SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Edited by
J. R. Martin and Y. J. Doran

CRITICAL CONCEPTS IN LINGUISTICS

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Volume II
Grammatical Descriptions

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2015
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Systemic functional linguistics : critical concepts in linguistics / Edited by J. R. Martin and Y. J. Doran ; Volume I–V.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Summary: Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional model of language inspired by the work of Saussure, Hjelmslev, Whorf, and Firth. SFL was developed by Michael Halliday and his colleagues in the 1960s and has grown into a widely studied and research field, with growing interest in China, Latin America, and North America. This new five-volume collection from Routledge focuses on the foundational papers underlying SFL theory and practice and illustrative papers that have inspired succeeding work.
ISBN 978-0-415-73200-0 (set : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-415-73201-7 (1 : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-415-73202-4 (2 : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-415-73203-1 (3 : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-415-73204-8 (4 : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-0-415-73205-5 (5 : alk. paper) 1. Functionalism (Linguistics) 2. Systemic grammar. 3. Language and languages–Globalization. I. Martin, J. R., 1950– editor. II. Doran, Yeagan J., editor.
P147.S974 2015
410.1'8–dc23 2014033042

ISBN: 978-0-415-73200-0 (set)
ISBN: 978-0-415-73202-4 (Volume II)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

Publisher's Note
References within each chapter are as they appear in the original complete work

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C013056

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publishers would like to thank the following for permission to reprint their material:

Elsevier for permission to reprint R. A. Hudson, 'An "Item-and-Paradigm" Approach to Beja Syntax and Morphology', *Foundations of Language*, 9, 1973, 504–548.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal we set ourselves for this volume was to illustrate the way in which Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) grammatics has been used in the description of the grammar of a range of languages, including coverage of axial relations at different ranks and from different metafunctions. We have book-ended these descriptions with theoretical papers by Halliday and by Matthiessen, the former focusing on doing grammatical description in SFL and the latter on generalising such descriptions from the perspective of functional language typology.

8 Meta/linguistic diversity

We begin this volume with Halliday's 'Systemic grammar and the concept of a "science of language"' (1992). By way of opening Halliday points out that whereas science has evolved as the study of physical and biological systems, the object of study in linguistics is of a different order – that of meaning. Linguistics thus involves a set of principles and practices that both align and differentiate it from other scientific disciplines, as the 'science of meaning' as it were. The paper proceeds to document SFL's working principles under 13 headings. Halliday explicitly addresses the problem of describing languages both in relation to extant descriptions of other languages and in their own terms, exploring as he does many of the substantive and terminological issues that arise when addressing axial relations (i.e. the system–structure cycles introduced in Volume I of this series). In closing Halliday comments that clarifying what we mean by a science of semiosis has become a more urgent task now that semiotic systems are 'taking the place of physical systems as the model we use to think about all the rest'.

9 Descriptions

Hudson's 'An "item-and-paradigm" approach to Beja syntax and morphology' (1973) is the most important study of morphological relations in SFL. It develops the 'Word and paradigm' tradition introduced in Robins' paper in Volume I as an 'Item-and-paradigm' approach to Beja morphology and morphophonemics.

Beja's striking array of portmanteau morphemes is elegantly described, drawing on the formalisation of system–structure cycles developed by Hudson in his 1971 monograph *English Complex Sentences* (in later formalisations the stricture that the realisation of higher ranking systems in lower ranking ones had to be mediated through functions structures would be considerably relaxed; cf. Hudson 1974, which deduces functions from configurations of features, and Hudson 1976, in which only three functions, Subject, Topic and Relator are deployed). The paper ends with a sketch of Beja clause grammar, by way of contextualising from a higher rank the multiple roles of the complex verb morphology introduced earlier.

Caffarel's 1992 paper shifts our attention upwards in rank in her exploration of the grammar of the French verbal group. Caffarel's focus is TENSE, which she approaches as a system of PRIMARY and up to three SECONDARY selections. Because of the restrictions on SECONDARY selections she does not model French TENSE as a recursive system (like the one suggested by Halliday for English; e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014). However she does treat the semantics of TENSE as a serial interdependency structure involving chains of tense selections, with each link in the chain depending on its interpretation on the others. Caffarel then takes the step of proposing distinct discourse semantic networks for TENSE with oppositions conditioned by three different contexts – third person narration in novels, news comment and 'present tense' commentary (which she refers to as 'simultaneous narration'). The paper thus illustrates a polysystemic approach to the semantics of TENSE, in which the valeur of generalised grammatical systems is semantically specialised depending on the register. In doing so Caffarel is proposing a model reconciling in some part Firth's belief that grammars needed to be formulated in register specific terms and Halliday's formulation of grammars for Chinese and English that generalise across contexts of language use.

Caffarel's discourse semantic orientation to grammatical systems also characterises the next paper on MOOD in Spanish, by Quiroz, who was herself inspired by Caffarel's work on MOOD in French (Caffarel 1995). Quiroz approaches the grammar of Spanish MOOD from the perspective of the discourse semantics of SPEECH FUNCTION and NEGOTIATION (i.e. exchange systems and structures), using the Spanish translation of a well-known Monty Python 'argument' skit as exemplification. She then moves on to develop her description of Spanish MOOD based on examples from a corpus of naturally occurring Spanish dialogue. Significantly she demonstrates that MOOD in Spanish is not grammaticalised through distinct Subject and Finite functions such as those proposed for English, but through the Predicator – as realised through the enclitic particles and portmanteau affixation negotiating modal responsibility in Spanish verbal groups. Quiroz's paper stands as a model descriptive exercise in relation to the practice outlined by Halliday's opening chapter in this volume.

Fang *et al.*'s 'On theme in Chinese: from clause to discourse' (1995) turns from the interpersonal to the textual metafunction, focusing on the systems of THEME and INFORMATION in Chinese clause structure – taking into account

information flow in relation to a range of process types: action, state, relation and existential clauses. SFL's tiered metafunctional perspective on clause structure and its 'separating approach' to Theme and New functions is introduced in relation to alternative proposals. Patterns of Theme and New are then further explored in various process types. This is followed by a revealing discussion of types of thematic progression in clause complexes which helps contextualise the discussion of information flow in relation to patterns of unfolding discourse (further supplemented by the analysis of a complete text in Appendices 1 and 2). As such the chapter sheds important light on SFL's contribution to an understanding of what are sometimes thought of as languages with a basic Topic Comment structure as opposed to a Subject Predicate one.

In Martin's 1996 'Transitivity in Tagalog: a functional interpretation of case' paper we turn to a discussion of clause rank experiential meaning, with a focus on TRANSITIVITY in Tagalog. The paper begins with a discussion of the significance of a cryptogrammatical approach to TRANSITIVITY, with reference to studies by Whorf, Fillmore and Halliday (for further discussion of transitivity analysis see Martin's 1996 'Metalinguistic diversity: the case from case'). Martin then applies this type of reasoning to an analysis of participants and processes in mental, material and relational processes in Tagalog – arguing that an interpretation based on the notion of centrifugality can be generalised across process types more effectively than the more familiar transitive and ergative perspectives. He further suggests that Tagalog's ascriptive/identifying/existential system is better understood as cross-classifying process types rather than as a classification of relational processes. Martin frames the paper as a response to Halliday's (1985: xxxiv) challenge:

> Twentieth-century linguistics has produced an abundance of new theories, but it has tended to wrap old descriptions up inside them; what are needed now are new descriptions. Tasks have changed, ideas have changed, and languages have changed.... The old interpretations were good, but not good enough to last for all time, even when dressed up in new theoretical clothes.

In the following paper Martin (1995) complements his discussion of experiential grammar in Tagalog with a focus on logical systems and structures. Following a discussion of metafunctions and types of structure (drawing on Halliday's 'Modes of meaning and modes of expression: types of grammatical structure, and their determination by different semantic functions' chapter in Volume I), Martin concentrates on hypotactic structures – which are explicitly grammaticalised in Tagalog through the linking particle *na/-ng* (for a discussion of hypotaxis in English see Martin 1988). Following a survey of the relevant systems and structures across ranks, the paper considers a range of non-recursive structures involving the linker, the logical meaning deployed in these structures is interpreted as functioning interpersonally by establishing the prosodic domain

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of expressions of MODALITY, negative POLARITY and EXCLAMATION. Martin concludes that the distinction between multivariate experiential structures and univariate logical ones which is so clearly grammaticalised in Tagalog argues for a grammatics that recognises their complementarity in language description – as opposed to a metalanguage formalised around constituency relations or dependency relations alone.

The final chapter of language description offered in this volume is by Johnston (1992), who discusses metafunction and types of structure in Auslan (Australian Sign Language). As far as experiential meaning is concerned, Johnston emphasises the significance of having space as a resource for construing meaning (alongside the sequence, segment and tone resources deployed by spoken languages). A number of examples are given involving location and direction showing how Auslan construes participant, process and circumstance relations without depending on sequence or segmental 'case marking'. Turning to interpersonal meaning, Johnston shows how the enactment of MOOD and AFFECT through facial expression provides a natural vehicle for the prosodic realisation of interpersonal meaning. Textually speaking, Johnston makes the point that the non-sequential realisation of experiential meaning makes it easy to position a participant or process first in a clause as Theme at the same time as a combination of hand and mouth gestures foreground a participant or process as New. Johnston's paper ends with an intriguing comment on the elaboration of metafunctional resources in Auslan and other sign languages, suggesting that they give greater weight to interpersonal and textual meanings than ideational ones because of the social conditions of their evolution and their day-to-day function in deaf communities.

10 Language typology

We close this volume with Matthiessen's 2004 overview of the descriptive motifs and generalisations afforded by an SFL perspective on functional language typology. He begins with a discussion of metafunction and rank in relation to key grammatical systems, exploring variation according to various factors – including the medium of expression realising systems (i.e. intonation, sequence and segmental marking), the rank at which systems are realised, and the mapping of particulate, prosodic and periodic structures onto one another (which he refers to as metafunctional unification). With this theoretical framework in hand he then reviews typological variation, working through systems one metafunction at a time – developing as he does so maps of the range of ideational, interpersonal and textual variation emerging in SFL language descriptions and related work. This chapter is a stunning tour de force in terms of both the range of language phenomena considered and the insightful meta-analyses provided, and has laid the foundation for SFL informed work on language typology for generations to come. Note here should be made of the languages surveyed in the edited collection for which this paper formed a capstone (Caffarel *et al.* 2004): French,

German, Japanese, Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Telegu and Pitjantjatjara; for monographs featuring SFL descriptions of particular languages see Anderson and Holsting forthcoming (Danish), Caffarel 2006 (French), Lavid *et al.* 2010 (Spanish), Li 2007 (Chinese), McGregor 1990 (Gooniyandi), Rose 2001 (Pitjantjatjara) and Teruya 2007 (Japanese).

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Part 8

META/LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

18

SYSTEMIC GRAMMAR AND THE CONCEPT OF A 'SCIENCE OF LANGUAGE'

M. A. K. Halliday

Source: *Waiguoyu (Journal of Foreign Languages, Shanghai International Studies University)* 2:78 (1992): 1–9.

Those who study language have often been concerned with the status of linguistics as a science. They have wanted to ensure that their work was objective and scientifically valid. The natural way to achieve this aim has been to use other, earlier developed sciences as a model: theoretical physics, evolutionary biology, chemistry — some discipline that is currently valued as a leader in the field of intellectual activity. It is assumed that, if we investigate language using the same principles and methods that have proved successful in these other domains, we shall have made our linguistics equally "scientific".

There are two problems here. One is perhaps a fairly obvious one: that the phenomena we are trying to understand — those of language — are phenomena of a rather distinct kind. Certainly there are, at a very abstract level, features in common to systems of all kinds, whether physical, biological, or social; and we can add to these also the fourth kind, semiotic systems, which are those which construe meaning — the kind of system to which language belongs. But there are also significant differences; and what constitutes "science", or scientific inquiry, is not likely to be the same thing in all cases. A science of meaning is potentially rather different from a science of nature, or of society.

The other problem may be less obvious. As I see it, the concept of "science" refers to scientific practice: to what scientists actually do when engaged in their professional activities. But this is not always the same thing as what they say they do; it is certainly not the same thing as what other people say they do, and it is still further away from what other people say they ought to do. We have tended to derive our concept of science from studying the models constructed in the name of philosophy of science, rather than from observing scientists at work. But these models are highly idealized; even when they set out to be descriptive (as opposed to normative) they present a picture that is far removed from scientific daily life. I share the view of colleagues such as Victor Yngve and Claude

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