

**Memory, orality, and identity: Socio-Cognitive Perspectives on Early Judaism and Early Christianity, Lund University 14–16 November 2013, Lund**

**Language and Social Identity in John 6**

Michael Halliday has written extensively on the nature and functionality of language, and one of his favoured approaches to language is that it is social. He describes language as “the creature and creator of human society”. One of the functions of language is to express and form social identity. One of Michael Halliday’s so-called metafunctions is the *interpersonal* metafunction, which is interactive and personal and deals with language as action and a manner to enact personal and social relationships. The interpersonal metafunction is one of three metafunctions that Halliday uses in order to capture the functions of language. The other two metafunctions are the *ideational* and *textual* metafunctions, where the ideational metafunction is geared towards the lexicogrammatical resources that are allocated to the function of reflecting and construing human experience, whereas the textual metafunction has a facilitating function, aiding the interpersonal and ideational metafunctions by creating continuous and coherent discourse sequences.

In this paper I enter into the textual landscape of the bread-of-life discourse in chapter six in the Gospel of John to test-drive the interpersonal metafunction, using it as vehicle to analyse the social interaction between Jesus and the people following him.<sup>1</sup> I have selected the discourse in John 6 because it contains a fairly long dialogue whose topic has bearings on the issue of identity and the formation of identity. Spoken text is always contextually anchored in the here and now, but as soon as text is written down it is translated into the context of the reader, of another time and place, and possibly another culture. The purpose of the text is to bring it to that moment when the *text* was spoken and to re-experience that original moment.

---

<sup>1</sup> M. A. K. Halliday and C. M. I. M. Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Fourth Edition ed.; Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 30-31.