

SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

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

CRITICAL CONCEPTS IN
LINGUISTICS

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Critical Concepts in Linguistics

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CONTENTS

VOLUME V LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

Acknowledgements vii

Introduction 1

PART 19

A language-based theory of learning 9

51 Towards a language-based theory of learning 11

M. A. K. HALLIDAY

**52 The Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching,
University College London, 1964–1971** 36

JOHN PEARCE, GEOFFREY THORNTON AND

DAVID MACKAY

**53 The *Write it Right* Project: linguistic modelling of secondary
school and the workplace** 73

ROBERT VEEL

PART 20

Learning language 99

**54 Learning language: a functional view of
language development** 101

CLARE PAINTER

CONTENTS

55 The role of interaction in learning to speak and learning to write	147
CLARE PAINTER	
 PART 21	
Learning about language	175
 56 Learning about language	177
JOAN ROTHERY	
 57 Ontogenesis and grammatics: functions of metalanguage in pedagogical discourse	232
GEOFF WILLIAMS	
 PART 22	
Learning through language	259
 58 How natural is 'natural' language teaching: employing wholistic methodology in the classroom	261
BRIAN GRAY	
 59 Mentoring semogenesis: 'genre-based' literacy pedagogy	292
J. R. MARTIN	
 60 Literacy pedagogy prior to schooling: relations between social positioning and semantic variation	328
GEOFF WILLIAMS	
 61 Curriculum macrogenres as forms of initiation into a culture	353
FRANCES CHRISTIE	
 62 Towards a reading based theory of teaching	380
DAVID ROSE	
 <i>Index</i>	412

INTRODUCTION

The papers in this volume cover two generations of language in education action research informed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Part 19 introduces these interventions in relation to Halliday's vision of a language-based theory of learning. Part 20 introduces the research on language development underpinning this vision. Part 21 follows up with a focus on the role of knowledge about language in language learning. Part 22 comprises papers discussing various dimensions of learning through language in relation to genre-based literacy programmes.

19 Language-based theory of learning

Our first paper, Halliday's 1993 'Towards a language-based theory of learning', suggests 21 features of child-language development that a fully-fledged language-based theory of learning would need to address; with reference to these Halliday emphasises that relevant observations need to be based (i) on natural, not experimental data, (ii) on language that is unconscious, not self-monitored, (iii) on language used in context, not in a vacuum, and (iv) on language that is observed, not elicited. The main thrust of the paper is to offer notes towards the development of an alternative to psychology-based theories of learning, which either ignore language or treat it as just one learning domain, and which rely on common sense or formalist models of language rather than social semiotic ones where language is brought into the picture. As part of the discussion he introduces his 'learning language, learning through language, learning about language' trilogy – which has framed so much of SFL informed action research in educational linguistics.

The next two papers give us a window on two generations of language in education theory and practice inspired by Halliday. The first paper was commissioned by Hasan and Martin for the first volume of a three volume festschrift series developed in honour of Halliday's retirement from the University of Sydney (Hasan and Martin 1989); it reports on the Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching, based at University College London, 1964–1971. Pearce *et al.* introduce the project, which brought teachers and linguists together to

address the English curriculum and produce practical materials. Mackay *et al.* report in detail on the work oriented to the early years of schooling, and the development of the influential *Breakthrough to Literacy* resources. Subsequently Thornton reports on the development of the well-known senior materials, published as *Language in Use*. Forsyth and Woods' 1980 middle-school textbooks are noted in passing but not discussed in detail. The paper closes with a thoughtful commentary by Pearce on what was achieved, in relation to what could have or might have been. For a linguistic perspective on this project and the initiatives on which it was building see Halliday and Hasan's 2006 retrospective and relevant sections of Halliday's interview collection (Halliday 2013: 116–122). Volume 9 of Halliday's *Collected Papers* (2007) brings together many of the papers grounding and arising from this 1960s intervention.

Halliday's arrival in Sydney to found the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney in 1976 was to inspire a second generation of SFL formed language in education action research there. Halliday soon established the first Applied Linguistics MA programme in the southern hemisphere, began work on the Language Development Project of the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra (with Frances Christie) and in 1979 organised a Working Conference on Language in Education which brought together concerned linguists and educators. The genre-based literacy initiatives associated with what came to be referred to as the 'Sydney School' arose from these collaborations. Rose and Martin 2012 provide a survey of three decades of development, with Chapter 2 focusing on the 1980s infants and primary school work. Veel's 2006 paper provides an overview of the major 1990s initiative, the Write it Right (WIR) project, which focused on secondary school and workplace literacy. For complementary retrospectives arising from WIR see Feez 2002 and Macken-Horarik 2002; Schleppegrell 2004 presents a useful overview of the language of schooling, strongly influenced by this research.

20 Learning language

This section comprises two papers by Clare Painter, whose 1984 (*Into the Mother Tongue*) and 1999 (*Learning through Language in Early Childhood*) monographs elaborated and significantly extended Halliday's 1975 ground-breaking *Learning how to Mean*. 'Learning language: a functional view of language development' (1989) was also commissioned for the Hasan and Martin 1989 festschrift volume noted above; it presents an overview of two children's language development, drawing on her own and Halliday's research. The micro-functional nature of their sons' initial semiotic systems, termed protolanguage, is outlined and exemplified. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the transition stage, as the pragmatic and mathetic macro-functions emerge and develop – involving mother tongue lexis and two, then three word structures. In this transition stage, the trend is for different words and distinctive structures to emerge and be deployed in one or the other macro-function. Then, somewhere

around two years of age, words in structures begin to combine freely to simultaneously construe experience and interact with others; and so children's meaning potential can be interpreted metafunctionally (the ideational, interpersonal and textual resources of an adult-like system).

Painter concludes her 1989 paper by reviewing some of the educational implications of this perspective on language development. Painter 1986 deals more specifically with these, based on her presentation at the May 1985 'Writing to Mean' conference organised by Bill Crowley, Gunther Kress, Jim Martin, Joan Rothery and Carolyn Webb at the University of Sydney. In particular Painter focuses on the contrast between the interactive nature of language learning in the home and the Donald Graves inspired 'process writing' approach to literacy development that was being widely promoted in Australia at the time – with Graves' 'progressivist' positioning of the teacher as a guide on the side rather than as a mentor guiding the child in the co-construction of meaningful discourse. By way of an alternative which accords more strongly with children's experience of language learning in the home, Painter refers specifically to Brian Gray's inspirational work with indigenous children at Traeger Park School in Alice Springs, where 'big book' reading materials were jointly constructed on the basis of experiences shared by teacher and students both inside and outside the school (e.g. Gray 1985, 1990). Painter's two papers consolidate here the conception of language development underpinning the then emerging genre-based literacy pedagogy of the 'Sydney School' – setting the ground for its guiding pedagogic principle, namely 'guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience'. For discussion of language development through the school years see Christie and Derewianka 2008, Christie 2012 and Martin and Matthiessen 2014.

21 Learning about language

The papers in this part address the role of knowledge about language (or KAL, as abbreviated in Carter 1990) in formal education. Contrary to popular assumptions, SFL research on language development such as that introduced by Painter in Part 20 has clarified the significance of talk about language in first language development in the home. The challenge for educational linguistics has been to design a comparably significant role for KAL in schools.

Rothery tackles this challenge in the context of her development of genre-based literacy programmes in the 1980s. She begins by contextualising the much diminished role of knowledge about language in Australian English language curricula, motivated in large part by the adoption of models of language and learning uninformed by a social semiotic perspective. She proceeds by introducing the functional model of language in context informing her work and then reports on the way knowledge about grammar and genre was used in the genre-based writing pedagogy she was developing for primary school in 1985 – as part of the interactive guidance provided in programmes of this kind. Of special

interest is the focus on nominal groups, which arose from the need to extend writing development once basic competence in report and narrative genres had been achieved. Critical to this work was a principled approach to using KAL in context, as part of the writing programme, and the elaboration of KAL in relation to specific language development needs.

Williams contextualises the KAL challenge from a Vygotskian perspective, drawing on his work introducing functional grammar to six- and eleven-year-old primary school students. Like Rothery, the basic strategy was to embed KAL in collaborative reading and writing activity, exemplified here in relation to procedure and recount genres and focusing on TRANSITIVITY (specifically PROCESS TYPE) and THEME systems in particular. Williams shows how students were introduced to KAL, took control of the metalanguage and were able to use it to both improve and reflect on the texts they produced. For further discussion of ‘grammatics’ in schools and additional references (including his work with six-year-olds), see French 2010, Williams 2000, 2005a; Rose in press pursues the discussion in relation to the deployment of KAL in genre-based literacy programmes.

22 Learning through language

Our final section gathers papers focusing on learning through language, at home and school. Gray’s 1987 ‘How natural is “natural” language teaching: employing wholistic methodology in the classroom’ confronts head-on the nature of language learning in the pre-school years in relation to claims made by advocates of the progressivist ‘process writing’ and ‘whole language’ traditions. In doing so he draws on both the SFL informed understanding of language development introduced earlier in this volume and the relay and development of Vygotsky’s sociocultural psychology in Bruner’s work – foregrounding as he does so, the complementary of the functional linguistic and neo-Vygotskian perspectives on what Bruner christened ‘scaffolding’. Gray’s point is that the facilitator role advocated for teachers in the process approach runs counter to the mentoring role adopted by caregivers in ‘natural’ learning contexts, and that guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience is a more appropriate stance for teaching in school. The paper closes with an illustration of scaffolded interaction in relation to a board game involving the negotiation of spoken procedural and mathematical ‘text routines’, which Gray comments might function well as the basis for the joint construction of written texts. For further elaboration of Gray’s own classroom practices, which had a major influence on ‘Sydney School’ literacy programmes, see Gray 1985, 1990 and 2007.

Martin’s 1999 ‘Mentoring semogenesis: “genre-based” literacy pedagogy’ paper was first presented at the conference on ‘Bernstein and SFL Theory’ organised by Frances Christie at the University of Melbourne in 1996 and is based on an unpublished paper co-authored with Joan Rothery, originally delivered at the Post World Reading Congress Symposium on Language and

Learning held at Mr Gravatt College, Brisbane, in 1988. In this paper Martin reviews the development of genre-based literacy programmes with regard to the inspiration of Bernstein's work on pedagogic discourse. Four evolving teaching/learning cycles are discussed, including consideration of their 'visible pedagogy', the waves of 'classification and framing' involved and the projection of both an 'instructional' and a social semiotic instructional discourse (i.e. KAL) by these 'regulatory' teaching/learning cycles. The paper closes with examples of the deployment and creative recontextualisation of genres by students in relation to the demands of social contexts well beyond those in which the relevant genres were learned. For further discussion see Christie and Unsworth 2005, Rose and Martin 2012 and the language in education papers collected as Martin 2012. Derewianka and Jones 2012 and Joyce and Feez 2012 provide excellent introductions to Sydney School pedagogy and curriculum, specifically targeting practising teachers and teacher education programmes; de Oliveira and Iddings (2014) and Brisk (2015) report on Sydney School influenced initiatives in North America.

Our next paper, as well as the final paper by Rose, elaborates the discussion of language development in this volume through a focus on reading. Williams 2001 'Literacy pedagogy prior to schooling: relations between social positioning and semantic variation' situates itself in the sociosemantic research paradigm introduced in Hasan's 'Semantic variation and sociolinguistics' paper in Volume IV. Here Williams deploys semantic networks to explore differences in reading 'style' as far as 'lower autonomy profession' and 'higher autonomy profession' families are concerned. Focusing on the interactions of mothers with three pre-school children while reading *The Three Little Pigs*, Williams illustrates the tendency of higher autonomy profession mothers to encourage children to 'interpret the text beyond its status as one specific story'; and he argues that this tendency is congruent with the coding orientation of this social class in interactions beyond the picture book reading context. An important implication of this work is that the semantic style of higher autonomy profession families prepares their children for teacher/student interactions in formal school settings, putting children from lower autonomy profession families at a disadvantage from which few are able to recover. For further introduction to this educationally significant strand of semantic variation research see Williams 2005b. Hasan 2009 and 2011 bring together papers developing the sociological and educational context of Williams' work.

Christie's 1997 'Curriculum macrogenres as forms of initiation into a culture' introduces her genre and register framework for analysing classroom discourse, which can be read as an SFL development of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) well-known model (which was inspired by the scale and category theory presented in Volume I of this series). As far as genre is concerned, Christie examines one classroom genre (the morning news genre), and one macrogenre (involving a unit of work in social science). She characterises a macrogenre as a genre complex, following on from Martin's 1994, 1995 analogy with clause complexing. Turning to register, Christie's analysis adapts Bernstein's (e.g. 1990) notions of regulatory and instructional discourse. Regulatory discourse is recontextualised

as language choices involved in establishing goals for teaching/learning activities and fostering and maintaining the direction of activities until these goals are achieved. This regulatory discourse is interpreted as projecting instructional discourse, which is itself concerned with the language choices through which the knowledge and skills being taught are realised. Christie's development of genre and register analysis for classroom discourse has proved very valuable as far as the evolving design and critical appreciation of 'Sydney School' teaching/learning cycles is concerned.

Rose's 2006 'Towards a reading based theory of teaching' develops several dimensions of the rationale for his 'Reading to Learn' programme, the major innovation of Sydney School literacy pedagogy following the WIR project reviewed by Veel in this volume. Reading to Learn develops earlier interventions into a better balanced reading and writing programme, taking into account, as Rose argues in this paper, the integral role of learning from reading in formal education. As part of this development Rose extends the global design of previous teaching/learning cycles by focusing on the micro-interactions realising curriculum genres, illustrated here in relation to exchanges designed for detailed reading – with examples of classroom practice taken from his work in a South African secondary school. Martin 2006 focuses on Rose's design of this level of classroom interaction in some detail; for elaboration of the evolution of Sydney School pedagogy and curriculum as Reading to Learn see Rose and Martin 2012. Rose's Reading to Learn website provides an important point of access for his materials, papers and in-service programmes: www.readingtolearn.com.au/.

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Part 19

A LANGUAGE-BASED THEORY
OF LEARNING

