

# The Application of SFL as a Pedagogical Tool in the Undergraduate Translation Classroom\*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a number of benefits of the application of an SFL-based pedagogical approach in the translation classroom on the basis of students' study logs collected over a semester. A register analysis, based on SFL's Field, Tenor and Mode, was introduced to undergraduate students taking a Korean into English translation course. The analysis contained the categories of 'Purpose' (Field), 'Target audience' (Tenor) and 'Mode' (Mode/Channel of communication), and was intended for the purpose of aiding analysis of source and target texts. After initial practice in the first week it was introduced, the students carried out the register analysis each time before beginning a translation task, with the purpose of enabling deeper understanding and interpretation of the source text, and consideration of target text-related aspects such as linguistic choice and style. Data showed that the register analysis enabled deeper understanding of the source text message, the organisation of ideas during the analysis stage prior to translation, the making of translation decisions relating to linguistic and modal factors and also helped in the post-translation stages, such as editing or reflection. Based on these findings, this paper

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demonstrates the usefulness in the application of the SFL-derived register analysis as a pedagogical tool for the student analysis of source and target texts.

## **KEYWORDS**

SFL, Field, Tenor, Mode, analysis, translation

## 1. Introduction

This paper looks at the pedagogical benefits of the application of SFL-based register in an undergraduate Korean into English translation course. Translation is a communicative act between the original source text writer, the translator and the target text reader. The act of translation requires the ability to recognise and analyse the intention of the writer of the source text, and convey this into the target text. Such a process also requires the ability to contemplate the contexts one is situated in, and the power of linguistic choices made in such context(s), through the given channel of communication.

SFL sees language use to be functional and able to fulfil a range of social functions. The linguistic theory also focuses on the social nature of language use. Context in such language use is an important element, and there are two types of contexts: the context of situation and the context of culture (Halliday 2007b). When a translator translates a text, they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text for. Consideration of such a target reader and how to translate for him or her also requires context; through the contemplation of the context of the target reader, the translator makes decisions in their translation.

This paper reports on the application of an SFL-derived approach

in teaching translation in an undergraduate Korean into English translation course. By detailing the methodology and presenting excerpts from data, the study will discuss the usefulness of SFL in the course when employed as a pedagogical tool. The paper is structured as follows: the background section will provide background to the current study. The methodology section will detail the application of SFL in the translation course. The findings and discussion will present qualitative excerpts for discussion and summarise overall findings. This will be followed by the conclusion.

## 2. Background: SFL, translation and the translation brief

This section will discuss the background to the current study in relation to SFL and the translation brief. While there are many principles in SFL theory, the current study draws on the following main ideas:

### 2.1. Language is social semiotic and its use fulfils a range of social functions.

Language is a social semiotic system, and language use is functional (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1985). Language is a systemic resource for meaning, or what Halliday calls ‘meaning potential’, that functions to create meaning (Halliday 2007b). The process of using language is a semiotic process, where people select resources within the system of grammar and lexis that are available in a language when they speak (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Halliday 1985). People create meaning through the exchange of symbols in a shared context of situation (Halliday and Hasan 1985; Halliday 2007b). Language is not a ‘domain of human knowledge’ but

the “essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge” (Halliday 1993: 94). Language is intrinsic to the living experiences of individuals in a society and culture. Furthermore, language is multi-functional: language interprets experience whilst enacting human relationships at the same time, and serves more than one function (Halliday and Webster 2009). According to Halliday, “every language is both a means of understanding one’s environment (building up a picture of reality that makes sense of your experience), and a means of controlling, or at least interacting with, other people” (Halliday 2007a: 345).

## 2.2. Language and social context are inseparable

Another characteristic of SFL is the social nature of language use. Meanings between humans are construed in, and influenced by, the social context in which exchanges occur, and language is inseparable from the social context. There are two types of contexts: the context of situation and the context of culture (Halliday 2007b). The context of situation is related to language in use (Halliday 2007b); it is the social context that lies behind a particular use of language. The context of culture, meanwhile, is related to language as system (Halliday 2007b); humans choose a resource from a system when they speak. The context of culture lies behind the system of language, and refers to the features of culture relevant to the register, and all people simultaneously participate in many cultures (Halliday 2007b). Each context of situation is both construed by and constructed through each use of language (Halliday 2007b: 282). This means that not only does social context condition language, but language use also defines the context. Each language in use, or language as text, is taken from a system of language, that is, all potentially possible instances of

language. In other words, each language as text is an instance of language as system.

Martin (2010) suggests that the context of culture roughly corresponds to genre. Genre can be defined as a staged activity with social purposes in which speakers participate as members of culture (Martin 2010). On the other hand, the context of situation is closely related to register, which can be defined as “the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type” (Halliday 2009: 182). The context of situation is related to the following three register variables: field, tenor and mode. Although there are different interpretations of these three, Martin (2010: 16-17) defines these as follows:

a) Field

This refers to what is going on, where it is interpreted institutionally in terms of some culturally recognised activity. Examples of fields are activities such as studying or teaching linguistics, cooking, building construction, farming, politics and education.

b) Tenor

This refers to the way one relates to other people when partaking in an activity. One aspect of this is status. Society is structured in such a way that people have power over one another. This power is of various kinds: mature people tend to dominate younger ones, bosses dominate employees; teachers dominate students and so forth.

c) Mode

This refers to the channel one selects to communicate. The choices

most commonly presented are speech (spoken) and writing (written). However, today's world makes use of many additional channels such as blogs, SNS such as Facebook, YouTube, SMS messages, e-mail, telephone, radio, television, video, film and such. These are all distinct modes in their own right.

As such, in summary it can be said that SFL focuses on the functions of language, i.e. how language is used in a social context. When employed as a pedagogical tool in the translation classroom, SFL can enable students to examine how language is used to create meaning within the given translation task, which has a particular setting involving a potential target reader and within particular channels of communication.

Translation, which is a communicative act between the source text writer, translator and then target text reader, requires the identification and analysis of source text intention and message. The analysis of the source text from an SFL viewpoint can enable students to negotiate the meanings contained within the source text and the intention of the writer of the source text whilst contemplating the power of linguistic choices made for the given context. As such, it can serve to encourage consideration of how to express the message in the target text for the potential target reader, and aid their decisions made during translation processes such as word choice.

Translation is “a production of negotiation with variables pertaining to the sociocultural context on which it is produced and received: the target culture” (Assis Rosa 2006: 100). Assis Rosa draws on types of reader in literary communication:

-The actual or real reader: the receiver of the literary text, the flesh-and-bones individuals actually sitting in living rooms reading the book

-The ideal reader: capable of an informed and sensitive reading, able to understand the meaning and significance of any literary text but distant from any given context.

-The implied reader: corresponding to the writer's expectations of his/her addressed readership built by and in discourse (Assis Rosa 2006: 101).

When a translator translates a text, they have an imagined or implied target reader for whom they are translating the text for. The notion of such a target reader, according to Assis Rosa, is important for translation studies as it will "motivate or constrain the translation process and product" (Assis Rosa 2006: 104).

Assis Rosa looks at the target text from the perspective of communicative interaction: the TT is a type of reported speech in which the translator reports a message from the source text, forming communicative interaction between the author and the readership. Two participants of this exchange have the role of implied author and implied reader, and these two intratextual participants in the interaction of the ST may also be transferred to the TT and take on the roles of implied author and implied ST reader (Assis Rosa 2006).

Register, which is one of the central notions of SFL, serves a role in acting as a link between linguistic choices, the communicative functions of the text and contextual factors behind the text. SFL has also served as a theoretical foundation for various theories of translation including Catford (1965), Baker (1992), House (1977, 1997, 2006) and Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997). Halliday (1992: 15) considers translation to be not only the creation of meaning but a guided one. According to Halliday (1992: 16), translators make decisions about what is the relevant context within which the

equivalence of function is being created. Drawing on SFL, Catford (1965) develops the notion of a translation shift and views language as communication: communication that is embedded in levels of context and operates at various levels (i.e. grammar, phonology, graphology) and various ranks (i.e. clause, group, word, morpheme). House (1977, 1997) develops a model of translation quality assessment based on SFL, in particular register and genre theories. Hatim and Mason (1997) also draws on SFL to analyse the translation text, including ideology issues. SFL has been adopted to translator training as well (Kim 2007; Kim and McDonald 2012). For example, Kim (2007) adopts an SFL-based text analysis, particularly in relation to the system of Theme, as a pedagogical tool for the teaching of translation. Furthermore, discourse analysis informed by SFL also enriches translation analysis, and various translation studies scholars have drawn on this (e.g. Steiner 2004, Munday 2012).

Such studies and firm theoretical founding serve as evidence for the usefulness of SFL as a pedagogical tool (Trosberg 2002; Kim 2009). The current study reports on the application of SFL as a pedagogical tool for use in the translation classroom, particularly for the role of source text and target text analysis.

The register analysis is designed for use alongside the translation brief for each translation task. The translation brief will state a target audience and purpose of the text, which will be different for each translation task, to enable exploration of learners' negotiating and mediating of culture-specific lexis in the texts. Discussing the translation brief from a functionalist translation approach, Nord highlights the important role it plays, particularly for trainee translators. While professional translators' experience means they may not need detailed specifications for a translation task, trainee translators, who lack experience, would need guidance (Nord 1997).



As such, each translation task requires a brief which “defines the conditions under which the target text should carry out its particular function” (Nord 1997: 47).

The application of SFL together with the use of the translation brief in the translation classroom can enable a synergistic learning effect: students can first analyse the text from an SFL perspective in relation to the information available to them in the translation brief, and then through the contemplations made during such analysis can proceed to make translation decisions.

### 3. Methodology

The current study reports on the application for an undergraduate Korean into English translation course, which was 16 weeks in duration. The course was designed so that the first half of the semester dedicated two weeks to each topic. From Week 4 onwards, students spent two weeks on a given text for a designated topic. A translation brief was designated for each translation task, and students were given time to hold a pre-translation session to discuss potential issues and translation strategies.

The study log was assigned as a semester-long assignment in Week 3 of the semester. The students wrote in this log four times during this semester. The study log was submitted as an assignment via email to the lecturer by the deadline given. All students submitted their study logs, although not all of them included the table based on SFL. At the end of the semester, the study logs containing SFL tables were extracted for analysis.

Students were introduced to the idea of a register analysis in class during the sixth week of the semester. This was introduced to the

students as an 'analysis table'. The table which was introduced can be seen below, in Table 1.

Table 1. Register analysis based on SFL

	Original Text	Your translation
Purpose		
Target Audience		
Mode		

An explanation was given in a way to enable easier connection to the translation context. Rather than use the terminology of field, tenor and mode, the categories for 'field' and 'tenor' were replaced with 'purpose' and 'target audience'. Prompts were also given as follows:

- Purpose: What is being talked about?
- Target audience: Relationship between the writer/the reader
- Mode: Where the text will appear

According to SFL, language simultaneously serves three functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The category of "purpose" was introduced to help students think about such multiple social functions of language. The target audience relates to tenor of the register categories. Tenor is not only about the reader but the relationship between the writer and the reader. However, due to

possible unfamiliarity of the terminology among students, the term “target audience” was used to as it is closer to “target reader” which translation students are more familiar with. This was introduced to encourage thinking about the tenor domain of the context of situation. The word “Mode” was used as it was, with an additional explanation of “where the text will appear”.

Furthermore, some additional discussion questions were prepared to elaborate on the context of the situation and encourage contemplation. Additional questions such as “Is the text formal or informal? Why do you think the writer wrote the text in this style?” and “What kind of relationship does the writer want to establish with the reader through his/her choice of language?” were added to the usual pre-translation discussion questions.

The students were given time to discuss this first of all with the previous week’s source text for practice. Once they had filled in the table based on the previous week’s source text and translation, they held small group discussions to share their register analysis. Following this practice, they were then asked to fill in a new register analysis for the Week 6 source text. From Week 6 onwards, the students filled out a register analysis each time they had a new in-class translation task.

The register analysis was filled in alongside consideration of the translation brief designated for the given translation task. The translation brief differed for each translation task, to enable variety and different perspectives during their translation tasks.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

Although at first students seemed to find it challenging to apply

the register analysis to their translation tasks when it was introduced, as the weeks went by it was evident that they became accustomed to using the register analysis prior to translating. Such evidence can be found in their study logs, in which they recorded summaries and thoughts of their learning at periodic intervals over the course of the semester.

Findings show the use of an SFL-derived register analysis in the translation classroom offers various advantages and pedagogical effects. For the classroom discussed in the current study, the table served to 1) enable deeper understanding of the source text message, 2) encourage the organisation of students' ideas during the analysis stage prior to translation, which in turn 3) enabled the making of decisions during the translation of a task with considerations relating to linguistic and modal factors and also 4) enable post-translation consideration, for purposes such as editing or reflection. This section will present examples from their register analysis documented in student study logs based on the same source text for discussion.

Weeks 12-14 of the semester were devoted to the translation of a business and economy topic text. A news article about business start ups among the younger adult population was used for the translation practice. The source text was short in length (125 Korean words including the headline and subheading) and the translation brief given to students was "You have been asked to translate the following for a local business and economy news magazine. They have an English-language version which is available both online and in print form". This period was selected for presentation of data as the table was introduced to the students in Week 6 and weeks 12-14 are near the end of the semester. Therefore it can be assumed the students had had sufficient time to become acquainted and accustomed to the table.

Students A, B and C below all incorporated their register analysis

in the study logs for the given assignment week (Week 14).

Table 2. Student A's register analysis

	ST	TT
Purpose/ message	How young adults consider founding their own start-up	How Korean young adults think about starting their own business and the how Korean economy is doing
Target audience	Relatively close relationship between author and the reader would relatively know about how the Korean economy is nowadays Informative	Close, but some foreigners might be reading Main target audience would be 'local' residents who would know how the Korean economy is doing
Mode	Online/offline	Online/offline local news magazine

Student A's register analysis shows consideration in relation to the differences in purpose/message of the two texts. For the ST (source text), Student A interpreted this at the primary level: as the article is a news article about business start-ups among the younger adult population in Korea, the purpose/message was seen as this. However, for the TT (target text), another perspective was added, of how the Korean economy is doing, in addition to the original ST message. As for the target audience, Student A decided that the relationship between the writer and reader of both ST and TT are similar in terms of distance, but for the TT while readers could be Korean, the addition of foreign readers is contemplated.

For Student B, the analysis of purpose and target audience is made on a level in terms of 'in' or 'out' of the source text society.

Table 3. Student B's register analysis

	Original Text	Your translation
Purpose	To inform people within the same society about the current business trend in Korea.  Providing information; fact	To inform people within, outside the society about the current business trend in Korea.  Providing information; fact
Target Audience	People within the same society who can find it easy to understand the content of the article and may have knowledge over the issue.  Non-specialists	People outside the society who do not have thorough knowledge over the issue. Thus, the translator may have to add footnotes, explanation inside the bracket and etc.  Non-specialists
Mode	Written form Both on-line, off-line (In local business and economy news magazine)	Written form Both on-line, off-line (In local business and economy news magazine)  I need to particularly consider that not only native English speakers can read the article but all English speakers throughout the world.

As the register analysis shows, while the overall purpose is the same for both ST and TT “to provide information and facts”, a differentiation is made in that the ST purpose is to inform those “within the same society” while for the TT it is to inform those both within and “outside the (source text culture) society”.

This consideration of ‘in’ and ‘out’ society factors also appears to influence Student B’s approach to the translation task. The student decided that for readers who are ‘out’ of the source text culture, additional information such as footnotes and explanations in brackets

may be needed. Additional notes are made regarding the possible need for additional information on behalf of the translator. Furthermore, Student B also made a note regarding the fact that possible target readers may not be only from countries where English is used as a first language, but from other countries too. This conclusion was arrived at through consideration of the ‘mode’ of the TT - as the translation product is to appear both online and offline, Student B considered the possible readers who may have access to the translation, in many countries around the world. Also, the fact that the audience may be ‘non-specialists’ of the topic is another factor considered.

Student C, meanwhile, had a similar analysis of the ST and TT, but considered the fact that while the purpose of the text is to “provide objective information” for both ST and TT, an additional consideration for the TT is the provision of this objective information so that it is understandable to non-Korean speakers.

Table 4. Student C’s register analysis

	Original Text	Translated Text
Purpose/ Message	To provide objective information about Korea’s economy and business	To provide objective information about Korea’s economy and business so that it can be understood by non-Korean speakers as well.
Target Audience	-Korean readers that are interested in business and economy related issues. -Those that may not be familiar with the terms	-Korean readers that can read English -Local English speaking foreigners -International readers that might land on the page through internet search
Mode	Online and offline	Online and offline local business and economy magazine.

Student C also considered the interests of the ST readers, and the target groups of the TT may include local Korean readers who may read in English, the local English-speaking foreign community and also readers around the world who may access the text via the internet.

As the examples show, the use of SFL-derived register analysis in the translation classroom enables students to analyse the purpose, target audience and mode of the source and target texts while organising their thoughts and ideas. Such analysis is carried out based on what information is available to the students in the source text (also through background research) and also in the designated translation brief. Through the analysis, students are able to make translation decisions based on considerations made. For example, Student A decided that as the article is a news article about business start-ups among the younger adult population in Korea, the purpose/message was seen as this. However, for the TT (target text), another perspective was added, of how the Korean economy is doing, in addition to the original ST message. As for the target audience, Student A decided that the relationship between the writer and reader of both ST and TT are similar in terms of distance, but for the TT while readers could be Korean, the addition of foreign readers is contemplated. For Student B, it was decided that for readers who are 'out' of the source text culture, additional information such as footnotes and explanations in brackets may be needed. Student C considered the scope of the target reader as well as the mode of the target text.

The following section will now present qualitative excerpts of students' comments made in their study logs regarding the register analysis, to gain insight to how students felt about the use of the SFL-derived register analysis in their translation tasks and the role



the SFL analysis register played.

Student D comments on the application of the table in Week 6, which was when the register analysis was first introduced to the students in class. As mentioned previously in the Methodology section, students were first asked to use the previous week's text to practice the filling out of the register analysis. Student D mentions how the table helped him or her to gain an understanding of ideas which had been "vague" during translation. It appears that although the register analysis was written out as practice, it helped the student clarify their ideas and in turn apply these during the editing of the translated text.

It was mentioned during class how the analysis tables are to be used to evaluate the ST and TT's audience. As suggested, I did the analysis table after the translation exercise. It helped me understand the vague ideas I had while translating better, and to clarify it. It helped me justify my way of translation. For instance, I tried my best to use easy language because the ST was to be in a travel magazine. While writing the analysis table, I wrote this. By writing the analysis table, because it clarified what I wanted to convey through the translation, I could edit my translation much easily (Student D, Week 6).

Students E and F comment in their study logs, during the Week 11 entries, about the analysis of the texts. Weeks 9-11 were devoted to the translation of a text that addresses a social topic. Student E explicitly mentions the use of the table to "arrange" the content of the text. The student makes an interesting observation about the perceived target reader:

First things first, I filled out the analysis table to arrange the contents. The purpose of the original text was to tell people that the old are being left out, and that people should do what they can to

help out. This article's target readers are most likely adults that are living separately from their parents, or people that are thinking of doing so. This news would fit perfectly in the section labeled 'society' (Student E, Week 11).

Student E believes that the potential readers of the source text would be those which the topic at hand may be directly relevant to. This interpretation of the source text message influences the student's approach to the translation task:

The purpose of my translation was of course to make people understand the situation, but also make it so that the readers who saw my translation would feel a bit more responsible for maintaining family relationships. The target audiences were people around the world that read this news site (which is based in the UK). The mode could be the social section of the internet news, something like the 'world issue' section of the magazine (Student E, Week 11).

The student appears to feel there to be an additional role of the translator: to render the translation in a way that would make readers feel "a bit more responsible for maintaining family relationships". Furthermore, the student also considers the 'mode', i.e. where the translation product will appear, and in what form.

Student F's excerpt shows the considerations made regarding the categories of 'Purpose', 'Target audience' and 'mode':

On a piece of paper, I drew the charts and wrote that the purpose of the original text was to discuss the issue of the growth in the number of South Korean elderly living apart from their children while having the Korean newspaper subscribers as its target audience. According to my analysis table, the relationship between the writer and the readers was a passive one where the writer simply just informed his audience of a local issue happening in Korea; unlike the previous articles no

such discussion between the author and the readers was expected to take place. In addition, I said the original text was to appear on a newspaper owned by a prominent Korean newspaper agency both in the form of online and offline text. I also noted that the purpose of my translation draft was to simply talk about the same issue as the original text but somehow convert some technical terms in Korean into simpler words in English since most of the subscribers of the U.K news site are non-specialists. The relationship between the writer and the readers in my draft was the same as that of the original text and I mentioned that the translated text would appear on one of the sections of the monthly online magazine from the U.K.; I probably would be required to pay close attention to the appearance of the subheadings and the headings (Student F, Week 11).

The student demonstrates considerations which arise from the analysis: the purpose of the text, the readers (subscribers, non-specialists) and the mode: as the brief specified a UK-based outlet online, the student consciously thinks about the appearance of the headline and subheadings.

In addition to enabling the organisation of ideas before and during the translation task, the register analysis also seems to function as a reminder of the student's ideas. As three weeks were spent on each topic during the latter half of the semester, the use of a register analysis can also serve to enable students to look back on and remember their ideas made at the analysis stage.

## 5. Conclusion

As this section has shown, the register analysis based on SFL, like language itself, can be multifunctional. On a primary level, it enables students to organise their ideas in relation to the contemplation of

source and target text based on the information available to them, and put these into perspective. Following such analysis, they are then able to make decisions based on such considerations during their translation tasks. The table also enables students to refer back to their analysis after the translation task, either for editing purposes or reflection. This can also be a useful function of the register analysis.

As mentioned previously, SFL can enable students to examine how language is used to create meaning within the given translation task, which has a particular setting involving a potential target reader and within particular channels of communication. As the data demonstrates, the register analysis provides students with such an opportunity: they consider linguistic factors as a result of their analysis, such as the choice of word or register, sentence length and such based on who the target readers are, and in what form the target text will appear.

The analysis of the source text from an SFL viewpoint enables students to negotiate the meanings contained within the source text and the intention of the writer of the source text whilst contemplating the power of linguistic choices made for the given context. As such, it can serve to encourage consideration of how to express the message in the target text for the potential target reader, and to aid their decisions made during translation processes such as word choice. In the case of Student E, this 'power' of linguistic choice is considered, and the student shows an awareness of the power which translator can have when serving as communicators between source and target text.

Furthermore, translation, which is a communicative act between the source text writer, translator and then target text reader, requires the identification and analysis of source text intention and message. The use of the table emphasises the communicative nature of

translation, particularly through the ‘purpose’ and ‘target audience’ categories.

While the current study is a report on the application of this pedagogical approach, further research will include more in-depth analysis of translation choices stemming from the approach in various areas such as translation decisions in linguistic areas including lexical choice and style, as well as comparisons of decisions made according to different translation briefs and target audiences.

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