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## Theorizing temporal dynamics in register: Context, instantiation, and the unfolding of situation

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Register studies often analyse patterns aggregated across whole texts, yet register is defined in relation to situational context—which itself unfolds dynamically. If situational parameters change over the course of an interaction, why should register be treated as a static property? To identify shifting clusters of linguistic features across text-time requires automatic segmentation methods; but without a theoretical account of why and how situational contexts produce temporally variable linguistic patterns, segmentation risks remaining atheoretical.

Halliday's claim that "text and situation come into being together" (1991) directs us to a different perspective: contexts are co-constructed through linguistic choices at each moment of unfolding interaction. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), through stratification, realisation and instantiation, articulates this dialectical relation between language and context. Extending this view, Wegener and Fontaine (2023) argue that 'system' and 'instance' are not simply poles on a cline but two perspectives on the same phenomenon—theoretical categories vs. actual occurrences that either realize those categories or prompt their creation. The dialectic is constitutive, not gradational. Three implications emerge:

Register vs. genre: Genre represents culturally recognized activity structure; register represents linguistic response to any situational configuration. While genre stages often correlate with register shifts, register can vary within stages as situational parameters shift.

Segmentation as analytical construct: From an SFL/CHAT perspective, context is continuous—boundaries emerge from analytical purposes, not inherent textual structure. This reframes segmentation as predictive.

Functional interpretation of feature clusters: SFL offers functional interpretation: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions may shift independently across and within text phases, producing distinct feature clusters that realize different contextual demands.

**References:** • Halliday, M. A. K. (1991). Corpus studies and probabilistic grammar. In K. Aijmer & B. Altenberg (eds.), *English corpus linguistics: Studies in honour of Jan Svartvik*. Longman, 30–44. • Wegener, R. & L. Fontaine (2023). A functional approach to context. In J. Romero-Trillo (ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of language in context*. Cambridge University Press, 116–139.