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# THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY AND SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

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**Abstract.** *Media perform a fundamental role in contemporary society: being intermediaries between users and the real world, they replace physical experience, construct views and knowledge, and shape attitudes, beliefs, and opinions that lead to the specific decisions and actions of individuals and groups. This article gives an overview of developments in the composite concept of media and information literacy and the premises of systemic functional linguistics that are relevant under the conditions of the current infodemic. The authors of this paper propose an approach that combines functional and social-cognitive elements, aiming to explain how we become susceptible to mis- and*

*disinformation and to raise awareness of how certain discursive practices become embedded in societal life. For media and information literacy to be a fully-fledged concept, it is vital to consider the ability to discern subjectivity and emotion in post-truth narratives. The notion of narrative as a cognitive structure is also fundamental because disinformation and misinformation spread as granular digital formations encompassing fragments of information from a multiplicity of fields.*

**Keywords:** *media and information literacy, systemic functional linguistics, social-cognitive approach, disinformation, misinformation, subjectivity, post-truth, narrative*

## Introduction

Bearing in mind current concerns about what researchers have called an *infodemic* and the spread of misinformation, disinformation, false news, and propaganda, it is necessary to find ways to cope with these problems as they are directly related to such important societal events as elections or the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, publications about media and information literacy focus on classifications of skills associated with being media literate and approach it from the pedagogical point of view, but a broader perspective has become very relevant in the context of the infodemic. Media perform a fundamental role in contemporary society: being intermediaries between users and the real world, they replace physical experience, construct views and knowledge, and shape the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions that lead to specific decisions and the actions of individuals and groups.<sup>1</sup> The complexity of the media landscape requires multidisciplinary knowledge. For instance, Lenker<sup>2</sup> builds on the developmentalist conception of the value of information, and believes that knowing trustworthiness criteria and using information afterwards do not help much if they are taken as separate stages. Lenker<sup>3</sup> believes that an essential link between the two has been neglected. In other words, simply locating resources for supporting one's opinion does not entail an awareness of how and why information is seen as useful and what is learnt from it. We also remain unaware as to how our media exposure impacts our knowledge construction in fact.

Generally, it is agreed that media and information literacy (MIL) comprises skills which help people to cope with challenges posed by misinformation, disinformation,

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- 1 Landry, N., "Articuler les dimensions constitutives de l'éducation aux médias", *Tic&société* 11, 1 (2017): 7–45. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ticetsociete.2236>. Also: Potter, W. J., *Media Literacy*, 5th edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011); Vaičiūnienė, V., and Mažeikienė, V., "Media Literacy and Information Literacy: Conceptual Convergence into a Composite Notion of MIL", *Socialinių mokslų studijos / Societal studies* 8, 1 (2016): 78–94. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13165/SMS%2016-8-1-5>
  - 2 Lenker, M., "Developmentalism: Learning as the Basis for Evaluating Information", *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, 4 (2017): 721–737. <http://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0043>
  - 3 *Ibid.*

false news, and propaganda in a deeply mediatized world. These skills are important because, in addition to critical thinking, they also imply an understanding of the nature of contemporary media, the principles of their functioning, and their aims and impact. Some researchers have extended this viewpoint as far as highlighting that the media that we use daily also bear material aspects that we must be aware of. Lopez<sup>4</sup>, for instance, introduces the notion of *ecomedia* and maintains that being media literate means being aware of one's toxic *footprint* on the planet (for example, exhausting natural resources, causing social harm such as child labor, etc.) and *mindprint*, "[...] the way that ICTs influence how we define, act upon, and survive within the living planet, what Corbett (2006) calls environmental ideology". As mentioned above, there is a noticeable tendency among scholars to seek the convergence of different knowledge fields. For Lopez, too, it is essential to view media literacy in the framework of systems thinking, and here Lopez builds on the fundamental work of Donella Meadows: "One of the pioneering public intellectuals of the 20th century who advocated systems dynamics, Donella Meadows, wrote extensively about the relationship between media and systems thought. System dynamics, she writes, 'makes clear the overarching power of deep, socially shared ideas about the nature of the world. Out of those ideas arise our systems—government systems, economic systems, technical systems, family systems, environmental systems' (Meadows, 1991, p. 2)".<sup>5</sup> Thus, media and information literacy emerges as a multi-faceted notion. Its complexity is discussed in more detail in the sections below.

It is also important to note that information reaches us in complex shapes: essentially, multimodality is gaining more importance while the amount of traditional lengthy linear text is declining. That is why it is insufficient today to have only definitions of MIL and classifications of MIL skills. Instead, it is necessary to perform more in-depth research as to how contextualized language use is related with the presentation of information in news portals and social media; for instance, how populists manage to propagate a particular worldview or how conspiracy theories spread. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explicate potential relationships between two *seemingly* different fields – media and information literacy and functional-cognitive linguistics – as they are seen by the authors.

### Media and information literacy and the functional-cognitive approach

Firstly, MIL as a composite concept encompasses complex issues, and an extensive body of literature exists on the scope of the concept. Some researchers approach *literacy* from a wide perspective,<sup>6</sup> and today the concept has become strongly em-

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4 Lopez, A., *Ecomedia Literacy. Integrating Ecology into Media Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 8.

5 *Ibid.*, 15.

6 Moreno-Morilla, C., Guzmán-Simón, F., & García-Jiménez, E., "Rethinking Literacy from a Mixed-Methods Approach: Through the Lens of Pupils, Families, and Teachers in Spanish Primary Educa-

bedded in the context of technologies and information and communication media. What is more, the advent of commercial social media platforms, their widespread use in work, study, and leisure, and the blurring of boundaries between information, entertainment, and consumerism have all contributed to the necessity of re-thinking literacy as a phenomenon, and have resulted in increased concern about the skills that we need today. More specified concepts such as media literacy, digital literacy, information literacy, critical literacy, etc., have been seen as corresponding to diverse aspects of today's reality. In search of an all-encompassing approach, UNESCO introduced the composite concept of *media and information literacy*,<sup>7</sup> and since then ample work has been conducted on this concept.<sup>8</sup> In the influential American school of thought, the composite term *digital and media literacy* has been proposed.<sup>9</sup>

The appropriateness of the terms *literacy* and *media literacy* has been questioned by such scholars as Kress,<sup>10</sup> who object to the metaphorical use of the term *literacy* in such combinations as *cultural literacy*, *media literacy*, *computer literacy*, *social literacy*, and *emotional literacy* (and many others) because, in his words, "*Literacy* remains the term which refers to (the knowledge of) the use of the resource of writing".<sup>11</sup> This viewpoint opposes that of scholars who view literacy from a very

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tion", *RELIEVE – Revista Electrónica de Investigación y Evaluación Educativa* 26, 2 (2020): 1–21. Also: Perry, K. H., "What is Literacy? – A Critical Overview of Sociocultural Perspectives", *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* 8, 1 (2012): 50–71; Stordy, P. H., "Taxonomy of Literacies", *Journal of Documentation* 71, 3 (2015): 456–476; Tamošiūnienė, L., "Reviewing the Scope of Literacy. A Case of Scholarly Identities", *Socialinių mokslų studijos / Societal Studies* 3, 1 (2011): 7–15.

- 7 The term *media and information literacy* was recommended for the first time by UNESCO back in 2007 in order to respond to the ongoing changes in media cultures determined by digitization and UNESCO's focus on freedom of expression in knowledge societies.
- 8 Carlsson, U., "Media and Information Literacy: Field of Knowledge, Concepts and History", in *Understanding Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in the Digital Age: A Question of Democracy*, edited by U. Carlsson (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2019). Also: Grizzle, A., et al., *Media and Information Literacy: Policy and Strategy Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 2013); Whitworth, A., "The Design of Media and Information Literacy", in *Media and Information Literacy for Knowledge Society* (Moscow, Russian Federation, 2013), accessed 15 May 2018, from [http://ifapcom.ru/files/News/Images/2013/mil\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://ifapcom.ru/files/News/Images/2013/mil_eng_web.pdf); Wilson, C., "Media and Information Literacy: Pedagogy and Possibilities", *Comunicar* 20, 39 (2012): 15–24; and many others.
- 9 Hobbs, R., *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action* (Washington: The Aspen Institute, 2010), accessed 17 September 2020, from [https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Digital\\_and\\_Media\\_Literacy.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Digital_and_Media_Literacy.pdf); Hobbs, R. (Ed.), *Exploring the Roots of Digital and Media Literacy through Personal Narrative* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).
- 10 Kress, G., *Literacy in the New Media Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003); Kress, G., "A Rhetorical Approach: The Social as Prior", presentation at the 1st International Seminar on Master programme of UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia – National University of Distance Education) "Social Networks and Digital Learning", Madrid, May 2012. Video recording, accessed 18 January 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgsboD4orIs>
- 11 Kress, *Literacy*, *supra note*, 10: 24 (italics in the original).

broad perspective, as mentioned in the previous passage. Tamošiūnienė<sup>12</sup> noted that “[...] nowadays the scholarly understanding of literacy exceeds by far the identification with the two abilities, or, rather, the questioning of these abilities yields so many levels of ideological, political, social, psychological, technological, semiotic, linguistic and other approaches that the very concept of literacy is for convenience and clarity sake divided into multiple literacies”. In fact, such specifying concepts that use the term *literacy* metaphorically bring to the fore particular aspects that matter in the complex informational and communicative landscape of today (as with *information* in Library and Information Science, *media* in Communication Science, or *digital* in the context of contemporary technologies across disciplines). The terms *media literacy* and the composite term *media and information literacy* have recently become widely accepted, and common definitions today define literacy as an ability that is not delimited only to the skills of writing or reading (as opposed to numeracy, for instance), but rather as a multifaceted phenomenon. For instance, Whitworth<sup>13</sup> refers to literacy as a *holistic* concept and explicates what he sees as the skills of a media literate individual – one who can *validate* information against *generic, personal, and context-based* criteria: “A holistic Media and Information Literacy can be defined as the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices required to access, analyse, evaluate, use, create, and communicate information and knowledge, in creative, legal and ethical ways”.

With the advent of interactive media, users have become not only consumers but also producers of content. As a consequence, principles of ethics and personal responsibility have been applied to all types of media (traditional press, radio, TV, film, advertisement, internet), information repositories, and providers (physical and digital libraries, archives, museums, databases), irrespective of the technologies used: media literacy “is concerned with people’s ability to access and process information from any form of transmission”.<sup>14</sup> Both use and production are seen as highly relevant: “Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media”.<sup>15</sup> In addition, a range of relevant competences is also referred to: “[...] the term ‘digital and media literacy’ is used to encompass the full range of cognitive, emotional and social competencies that includes the use of texts, tools and technologies; the skills of critical thinking

12 Tamošiūnienė, L. “Reviewing the Scope of Literacy. A Case of Scholarly Identities”. *Socialinių mokslų studijos / Societal Studies* 3, 1 (2011): 8.

13 Whitworth, A., “The Design of Media and Information Literacy”, in *Media and Information Literacy for Knowledge Society* (Moscow, Russian Federation, 2013), 47. Accessed 15 May 2018, from [http://ifapcom.ru/files/News/Images/2013/mil\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://ifapcom.ru/files/News/Images/2013/mil_eng_web.pdf)

14 Potter, *supra* note, 1: 12.

15 Kellner, D., and Share, J., “Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core Concepts, Debates, Organizations, and Policy”, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 26, 3 (2005): 369–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596300500200169>

and analysis; the practice of message composition and creativity; the ability to engage in reflection and ethical thinking; as well as active participation through teamwork and collaboration”.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, taking into consideration what has been mentioned above, literacy in this paper is viewed from the perspective that highlights *cognition* and *participatory attitude* as defined by Kellner and Share: “Literacy involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read, interpret, and produce certain types of texts and artefacts and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one’s culture and society”.<sup>17</sup> It also has to be noted that literacy continues to be seen not only as an endpoint ability but as an *ongoing process*,<sup>18</sup> and as a phenomenon that functions within *socially-situated practices*<sup>19</sup> and evidences both the *social turn*<sup>20</sup> and the *digital turn*<sup>21</sup> in studies of multiple literacies.

The focus on individual participation in culture and society is essential when we think about the role social media play today in our search, selection, and dissemination of information of all sorts. In an information saturated environment, media literacy skills contribute to becoming more aware of the consequences of our actions, such as sharing content on social media. Vosoughi et al.<sup>22</sup> investigated the spread of true and false news online, noting that *novelty* strongly drives the sharing of viral news and that false news is more likely to be shared. For this research, the authors used a lexicon which contained a list of 140,000 English words associated with basic emotions that were expressed by users, and found that the spread of false rumours was inspired by six basic emotions (surprise, disgust, sadness, anticipation, joy, and trust). Interestingly, the authors determined that, contrary to common expectations, individual characteristics and network structure do not promote the spread of false news, but rather it hinges on the perception of novelty in terms of emotions experienced during exposure to news. It was also found that human behaviour, not robots or algorithms, contributed more to the spread of false news. Therefore, the authors noted that policies aimed at misinformation containment should not focus so much

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16 Hobbs, *Digital and Media Literacy*, *supra note*, 9: 17.

17 Kellner and Share, *supra note*, 15: 369.

18 Brabazon, T., *University of Google: Education in the (Post) Information Age* (London: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2012). Also: Street, B., *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

19 Luke, A., “Critical Literacy in Australia: A Matter of Context and Standpoint”, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 43, 5 (2000): 448–461.

20 Gee, J. P., “The New Literacy Studies: From ‘Socially Situated’ to the Work of the Social”. In *Situated Literacies: Theorising Reading and Writing in Context* (Taylor and Francis, 2005), 177–193.

21 Mills, K. A., “A Review of the ‘Digital Turn’ in the New Literacy Studies”, *Review of Educational Research* 80, 2 (2010): 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654310364401>

22 Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., and Aral, S., “The Spread of True and False News Online”, *Science* 359, 6380 (2018): 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>

on preventing bots, but rather on human behavioural change and awareness of how false news spreads.

Consequently, some scholars have suggested concentrating not so much on the technological side, which inherently underlies the notion of literacy today, but rather on the human perspective; that is, the cognitive skills of individuals and their social practices.<sup>23</sup> This has served as a vantage point for the authors of this paper in her attempts to elaborate on the work of such scholars as Stordy<sup>24</sup> and Hobbs<sup>25</sup> and to contribute to the field by incorporating insights from the functional-cognitive linguistic perspective. Language as a social semiotic system serves as a resource for meaning making<sup>26</sup> and discursive practices. Hallidayan theory is the most influential among the few linguistic schools of thought that have highlighted the importance of context. However, as noted by Chilton,<sup>27</sup> being essentially classificatory, the systemic-functional approach also has to be supplemented with cognitive-linguistic insights. Moreover, as Chilton<sup>28</sup> maintains, in the post-truth era, these models have to be further supplemented with findings from psycholinguistic models of truth, Searl's speech act theory, Grice's cooperative principle and maxims, and Habermas' notion of validity claims and discourse ethics.

Looking at the origins of functionalism, the theories of communicative dynamism<sup>29</sup> and the functional sentence perspective<sup>30</sup> lie at its core. Communicative dynamism builds on the assumption of communication being driven by the communicative purpose and the contribution of language to achieve that purpose. The functional sentence perspective explains how the distribution of linguistic elements increases communicative dynamism. Halliday<sup>31</sup> elaborated on the distinction between theme

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23 Stordy, P. H., "Taxonomy of Literacies", *Journal of Documentation* 71, 3 (2015): 456–476.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Hobbs, R., *supra note*, 9. Also: Hobbs, R. (Ed.), *Exploring the Roots of Digital and Media Literacy through Personal Narrative* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016).

26 Halliday, M. A. K., *Language as Social Semiotic* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978); Halliday, M. A. K., *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 1st ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1985); Halliday, M. A. K., and Matthiessen, C. M. I. M., *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

27 Chilton, P., "Stance, Truth and Lies in a Post-Truth Discourse Environment", presentation at the International Conference on Stance, (Inter)Subjectivity and Identity in Discourse (STANCEDISC'20), Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 9–11 September 2020.

28 *Ibid.*

29 Danes, F., "Functional Sentence Perspective and the Organization of the Text", in *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective*, edited by F. Danes (Prague: Academia/The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 106–128.

30 Firbas, J., "On Defining the Theme in Functional Sentence Analysis", *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague* 1 (1964): 267–280; Firbas, J., "On the Dynamics of Written Communication in the Light of the Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective", in *Studying Writing*, edited by C. R. Cooper and S. Greenbaum (London: Sage, 1986), 40–71.

31 Halliday, M. A. K., "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English: Part 2", *Journal of Linguistics* 3 (1967): 199–244.

and rheme in the thematic structure of clauses, and laid down the foundations for the investigation into how the linear organization of texts can be manipulated by the writer/speaker to highlight certain items in discourse, and how listener-oriented information can be presented as either given or new.<sup>32</sup> From then on, Hallidayan theory became prominent in the studies of communication from the social semiotic perspective.

Systemic-functional linguistics provides analytical tools for looking at the existing discursive practices and the evolving narratives which can be intentionally malevolent (in the case of disinformation), unintentionally misleading (in the case of misinformation), or either harmful or beneficial (in the case of propaganda), alongside other harmful actions such as the spreading of false news, rumours, or conspiracy theories. The rapidly evolving informational landscape has made the perception of truth very fluid; this fluidity is a symptom of the post-truth world. Very specific examples of this fluidity are the changing perceptions of once stable notions. For instance, Hobbs<sup>33</sup> (2020) notes that today the term *fake news* “conceals more than it reveals”. Hobbs notes that, in the 1980s, the term was associated with entertainment-oriented television and comedy journalism, and, consequently, that entertainment values contributed to the weakening of trust in journalism in general. Fundamental changes occurred because of Donald Trump’s widespread use of the term: “The term fake news shifted its meaning rather quickly when President Donald Trump began repeatedly using the term in rallies and tweets to disparage press. Whenever journalists reported on his behaviours and policies in ways he did not find flattering enough, he labelled them with the phrase, saying ‘you’re fake news’. Others began using the term even more broadly to refer to partisan journalism and political spin”.<sup>34</sup> Such examples evidence that we have to be very attentive to the use of language in context and very sensitive to language changes that occur rapidly in the contemporary media landscape and that are conditioned by the symbiotic relationship between humans and media.

The analytic tools offered by Hallidayan social semiotic theory help in seeing what makes one rendering of an idea different from another potential rendering of the same idea. The social-cognitive perspective allows assumptions to be made about the motives behind the choices of language users. Within the *systemic-functional* perspective, therefore, scholars take into consideration the three interrelated levels of language: the expression level, the content level, and the extralinguistic level of context (situation and culture). Within the *social-cognitive* perspective, researchers often apply the three-dimensional analytical framework proposed by Fairclough<sup>35</sup> for

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32 Halliday, *supra note*, 26: 1985.

33 Hobbs, R., *Mind over Media: Propaganda Education in the Digital Age* (New York (USA): Norton Professional Books, 2020), 28.

34 Hobbs, *supra note*, 33.

35 Fairclough, N., *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London and New York: Longman, 2010), 133.

studying contextual factors of discursive events; in this framework, an event is seen as an instance of text (micro level), discourse practice (mezzo level), and social practice (macro level). In addition to these dimensions, there is an additional layer of meaning that is discussed in the passages below.

The three metafunctions of language – *experiential (ideational)*, *interpersonal*, and *textual* – operate and intersect across discursive events. Investigation of their manifestations allows for the identification of key structures in discourse that determine how particular points of view are constructed and how they can be perceived. Being one of the main purposes of communication, interaction inherently implies interpersonal links and the motives of individuals. Research on the interpersonal function has become especially relevant in the era of social media, which has made such issues as disinformation, the viral spread of hate or racist speech, clickbait, etc., very acute. Researchers have exploited analytical tools offered by the functional approach to investigate the interpersonal metafunction. For instance, Menard<sup>36</sup> points out that modalities are essential in constructing and deconstructing ideologies, and are both resources for representing truth and reality and analytical cognitive aspects reflecting relationships between authors and their audiences. Modality can also be looked upon from the power perspective and the perception of truthfulness – as in Shi,<sup>37</sup> where the author investigated interactions in a Chinese courtroom trial and found that the actors holding institutional power (such as judges) employ modality for clarifying duties, rights, regulations, prohibitions, etc., and when modality is employed by the powerless, non-institutional actors, their statements and expressed meanings are perceived as less credible and accurate. Gavins and Simpson<sup>38</sup> combined a range of pragmatic, systemic-functional, and cognitive-linguistic strategies to show how their confluence can change a specific verbal exchange (a speech act) entailing multiple legal and mediatized ramifications. Gavins and Simpson<sup>39</sup> also analysed modality, polarity, and modalization in combination with the analysis of verbal irony and the discursive positions of key actors to reveal how, in the long run, initial intentions become framed and mitigated.

Ideational meanings can also render important insights into representational processes and the ideologies inherent in them. For instance, Oktar,<sup>40</sup> building on the social identity theory, maintained that it is important to consider representa-

36 Menard, R., “Analyzing Ideological Complexes from the Perspective of Modalities”, *Text & Talk* 38, 6 (2018): 729–751. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2018-0021>

37 Shi, G., “An Analysis of Modality in Chinese Courtroom Discourse”, *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 7, 2 (2012): 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2011.581285>

38 Gavins, J., and Simpson, P., “Regina v John Terry: The Discursive Construction of an Alleged Racist Event”, *Discourse & Society* 26, 6 (2015): 712–732. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926515592783>

39 Gavins and Simpson, *supra note*, 38.

40 Oktar, L., “The Ideological Organization of Representational Processes in the Presentation of Us and Them”, *Discourse & Society* 12, 3 (2001): 313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926501012003003>

tion in terms of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. From the social-cognitive perspective, the representation of oneself and other has become a much-debated topic during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the relevant discursive and linguistic means used in constructing collective identities have been researched.<sup>41</sup>

Analyses of the textual metafunction are pertinent to thinking about how narratives evolve. Textual cohesion and coherence contribute to making sense of our exposure to information as a unified whole. Koller<sup>42</sup> investigated gay rights as a symbol of ideological struggles and, as part of her research, investigated cohesion in the analysed texts to understand how ideologies are used to align with or distance oneself from them.

As the three metafunctions are systemically interrelated, it is common to investigate the manifestations of all three in a researched discursive event. Koller,<sup>43</sup> in her multi-layered approach to analysing collective identity in discourse, investigated social actor representation, processes, evaluation, modality, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, metaphoric expressions, and semiotics. In Tseng's<sup>44</sup> study, discourse markers, traditionally seen as structural textual items, were studied as markers of the presence of authorial voice. Similarly, Maschler and Estlein<sup>45</sup> investigated the uses of the Hebrew interpersonal item "be'emet" (really, actually, indeed – literally "in truth") as a marker of the speaker's attitudes and beliefs in terms of modality, evidentiality, and authorial stance. The scholars found that the great majority (70%) of the tokens of "be'emet" function on the interpersonal plain of discourse and perform roles that are mirative, reprimanding, or negating any doubt, or they ratify a previous attitude or elaborate on a new topic. Zappavigna<sup>46</sup> maintained that hashtags are flexible semiotic resources that construe complex meanings in social media texts. The author noted that, in addition to construing experience as topic markers, organizing text meta-discursively, and indicating

41 Kranert, M., et al., "COVID-19: The World and the Words: Linguistic Means and Discursive Constructions", *DiscourseNet Collaborative Working Paper Series no. 2/9* (2020), 1–8.

42 Koller, V., "Gay Rights as a Symbol of Ideological Struggles Between Russia and the West: A Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis", in *Political Discourse in Central, Eastern and Balkan Europe*, edited by Martina Berrocal and Aleksandra Salamurović (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019), 69–92.

43 Koller, V., "How to Analyse Collective Identity in Discourse-Textual and Contextual Parameters", *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines* 5, 2 (2012): 19–38.

44 Tseng, M.-Y., "Dan as a Discourse Marker, Metadiscourse Device and Metapragmatic Marker: Examples from the Evaluation Reports of Taiwan's Higher Education Sector", *Journal of Pragmatics* 50, 1 (2013): 108–128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.01.011>

45 Maschler, Y., and Estlein, R., "Stance-taking in Hebrew casual conversation via be'emet (.really, actually, indeed', lit. 'in truth')", *Discourse Studies* 10, 3 (2008): 283–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445608090222>

46 Zappavigna, M., "Searchable Talk: The Linguistic Functions of Hashtags", *Social Semiotics* 25, 3 (2015): 289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2014.996948>

ambient intertextuality, hashtags also enact interpersonal relationships and indicate an evaluative stance. For instance, they may issue commands, invoke a feeling of community with people that feel similarly, enhance social bonding, and align one with imagined audiences.

### The combinatorial approach: discerning subjectivity, evaluation, and emotion in post-truth narratives

Within the framework of the arguments laid out above, two important reasons for the combinatorial approach can be mentioned. Firstly, the combinatorial approach offers useful analytical tools for investigating evaluation and subjectivity. As noted by some researchers, public discourse, media discourse, and, especially, social media discourse, are becoming more emotional,<sup>47</sup> and emotion-channelling stories tend to prevail over neutral analytical texts in journalistic discourse.<sup>48</sup> This is relevant in the context of this paper because, if we are to better understand how media shape our perception of the world, we have to be able to discern emotion-driven and emotion- content today more than ever. The traditional distinction between fact and opinion in teaching critical thinking did not focus enough on emotion, evaluation, and subjectivity because the need to do so has been accelerated only after exponential growth in the use of information and communication media, which have never before had such a huge impact on our decision-making. Today, social media are much more rapid in reacting to such events as terrorist attacks, elections, natural calamities, and the spread and control of diseases than governments. Social media burst with information of all kinds in a matter of seconds. Researchers note that, mostly due to the nature of social media, the boundaries between the previous conventions of professional public discourse and mundane communication (for instance, informal conversation) are blurring. Social media communication uses much shorter forms of expression, multimodal and intertextual sources, and, as mentioned above, increasing amounts of emotion-laden and emotion-stirring content. Therefore, the language of evaluation, authorial stance, and intersubjectivity must be taken into consideration when we deal with issues such as disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and false news in post-truth narratives. Thus, it can be argued that (i) the awareness of the tendency of social media content to thrive on messages that are aimed at evoking strong emotions and (ii) the ability to spot elements of evaluation and subjectivity seem to form an increasingly important part of MIL today.

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47 Bolívar, A., "Emotions and Ideology in Times of Political Change", presentation at Open DiscourseNet Seminar, London - monthly online seminar in Discourse Studies, 19 July 2020. Video recording, accessed 19 July 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W7Qjr9yyia0>

48 Alba-Juez, L., and Mackenzie, J. L., "Emotion, Lies, and "Bullshit" in Journalistic Discourse: The Case of Fake News", *Ibérica* 38 (2019), 17–50.

Secondly, another important aspect that must supplement a fully-fledged concept of MIL is the notion of narrative. In the approach developed by the authors of this paper, the work of Herman<sup>49</sup> is taken as a theoretical basis. Herman<sup>50</sup> distinguishes four elements of a narrative: (i) *situatedness* (a situated mode of representation, a specific discourse context, an occasion), (ii) *event sequencing*, (iii) *worldmaking/world disruption* in a storyworld (a mental model), and the (iv) *what's it like* element (how narrative is experienced or lived-through). Herman's<sup>51</sup> model takes into consideration Ryan's<sup>52</sup> theory of narrative, where narrative is viewed both as a certain type of text (an artefact) and a cognitive structure. The focus on the cognitive framework of narrative is of utmost importance for the combinatorial approach described in this paper for the following reasons. Firstly, disinformation often spreads through social media which generally employ short textual, multimodal, and intertextual modes of representation. The attention of social media users is often drawn by skilfully written clickbait and hashtags, lengthy texts are not attentively read to the end, and content is easily, even impulsively shared. Therefore, we can no longer view narratives only from the classical narratological perspective. Shortening textual forms, the granularity of information, informational overload, and the increasing importance of visual representation – all of this requires new concepts such as “interactive digital narrative” (IDN)<sup>53</sup>: “An IDN work does not need to be similar to the literary novel or the movie to be considered a narrative”. In other words, “[...] narrative is a cognitive activity, which may or may not be realized as an artefact falling within the text type *narrative*. That text-type category in turn encompasses a variety of media and representational conventions, ranging from those used in sign language and cinematic narrative to face-to-face storytelling and avant-garde literary narrative”.<sup>54</sup> Viewing narrative as a mental construct rather than an artefact is important in explaining how disinformation spreads and functions. Herman<sup>55</sup> discusses the relationships between scientific explanation and narrative, and notes that “disentangling” descriptions from narratives is impossible; for this reason, narratives have to be studied both as “causes and symptoms of the webs of beliefs in which any (scientific or other) description of the world must be situated”. In addition, if we take into consideration the premises of functional linguistics regarding, for instance, the ideational representation of the world, and if we focus our attention on the types

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49 Herman, D., *Basics Elements of Narrative* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*, 76.

52 Ryan, M.-L., “Narrative”, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by D. Herman, M. Jahn, and M.-L. Ryan (London: Routledge, 2005), 344–348.

53 Koenitz, H., et al., *INDCOR White Paper 1: A shared vocabulary for IDN (Interactive Digital Narratives)*. White Paper, COST Action 18230, 20 October 2020. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2010.10135>

54 Herman, *supra note*, 49: 92.

55 *Ibid.*, 102.

of processes (material, mental, relational, behavioural, verbal, or existential) in a particular discourse (for instance, climate change or COVID-19 vaccination), we will see, as Thompson<sup>56</sup> puts it, “[...] patterns of choices that were made in one text but not in the other, and relate the differences to the context”. Thompson<sup>57</sup> notes that the reasons for these choices are worth paying attention to because they give us a better understanding of how context relates to linguistic choices. Therefore, researchers have highlighted the need to expand investigations of disinformation so that they do not focus either on the development of literacies or on isolated linguistic phenomena, but rather pay more attention to overall language construction in disinformation.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

Informational overload, complex multimodal interactive narratives, and the blurring boundaries between work and leisure have made it difficult to discern reliable information. The combinatorial approach which is described in this paper (i) explains well how we become susceptible to mis- and disinformation, and (ii) makes us more aware of how certain discursive practices become embedded in societal life. For media and information literacy to be a fully-fledged concept, it is vital to consider the ability to discern subjectivity and emotion in post-truth narratives. The reconsidered notion of narrative is also fundamental because disinformation and misinformation spread as granular digital formations, encompassing fragments of information from a multiplicity of fields. These formations are increasingly multimodal and interactive, engaging users in the spread of both true and false information, often unwittingly and unintentionally. Most importantly, a better understanding of how our linguistic and discursive practices impact our lives and how information and communication media shape our worldviews makes us more resistant to the hardly predictable consequences of the current infodemic.

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56 Thompson, G., *Introducing Functional Grammar*, 3rd edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 133.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Vereshchaka, A., Cosimini, S., and Dong, W., “Analyzing and Distinguishing Fake and Real News to Mitigate the Problem of Disinformation”, *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory* 26 (2020): 350–364. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10588-020-09307-8>

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## MEDIJŲ IR INFORMACINIO RAŠTINGUMO BEI SISTEMINĖS FUNKCINĖS LINGVISTIKOS SĄSAJOS

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**Santrauka.** *Medijų vaidmuo šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje yra esminis: jos veikia kaip tarpininkai tarp naudotojų ir tikrovės, atstoja fizinę patirtį, konstruoja pasaulėžiūrą ir žinias, formuoja nuomonę, įsitikinimus, požiūrius, o visa tai lemia konkrečius individų ir grupių sprendimus ir veiksmus. Šiame straipsnyje aptariama, kaip vystėsi kompleksinė medijų ir informacinio raštingumo sąvoka ir kokie sisteminės funkcinės lingvistikos principai siejami su medijų ir informaciniu raštingumu „infodemijos“ sąlygomis. Straipsnyje aprašomas modelis, kuriame dera funkcinės lingvistikos teorija ir socialinė-kognityvinė diskurso tyrimo metodologija, galinti paaiškinti, kodėl žmonės tampa imlūs misinformacijai ir dezinformacijai, ir geriau suprasti, kaip tokie diskursai įsiveši visuomenės gyvenime. Norint, kad medijų ir informacinis raštingumas būtų visavertė sąvoka, svarbu pabrėžti gebėjimą išvelgti, kur slypi subjektyvumas ir emocijos naratyvuose, besirandančiuose ir gyvuojančiuose posttiesos epochoje. Šiuolaikinį naratyvą reikėtų suprasti kaip kognityvinę struktūrą, ne tik kaip artefaktą, kadangi dezinformacija ir misinformacija įprastai sklinda kaip padriki, „granuliuoti“, dažnai multimodalūs dariniai, apimantys įvairių sričių hipertekstinius informacinius trupinius, plintančius socialinėmis medijomis ir kitomis formomis.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *medijų ir informacinis raštingumas, sisteminė funkcinė lingvistika, socialinė-kognityvinė metodologija, dezinformacija, misinformacija, subjektyvumas, posttiesa, naratyvas.*

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