

A critical review on “*Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*” by M. A. K Halliday, revised by Christian M. I. M Matthiessen (2014)

Duong Thi Hong An

University of Information and Communication Technology, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam

PhD student, Hanoi Open University, Vietnam

Email: dthan@ictu.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

The 4th edition of *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar* by M. A. K Halliday and revised by Christian M. I. M Matthiessen (2014) is considered to be an invaluable textbook for students and researchers of linguistics, especially of functional linguistics, discourse analysis and literary studies and also for those with broader educational concerns. As a novice researcher in Systemic Functional Grammar, a critical review by chapters of this edition has been carried out with great efforts. An evaluation on the features of this edition from various perspectives has also been implemented. As a PhD student, who is using this work as the most significant research framework, the personalized exploitation has been expressed in the review.

Keywords: *critical review, Halliday, systemic functional grammar.*

INTRODUCTION

In the 4th edition of *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar* by M. A. K Halliday and revised by Christian M. I. M Matthiessen (2014), there are a number of evident changes in comparison with the earlier versions. The first one that can be easily recognized is its title. The previous editions have been called “*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*” (IFG) while the newest one is titled as “*Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*”. The second change is the publisher London & New York: Routledge, as before it was under the imprint of Hodder Arnold. The third change is that there is specific reference to the revisions by Christian Matthiessen although he was also identified as collaborator in the 3rd edition. More importantly are the changes indicative of the framework and descriptive work on English in systemic functional linguistics.

Overall, this 4th edition has updated the following points:

- + Recent use of systemic functional linguistics to provide further guidance for students, scholars and researchers.
- + More on ecology of grammar, illustrating how each major system serves to realize a semantic system.
- + A systematic indexing and classification of examples.
- + More from corpora, thus allowing for easy access to data.
- + Extended textual and audio examples and an image bank available online at www.routledge.com/cw/halliday.

A CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

Firstly, let's have an overview of this newest edition of this book by chapters.

In the first part of IFG 4 (chapters 1 – 5), the Hallidayan tradition of 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL) approach to language description holds meaning as a socially constructed activity. It supports the view that a descriptive account of context is integral to linguistic descriptions, and that language as a social semiotic describes discourse as semiotic choices made by speakers or discourse participants to create social contexts in and through interactions. Halliday emphasizes the central importance of language and has been concerned with describing how the organization of language is related to social use. This model of language identifies the context of any instance of language use as consisting of a '*context of situation*', which is in turn embedded in a context of '*culture*'. The context of situation is further defined in terms of: the '*field*' which focuses on the institutional practices, the '*tenor*' on social relationships and the '*mode*' which focuses on the channel of communication. To achieve the social purposes in discourse within each context of situation, the language performs three simultaneous '*meta-functions*' expressing three types of simultaneous meanings. These '*meta-functions*' are seen through the '*clause*' structure as both spoken and written language can be analyzed through the clause, while the '*sentence*' is only logical in reference to the written form of the language. The first part of IFG 4 introduces Halliday's concepts of the architecture of language and what this means in terms of a functional grammar in Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 3 looks at the '*clause*' as '*message*' or as a '*textual*' resource concerned with the flow of information. Chapter 4 describes the clause as an interpersonal resource concerned with the interaction within the nature of dialogue. Chapter 5 is concerned with the representation of how we see the world and ourselves.

The second part of the IFG 4 (chapters 6-10) describes the clause in terms of its complexity: the structure of groups and phrases, the different types of clause structure, cohesion and discourse and finally the metaphorical modes of expression. Such an approach allows for a classification of texts according to '*contextual variables*' and thus be able to see the grammar at work in different text types (genres). This also supports the understanding of language as an '*assemblage of registers*'. These are two important concepts in language teaching and research into language.

It is interesting to note that not long ago, systemic functional description of English was considered as quite '*unorthodox*' in that it differed from many mainstream accounts, in particular Chomsky's generative grammar. What Halliday did was to present an account of grammar and lexis with what he termed a lexico-grammatical continuum, rather than separate entities as to often presented in our language textbooks. In this theory of grammar, '*text*' is realized by clauses at different levels, the semantic (meaning) and the lexico-grammatical (the wording).

Since IFG 1 was first published in 1985 and subsequently followed by IFG 2 in 1994, several textbooks have been published drawing on Halliday's initial work. The scale of these can be seen in Halliday's own publication '*Complementaries of Language*' (2008) as well as those listed in the expanded reference in this 4th edition. IFG 3 (in 2004) used many examples from various corpora because of the increasing availability of computational tools. IFG 4 has expanded the use of corpus based examples and has added a website www.routledge.com/cw/halliday for further exemplification.

Secondly, for more details, I evaluate the features of the 4th edition of *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* from various perspectives as follows:

(1) Elaborated key theoretical concepts

Some theoretical underpinnings of functional grammar presupposed or treated briefly in its previous editions are foregrounded in this new one. Among them structure (syntagmatic order), system (paradigmatic order), stratification (phonetics and phonology as expression, lexicogrammar and semantics as content, and context), instantiation (the connection between system and text, a text being an instantiation of the system), and above all, Metafunction (ideational- construing experience, interpersonal-exacting interpersonal relations; textual-organizing the discursive flow and creating continuity).

Among these key concepts which form the basis of the functional grammar tenets, the relatively difficult concept "instantiation" is explained neatly as: "*Like the relationship between climate and weather, the relationship between system and text is a cline, the cline of instantiation*". (p.27). This is just an example of the overall language style which strives to be more transparent and spoken without sacrificing the theoretical loadings.

Another two core concepts are lexico-grammar and grammaticalization. Lexico-grammar, a coined word in FG, embodies the unity of lexis and grammar. Lexis and grammar form the two poles of a single cline. Lexis is viewed as the most delicate grammar, though the book devotes more of itself to the "medium delicacy grammar" areas (p.46).

FG adheres to the principle that for in studying the systems of language, the delicacy level can always be pushed further. In the new edition, we find many progresses down the delicacy scales. For instance, the type of doing is explicated under "creative" and "transformative". Also, there are detailed tables giving examples of verbs serving as Process in different material clause types. In fact, the whole chapter is considerably expanded, making the complexities of transitivity more accessible.

Grammaticalization, being an area of robust development in linguistic research, also receives increased attention and proportion in IFG. Functional grammar considers closure, generality and proportionality the three features that characterize a grammatical system. Systemic grammar is one which is organized around this concept of grammaticalization, whereby meaning is constructed in networks of interrelated contrasts (p.47).

In relation to grammaticalization, the theoretical underpinning of grammatical metaphor are foregrounded in the sections (10.1 , 10.2) discussing lexicogrammar and semantics; while in the 2nd edition, the discussions started a bit abruptly from rhetorical transference. Among the theoretical tenets, strata is not such a simple idea. The normal conception of a text consisting of clauses is replaced by a text realized by clauses, text and clause being located respectively on the strata of semantics (the stratum of meaning) and lexicogrammar (the stratum of wording). While the book focuses on the lexicogrammatical stratum, a central concern is the relationship between this stratum and the one above it (semantics) and below it (phonology). In fact as we can see in the neo-Hallidayan approach to functional grammar, discourse semantics is being developed into a field of its specific concerns with genres and registers (Martin & Davis 2003).

(2) More outstanding text-orientation

The beginning of the book makes it clear that this is a grammar for those interested in using it to analyze and interpret texts. And texts in various contexts, such as educational, social, literary, political, legal, clinical etc. can be analyzed as specimen or artifact. The book incorporates these two facets of texts.

The text orientation of the book also shows itself in the new corpus it uses throughout the book. Corpus data is used for its authenticity, inclusion of spoken language and the possibility to study grammar in quantitative terms. P.55 lists the corpuses and text archive (opportunistic samples) used for description and exemplification in IFG, including COBUILD, LOB, Kohlapur, London-Lund and UTS/Macquarie corpus of spoken Australian English.

In addition to corpus as data, text orientation is manifest in the more sharpened register-awareness in the functional grammar framework. A case in point is the identifying clause (p.234). Common-sensically, we would think doings and happenings are the predominant processes in transitivity system. However, it is noted that the token-value structure, a subtype of the identifying process is the most important in that it tends to dominate in certain highly valued registers (such as scientific, commercial, political and bureaucratic discourse) where the meanings that are being construed are inherently symbolic ones. This kind of analysis of the transitivity sub-types relates grammatical patterns to register and is illuminating for text analysis.

(3) Friendly visuals

The systemic aspect of the grammar, which was omitted in the 1st and 2nd edition, gets an equal share in the 3rd and 4th with the functional aspect. This is also the main reason why the 4th edition grows considerably in volume. However, the systemic graphs are not there just to add a scientific touch of the book or to make the grammar more intricate than it is. The graphs represent the network more clearly and appeal to vision. For example, the system network of speech functions (p.108) offers a very good summary of what the two tables are trying to represent in the 4th edition. Other examples are Fig.5-6. Mental Clause Systems (p.258), Fig. 5-10 Material clause systems (p.229) and Fig 5-22 Relational clause systems (p.299) which elaborates the processes are dealt briefly in this 4th edition.

(4) New organization of sections

In chapter 1, which explores *Architecture of language*, after basic concepts for the study of language, we have Section 1.4. about Context, language and other semiotic systems and Theory, description and analysis. This is more logical and is also teacher-friendly compared to the 3rd edition. In chapter 7 on *Above the clause: the clause complex*, the clause complex as textual domain is added compared to the previous one.

Thirdly, I will clarify how I will exploit this edition for my PhD research on ***“Semantic and Lexicogrammatical Features of Mental Processes in English and Vietnamese: A Systemic Functional Comparison”***. I find it extremely valuable, especially chapter 5 *“Clause as representation”*. According to Halliday, *“the clause- like any other grammatical unit - is a multifunctional construct consisting of three meta-functional lines of meaning”*: the textual line of Theme –Rheme, the interpersonal line of Mood –Residue and the experiential line of organization. The author also clarifies the six type of processes: *material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational and existential*, which are well-illustrated in Fig. 5-3 & 5-4 (p. 216 & 219). Material, mental and relational are the main types of process in the English transitivity system, so my research only focuses on mental processes or processes of sensing. Mental clauses are concerned with our experience of the world of our consciousness, which may be construed either as *“flowing from a person’s consciousness or as impinging on it”*. From a reader without any knowledge about this process initially, after reading this chapter, I can fully understand about the nature of the terms like *“senser”*, *“phenomenon”*. The four subtypes of sensing: *perceptive, cognitive, desiderative, emotive* are clearly modeled in Fig.5-16 (p. 258). This helps me to have basic knowledge of mental processes, which is of great value for my writing theoretical review section.

However, from my personal viewpoint - a novice researcher in the field of SFL, there exists some points in IFG4 that need to be improved. Firstly, in IFG3 and IFG 4, Halliday’s original introduction has been dropped. It is unfortunate for teachers and beginners in the field of linguistic research as it is one of the most elucidating accounts of the use of a lexico-grammar. Secondly, as for illustration with graphs and figures, some networks are printed so tiny that the readability is reduced. For instance, to get a clear view of the Transitivity network on p.355 (Fig. 5-46), most people might need a magnifying glass. I can predict that the future editions will take a new turn in multimedia using images and photos to illustrate the points.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this edition is a must-read for researchers and scholars interested in the relation between grammar, meaning and discourse. It gives a comprehensive description of Halliday’s SFG and has been extensively revised by exploring large amount of corpus data, foregrounding the theoretical underpinnings of FG and incorporating systemic networks into the body of the book. In fact, it is a great joy and comfort to see a theory keep renewing itself while sticking to its basic views about the relationship between language, text and society. It is hard to imagine anyone in the field of applied linguistics that does not recognize the ever increasing insights that this 4th edition of SFG continues to give in seeing language from so many different perspectives. Its great value for researchers in general and for me - a PhD candidate in particular is immeasurable.

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