

Discontinuous Residue and Theme in Higher-Order Semiotic: A Case for Interlocking Systems

*Ali Akbar Farahani,
Yaser Hadidi
University of Tehran*

The fallacy persists in discourse analysis research to explore lexicogrammatical phenomena detached from any adjacent plane of the meaning potential. In an attempt to dispel this and toss out some preconceived notions about what a modern SFG vantage point should involve, this study homes in on one aspect of SFG within prose fiction in particular, which is very revealing in terms of how separate system networks are actually in synergistic simultaneity, and how SFG allows one , phenomenally well, to bring such synergies out, getting to the heart of the fact that language pervasively operates on multiple planes of textuality simultaneously. Thus, building upon Halliday's 2004 work, the quest is if it is interpersonally significant when the Residue is split into two parts; more importantly, if it is also laced with some lexicogrammatical quality on the textual plane, in light of the fairly well-entrenched assumption that there is always Theme at work when the Residue is split. Halliday is the only scholar to touch upon the topic of Discontinuous Residue and its relationship to Marked Theme in the culmination of his groundbreaking career, i.e. his 2004 work. Having driven home the proposal to make into a watchword the ubiquity of interlocking macro-semantic system networks, some pedagogical and research implications and suggestions flowing from this are brought up.

Keywords: Discontinuous Residue, Theme, Higher-order semiotic, Systemic-Functional Grammar, Synergistic Simultaneity

We are addressing ourselves to and have been stimulated by a part of Halliday's (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) discussion concerning the Mood $\wedge$ Residue structure, and the order of elements therein. Typically and in the unmarked case, virtually every systemicist, besides Halliday himself in his groundbreaking and fundamental work along with Matthiessen, would concur that the order of the elements in the Residue is: Predicator $\wedge$ Complement(s) $\wedge$ Adjunct(s), as in *The duke gave my aunt that teapot last year for her birthday* (adopted from Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) (e.g. Martin et al, 1997; Eggins, 1994; Morley, 2000; Thompson, 2004). But the Residue may be made discontinuous, split into two parts, by an Adjunct or Complement occurring thematically as in *that teapot the duke had given to my aunt last year*, where *that teapot* is a marked-thematic Complement, and the Residue is *that teapot . . . given to my aunt last year*. Now the point is that, as far as our close researching of the matter indicates, this account of Halliday's is the very first to articulate this nuance in the Mood $\wedge$ Residue structure. Besides, on a less scholarly note, our impression is that he seems to be the one championing every novel systemic phenomenon people so keenly seize upon shortly afterwards.

An appreciable number of researchers have worked on the nature of Theme/Rheme system, Thematicity, Thematization and the strategies therein, flow of information, etc (e.g. Fries, 2002; Martin & Rose, 2003; Fries, 1994; Ghadessy, 1995). However, what is left unsaid and untapped is the interaction between Mood/Residue structure and Theme/Rheme in their unmarked status or, more importantly, in their marked status and use. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) were the first ones to touch – in a passing nod – upon the marked concepts of Discontinuous Residue and Marked Theme and the relationships between the two.

What we'd like to concern ourselves with is the potential

effect of the main semantic/ideational bulk of the clause and very well the proposition of the sentence –i.e., the Residue- being split into two parts. We are for one thing wondering if it is interpersonally significant; if it is laced with some systemic significance at another level , i.e., the textual level. Our contention here is that yes, it does realize some interpersonal, interactive, and communicative goals on the speaker's part which are perfectly intentional in large part. This claim has got to be made against the backdrop of a presumably well-entrenched assumption that there is always Marked Theme at work when the Residue is split. And this is a point raised by Halliday himself. Another significant part of our impetus here is to see if and how far depth of DR and its length and complexity fall in line with what one of the writers called “elegant ambiguity” in his MA project. Elegant ambiguity, as used there, refers to the literature-text's pervasive taxing of cognitive inference-making procedures activated in the reader's mind and the maintaining of simultaneous interpretations and unresolved ambiguity in the reader's mind. Then, it is a twofold aspect of the proposition we are seeking to bring out: the Residue being split, and the delay of the proposition. Below we see how all this works. But it ought to be said that we tend here to help toss out some preconceived notions about a given perfect discourse model by homing in on one aspect of SFG which is very revealing in terms of how – within the paradigm of functional grammar – separate system networks are actually in synergistic simultaneity, and how SFG does phenomenally well in bringing such synergies out. Meanwhile, our hopes are to dispel any images of ourselves – through making the analyses as compelling as possible – to the effect that we have an axe to grind in this matter or that we are entertaining a biased attitude towards a presumed state of God Truth.

Theoretical Framework

One downside to an undertaking such as this is the frightfully vast dimensions that even a cursory look at functional grammar assumes, if one intends to start out on simply setting out the

underlying theory and its fundamental basics. That proving rather unwieldy, we'll but have to presume some general grip over the thinking on the part of the reader, so that we can proceed with the mainstay of the study, after embarking upon a fairly grainy introduction to the thinking behind the model, which incidentally plays unmitigated havoc with the depth and vastness of the theory. And yet, we'll be hamstrung inordinately if we slip into an intractable long-winded account.

The systemic approach is increasingly being recognized as providing a very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource (Eggins, 1994). Functional grammar is a way of looking at grammar in terms of how grammar is used; it focuses on the development of grammatical systems as a means for people to interact with each other. It sees grammar as shaped by, and as playing a significant role in shaping, the way we get on with our lives (Martin, et al, 1997). Fuelled by a focus on the analysis of authentic products of social interaction (texts), considered in relation to the cultural and social context in which they are negotiated, a noticeably unanimous pursuit is to 'understand the quality of texts: why a text means what it does, and why it is valued as it is' (e.g. Eggins, 1994; Martin et al, 1997; Thompson, 2004, etc). Championed admittedly by M.A.K Halliday in his influential and uncommon flurry of works on functional grammar throughout the decades starting out from as early as the sixties and smoothed out into elaboration, elegance and delicacy within his 2004 work, the theory holds that language is structured to make three main kinds or layers of meaning simultaneously. This semantic complexity, Halliday argues, which allows *experiential*, *interpersonal*, and *textual* meanings to be fused together in linguistic units, is possible because language is a semiotic system: a conventionalized coding system, organized as sets of choices. This involves each choice having repercussions for other seemingly distant choices in the system, such that each choice ripples out to other choices elsewhere (Lotfipour-Saedi, 2006), and each acquires meaning against the background of other choices in the system which could have been made. Since the English clause

is the main unit of text analysis here, the theory holds that any major clause serves three simultaneous metafunctions: the experiential, the interpersonal, and the textual.

The experiential metafunction has the clause as *representation* of some process in ongoing human experience, deploying the system of *transitivity*; the interpersonal has the clause as *exchange*, a transaction between speaker and listener, deploying the system of *Mood*; the textual has the clause as *message*, a quantum of information, deploying the system of *Theme* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The English clause seems to select simultaneously from transitivity, mood and theme networks (Ventola, 1988). But it is important to register that as we go down the scale of delicacy and probe deeper and more delicately the nature of these interdependent and interrelated subsystems, the picture gains progressive complexity amazingly.

All the same, our focus here is specifically on the system of *mood* which is the mainspring of the interpersonal metafunction, as it manifestly carries the nub of the proposition and makes it 'negotiable' and enacts a speech function (Martin et al, 1997). The system of mood comprises the grammatical resources for the interaction between speaker and hearer, expressing speech-functional selections in dialogue (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997). The Residue, in effect, is an element that expresses the rest of the proposition or proposal being negotiated through the speech function. The mood consists of subject followed by a finite element, implying that the mood obtains only for major clauses (see Morley, 2000 for an instructive syntactic account).

Method

Building upon our extensive experience of and interaction with higher-order semiotic, we reckoned that the particular textual patterns and phenomena raised in this study pertain to higher-order semiotic in general, and to English prose fiction genre in particular. We define higher-order semiotic along Hallidayan lines (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), in the sense that we look upon a given *text* as being either a *specimen* or an *artifact*. A *specimen* is

an instance of the system which is an ephemeral, soon-forgotten token of a certain systemic type in instantiation, while an *artifact* is a lasting, memorable and momentous token of the same type. These two perspectives are clearly complementary.

Halliday and Matthiessen argue that when grammarians say that from their point of view all texts are equal, they are thinking of them as *specimens*. They further maintain that if we are interested in explaining the grammar of English, both of these perspectives illustrate numerous grammatical features of the language, in meaningful functional contexts, which all need to be taken into account. Seen as *artifacts*, on the other hand, they are far from equal. An *artifact* constitutes an important lasting moment in the evolution and semogenesis of the language, and may leave its imprint on the language in a way that only a few highly-valued textual instances are destined to do. Yet, they are complementary in the sense that textual artifacts have value for us because we understand textual specimens. We cannot explain why a text means what it does, with all the various readings and values that may be given to it, except by relating it to the linguistic system as a whole. And equally, we cannot use it as a window on the system unless we understand what it means and why. Each textual instance gets its meaning from the same meaning-making resources; what distinguishes any one text is the way these resources are deployed.

We went for English prose fiction because it deploys the textual phenomena in focus here to a very great extent. It has an array of very informative insights in terms of how textual devices are used creatively in context in a transcendental fashion. In the light of the above, the thought is that the most revealing picture emerges from how discourse unfolds in real time in this genre, once one looks for both perspectives on text. We made attempts to cast around for a compelling and confident number of styles, eras and types of prose fiction so that the pervasiveness of the textual patterns is demonstrated more efficiently. That is done, though, with an eye out for the limitations on scope and space warranted here for this respectable journal. A very few instances are taken from seminal works on SFG rather than from English prose fiction,

but these are marginal exceptions. In all cases, the source is mentioned.

Analysis and Discussion

To start with, note should be taken of functions like exclamation in their various forms falling outside the Mood $\wedge$ Residue structure, along with Comment Adjuncts, Vocative Adjuncts, Conjunctive Adjuncts, etc. One operation we have undertaken to elucidate here is the intentional delay of the proposition when the Residue (assuming that we clearly define the Residue as the main semantic load of the clause and the nub and crux of the proposition being swapped back and forth in the dialogue by the Mood) is split. In other words, while Discontinuous Residue (henceforth DR) is in collaboration with Theme $\wedge$ Rheme and Given $\wedge$ New patterns, it does realize some other discourse goals as well. We will pick up on this line of argument below. Moreover, the flipside to that coin is that 'the ongoing selection of subjects by a speaker or writer does give a characteristic flavour to a piece of discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). So, this is further tied to patterns of complex subject and clausal subjects.

The following examples could all be said to delay the occurrence of the Residue. One could provisionally argue that, textually speaking, they have a function of keeping the text together and maintaining the flow of discourse, but interpersonally and perhaps ideationally speaking, they meet the identifiable function of delaying the discharge of the Residue, or otherwise manipulate its unmarked layout.

One of the main objectives of the study is to throw light on the synergy between Marked Theme and DR. A Marked Theme in a declarative clause comes about whenever something other than the subject fronts the sentence. Therefore, one has a variety of categories of Marked Theme at hand in analyzing the patterns of Thematization. The most important one is Attributive Complement being reversed. This is the main focus here and that's why we get into it first. This pattern also happens to be by far our most

interesting one, as it has more to say about our underlying point about activation of cognitive delay and inference-making procedures and metafunctional interface. Complement is also ‘the most marked type of Theme’ because it is least likely to be thematic (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) :

- Of greater interest is the issue of rate of decay. (from Thompson, 1996)
- How strongly this formal encouragement may operate you can see in the following translation. (*Analyzing Prose*, Richard A. Lanham)
- How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. (*Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad)
- This one could gather from his casual talk. (*Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad)
- His strength only the faithful can fathom. (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte)
- Of more concern was the callous inroads and dereliction of time upon his brother. (*Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton)
- So unexpected was the apparition. (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte)
- What he cannot use he leaves in good condition in plain sight. (*My Daily dives in the dumpster*, Lars Eighner)
- Upon this bough were seated an enormous pair of turtle doves. (*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Bronte)
- A fine thing it would be if the Muggles found out about us all. (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, J.K. Rowling)
- Many greyhounds my wife has rescued. (*An Introduction to Language*, Fromkin, K. et al)
- Therefore, flow they must. (*The Extinct Angel*, C.P. Gilman)

- Harry had almost forgotten that the exam results were still to come, but come they did. (*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone*, J.K. Rowling)

The last two examples – with the verb in Thematic position – are very intriguing and illuminating ones by way of the fact that they occur very rarely to begin with, and they represent the verb being used as if it were a complement. That this verb in the position of a very marked Theme should happen so infrequently indicates that there are very strong and fundamental driving forces behind its deployment, in terms of Thematicity, Information value and status, discoursal shifts in the message, etc. This is an underlying belief almost all discourse analysts would confirm. We also reckon that this textual device stands worthy of further research and would have many insights in store for the researcher and interested parties alike, once it receives thorough attention and research.

But more importantly, the examples above altogether send out a very strong message about the strata of semantics and lexicogrammar being related in a non-arbitrary and iconic relationship (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999) and about how one can treat these as evolutionary shifts in English discourse, particularly along ontogenetic and logogenetic dimensions of semohistory. This calls for an entirely different project in its own right and the writers invite other researchers to consider exploring that insightful territory. Here though, it suffices to register these textual devices and argue lucidly – along systemic lines – for the existence of a strong semantic and iconic force behind a given author's manifested deployment at the lexicogrammatical plane of, for instance, complement as Theme to express an ideational meaning which could have been perfectly expressed by less marked arrangement of participants in the clause.

Another pattern is Adjunct as Theme. Upon researching English text, it becomes almost momentarily evident that this sort of pattern is easily losing its flavour of being a marked Theme. By the same token, it has arguably been losing its status as a vehicle of deploying and triggering cognitive inference-making processes.

However, in prose fiction, we are dealing with a different picture. The following sentences deploy Adjunct as Theme (the Residue, obviously discontinuous, is underlined), but these are manifested as typically long-winded and conspicuously stretched-out Adjuncts in prose fiction and are, in that capacity, triggers of more involved cognitive load and inference-making. Similarly, these mark one very frequently-occurring textual device and strategy in prose fiction and, thus, need to be brought out, not only for the teacher-researcher but for the advanced student of English.

- *In an attempt to limit the potential damage, John Prescott yesterday met privately with suspended party members over allegations of intimidation.* (Thompson, 1996)
- *On the following day he did not go out early.* (Thompson, 1996)
- *In the open glade, the wild rabbits danced with their shadows.* (Matthiessen and Halliday, 1997)
- *To show him how I valued it, I tore it in two, and threw it into the fire.* (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Anne Bronte)
- *Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns- and even convictions.* (Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad)
- *Desperate for something to do, for distraction, he slipped out of his sleeping bag, picked up his wand, and crept out of the room.* (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, J.K. Rowling)

In literature-text in general and in prose fiction in particular, it sometimes happens that part of the Residue is embedded within another part and this can thus give rise to complex subjects, heavily embedded hypotactic clause complexes and clausal subjects, hence the room for cognitive play and 'ambiguity' (Carter, et al, 2001). Yet, the thing is that delving into such textual devices as these calls for an entirely separate study and can't

possibly be dealt with here. And similarly, we suspect it is incumbent upon us or other researchers likewise affiliated to undertake to do that in separate works. But the following three cases are very intriguing ones and are perhaps worth a look or two:

- ***Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that steam, bearing the sword and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire.*** (Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad)
- ***Lights of ships moved in the fairway- a great stir of lights going up and down.*** (Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad)
- ***And farther west on the upper reaches, the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.*** (Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad)

How is one to categorize these? As apposition for the subject or as cataphora? Either way, we are faced with the interplay of the Interpersonal and the Textual and there is also cognitive delay involved. But more apparently, these cataphoric subjects seem to merit more ‘newsworthiness’ than it appears at first brush. Newsworthiness of this kind may be said to result from the bond and the interface that is established between interpersonal systems and textual systems in a hypotactic clause complex. Interestingly, there are some logogenetic and ontogenetic phenomena at the ideation base that are manipulated by the author towards some cognitive and semiotic effect that marks his message with a lasting palpable touch.

Our researching of this particular literature-text genre, i.e., prose fiction, also brings out another important deployment of DR, although owing to restrictions on space, we are not going to present the examples in this connection here. What we discern is frequent insertion of adjuncts right after the subject. This yields DR since in the present scheme of things, it is assumed that any disruption in the unmarked lay-out of the Residue brings about

DR. Thus the adjunct has to go in its unmarked position in the arrangement of the Residue, which is at the end of the clause, in order for the Residue to retain its unmarked sequence of the arguments in the ‘main bulk of the proposition’. What effectively happens is the imperative on the Hearer’s part to go about rearranging the arguments scattered about in the clause which represents the proposition. This is something the Hearer invariably does in order to make sense of the proposition.

Predicated Theme (known as Anticipatory “it” and Cleft sentence in formal grammar) is another category of Marked Theme which results in DR. Predication in this way can be applied to any element having a representational function in the clause and involves a particular combination of thematic and informational choices (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). We will not of course slip into what bonds exist between Theme ^ Rheme structure and Information structure as – suffice it to say- the correlation between Theme and Given is not perfect (Fries, 2002). (Note that within a simple verbal group, we have two elements; the finite which belongs to the Mood, and the predicator which belongs to the Residue and actually forms the most vital argument of the proposition. Residue is in italics including all the verbal group for the purposes of the moment):

- *It wasn't the job that was getting me down.*
- *It was from that sort of nonsense that he escaped.*
- *It is this latter question which is often ignored.*
- *It's a real pain having to shave in cold water.*
- *It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. (Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad)*
- *It is not my loss nor her triumph that I deplore so greatly as the wreck of my fond hopes for his advantage. (The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Anne Bronte)*
- *With Gregorovitch dead, it was the merry-faced thief who was in danger now, and it was on him that Harry's thoughts dwelled. (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, J.K. Rowling)*

- It was *from his lips* that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. (Lord Jim, Joseph Conrad)
- Most of the eyes around the table followed Snape, and it was *to him* that Voldermort spoke first. (Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows)
- It was *in the spirit of patriotism* that I posed the question.

As to a pseudo-cleft sentence (thematic-equative in the systemic sense), one can argue that it lays out a very straightforward unmarked Mood $\wedge$ Residue structure (a clause like ‘what was getting me down wasn’t the job’). Therefore, one could as well leave it out. Yet within analyses of text Thematization strategies, thematic equative is as good a marked Theme as predicated Theme. It can be inferred from this that while the thematic-equative yields a marked thematic structure and an unmarked Mood $\wedge$ Residue one (precisely because it forms a complex subject), the Predicated Theme is marked not on one but on two planes, or rather three (i.e., ideational metaphor, but we’ll nimbly edge away from those dangerous waters!). This goes the longer way towards meeting our initial objective of establishing that Theme and DR had best be studied not only in isolation but for their interesting synergies as well. This joint effort would have a great deal of insights for the language teacher, learner and researcher. This is owing to the fact that these phenomena as analyzed above constitute an overwhelming part of prose fiction and are, in that spirit, worth a peeled knife-sharp eye.

Conclusions and Suggestions

It is not uncommon over the past years of the field’s history to come upon discourse analysts or applied linguists likewise affiliated who would object that systemic-functional grammar may have long run out of steam, its once highly glorified contributions to text and discourse analysis now depleted out of necessity, owing to the natural erosive inroads of time and all. They sometimes even

tend to express their concern about SFG being now oversubscribed, and overwrought, having outworn its usefulness as it were, arguing that one should remain guarded and discreet about carrying the potentials of SFG too far, and profligately stitching together novel uses for it by way of sheer prejudice.

We contend – to begin with – that the above time-worn argument may be all cock-eyed and misplaced, and this study was a move in that direction. Still, even though getting to grips with numerous frameworks for Multi-Modal Discourse Analysis (MDA) (Martin and Rose, 2003) is in and of itself a laudable pursuit, and one which – incidentally – does stake out a position on matters of importance and interest, it is dismaying in the extreme to see a labored-over discoursal/textual model reduced to a smear, to the lowest common denominator, conjured up as it is by one of these same misanthropic discourse analysts going out of their way to rig together a painstakingly multi-tiered model for all-encompassing flawless discourse analysis.

Modern SFG can get to the heart of the fact that language operates on multiple planes of textuality simultaneously. This should be blindingly obvious from the small Mickey Mouse phenomena we attempted, but the fallacy persists that lexicogrammatical phenomena are better explored in hefty isolation, divorced from any other functional consideration of systemic significance, and in neglect of the imperative that any clause, clause complex or text for that matter is the realization – out of necessity – of several interlocking systems at work. Other interested researchers are strongly advised to go about investigating other textual devices as mentioned above here and there in the analysis section. There can potentially be –as an example and as mentioned above- a good number of other deployments of complex, embedded and clausal subjects along with patterns of thematic-equative within the clause in higher-order semiotic that need to be brought out. Just as there are simultaneous systems in the network of a continuous semiotic space (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), there are necessarily simultaneous cognitive interpretations, triggered, activated and held in tandem in the Hearer and Reader's mind and processing

systems, but there is also cognitively challenging delay in the discharge of functional elements in the text at different levels of delicacy, perhaps alongside the caveat that language by its very nature operates intriguingly metaphorically out of necessity, with metaphor permeating in all areas of language (see e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999; Knowles and Moon, 2006). These system networks are so intimately intertwined and they pervade so profusely down and through the language that one can't come to grips with the proper analysis of texts without reconciling oneself to those interfaces, making into a watchword the ubiquity of interlocking macrosemantic systems.

Interestingly, there are some logogenetic and ontogenetic phenomena at the ideation base that are manipulated by a given author of higher-order semiotic, creating meaning and engaging in the largely intriguing and uncharted act of semiosis, towards some cognitive and semiotic effect that marks his message with a lasting palpable touch. So, there is something operating on the ideational plane as well. But then, we would have had to categorize these types of phenomena as 'ideational metaphor' and we know that we can't because ideational metaphor within SFG operates in a totally different domain. That's why Halliday believes that the Information structure of, for instance, Given/New has to remain as a totally different system of its own right to enable us to account for such phenomena as we have been exploring. And here lies a tricky interception, containing strands, among many, like critical discourse analysis to research the ideology of the text, and this is where Multimodal Discourse Analysis takes on a very grave and solemn existence going beyond inter- or multi- disciplinarity. Looking for another way to account for these either newsworthy phenomena or textually marked ones seems difficult. Thus, this SFG model's capacity may be vividly shown to be undiluted and textual phenomena may start to fall into place and cease to confound in the old ways.

We would like to make a point of similar studies to ours potentially carrying a great deal of insights for the language teacher, learner and researcher. This is owing to the fact that these phenomena as analyzed above constitute an overwhelming part of

prose fiction; they are its hallmark and, in that spirit, worth a peeled knife-sharp eye. That is, these textual devices and patterns mark very frequently-occurring textual devices and strategies in prose fiction and, thus, need to be brought out, not only for the teacher-researcher but for the advanced student of English as well, both of which are of paramount importance. Literature pointing to the important and ubiquitous role and contributions of literature in the EFL/ESL classroom and language learning is truly legion (e.g. Collie and Slater, 1987; Long, 1986; McKay, 2001). In that spirit, bringing these textual underpinnings marking prose fiction to the attention of these parties who stand to benefit a lot from such an enterprise has a fundamental scholastic value, rippling out to far-reaching implications and constructive knowledge-building.

The Authors

Ali Akbar Farahani is an assistant professor of English and Linguistics in the English department of University of Tehran. His research interests include Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. He has taught extensively in these areas at MA and PhD levels and has produced many papers with his students and alone.

Yaser Hadidi is a PhD candidate in the University of Tehran and an instructor of English in Tabriz University. He is interested in bringing out the contributions of Systemic Functional Linguistics to Discourse Analysis and Stylistics and its potentials for Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

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