



[music](#)

CMNS 3500 - Language and Power: Clarity, Accessibility and Persuasion in Health Messaging



Territorial Acknowledgement



Where we're going today



01

Recap on
Systemic
Functional
Linguistics

02

Introduction
to Ideational
Metafunction

03

Guest: Elder
Joanne Brown

04

Prepare for
next week

Recap on Systemic Functional Linguistics

Developed by **M.A.K. Halliday**

Views language as a **social semiotic system**

Focuses on **how language functions in context** to make meaning

The Three Metafunctions:

<u>Metafunction</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Example in Health Discourse</u>
Ideational	Representing experience	“There has been a shortage of nurses since 2020”
Interpersonal	Enacting social roles & relationships	“Doctors urge Canadians to get vaccinated.”
Textual	Organizing information flow	“First, we outline the symptoms. Then...”

Why SFL Matters in Communications



Helps analyze **how meaning is constructed**



Reveals **bias, power, and perspective** in texts



Essential for unpacking **media, policy, and public messaging**

Example:

"Protesters clashed
with police"

vs.

"Police confronted
protesters"

Why SFL Matters in Health Messaging



Health communication isn't just about facts—it's about **framing experience**



Language choices shape:



Public perception of illness



Trust in institutions



Policy support and resistance

The Ideational Metafunction

- Language as a tool to **construe reality**
- Answers the question: “*What’s happening?*”
- We look at:
 - **Actor**
 - Actor, Senser, Carrier, Sayer, etc.
 - **Goal**
 - Recipient of Process
 - **Circumstances**
 - Time, place, manner, cause, accompaniment
 - and..

Processes

<u>Process Type</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Example</u>
Material	Physical actions/events	"She built a house."
Mental	Thoughts, feelings, perceptions	"He fears rejection."
Relational	States, identity, attributes	"The sky is blue."
Behavioral	Physiological/psychological acts	"She laughed."
Verbal	Communication	"They shouted."
Existential	Existence	"There is a problem."

Processes

<u>Process Type</u>	<u>Health Example</u>	<u>Implication</u>
Material	“Health Canada approved the drug.”	Institutional authority
Mental	“Canadians fear a winter COVID surge.”	Emotional framing
Relational	“Mental health is a public priority.”	Identity and classification
Verbal	“The Minister stated new measures.”	Political communication
Existential	“There is a shortage of nurses.”	Crisis framing

Indigenous Health Access & Ideational Meaning

- Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Métis) face systemic barriers to health care access in Canada
- Language in health discourse often:
 - Frames Indigenous communities as passive recipients rather than active agents
 - Uses existential processes to highlight lack ("There is a shortage of services")
 - Employs relational processes to define identity ("Indigenous health is underfunded")
- Ideational choices can either empower or erase Indigenous perspectives

Community-led governance models offer a pathway to equitable healthcare access.

Actor:

Process:

Goal:

Circumstances:

Despite the push for cultural competency training, institutional barriers such as a lack of funding, resistance from healthcare providers, and gaps in Indigenous representation within health leadership hinder widespread implementation.

Actor:

Process:

Goal:

Circumstances:

While cultural safety training fosters inclusivity within healthcare environments, ensuring Indigenous community control over health services further strengthens autonomy and trust in care delivery.

Actor:

Process:

Goal:

Circumstances:

Studies reveal that some healthcare professionals struggle to consistently apply cultural safety principles, reinforcing the need for ongoing education and Indigenous-led guidance.

Actor:

Process:

Goal:

Circumstances:

This week's analytic exercise

- Compare two sentences about Indigenous health care
 - Identify actor, process, goal and circumstances
 - Interpret choices
 - Reflect on impact
- Due Monday, September 15
- Upload to Moodle

