Continuing Discourse on Language

A Functional Perspective
Volume 2

Edited by
Ruqaiya Hasan
Christian Matthiessen
Jonathan J. Webster

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Word as linguist

What the Word made was whole and stable, till
That snake pushed a theory in another key. Then Eve
Bit deep, starting feminist studies, as she traded diurnal
Garden, preferring post-modern longings that branch, fork
And twist between Divinity and the Devil's branded
Habitations. After dreaming of Michael Angelo, some
Chose lyres whose strings set consonants in Sistine sepia,
Or follow guttural longings rattling down pulsating throats.

Words adapt: servant, master, hidden imperial will;
Inducting smiles, a frown, a silver lining; double-takes
Brimful of Derrida, still busy in the judgement seat.
His tribe constructs each moment's brief. They delete,
Like no other, traditions, key texts, purest commonsense;
Cast aside immortal longings; and such truth of generations
That sanctify point and purpose, or insource epic stamina.
This is manifold history, a recurring choice; ever there:

A newly risen Promise, or Babylonian agencies. But

No option for our tribe: Prophesy and Revelation, knowing
Poetry is elemental; its interlinked intimacies remember, read,
And write us. There is the rock cleft memory along a home-
Returning. Forty years and just a glimpse for a man of faith.
With others, imperfection asks word and grammar to rhyme
With thought. Intensify metaphors: they all uncoil the mind,
Burnish spirit; heal split infinities. Summon benedictions:
They re-arrange, restore us, for this release, this search.

We feel to see to breathe. Night-faces brighten yet again
As breaking light lays the first shafts to kiss each flower.
The falling leaf is equinox, yet without season, narrating
His walk in the Garden. That we cannot share, but share again
Because words there are to tell me so; because I see faces
Who have strolled some graceful evenings in that far place.
They elicit words that signify, that we should cleave unto,
Because they touch; because they tell ... far more than words.

Edwin Thumboo,
11th August 2005

Part 4 Inside language

18 The 'architecture' of language according to systemic functional theory: developments since the 1970s

Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen

1 Into the 1970s

1.1 Evolutionary development of holistic model

The development of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has always been of an evolutionary kind rather than of a revolutionary kind: Halliday (e.g. 1959; 1961) built on his immediate predecessors instead of distancing himself from them and new findings have been added in a cumulative fashion. This has been true of all aspects of SFL – theory, description, analysis, application – and it has certainly been a property of the development of the systemic functional model of the 'architecture' of language (and in more recent years of other semiotic systems as well). Here I will be concerned with the modelling of this 'architecture'. The term 'architecture' has been used quite widely in discussing the organisation of language and of other systems as well (see Matthiessen, in press, for general remarks). It embodies a helpful metaphor – as long as we keep in mind that language is not rigid, it is not static and it is not designed.

The scope of the systemic functional model of the architecture of language was **comprehensive** from the start. The total system of language in context has always been in focus and SFL has been developed by moving from a comprehensive overview map of language in context towards more detailed maps of regions identifiable on the overview map. This move has involved not only filling in details, as in the ongoing description of the lexicogrammar of a given language (as with successive editions of Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* and work building on this description), but it has also involved adding new **semiotic dimensions** to give a more multifaceted view of language in context, bringing out complementarities that were earlier hidden

from view or appeared to be competing alternatives (cf. Butt, Chapter 5). With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that the SFL approach fits in very well with holistic approaches in general and with **systems thinking** about complex adaptive systems (see Matthiessen and Halliday, in prep.). Comparing the view of language around 1960, or around 1975, when I first began to engage with linguistics, I certainly have a very clear and powerful sense that SFL has made visible so many aspects of language that weren't visible earlier.

The comprehensive map that has guided the research into language in context and the development of the theory has been based on a set of interlocking semiotic dimensions since Halliday (1961). Halliday has increased the number of dimensions since then, allowing us to see more of language in context; but the increase has been cumulative, as when topography is added to a contour map. Key dimensions had already been established by the 1970s and much of the theoretical research since then has involved developing a deeper understanding of these dimensions and working out the implications of their intersections.

1.2 Stratification

One of the key dimensions is **stratification**, which is in a sense the defining organisational characteristic of all semiotic systems (see further below). This is a 'global' dimension that organises language in context into an ordered series of levels or strata. It was in place from the start (e.g. Halliday, 1961). The notion of **levels of analysis** was taken over from Firthian linguistics, but while these levels of analysis were not hierarchically ordered, Halliday (1961) modelled them as a hierarchy, as shown in the diagram in Figure 18.1, taken from Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964: 18). This model was more in tune with European structuralism, in particular with Glossematics; and it has remained remarkably robust over the years. Based on this model, the internal organisation of each stratum has been explored, as have interstratal mappings; and a proposal for further levels within 'situation' in Figure 18.1 was developed by Martin and this group of educational linguists (e.g. Martin, 1992). There have also been some terminological changes. In particular, the term 'context' is now again used in its more Malinowskian and Firthian sense of the level above language (at the same level as 'situation' in Figure 18.1), 'grammar and lexis' are now referred to as lexicogrammar and 'script' is graphetics. The term 'stratum' is now often used in preference to 'level' (following Lamb's, e.g. 1966, stratificational linguistics), partly to avoid ambiguity since 'level' has been used for both stratum and rank.

Subject concerned:	Phonetics		Linguistics		
Level (general):	SUBSTANCE (phonic or graphic)	relation of form and substance	FORM	CONTEXT (relation of form and situation)	situation (non-linguistic phenomena)
Level (specific):	PHONETICS	PHONOLOGY	GRAMMAR & LEXIS (vocabulary)	SEMANTICS	
	SCRIPT	"GRAPHOLOGY" (writing system)			

Figure 18.1a: The model of levels (strata) in Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens (1964: 18)

The broad outlines of systemic functional linguistics can be sketched by reference to Figure 18.1. In Firthian linguistics, the focus was on the 'outer' strata – on phonetics and phonology on the one hand (e.g. Firth, 1948; Henderson, 1949) and on context (= 'situation' in Figure 18.1) and semantics on the other (e.g. Firth, 1950; Mitchell, 1957). There were some important contributions specific to the investigation of the 'inner' stratum of 'lexicogrammar' (to use the current term in SFL) – in particular the notions of **collocation** and **colligation**, but on the whole this stratum remained a gap in the account. There was clearly a need to fill this gap by developing the general theory of language to handle this stratum and by developing descriptions of the lexicogrammars of particular languages.

Halliday's work addressed this need. He developed descriptions first of the grammar of Chinese (Halliday, 1956a; 1959; Halliday and McDonald, 2004) and then of the grammar of English (e.g. Halliday, 1964; 1967/8; 1970b; 1976; 1984). His descriptive work was interleaved with his development of the general theory, in an ongoing dialogue. The early description of the grammar of Chinese was followed by the first major theoretical publication, Halliday's (1961) 'Categories of the theory of grammar', which gave rise to what came to be called 'scale-and-category theory', the first phase of SFL. The development of the description of the grammar (and also intonation) of English in the 1960s provided material for and was enhanced by, the creation of systemic functional theory out of scale-and-category theory. While the examples in the theoretical discussions published during the 1960s were typically taken from the description of English, the theory was now also being used in the description of languages other than Chinese and English (e.g. Barnwell, 1969, on Mbembe;

Mock, 1969, on Nzema; Huddleston and Uren, 1969, on MOOD in French); see further Teruya et al. (Chapter 27).

1.3 Scale-and-category theory transformed into systemic (functional) theory

Analytically, we can identify two phases in the transformation of scale-and-category theory into systemic functional theory:

1. First Halliday transformed the **system-structure theory** that had been inherited from Firth into **systemic theory**: Halliday (1966a) made paradigmatic, or systemic, organisation the primary mode of organisation within a given stratum, thus shifting the balance between the paradigmatic axis and the syntagmatic axis in favour of the paradigmatic axis. The relation between the two axes was one of realisation.
2. Halliday (1967/8; 1970b) then introduced the theory of **metafunctions**, transforming systemic theory into **systemic functional theory**. He showed that the internal organisation of (the content plane of) language was functional in nature, being organised into ideational, interpersonal and textual systems.

In the early **scale-and-category** model, axis was also present as a dimension, but the two axes, the syntagmatic axis and the paradigmatic axis (the axes of 'chain and choice', as in Halliday, 1963a) carried equal weight, neither having priority over the other. This was a continuation of Firth's system-structure theory, in which systems were always 'placed' in structures (but it differed from American structuralist approaches, which gave priority to the syntagmatic axis). This approach to axis was pushed in descriptive work – in particular, in the early work on intonation (Halliday, 1963b; 1963c; 1967) and in the 'Bloomington' grammar from about the same period (e.g. Halliday, 1964; 1976). In the course of this work, Halliday 'freed' systems from places in structures and transformed them into **system networks** with units such as the clause and the tone group as their points of origin. Specifications of structures were now located as **realisations** of terms in systems (the term 'realisation' being a term taken over from Lamb to replace Firth's term 'exponence'; Halliday, 1966a: 59). The paradigmatic axis had thus been given priority and defined the environment for syntagmatic specifications.

Prioritising the paradigmatic mode of organisation for a given stratum resonated with the general orientation of the theory and had important consequences. It resonated with the holistic approach, since it is much easier to develop a comprehensive picture of a given stratum in paradigmatic terms, using system networks (cf. Matthiessen, 1995b), rather than in syntagmatic terms, using some form of syntagmatically-based rule system. It also resonated

with the focus on text analysis and text based-description, since text can be conceptualised as a process of selection from system networks (cf. Halliday, 1964; 1977) and relative frequencies of selections in text can be represented in the system as systemic probabilities (as Halliday, 1959, had already done).

It also resonated with **prosodic analysis** inherited from Firth's theory, since prosodies can be represented as terms in system in system networks. This was brought out very clearly in the description of intonation (Halliday, 1967, extended by Elmenoufy, 1969, and now Halliday and Greaves, in press; see Greaves et al., Chapter 30): intonation did not have to be forced into and interpreted in terms of some form of syntagm of segments, but could instead be handled paradigmatically in the system network and represented syntagmatically as (in theory) elastic tone contours. And in the description of the grammar, Halliday was able to show how this description could be extended to cover systems realised not by grammatical syntagms but by intonation.

Finally it resonated with Firth's **polysystemic theory**, since systems can be simultaneous in a system network. Thus the system network of the clause turned out to be a set of simultaneous systems – those of THEME, MOOD and TRANSITIVITY (as shown in Halliday, 1969). This polysystemic nature of the clause lead to a 'discovery'.

One important consequence of the prioritising of the paradigmatic mode of organisation was the 'discovery' of the **metafunctional organisation** of the content plane of language: in developing the description of the grammar, Halliday noticed that systems would 'cluster' into more interdependent systems. He asked why and the answer was his theory of **metafunction** (e.g. Halliday, 1967/8; 1970a; 1970b; 1969; 1976; 1978). Functional approaches to language had been around for quite a while – in particular, Malinowski's functionalism, Prague School functionalism and Bühler's organon model; but Halliday's theory was the first fully developed metafunctional theory of language modelling its **intrinsic** organisation according to functional principles (instead of referring mainly to **extrinsic** uses; see Martin, 1991). (Later, Halliday, e.g. 1978; Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Martin, 1992, showed how the intrinsic functional organisation of language related to the functional organisation of context, introduced earlier, e.g. Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens, 1964, as a development of Firth's contextual schema.) Metafunctions are manifested in the organisation of systems along the paradigmatic axis (the systems of THEME, MOOD and TRANSITIVITY in the clause). They are also manifested in the organisation of structures along the syntagmatic axis as simultaneous layers of functional configurations (Theme ^ Rheme, Mood + Residue, Process + participants + circumstances in the clause) and Halliday (1979) later showed that each metafunction engenders a distinct syntagmatic **mode of expression**.

Metafunction can be interpreted as an additional dimension in the organisation of language; but (unlike stratification and rank) it is not a hierarchy, it is a **spectrum** of simultaneous strands within both paradigmatic and syntagmatic organisation. This is brought out very clearly in the **function-rank matrix** introduced as an overview map of the lexicogrammatical system of English by Halliday (1970b). Such matrices show how lexicogrammatical or semantic system of a language is organised into a range of subsystems such as TAXIS, TRANSITIVITY, MOOD, THEME, TENSE, EVENT TYPE, PERSON which are distributed across the ranked units of that system.

Another important consequence of the prioritising of the paradigmatic mode of organisation was that it became possible to model grammar and lexis paradigmatically as a continuum. This had been foreshadowed by Halliday (1961), who suggested that the 'grammarian's dream' extend the description of the grammar in **delicacy** to include lexis. But it wasn't until the 1980s that Hasan (1987a) demonstrated the feasibility of this research programme (see Tucker, 1997, Chapter 29).

1.4 Rank

In the modelling of a given stratum, the dimension of **rank** (the 'rank scale') was part of the theory put forward by Halliday (1961). It represents the division of semiotic labour across a hierarchy of units, ordered from the most extensive to the least extensive. According to this stratum and rank model, language is thus organised globally in terms of abstraction (stratification), but locally (within each stratum) in terms of composition (as Halliday, 1966a: 66, noted: 'In stratificational terms, rank defines a series of inner strata, or sub-strata, within the outer grammatical stratum, with each rank characterised by a different network of systems.').[1] Interestingly, it is the global form of organisation, stratification, that is characteristic of semiotic systems in particular, whereas composition seems to be a principle of organisation in systems of all kinds (cf. Steiner, 1991, on action). Like stratification, rank has proved to be very robust (even though it has been discussed and challenged at various points in time, as in the early exchange between Matthews, 1966 and Halliday, 1966b).

In fact, the value of this local dimension of organisation grew over time, as its 'cartographic power' came into focus – that is, its importance in making it possible to bring out the internal organisation of lexicogrammar (or, indeed, of any other stratum): see Halliday (1970b; 1978) for early publications of the 'function-rank matrix'. Figure 18.1b presents a schematic version of a function-matrix, extended in delicacy from the grammatical zone of

lexicogrammar to the lexical zone. It shows how cells in the matrix defined by rank and metafunction constitute 'semiotic addresses' (to use Butt's term) for systems, represented here by a fragment of the transitivity network within the system network of the clause. The network (taken from Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) has been extended in delicacy to illustrate the relation between grammar and lexis.

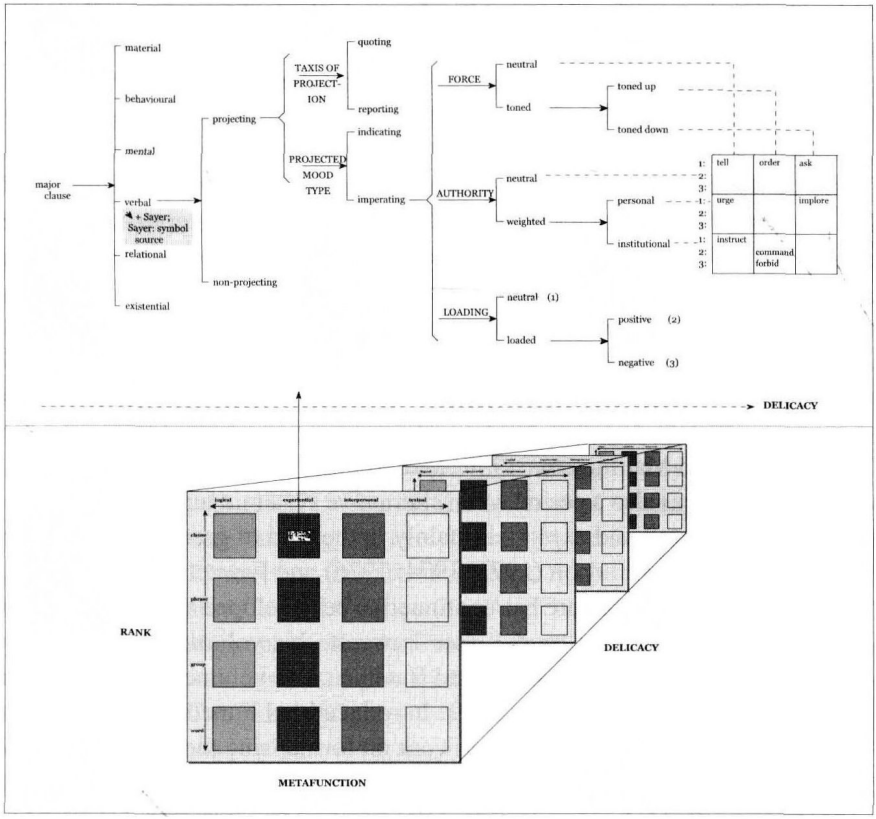

Figure 18.1b: Schematic representation of function-rank matrix, showing cell in matrix defined by rank and metafunction as the 'semiotic' address for one of the simultaneous systems within the system network of the clause