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Functionalism in Linguistics: Significance and Relevance in Contemporary Language Studies

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the significance of functionalism in language and linguistics and to explore how the functionalist perspective is applied in contemporary studies of language. Therefore, it uses a descriptive and analytical review of the relevant literature to investigate the role of functionalism in explaining language structures through their communicative functions and evaluates its contribution to different branches of linguistics. The analysis shows that language components, including grammar, syntax, semantics, and discourse, are shaped by communicative needs and language use rather than only by formal linguistic properties. It further demonstrates that functionalism has contributed to sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, language acquisition, corpus linguistics, language variation, language evolution, and the relationship between language and society. The findings also indicate that functionalist theories remain relevant to digital communication, multilingual interaction, corpus linguistics, and language education, where meaningful communication is emphasized over the teaching of rules. Although some linguists question its limited attention to underlying linguistic structure, the study concludes that functionalism continues to influence contemporary linguistic research and remains essential for understanding language as a communicative and social phenomenon.

Keywords: *Digital Communication, Functionalism, Communicative Competence, Language and Communication, Language and Society, Language Teaching.*

1. Introduction

Functionalism has been one of the most influential approaches in linguistics and social science, focusing on the function of language in both society and communication rather than merely on how languages are governed by formal grammatical rules (Halliday, 1978; Peluso, 2021). Functionalist linguists advocate that while grammar may exist within a language, it is but one way in which that language serves its primary purpose: to communicate meaning among the people (Dik, 1997; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The functionalist view of language is that its structure evolves as a result of the function it serves (Peluso, 2021), so has played a significant role in shaping many linguistic theories today and continues to play an important role in a variety of disciplines such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, language teaching, pragmatics and communication studies (Christie & Martin, 2007; Feng, 2022; Hickmann, 1987). While other linguistic theories (e.g., formalism, generative grammar) have criticised functionalism (Chomsky, 2014; Feng, 2022), it nevertheless provides a sound basis upon which to study the

function of language in real-life situations (Halliday, 1978; Thompson, Bowcher, Fontaine, & Schönthal, 2019).

Functionalism was first proposed by early linguists such as Bronisław Malinowski and Roman Jakobson who placed emphasis on both the social and communicative processes of language (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen, Wang, Ma, & Mwinlaaru, 2022). Later, M.A.K. Halliday proposed a new functional type of linguistic theory called Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which he characterised as a "social semiotic" system (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen et al., 2022). That is, it allows people to understand their environment and develop effective means of communicating within that environment (Matthiessen et al., 2022). Halliday described language as having three functions which include creating concepts, creating social relationships, and organising a message into a coherent form (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). His framework changed the way that linguists consider language analysis and introduced a number of new elements (context, meaning and key human factors) into their thinking about language (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen et al., 2022).

A key part in the rise of functionalism was the shift from sentence structures to language in use in society (Halliday, 1978; Thomas, 2020). The formalist view of traditional interest in syntax and the internal organization of the grammar neglected the social setting of communication (Chomsky, 2014; Thomas, 2020). However, functionalist linguistics studies the variability of language in terms of function, addressee, place, and culture (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thomas, 2020). This view enables researchers to grasp the reasons behind the use of various styles, expressions, and language patterns in various social contexts (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Mackenzie, 2019). For example, the language used in classrooms, political speeches, advertisements, and social media communication has different communicative purposes and interactions with others (Başbuğ, 2024; El-Falaky, 2016; Sumartini, 2025).

Since the last decades, functionalism has become a popular trend again, largely as a result of the process of globalization, technological progress and digital communication (Judijanto, 2025). In recent years, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X have revolutionized the way people communicate and share information (Başbuğ, 2024; Sumartini, 2025). Both use functionalist technique to assess the language variations as the medium of communication in communication changes (Pradita, 2024). Emojis, acronyms, hashtags and multimodal texts are some examples of how language is dynamic in response to social and technological demands (Başbuğ, 2024; Darong & Regus, 2024).

Although functionalism has its merits, it has been criticized (Chomsky, 2014; Newmeyer, 2000). They argue that functionalism has been more successful than the basic cognitive approach to language, or structure, in communication and social context (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022). Nonetheless, a number of contemporary linguists have accepted that the functional approach gives necessary hints regarding the social and practical boundaries of language (Butler, 2003; Halliday, 1978). The theories of functionalism are now applied in education, translation studies, discourse analysis, communication systems in artificial intelligence and language policy studies (Judijanto, 2025; Matthiessen et al., 2022).

This essay discusses the importance of functionalism in linguistics and how it is related to current-day society. It will examine the key concepts of functionalist theory, how functionalist theory is used for second language acquisition, and how important functionalist theory is today in the areas of education and communication. The essay also describes the limitations of functionalism and why it continues to be an important part of the study of language as a social, dynamic system.

Linguistic functionalism is important in the field of linguistics because it provides the language with communicative and interactive aspect and communicative function (Dik, 1997). The functionalist linguists argue that language shows as a reflection of the communicative needs of humans and that the overall framework of language is a mirror of social functions (Halliday, 1978). One of the main virtues of functionalism is its ability to relate language, context and meaning. Functionalism is not a formalist theory, but rather an analysis of the use of language in real-life situations. Language serves a number of purposes which Mattiessen et al. (2022) argue are significant: to communicate information, to establish social interactions, and to organize information. This perspective allows for the analysis of communication in classrooms, offices, media, politics, and digital spaces. The other reason for the significance of functionalism is that it has affected the language teaching. The functional approaches focus on communicative competence rather than on grammatical rules. Language is learned in contemporary classrooms through interpersonal, communicative activities and classroom discourse. This approach enhances learners' language use effectiveness in real social context (Pradita, 2024).

Another significant contribution of functionalism is that it has also played a significant part in discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. Functional linguistics provides an explanation for the use of different styles of language in different social contexts (Tian, 2013). For instance, communication in social media is not the same as in academic and professional settings since these contexts have different functions (Unsworth, 2000). As such, functionalism offers concrete resources for the investigation of language variation, identity, culture, and communication in today's world (Tian, 2013; Young & Harrison, 2004).

In addition, the concept of functionalism is still applicable in today's digital era due to the ever-changing nature of communication (Borello, Luise, Pederzoli, & Tardi, 2016; Zhao & Lu, 2022). The analysis of web use, discourse in the media, and communication in multiple languages is done with the help of functionalist perspectives (Başbuğ, 2024; Zhao & Lu, 2022). The concept of functionalism is useful for understanding how humans make meaning and how they maintain social relationships through language, and new developments in language, as a result of technology and globalization, are consistent with this concept (Halliday, 1978; Zhao & Lu, 2022).

1.1 The Relevance of Functionalism in Today's World

In the field of linguistics, the relevance of functionalism in the contemporary society can be felt in the area of giving practical explanation of the functioning of language in social and communicative situation (Mackenzie, 2019). Although new theories such as generative grammar and cognitive linguistics have emerged, functionalism has continued to have a strong impact on the study of discourse, sociolinguistics, language teaching, media studies and digital communication (Judijanto, 2025; Zahiroh, 2026). The theory is still relevant because the contemporary communication tends to be social, functional and interactive, all of which are core issues of the functionalist linguistics (Mackenzie, 2019; van Valin, 2017).

Partly, this is because of the quick growth of digital communications. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram and X have transformed the way people communicate (Sumartini, 2025). Effective communication is frequently achieved through emojis, abbreviations, hashtags, memes and multimedia expressions (Judijanto, 2025; Sumartini, 2025). One way that linguists can try to understand how these forms of language are used to communicate and socialize in online interaction is through functionalism (Başbuğ, 2024; Mattei, 2026). It offers an insight

into the ways in which language varies according to audience, purpose and technology (Afreh, Atta-Asamoah, & Asare, 2024; Judijanto, 2025).

The simplicity of functionalism is still applicable in language teaching. Modern teaching methods emphasize more on communicative competence than grammatical correctness (Mhundwa, 2008; Mouvet & Taverniers, 2022). The principles of functionalism enable students to use language in appropriate contexts (discussions, presentations, and group activities). Students' ability to communicate successfully in real-life situations will be improved by this practical approach (Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022). Also, functionalism continues to be applied in media analysis and discourse analysis (Judijanto, 2025). The functionalist theories are applied to political speeches, political advertisements, news articles, and intercultural communication (El-Falaky, 2016; Tahira, Hussain, & Rubab, 2025; Young & Harrison, 2004). Fatima, Siddique and Ahmad (2023) studied media discourse and revealed how language in newspaper editorials serves different communicative and ideological functions. Functional analysis establishes a link between language and social identity, cultural interactions and public opinion (Borello et al., 2016). Additionally, functionalism is still relevant in media analysis and discourse analysis, examining the function of communication in facilitating interaction and collaboration in multilingual and international society (Halliday, 1978; Young & Harrison, 2004).

Many linguists still believe that functionalism gives a realistic and socially relevant understanding of communication, despite some limitations that it does not pay enough heed to the cognitive structure of language (Nuyts, 2025). As a result, functionalism is still a crucial and applicable approach in the study of language and communication today (Walter, 2025).

2. Literature Review

One of the basic theories in functional linguistics is the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) by M. A. K. Halliday (1978). Halliday's theory states that language is a social semiotic system that enables people to make meaning in social contexts (Wang & Ma, 2022). Halliday claims that language has a text, interpersonal and ideational function at the same time (Forey & Sampson, 2017). Recent scholars such as Matthiessen et al. (2022) built on Halliday's work by examining the potential of systemic functional linguistics for the study of contemporary communication, multilingualism, and discourse. According to their research, functionalism is still crucial to comprehending how meaning is created in technical, cultural, and educational contexts (Matthiessen et al., 2022). Similarly, a recent corpus-based study (Ahmad, Mahmood & Sidique, 2025) empirically proved the significance of functionalism in the process of determining the stages of academic writing development.

Functionalism is still one of the most important theories in the field of linguistics, as it emphasizes the social and communicative functions of language (Halliday, 1978). Functionalism focuses on the role of language in real-life situations and the effect that communication needs have on linguistic patterns, whereas formalist approaches primarily focus on grammatical patterns (Butler, 2013; Mackenzie, 2019). Over the years, researchers have examined the functional approach to discourse analysis, language teaching, sociolinguistics, media communication, and digital interaction (Judijanto, 2025; Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022; Zahiroh, 2026). The research carried out from 2020 to 2025 indicates that functionalist approaches are still very relevant in contemporary language learning (Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022; Mouvet & Taverniers, 2022).

The significance of functionalism in language instruction is also emphasized in recent literature. After doing a thorough literature review on functionalism in second language writing, Pradita (2024) came to the conclusion that functionalist techniques greatly enhance learners' communicative skills. The study (Pradita, 2024) indicates that students who are taught with

functional and communicative approaches develop their writing skills because they learn the way language is used in authentic social situations (Pradita, 2024). These findings are further supported by a recent study (Leotta & Ahmad, 2025) which showed that explicit instruction, and process writing approaches improve communicative competence and academic writing skills. This is part of the general trend in language teaching to move away from the memorization of grammar rules and towards the development of useful communication skills (Rahmonovich & Qizi, 2025; Ribbens, 1984). Consequently, functionalist concepts are often used in curriculum development, classroom discourse analysis and communicative language teaching (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983).

Functional linguistics is the study of how language is used by speakers in various ways, depending on the context, audience and purpose (Thomas, 2020). Thomas (2020) compared the formalist and functionalist traditions, stating that functionalism is more realistic in its consideration of language since it focuses on natural communication instead of sentence forms. In media discourse, political speeches, advertising, and social media interaction, where meaning is highly influenced by social and cultural context, this viewpoint has become particularly pertinent.

Digital communication has added to the importance of functionalism in linguistics. In recent years, researchers have focused on the impact of the use of language in online communication platforms (Darong & Regus, 2024; Judijanto, 2025). Emojis, hashtags, acronyms, and multimodal texts are examples of how language is rapidly evolving in social media communication on sites like Facebook, Instagram, and X (Darong & Regus, 2024; Sumartini, 2025). The ways in which these new modes of communication serve social and interpersonal purposes are explained by functionalist theories (Başbuğ, 2024; Darong & Regus, 2024). Darong and Regus (2024) state that functional linguistic analysis is particularly helpful in analyzing the patterns of communication in digital and instructional texts because it connects grammar to meaning and social purpose.

The role of functionalism in the field of sociolinguistics and intercultural communication has also been explored. Functionalists believe that language is a reflection of relationships, power and social identity (Halliday, 1978). Sembiente and Tian (2021) explored the support of systemic functional linguistics to approaches to academic language learning that are culturally sustainable. Their results indicate that functionalist approaches help students to understand the role of language in different social and cultural settings. This is a good example of the importance of functionalism in multilingual communities and international communication.

Functionalism has been criticized by formalist linguists, especially those who follow Noam Chomsky (Butler, 2003; Nuyts, 1992). Critics of functionalism argue that it focuses too much on communication and neglects intrinsic and cognitive aspects of the language (Nuyts, 1992). Grammatical competence should continue to be at the core of linguistic theory, according to generative linguists (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022). Recent studies, however, indicate that both strategies may be complementary to one another (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022). Butler (2020) argues that functionalism, particularly in the fields of applied linguistics and discourse studies, remains a valuable source of understanding of the relationship between grammar, meaning, and communication.

All things considered, current research shows that functionalism is still a very important and significant method in linguistics (Judijanto, 2025). Its focus on meaning, communication and social interaction is especially useful in understanding the ways in which language is used in the modern world in education, media, technology and intercultural communication (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen et al., 2022; Sembiente & Tian, 2021). The importance of functionalism in

the study and practice of language is reflected in the fact that the theories of functionalism are still being used in new contexts of communication by modern scholars (Başbuğ, 2024; Darong & Regus, 2024; Pradita, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to examine the contemporary relevance and applicability of functionalism in linguistics (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach is particularly suitable as it facilitates the analysis of theories, concepts, interpretations, and scholarly debates rather than relying on numerical or statistical data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Flick, 2018). The primary objective of this study is to investigate the continued influence of functionalist approaches on language studies, communication, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics research (Pradita, 2024). Through qualitative analysis, this study explains the complex relationship between language, communication, and social context which are the core concerns of functionalist linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Mackenzie, 2019).

The primary data for this study were drawn from educational and scholarly sources published between 2020 and 2025. These sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, research papers, conference proceedings, and online academic databases (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher deliberately selected contemporary literature to capture recent developments and reflect current debates within the field of linguistics (Flick, 2018). To ensure reliable and consistent references on functionalism and linguistics, academic platforms such as Google Scholar, Springer, ResearchGate, and JSTOR were utilized (Booth et al., 2016).

The methodology is strongly analytical, with emphasis placed on selected texts and scholarly arguments. The researchers conducted a careful examination of the works of major scholars such as M. A. K. Halliday, Roman Jakobson, and Noam Chomsky, undertaking an in-depth analysis of diverse perspectives on functionalism (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022; Halliday, 1978). Particular attention was devoted to Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL), as it remains one of the most influential functionalist frameworks in contemporary linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen et al., 2022). This study focused on the conceptualization of functionalism in explaining language as a communicative and social system, as well as the contrast between functionalism and formalism which is the dominant approach that prioritizes grammatical structures (Butler, 2003; Mackenzie, 2019; Thomas, 2020).

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the collected data which enabled the researchers to identify recurring themes and key areas of discussion within the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2012). The analysis explored several major thematic areas, including communication and discourse analysis, language teaching, social interaction, digital communication, sociolinguistics, and language and society (Judijanto, 2025; Pradita, 2024; Sembante & Tian, 2021). In addition, this study examined the application of functionalism in contemporary communication contexts, such as media discourse and social media communication (Başbuğ, 2024; Sumartini, 2025). By analyzing the differences among various theoretical perspectives, this study critically assessed both the strengths and criticisms of functionalist theories in modern language studies (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022; Thomas, 2020).

This approach is well-suited for the discussion of functionalism, as it does not require experimentation or statistical analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Flick, 2018). Theoretically, this study aims to provide an understanding of why functionalism remains a vital component of contemporary linguistics and how it maintains its relevance in a rapidly evolving technological society (Halliday, 1978; Matthiessen et al., 2022). Consequently, the chosen methodology has enabled a critical reflection on the significance of functionalism within the disciplines of

linguistics and communication studies, as well as its continued relevance in the present context (Butler, 2003; Mackenzie, 2019). It should be acknowledged, however, that this study is based on secondary qualitative data, and all sources consulted were limited to those published in English (Booth et al., 2016).

4. Analysis

In functionalism in language and linguistics, it is found that the study of language can be studied not only from the concept of grammar, but also from the concept and functional analysis of language. Rather, communicative purposes, interpersonal interaction and the meaning of sentences in context are closely related to language form. The results of recent linguistic studies show that the functionalist views have remained relevant in the understanding of the working of language in actual communication.

The first is that the communicative function of the language determines the structure of the language (Halliday, 1978; Mackenzie, 2019). According to functionalist linguists, the real patterns that occur are a result of the communicative needs of the speakers (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson et al., 2019). Discourse analysis and pragmatics research has demonstrated that "discourse" is influenced by social context, audience, intent, and context (Paltridge, 2022; Schiffrin, 1994). For instance, the structures like "Could you open the window?" are more preferred than direct expressions as they are used for politeness in communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, Haugh, & Kádár, 2017). This finding indicates the functional or practical interpretation of the choices of language, which are driven by the communicative and social tasks at hand, rather than formal rules set forth by the language learner (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson et al., 2019).

It is another important fact that functionalism gives a better understanding of the authentic use of language (Biber, Reppen, & Staples, 2021; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Corpus studies have shown that in natural language, the deviations from the idealized structures advocated by formalist theories are quite common (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Sinclair, 1991). In the study of spoken and written corpora by functionalists, they have discovered several elements that are associated with everyday communication, such as repetition, ellipsis, incomplete sentences and discourse markers (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). The results suggest that users of language are concerned with getting the job done and communicating rather than with accuracy of grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson et al., 2019). Since functionalism is not about individual sentences, but about real communication, it has been quite influential in corpus linguistics and discourse studies (Biber & Reppen, 2015; Flowerdew, 2012).

It is also found that the functionalism holds much importance in L2 acquisition and teaching (Ellis, 2015; Lightbown & Spada, 2021). The principles of modern communicative language teaching (CLT) approach can be traced back to functionalism to a large extent (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Richards & Rodgers, 2022). Studies have demonstrated that communicative competence can be improved if language is learned through meaningful interaction and in context rather than by memorizing rules for language use (Ellis, 2015; Long, 2014; Swain, 2000). Functional grammar provides learners with an understanding of the variation of language in different contexts, dependent on purpose, register and social context (Biber & Conrad, 2019; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). As a result, the application of functional methods has improved the motivation of learners, fluency and increased their pragmatic competence in the language classroom (Ellis, 2015).

Another key finding pertains to the role of functionalism in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013). Functionalist approaches have been widely employed in the analysis of political speeches, media discourse, advertisements, classroom interaction, and

social media communication (Başbuğ, 2024; El-Falaky, 2016; Young & Harrison, 2004). Such analyses extend to the educational materials where corpus-based studies (e.g., Ahmad, Mahmood, Siddique, & Asghar, 2021) investigate that how gender representations in ESL textbooks contain ideologies, and power structures. Researchers have found that language serves as an expression of ideology, identity, power, and social values (Fairclough, 2013). For example, in discourse studies, the political elites use rhetorical devices like pronouns, repetition and persuasion to manipulate their audience. Likewise, in social media communication, structures, emojis and language forms are frequently used in a shortened and informal way so as to perform interpersonal and expressive functions. The results show that language is a social instrument, and not just a grammar system.

The results also indicate that the concept of functionalism is still very applicable to digital communication and technological development. The study of language in context has become increasingly relevant with the evolution of communication, multilingual interaction, and the use of artificial intelligence. Contextual and functional analyses are increasingly adopted in computational linguistic systems and natural language processing to achieve accurate understanding of meaning (Martin, 2009). Consequently, functionalist principles are essential in fields such as machine translation, speech recognition, chatbot interaction, and sentiment analysis, where meaning is heavily dependent on communicative context and usage patterns (Liu, 2020; Martin, 2009).

In addition, the functionalist assumptions are supported by some of the current cognitive-linguistic studies (Bybee, 2015; Langacker, 2008). There has been a tendency to see language structures as developing as a result of repeated communicative interactions and cognitive processing (Bybee, 2015; Ellis, 2019). Studies have demonstrated that the more a child uses language, the more it will impact the patterns he or she employs and the development of language (Bybee, 2015). These results are consistent with the functionalist view of language as a system that evolves in response to communicative and cognitive needs (Bybee, 2015; Halliday, 1978).

The results also reveal a number of weaknesses in functionalism. One of the criticisms of functionalism is that it sometimes lacks precise formal explanations for more complex grammatical structures (Chomsky, 2014; Newmeyer, 2000). Formalist linguists contend that certain universal properties of grammar are not necessarily motivated by communicative function (Chomsky, 2014; Feng, 2022). However, despite these criticisms, the majority of contemporary linguistic studies have acknowledged the importance of considering context, meaning, and communicative function in understanding how language operates (Halliday, 1978). For this reason, many modern researchers adopt both functionalist and formalist approaches to achieve a comprehensive linguistic analysis (Butler, 2003; Feng, 2022).

Overall, this indicates functionalism to be among the most valuable and influential theoretical frameworks in linguistics (Halliday, 1978). Additionally, there are many other areas within linguistics where functionalism has had an influence, including corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, language teaching, and computational linguistics (Biber & Reppen, 2015; Judijanto, 2025; Pradita, 2024). Ultimately, the research demonstrates that language is a dynamic system rather than a set of grammatical rules, and is shaped by social relationships and human interaction (Bybee, 2015; Halliday, 1978). Functionalism is rich in social contact, real communication, discourse, and meaning (Mackenzie, 2019; Thompson et al., 2019). Therefore, functionalism remains a highly relevant approach for the study of linguistics today (Judijanto, 2025).

5. Discussion

The results of the research indicate that the functionalism is still very significant and applicable in the current study of language. The current academic publications (2020-2025) were examined to see how functionalist theories continue to influence various fields of language studies, such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, language instruction, media communication, and digital engagement. This study demonstrates that functionalism provides a useful and socially aware explanation of language, as it emphasizes communication, meaning and context, rather than grammatical elements.

The results of the research indicate that functionalism remains highly significant and applicable in the contemporary study of language (Judijanto, 2025). The current academic publications (2020–2025) were examined to see how functionalist theories continue to influence various fields of language studies, such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, language instruction, media communication, and digital engagement. The research indicates that functionalist theories are particularly helpful in identifying real world communication because they focus on the construction and comprehension of meaning in social relations.

The continuous effect of M. A. K. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics is another important finding. The literature study shows that Halliday's approach is still widely used in the field of media studies, instructional linguistics, and discourse analysis. Researchers continue to use systemic functional linguistics to investigate the arrangement of texts, interpersonal relationships, and the communication of ideas in language. These findings indicated that SFL has proved to be a useful tool for studying digital communication, which is constantly changing to suit social and technological demands.

The study also examines that modern approaches of teaching languages have been greatly affected by functionalism. Many current studies have been conducted to explain that communicative language teaching has an emphasis on meaningful communication, which makes students speaking, writing, and social skills better. The functionalist approach thus continues to contribute positively to language teaching and curriculum development (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022). The results also indicate that the functionalist approach remains relevant in the digital world (Judijanto, 2025). Social media communication on sites like Facebook, Instagram, and X demonstrates how language adapts to accommodate new forms of communication (Başbuğ, 2024; Sumartini, 2025). Functionalist theories can be employed to illustrate that emojis, acronyms, hashtags, and multimedia texts function as communicative tools with social purposes in online contexts (Başbuğ, 2024; Darong & Regus, 2024).

The results also reveal that functionalists are challenged by formalist linguists who claim that they do not take into account the structural and cognitive aspects of language (Chomsky, 2014; Newmeyer, 2000). While opposing views do exist, most studies in the academic community recognize that this approach can provide effective insights into the links between language, society, and communication (Halliday, 1978). In general, the results suggest that functionalism remains a valuable and relevant theoretical approach in modern communication studies and linguistics (Judijanto, 2025).

6. Conclusion

Another important and practical theory from the current perspective of language studies is functionalism, which considers language as a dynamic process of communication with a social context, culture, and human need. The conclusions drawn in the article highlight that functionalism is still applicable in understanding the role of language in traditional and contemporary communities. Functionalism has focused on the language, meaning and use of

language for communication, and so offers a systematic perspective on the use of language in everyday contexts. Unlike other approaches that emphasize grammatical structures, functionalism emphasizes the use of language in social contexts, a point of great relevance to the study of linguistics today.

The study indicates that the ideas of functionalism have made great strides in the modern linguistic sciences which include discourse analysis, media studies, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and language teaching. Here the functional approach to language is defined as a communicative medium which is used by human beings to exchange ideas, establish relationships, pass information and maintain social interaction and is not just a medium for rules and structures. This view has changed the focus of the language study from sentences to real-life conversations in typical contexts. One of its important contributions is the use of functionalism in M. A. K. Halliday's SFL. SFL theory has been influential because of the way it expresses the role of language in the ideational, interpersonal and textual modes. The findings of this study provide evidence for the continued use of SFL in the field of digital communication, discourse analysis, educational research and translation studies. The functionalist approach to language analysis is used in classrooms, political speeches, the news media, ads and social media to analyze meaning. This is an example of the way functionalism can be modified in response to the varying modalities of communication in the contemporary world.

In addition, the article pointed to the continued relevance of functionalism in the process of language acquisition and teaching. The focus on communicative competence has been more emphasized than the teaching of students the grammar rules by rote learning in modern educational systems. Functionalist approaches call for students to interact in real world environments to build real world communication skills. The results of the study indicate that the effective learning of communicative languages has a positive effect on students' communicative competence in social, professional and academic aspects. For this reason, functionalism still has relevance in the curriculum development, classroom management, and SLA studies.

The second conclusion of the study concerns the importance of functionalism in the digital age. Globalization and technological advancement have transformed the way communication is done. Language is always changing, and with new social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X, so too have people found new ways of communicating. An examination of the emojis, acronyms, hashtags, memes and multimedia material provide an explanation for the flexibility of language in its social and communicative responsibilities in digital contexts. These novel ways of communication can be studied with the help of Functionalism because it focuses on meaning, interaction, and context instead of strict grammatical rules. The study has preserved the importance of functionalism in understanding the use of language and communication despite the criticisms of formalist researchers from the Chomsky side. The critics of functionalism argue that sometimes the structural and cognitive aspects of language fall short in functionalism. Recent research in linguistics, however, denies that the formalist and functionalist views are mutually exclusive. Formalism helps to learn grammatical competency knowledge while functionalism explains the functioning of language in social reality. The balanced approach has improved the functionalist approach in the modern teaching of languages.

Further, the findings in the article show that functionalism continues to be very useful in understanding international communication and multilingual culture. In the contemporary globalized world, communication takes place in diverse languages, cultures and technological

mediums. Functionalist methods enable researchers to find out how humans use language to control identity, social bonds, and react to various situations of communication. This clarifies why functionalism is a beneficial approach in modern society as well as a theoretical framework. This study concludes with a discussion of the importance and applicability of functionalism to the present language research field. Because of its focus on communication, meaning, context and social interaction, it is one of the best ways to analyze language in the real world. Functionalism continues to have a great influence in discourse analysis, education, digital communication, sociolinguistic studies and media studies. It has been criticized by other theories but it is a vital theory for the contemporary study of language due to its ability to explain the working of language in the society. In the era of communication changes in the digital and global world, functionalism will continue to be one of the important tools for understanding the dynamics of human language and communication.

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