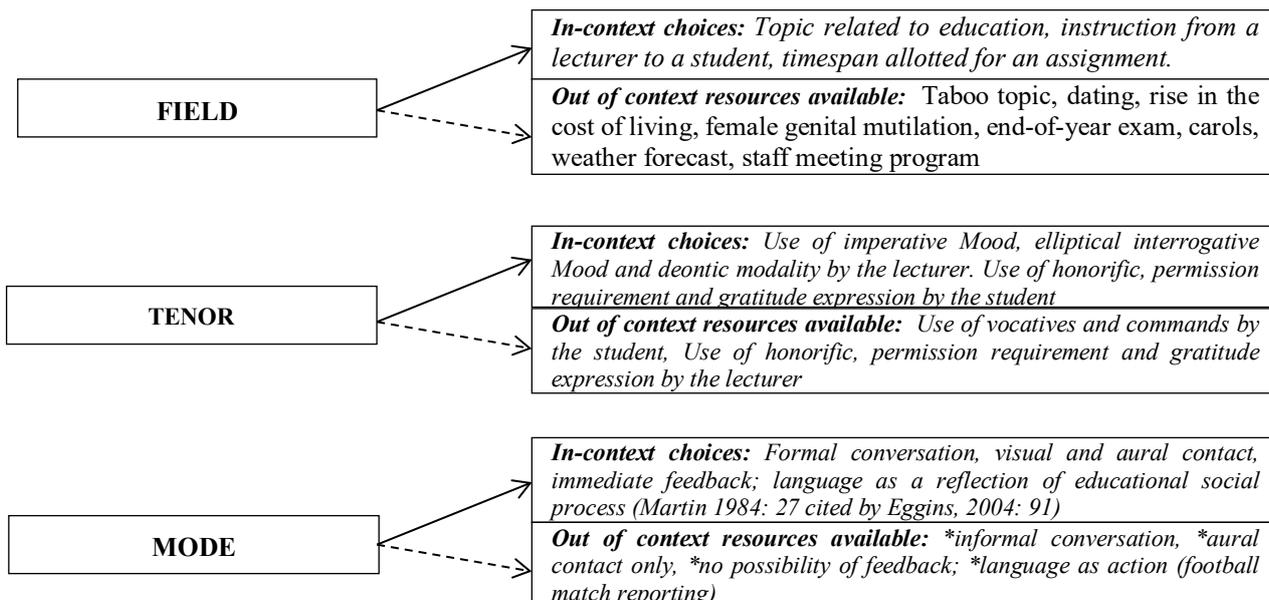
....the selection of a Vocative is more frequent with 'demanding' clauses (interrogative or imperative mood) than with 'giving' clauses (declarative mood).

These are all choices from the MOOD system in English, realising interpersonal meanings. But at the contextual stratum, conditional probability is more likely to implicate features *across* the systems of field, tenor and mode” (Hasan, 1999:246). For instance, where the social activity is quotidian in nature (a ‘choice’ in field), the probability of a dialogic context increases (a ‘choice’ in mode). This principle of conditional probability underpins the concept of register, where we find predictable configurations of semantic options motivated by configurations of contextual features (Halliday, 1978b).

Following this illustrative insight on lexicogrammatical choice based on context, this study suggests a plausible way contextual choice could operate along the lines of the field, tenor and mode register variables through the following invented dialogue between a lecturer and a student. As Berry (2013) posits, FIELD of discourse is “the nature of social activity relevant to speaking”, TENOR of discourse is “the nature of social relation relevant to speaking” and MODE of discourse is “the nature of contact for the conduct of speaking”. As represented in the diagram below, to each variable of the register framework correspond a pair of in-context choices and out-of-context resources available. The continuous and discontinuous arrows in the diagram that follows the invented dialogue indicate the in-context and out-of-context layers respectively.

Invented dialogue

- Lecturer** : Come on Jack. Are you still on the same assignment for an hour span?  
**Student** : Please Sir, there was one instruction missing  
**Lecturer** : So what?  
**Student** : I beg your pardon, Sir. I wish I could have ten more minutes  
**Lecturer** : You have to submit in five minutes from now  
**Student** : Thank you Sir



**Diagram 4:** An invented illustration of Field, Tenor and Mode choices in sfl

#### 4 - Recapitulative discussion

This recapitulative section of the research work is set to present the significance of the study through a roundup of the place of choice in the systemic functional framework on the one hand and the answers to the research queries on the other.

From its start, this study was purposed to undertake a theoretical survey of the place and importance of the concept of choice which is consistently present and active throughout the whole architecture of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics. In addition to this shedding of light on the prominence of choice in SFL, the corroborating remarks of front systemic functional proponents (Hasan, 2013; Hasan and Martin, 1989; Bache, 2013; Fontaine, 2013b) on the lack of writings on the nature of the concept, fuelled the scientific need for the current study. Starting this work from an insightful dig and dive into the very meaning and distinctive features of the SFL framework has thus proved highly scientifically contributory. Actually, in the theoretical approach to the SFL framework as presented in Table 1, the presence of the choice concept remains consistent, which adds to the significance of this work as far as the place of choice in systemic functional analysis is concerned.

| SFL acronym components | An explanatory gist of SFL acronym components  | Presence of the choice concept |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| SYSTEMIC               | Language viewed as a composite entity made up of a set, a conglomerate (system) of tools (instruments), which rings the bell to <b>an idea of choice</b> regarding which component to select in the whole system   | ✓                              |
| FUNCTIONAL             | Language viewed meaning oriented entity made up of a set (system) of tools (instruments), which <b>compels the user to choose</b> from the toolkit based on the communicative goal (function) to be achieved.  | ✓                              |
| LINGUISTICS            | From Halliday’s perspective, language is mostly scientifically studied not for the way it is formed (structuralist view) but rather for what <b>each user purposely chooses</b> to do with it (functionalist view), “doing this rather than doing that”, in Halliday’s (2013) phraseology. | ✓                              |

**Table 1:** The pervasive presence of choice in the SFL theory

Subsequently to locating the nature, the importance and the pervasiveness of choice in the definitional approach to sfl, the role-play of the concept per se is set to the fore when it is paralleled with the simple system of [red light for 'STOP'] OR [amber light for 'CAUTION'] OR [green light for 'GO'] proposed by Fontaine (2013a), with the inspiration of Fawcett (2008) and Eggins (2004). Actually, as this work suggests through an imagined lecturer-student dialogue in diagram 4, viewing language in a functional perspective definitely pairs up with a purposeful choice, if the expected meaning making goal is to be achieved. The same proves true, with the location of the choice concept more generically on the paradigmatic axis which is by the way termed as the axis of choice by Eggins (2004, 191). However, and dovetailing with Fredi (2013), this study also sees choice occurring exceptionally along the syntagmatic axis [the chain axis], for example in the specific case of Thematic progression where a speaker/writer may operate many different shifts of constituents to the Thematic point of departure position for meaning foregrounding purposes. In addition to the valuable resources and insights achieved in the course of this paper, the existence of the controversy over the conscious or unconscious nature of choice in SFL proved particularly mind-stimulating. As a matter of fact, whereas the consciousness standpoint could be blindly approved of unanimously based on human being (language user) as an Agent-Cognisant (Fawcett 1980/2013; Badre, 2008; Baker, 1973), the idea that choosing in meaning making is mostly unconscious or subconscious still prevails, with Halliday (2013) heading that standpoint. However, and interestingly enough, Fawcett (2013:124) finds the right balance, revealing the unsaid part of the deeper motivations of Halliday and his colleagues' reluctance toward seeing choice labelled as a cognitive and conscious process. As Fawcett (*idem*) indicates:

Another possible factor was that this was a period in the history of linguistics when the Chomskyan paradigm, with its claim to be 'a window into the mind', was at the height of its forbidding dominance - coupled with the incompatibility between the goals that Chomsky (2008a / 2012) set for linguistics and those set by Halliday, ...with the result that Halliday and his colleagues systematically avoided making overt claims about any aspect of language that seemed to be 'cognitive' (and so to belong in Chomskyan territory), focusing instead on the 'social' aspects of language. But the drawback of adopting this position was that it led to the need to establish alternative ways of referring to any 'cognitive' concept.

The next endeavour of this work is that the framing out of the constraints of context on choice has uncovered the dichotomy between Malinowski's and Halliday's perspectives on context. While Malinowski consistently based the analysis of language on both the context of culture and context of situation, Halliday rather views context of situation as more prominent. In other words, the

SFL theoretical framework sees context more practically as rendered in the specific linguistics production under study.

### **Concluding remarks**

Embarking on this theoretical review research has been prompted by the incongruity between the high rush language analysis that SFL proves to be and the scarcity of insightful literature on its major bedrock, choice. A proofread of some major findings in *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring choice* edited by Fontaine, Barlet and O'Grady in 2013 has ignited an opportunity for both a review and some critical and illustrative contributions. The selection of this review, illustrative and critical approach finds its justification in the fact that this work is a reflection on the systemic functional theory itself rather than the analysis of a fictional or authentic linguistic production. The insightful knowledge on the nature and prominence of choice thus proved prolific while reading through the contributions of Hasan (2013, 269), (Halliday, 2013), Fawcett's (2013, 119) (Bache, 2013), Freddi (2013, 56) and Berry (2013) in the *Systemic Functional Linguistics: Exploring choice*. Most particularly, it is scientifically interesting to notice that even Halliday, as the leading scholar in the SFL endeavour kept the consciousness/unconsciousness controversial status of choice in SFL going mainly because of his social semiotic view of language study as opposed to Chomsky's structural and mind-based perspective as revealed by Fawcett (2013:124). In the same manner, regarding the concept of choice as the core and centre of SFL, Eggins's (2004) *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* has been helpful in the illustrative and easily accessible method she has often adopted. Indeed, undertaking this study represented both a personal and scientific reaching for two main reasons: first, the parallel between the pervasiveness of choice in SFL and every day's life; secondly, the social semiotic for meaning construction that consistently keeps the lead in the very rationale of Halliday's perspective on linguistic analysis. Setting the bridge for a step forward to the contribution of this work in advancing the field of applied linguistic thus appears self-driven. For the language specialist in general, and most specifically for the learner and specialist in SFL, this work provides three distinctive tools. Firstly, the awareness that choice is at the core of the lexicogrammatical functioning of SFL; secondly, the location of choice activity mainly on the paradigmatic axis and thirdly, the Agent-Cognisant nature of human beings as the users of language.

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