

## FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL CULTURE: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

*Roya Abdurahmanova Gazanfar*  
*PhD., Assoc. Prof.*  
*Azerbaijan University of Languages*  
*Baku, Azerbaijan*  
*ORCID 0009-0002-1577-4482*

**Abstract.** The article presents an analysis of language transformation in the era of digital culture, based on a functional grammar approach. The article aims to examine changes in the structural and functional characteristics of language in the digital communication environment and to investigate them systematically. The research work shows that the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of functional grammar are developing and are being reorganized in accordance with the requirements of technology. The article notes that abbreviated grammatical forms, emojis, and multimodal means change the semantic and pragmatic load of the language. When approaching the language from the point of view of functional grammar, it should not be considered as corruption or distortion of the language, but rather as its adaptation to the new communicative environment.

**Keywords:** language transformation, functional grammar, ideational function, interpersonal function, text function, social media language

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technologies in the 21st century has led to significant changes in the use and structure of language and has formed new trends. Some linguists note that the rapidly updated, and growing social networks, messaging platforms and communication tools encourage the use of language in a fast, concise and multimodal way (Jewitt, 2021; Rodney Jones, 2022). As a result, new forms of communication are emerging. The current developments are reflected in the lexical and grammatical levels of the language as well as in its functional properties. That is why the functional grammar approach is of great importance for analyzing the transformation of language. Because functional grammar provides a theoretical framework based on systematic functional linguistics to explain these changes (Halliday, 1994, p.34).

Recent research in linguistics shows that language in the digital environment cannot be considered only as text. Because it is also formed by the integration of visual and symbolic elements (Kress, 2020, p.1-15).

This research was conducted based on a qualitative approach. The methods used in the article were applied to specific language samples, and the functional transformation of language in the digital environment was substantiated. Language samples used on social media platforms were examined through discourse analysis. In addition, two methods were partially used. Of these, language units were analyzed in terms of communicative functions through functional-semiotic analysis, and a comparison of traditional written language with digital language was made using a comparative approach. The integration of these methodological approaches allows for a comprehensive explanation of the transformation of language in the digital environment

and expands the application possibilities of the theory of functional grammar. The focus of the research was on identifying changes in the three metafunctions of language.

In this study, various linguistic materials taken from digital social media and messaging platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram and X(Twitter)) were analyzed. The analysis was based on a systematically constructed social media corpus (Abdurahmanova, 2026). These platforms are suitable for comparative analysis as they reflect different communicative purposes and styles. The corpus was compiled to identify key characteristics of digital communication. This approach adheres to established norms in discourse analysis and computer-mediated communication studies. Constructed datasets are used to maintain scientific integrity, principled analysis, and cross-platform comparability.

### **Main part**

#### **Digital culture and language transformation**

The use of language in the digital environment is characterized by new features. Characterizing this process as internet linguistics, David Crystal noted that online communication combines the features of both written and oral speech (Crystal, 2006, pp. 1-5).

When looking at social networks, the main features of language in the digital era can be presented in the form of an increase in abbreviations and acronyms, the widespread use of emojis and visual elements. Along with these, it is also possible to observe the dominance of an informal style and the spread of hypertextual structure. These changes lead to a restructuring of the functional aspects of language. The transformation of language in the digital environment is based on short and economical forms of expression and the widespread use of emojis and visual elements. At this time, an informal style and a hypertextual and fragmented text structure prevail. According to David Crystal, these features shift the functional load of language and create a new model of communication (Crystal, 2021).

Carolina Tagg notes that the younger generation, in addition to adhering to literary writing norms in an academic environment, can also easily communicate with their friends online. Agreeing with the author's opinion, we conclude that the transformation of language in the digital environment does not corrupt it (Tagg, 2015, p.26).

#### **Analysis of transformation in terms of functional grammar**

In the systematic-functional linguistics put forward by M.A.K. Halliday, language is evaluated as a socio-semiotic tool. It is noted that the structure of language is a reflection of its developed functions to serve society (Halliday, 2004).

In SFL, discourse analysis examines how language choices realize three types of meaning known as metafunctions. The three main functions of systematic functional linguistics put forward by M.A.K.Halliday (1.ideational function, 2. interpersonal function, 3.text function) also form the basis of functional grammar. These functions perform the tasks of transmitting information in language, establishing relationships and constructing text. The mentioned metafunctions manifest themselves at all levels of language and interact in each communicative act. They are considered an integral part of it by many linguists. Because Functional grammar considers language as a socio-semiotic system. Functional grammar also studies how each sentence, which combines form with meaning, presents an idea and how to relate to the presented idea. In addition, it explains how the text is created and connected. According to M.A.K.Halliday, these metafunctions operate simultaneously in each language unit and are formed in

accordance with communicative purposes. The author also notes that these metafunctions are realized in new forms and cause structural changes in the language (Halliday, 1994, pp. 36-38). According to the author, the ideational function is the expression of human experience and reality. The interpersonal function is the establishment of social relations and positions, and the textual function is the organization of the text and the structuring of information.

#### a) Transformation of ideational function

Since the transfer of information in the digital communication environment is faster and more economical, complex syntactic constructions are simplified, and the context is completed with more visual means.

For example: (In what's App)

I will be late for class today- I am late

I am very happy- ☐

I can't help but laugh- 😄

As can be seen from the examples, the changes on the second side show that the ideational function is realized in a compact and context-related way. The abbreviation "I am late" presented in the first example presents us with a compact form of the ideational function. In this case, although there is incompleteness from a grammatical point of view, the sentence can be considered complete in terms of communicativeness. David Crystal associates such changes with a decrease in information density and, conversely, an increase in the speed of transmission. (Crystal, 2006, p. 37)

#### b) Transformation of interpersonal function

In the digital environment, emojis and reactions, shortened sentences, and informal style are used to express the relationship between the speaker and the listener. In this case, the interpersonal function comes to the fore more. Language users use non-verbal means to express their emotions and relationships. As a result, informal language increases the level of intimacy of communication. In addition, emojis and reactions encode social relationships. According to Naomi Baron, language is not only a means of transmitting information, but also a tool for social identification and relationship building (Baron, 2008, p.45-50).

For example: (In Instagram)

Superb- 🔥

Admired- 😊

WOW!!!

Since language on the Instagram platform also carries a very emotional and evaluative function, the interpersonal function is dominant here. The many exclamation marks presented in the third example increase the intensity. Lexical minimalism is observed in each of the examples.

Let's approach the examples a little differently:

I appreciate it- 🙏🙏🙏 or 🙏 (🙏🙏, 🙏🙏)

I agree- 👍 (👍🙏, 👍🙏) or (🙏, 🙏🙏, 🙏🙏)

The expression of different shades of meaning with the signs in the examples shows the increased emotional and expressive function of the language. At the same time, the signs also change according to different ways of thinking and religious beliefs. The first sign in the example is the sign used by many Hindus, while the second is used by Muslims. It is even possible to express races with different colors of the same sign.

The different colored signs given in brackets after each sign in the examples provide information about the skin tones of people without saying anything additional.

### **c) Transformation of textual function**

The organization of text on digital platforms has changed radically, presenting its coherence and cohesion in new ways. For example, the traditional linear text structure has been transformed into a hypertextual and fragmented text structure.

Coherence in the text is expressed in a more concise way. The classic paragraph analysis is replaced by post and thread structures. As for new cohesion methods, hashtag (#), mention (@) can be cited as examples of linking tools.

For example: (In Twitter)

“Today’s conference was very interesting # research# conference”

“My new article has been published. Link in bio.”

Hashtag (# research) carries a textual function, creating thematic connections within and between texts. Thus, information is presented in a concise and structured way. In addition, the example contains hypertextual redirection (Link in bio). The language used on the Twitter platform contains more ideational and textual functions.

Many linguists emphasize that these changes lead to the restructuring of the coherence and cohesion mechanisms of the text (Michael Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p.4-6).

Based on the analyses conducted, it can be noted that the process of language transformation in the conditions of digital culture is not a set of random and mixed changes. It is a systematic process that depends on changing communicative needs. As we have already noted, the Functional Grammar approach provides a convenient theoretical framework for explaining this process. This is because, within the framework of this theory, language units are evaluated not as formal structures, but, on the contrary, as carriers of specific functions. Based on the advancements that have occurred in the digital environment, the ideational function is more adapted to the principles of compactness and speed. The interpersonal function is expanded with the increase in emotional and expressive means. As for the textual function, the traditional text structure is moving from a linear structure to a nonlinear structure. There is also a replacement with multimodal structures. The current changes should not be viewed as a simplification of language, but as its adaptation to the communicative structure. Kress (2020) notes that multimodal communication forms a new dual stage of language. Therefore, digital discourse does not limit the functional potential of language. This means that language is enriched with new expressive possibilities. Based on this, we can note that the transformation of language in the digital era is the result of its functional adaptation. That is why language units do not change. The variable is their usage and functional load.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the presented theoretical data, it can be said that in functional grammar, language is considered an integral part of communicative activity. Therefore, the transformation of language in the era of digital culture can be explained more fully and systematically within the framework of functional grammar. According to this approach, the reorganization of the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language in the digital communication environment, that is, the communicative functions of language, leads to changes in its structure. In particular, the spread of multimodal forms of communication expands the expressive capabilities of language and creates new

semantic-structural models. This approach confirms that language is a dynamic and adaptive system. Therefore, language is not considered a static system. It is a dynamic system that develops in accordance with social and technological advancements. Thus, the functional capabilities of language in the digital environment expand and new communicative strategies arise. Therefore, the expansion of semiotic means also leads to the expansion of the functional structure of language. Because in the digital environment, language does not consist only of words but also symbols and visual elements carry a functional load. In this regard, the transformation of language in the digital age should not be seen as a negative process, but as a stage of its development. Conducting comparative analyses in future studies may allow for broader and deeper results in this area. As a result, communicative effectiveness in the digital environment is a priority, multimodal communication becomes dominant, and contextual meaning is strengthened.

#### References:

1. Abdurahmanova, R. (2026) *Author Corpus on digital discourse (samples from Whats App, Instagram, X platforms)* [Unpublished material]
2. Baron, N. S. (2020). *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*. Oxford University Press.
3. Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Crystal, D. (2021). *Language and the Internet (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press
5. Halliday. M.A.K. & Hasan, R. (1976) *Cohesion in English*. Longman.
6. Halliday. M.A.K. (1994) *An introcution to functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.
7. Halliday. M.A.K. (2004) *The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday*. Continuum.
8. Jewitt, C. (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis (2nd ed.)*. Routledge
9. Jones, R. H. (2022). *Discourse Analysis: A Resource Book for Students (3rd ed.)*. Routledge.
10. Kress, G. (2020). *Multimodality: A social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. Routledge.
11. Tagg, C. (2015). *Exploring Digital Communication: Language in Action*. Routledge