Studies in
English
Language

M. A. K. Halliday

Edited by Jonathan J. Webster

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The Collected Works of M. A. K. Halliday

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PREFACE

Perhaps because he is a language teacher turned linguist, Professor Halliday has been able to maintain a perspective on language that is grounded in how we actually use language to construe reality and enact social relationships. What began as a "laundry card grammar" – "being written on the beautiful white cards that laundries inserted in one's shirts in the days before washing machines took over" – eventually developed into systemic-functional grammar, which has become the theory of *choice* (in more ways than one) for those interested in achieving an "appliable" description leading to an understanding of the enabling power of language.

In his introduction to this volume on *Studies in English Language* (and the next on *Studies in Chinese Language*), Professor Halliday summarizes what he describes as the "problems which forced me (with many misgivings, because I never thought of myself as being a theorist) to construct my own mapping, or projection, of the design and traffic flow of language". These include the problem of the clause; the system; units; rank and the rank scale; structure; types of structure; taxis (interdependency) and rankshift; the relation between system and structure; delicacy; probability; metafunction; dimensions of structure; types of structure; complex systems; complementarity; intonation; and dimensionality.

For Professor Halliday, the underlying quest has always been about description rather than theory. He maintains that it is "not so much new theories but new descriptions" that will enable us to engage more effectively with language. Theory becomes pertinent only insofar as it lays the foundation for grammatical description which embraces the complexity of language. It was the need to analyse discourse more effectively that prompted the elaboration of grammatical theory in 'Notes on transitivity and theme' (the first three chapters of this volume), dealing with "a characterization of

the different types of process that were distinctively construed in the grammar (the material, the mental and the relational) and of the mechanisms of discourse flow in the thematic and informational systems".

Grammar is multidimensional in both structure and system. How grammatical options cluster together in what Professor Halliday describes as discrete patches or subsets around a particular kind of structural representation provides a grammatical basis for distinguishing between the various components of meaning. Transitivity and theme, for example, represent two distinct dimensions of structure in the grammar of the English clause, each corresponding to a particular metafunctional component, or dimension of meaning. Transitivity is related to experiential meaning; thematic structure to (intra)textual meaning. A third set of grammatical options involving mood structure corresponds to interpersonal meaning. In 'Options and Functions in the English Clause' (Chapter Four), Professor Halliday refers to a fourth component, the logical component, which deals with how simple clauses combine to form a clause complex. Much of the complexity of language owes to the fact that there is more than one set of grammatical options in play at the same time.

Sometimes the conflicting demands of interacting semantic systems motivate unexpected choices leading to such 'unacceptable' instances as those illustrated in 'On Being Teaching' (Chapter Six). Spontaneous conversation provides fertile ground for just such attempts at pushing the envelope of what the system will allow. Variants of another kind, namely dialectal variants, are discussed in 'It's a Fixed Word Order Language is English' (Chapter Seven). While norms may vary according to users – the norm in Northern English being to put the Given Subject last, and the New information first; the principle remains the same across the language as a whole – "the order of elements in the clause realizes the texture of the message".

When it comes to describing the grammar of spoken English, both intonational and non-intonational systems "figure side by side". This relationship between intonation and other grammatical choices is the subject of the papers in the third section on 'Intonation and Grammar'. The contrast between falling and rising tones, for example, combines with choices in the mood system to distinguish between declarative and interrogative. Intonation also plays a role in "carrying forward the discourse" and contributing to the realization of information structure.

The fourth and final section presents two analyses, both of which offer new insights into not only the grammar but also those domains of human experience transformed into meaning by the grammar. In '"The Teacher Taught the Student English": An Essay in Applied Linguistics' (Chapter Eleven), Professor Halliday's five different grammatical descriptions of the same English sentence, 'The teacher taught the student English', are like five smooth stones that help to topple that giant of a misconception that there is only one interpretation of the teaching or learning process. In the final chapter, 'On the Grammar of Pain' (Chapter Twelve), Professor Halliday explores how pain is construed in the grammar. What we learn from these analyses of the teaching/learning process, and pain, is how the many-sided nature of the human experience is captured in the complexities of its grammatical realization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS AN APPLIABLE DESCRIPTION OF THE GRAMMAR OF A LANGUAGE

1

I had hoped to start off my career by working in East and Southeast Asian languages, with specialization in Chinese dialects. At that time, the beginning of the 1950s, there were hardly any academic posts in linguistics in British universities; but I was quite happy for my teaching to be in Chinese language – I enjoyed language teaching, and that was still close enough to my intended field of research (I have never been able to separate teaching and research very clearly anyway). While studying linguistics with Wang Li in China, and being part of his small research team working in the dialects of the Pearl River Delta, I had prepared my own syntactic questionnaire containing a set of sentences in (standard spoken) Cantonese, and had used it to investigate 12 out of the 36 dialects that Professor Wang was including in his survey. I intended this to be the material for my PhD when I returned to England under the conditions of my postgraduate scholarship.

However, having been living through the revolution in China, I knew nothing about the "cold war"; and I was amazed when the only question I was asked when being interviewed for a teaching position in the Chinese Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies was whether I was a member of the communist party! I wasn't; but I refused to undertake not to become one, and so lost the chance of that appointment (when I queried the reasons for the decision, I got the coy reply that "political considerations were not absent"). The authorities at Cambridge had refused to

be dragged into the witch hunt; so my scholarship was transferred to Cambridge and I went as a student to their Faculty of Oriental Languages. At that time, however, the Department of Chinese at Cambridge did not cater for Modern Chinese; so my PhD proposal was rejected, on the grounds that, even if it could have been a viable research project, there was no one on the teaching staff who was qualified to supervise it.

I could read classical Chinese reasonably well, but certainly not to the standard required for doctoral research; in any case, being someone who learns almost exclusively by ear, I don't engage readily with dead languages – the main reason I had left school early to study Chinese for my war service was to get away from Greek and Latin, which I had been made to specialize in at school; so a compromise was reached whereby I would study one of the earliest known texts written in Mandarin, namely the C14 Chinese translation of the so-called "Secret History of the Mongols" (元朝祕史). To this day I still regret not having been able to pursue my Chinese dialect studies. It is no good asking, as my kind-hearted editor did when I told him, "why not now?"; even if my field notes had survived the movings and disruptions of the past half century, I would certainly no longer be able to understand and interpret them. But the editor has included in Volume 8 a paper I wrote at the time giving some account of that Chinese dialect research.

I was, however, permitted to attend lectures in the Linguistics Department at SOAS, and was fortunate to study under the supervision of R. H. ("Bobby") Robins and J. R. Firth. This gave me both a theoretical foundation to underpin everything I had learned from Wang Li and – I won't say a methodology – a direction in which a methodology might be sought. Firth's general theoretical view of language, and his post–Saussurean system–structure descriptive model, provided exactly the sort of insights I felt were needed. But the model had been developed in phonology; and to the extent that it had been applied elsewhere this was as a way of thinking about the "context of situation", the representation of the environment of a text that Firth had taken over from Malinowski and refined. It had not been used as a tool for describing grammar.

I found no problem in understanding the language of the Secret History; and I had had from Wang Li an excellent grounding in the description of modern Mandarin grammar. What I tried to do in my thesis was to apply Firth's theoretical model, analysing the text at various levels while taking the lexicogrammar as the core.

This meant imposing some determinacy on the grammar – this essentially for three reasons. First, I was describing a text: a finite entity in itself, but also in this case a unique specimen of a language (Modern Mandarin could serve comparatively, as a point of departure, but not as a source of further textual data). Second, the model had, as I said, been elaborated largely in phonology, where categories were at least selectively determinate. Third, I wanted to use quantitative methods to test internal predictions based on proportionality. Suppose, for example, the text contained no instance of negative imperfective: was that a systemic or a random gap? If 10 per cent of clauses have negative polarity and 5 per cent have imperfective aspect, then if aspect and polarity are independent (freely combinable), the expected number of negative imperfectives would be only 0.5 per cent of the population; so if out of 2,000 clauses none is found to occur, this was not sufficient evidence to suggest such a category was systemically excluded. Firth of course accepted the first consideration: it was his own notion of the text as "restricted language". I don't remember discussing the more general points; Firth was always suspicious of overdeterminacy – but when the thesis was published he accepted the dedication of the book. (The central sections of the book are included as Part 1 of Volume 8.)

My central interest was in modern spoken Chinese. But once I got appointed as Assistant Lecturer at Cambridge I was charged with introducing a new programme in Modern Chinese and had to teach well over twice the number of hours then stipulated by the university as a maximum, so I had rather little time left for writing. Meanwhile I was becoming increasingly committed to general linguistics, and especially to working with an inspirational group of colleagues in the Linguistics Group of the British Communist Party – in particular Jeffrey Ellis, Den(n)is Berg, Trevor Hill, Jean Ure and Peter Wexler. Our topics for discussion – and discussion papers – were many, from the promotion and development of national languages in post-colonial societies, via the principles of functional variation in language ("register" variation), to the description of grammar in a way that was formally explicit but at the same time based on meaning (Denis Berg's name for this was "conceptual – functional grammar").[1] I had lost my personal contacts with China, which became increasingly difficult to maintain as the 1950s progressed; and when the chance was offered I switched to a position in linguistics, moving to the University of Edinburgh in 1958.

This is not the place to pursue a personal history; the foregoing is intended simply to give some background to the current Volumes 7 and 8. In a sense these are appearing in the wrong order, since I worked in Chinese studies for 13 years before having any professional concern with English. But for the remaining 30 years of my academic life, work on English predominated; and whereas the basic ideas on language were generated by – and worked out in the course of – my engagement with Chinese (and, on a much smaller scale, some initial explorations into Thai, Vietnamese and Malay), the "systemic–functional" framework that emerged during the 1960s was tested out most thoroughly in English (it began as the "laundry card grammar", being written on the beautiful white cards that laundries inserted in one's shirts in the days before washing machines took over). In the remaining sections of this chapter I shall abandon personal history, and instead try to recapitulate the particular problems I met with in working towards "appliable" descriptions – problems which forced me (with many misgivings, because I never thought of myself as being a theorist) to construct my own mapping, or projection, of the design and traffic flow of language.

2

2.1 *The problem of the* **clause**

It was clear to me already, when I taught my first Chinese class on 13 May 1945, that the clause was the centre of action in the grammar. At that time the clause didn't seem to exist as a general organizing category – only "compound / complex sentences" had clauses; the "simple sentence" was a sentence but not a clause. But the clause had to be introduced because it was the place, or the locus, where fundamental choices in meaning were acted out. Much of the impetus towards a "scale-and-category" grammar started from that simple observation. (See 2.11 on metafunction.)

2.2 *The problem of the* **system**

Categories like negative, interrogative, passive tended to be identified as isolates and then get bundled together without regard for their operational context. It seemed necessary to sort them out into their contrasting sets: to identify the system, and its terms, and to locate

it at an explicit point of origin – the environment in which the selection is made, irrespective of where and how it is expressed. I needed to account for such features as:

[system]	POLARITY:	[terms]	positive / negative
"	ASPECT:	"	perfective / imperfective / neutral
"	VOICE:	"	ergative / passive / neutral
"	TRANSITIVITY:	"	intransitive / transitive

All these had the same point of origin, the "clause" – whether free or bound, and, if free, no matter whether standing alone (as "simple sentence") or in a structural relation with another (as "main clause"). Another system,

[system]	MOOD:	"	affirmative / interrogative / imperative

was accessible to free clauses only ("affirmative" I later changed to "declarative" to accommodate to Chomskyan terminology). Thus a primary class, or any of its subclasses, could be available as the location of a systemic choice. (See further below on delicacy.)

2.3 The problem of *units*

But other choices had different points of origin: systems such as DEIXIS, NUMBER or PERSON were associated with some smaller unit, one that had evolved out of the expansion of a word. (For this I took over Sydney Allen's term "group": hence verbal group, nominal group, adverbial group.) Other systems might have their origin in the word; for example SUBSTANCE: count / mass, or the various systems expressed by derivational morphology. But there was a limited number of such locations in a language; they corresponded to the small number of structural units needed to model constituency.

2.4 The problem of *rank*, and the *rank scale*

It was possible to identify a compositional set such as

sentence – clause – group – word – morpheme

such that each member was the locus of a number of independent systemic choices and each could be shown to consist of whole members (one or more than one) of the unit next below. Such a "rank scale" seemed more powerful than the structuralists' "immediate constituent" analysis, where the constituent units (the "nodes") were

structurally defined fragments which had no systemic value – no functional or semantic significance. The grammar of a language could be represented in terms of features, but not as a simple inventory; features were defined as terms in systems, and the systems sorted into independent vectors (e.g. MOOD: indicative / imperative, independent of POLARITY: positive / negative) according to the rank at which the system of options was entered. In Firthian terms, the systems "gave value" to the elements of the structure.

2.5 The problem of **structure**

But what were the "elements" of a structure? They were not strings of classes, such as nominal group + verbal group + nominal group, among which there is just a mechanical kind of solidarity, but configurations of functions, where the solidarity is organic: each element has its specific part to play within the whole. (The class is a statement of potential: if you are a nominal group, you may function either as Subject or as Complement within the clause, and you may select for NUMBER: singular / plural. Which function(s) you fulfil, and which feature(s) you select, are actualizations of this potential in a particular instance of text.)

2.6 The problem of **types of structure** (see 2.14)

But not all structures were configurational. Some were prosodic, typified by intonation contours: graduated movements between different steadier states. Some were periodic: wave-like trajectories from an initial to a final posture. These could still be represented in constituency terms, as if they had been configurations (see 2.11 on metafunction). But there was one other type which could not: those where the elements could be iterated in logical sequences, by relations such as 'and', or 'if', or 'said'. These were generated by systems of a special type: recursive systems, which had two simultaneous choices – one the basic options, the other "stop / go", i.e. 'choose whether or not to go round again'. Thus with each rank there is the potential of expanding to a "complex" element: clause complex, group complex and so on (Huddleston, 1965a). Thus in the English verbal group the tense system was recursive in this way (Ellis drew my attention to Reichenbach, 1947): the options were: (1) past / present / future, (2) stop / go, where the choice of "go" leads into tenses such as

[present in present] *is doing*, [past in present] *has done*, [present in past] *was doing*, [future in past] *was going to do* and so on, up to a limit (in my own observations) of five as in:

> they'd been going to've been paying me
> it'll've been going to've been being tested

This iterative potential was a feature of the system, and was quite distinct from the structural phenomenon of rank shift, or "embedding" (see 2.7 on taxis).

2.7 *The problem of **taxis** (interdependency) and **rankshift***

In the clause complex, the system of logical relations intersected with another system where the option was one of interdependency, or "taxis": in any one nexus, the status of the two clauses could be either equal ("paratactic") or unequal, with one dependent on the other ("hypotactic"). Thus,

'and',	paratactic:	she's very old, and rather blind
	hypotactic:	besides being very old, she's rather blind
'so',	paratactic:	he's very old, so he needs help
	hypotactic:	he needs help, because he's very old
'said',	paratactic;	"we need help", Henry said
	hypotactic:	Henry said they needed help

The system of taxis generates an immense potential for agnation, with regular proportionalities between paratactic and hypotactic agnates – sometimes just between subsystems, sometimes extending to their individual terms. But hypotaxis was often confused with rankshift: grammars traditionally operated with an undifferentiated category of "subordinate clause", or "embedding", which lumped together these two distinct phenomena – one clause being **dependent on** another [hypotaxis], one clause being **part of** (usually something that is itself a part of) another [rankshift]. Once these were distinguished, it was possible to explain (as well as the patterns of agnation already mentioned) such things as the parallelism between expansion and projection as the two fundamental relations between clauses in a nexus, with "direct and indirect speech and thought" as paratactic and hypotactic projection; the distinction between "defining" and "non-defining" (or "describing") relative clauses, the former being rankshifted the latter hypotactic; the

status of non-finite clauses in English, as a type of hypotactic clause, including those having "no verb" in them, since non-finite forms of *be* are optional:

finite: since you're in charge, there should be no problem
non-finite: with you (being) in charge, there should be no problem

– and so on.

2.8 *The problem of the relation between* **system** *and* **structure**

The recognition of highly generalized functional-semantic categories such as expansion and projection depends on being able to bring together features that turn up all around the lexicogrammatical continuum. If one takes seriously Firth's dictum of **starting from** the distinction between system and structure, one can free the description from the straitjacket of structural representations. Another example is the area of modality in English, where regular proportions occur over widely disparate wordings such as

it's certain they are	they certainly are	they must be	I know they are
it's likely they are	they probably are	they will be	I think they are
it's possible they are	they perhaps are	they may be	I accept they are

as well as other subsystems such as are instantiated by

it's essential you …	you're required to …	you must …	I insist you …
it's desirable you …	you're supposed to …	you should …	I want you to …

and so on. The **system** thus gradually emerges as the fundamental organizing concept for the grammar (a "deep paradigm", as I explained it in 1965). This has a further important consequence: it neutralizes the distinction between describing something and relating it to everything else. Once the systems are interrelated, in the form of a **system network**, then the underlying description of any item in the grammar is a **selection expression**, the set of features that delineate its path through the network; and since each feature is in systemic contrast to one or more others, the description **consists in** the statement of its patterns of agnation – of all the proportionalities into which it enters. The clause, or other item, is described by being located in its place in the total systemic potential.

2.9 The problem of **delicacy**

One problem I always had was that of showing how two (or more) instances were both alike and not alike at the same time. I tried to do this with structural representations, showing more and less differentiated variants of a particular structural function (types of Complement, or Actor, and so on); but such a device is both cumbersome and arbitrary. The system network solves that problem, because its "delicacy" is non-arbitrary: it is the function of the dependence of one system on another (or more than one other). The description can stop short any point, when the required degree of detail has been reached; wherever that is, there will be some sets of instances which up to that point have identical descriptions, but which would be differentiated if a further step in delicacy was taken. The network also shows, of course, exactly which features are shared and which are not.

2.10 The problem of **probability**

From my own experience − primarily as language teacher, but also in machine translation work and from observing children − I could not help seeing grammar as a probabilistic system. This has been discussed at length in Volume 6 and I will not repeat all that discussion here. The problem lay in how to represent it. I did not think that a syntagmatic representation − structure as left-to-right Markov process − hit the mark; once again, structure was not where explanation was to be found. But the system, as a closed set of options with a defined condition of entry, was clearly quantifiable in the terms of information theory: it was possible to assign probabilities to the various terms in a system on the basis of observed frequencies in a substantial body of text. This, it seemed to me, was an essential part of the description of at least the most general systems: it was not enough to define negative polarity by opposition to positive − we needed to specify with what degree of probability. Once again it was the **system** that opened the way.

2.11 The problem of **metafunction**

When you "networked" the systems of the grammar, they arranged themselves in a small number of discrete patches, a "patch" being recognized as a cluster of systems having very dense internal

connections but relatively sparse connections with the rest of the grammar. Thus, for example, within mood and modality in English there was a great deal of organization, with systems sharing a common entry condition, one system being dependent on one or more others and so on; whereas between mood and modality on the one hand and process type (in transitivity) on the other there were very few mutual constraints. In other words, as a general principle you can combine any content, or "thesis", with any speech function and accompanying expression of attitude; but each of these regions in itself comprised an intricate latticework of related options. This brought into relief the **intrinsic functionality** of language (Martin, 1991): how the way language is organized is explained by the functional contexts in which it first evolved. I referred to these generalized functional components as "metafunctions", the *ideational* (*logical* plus *experiential*), *interpersonal* and *textual*; they have already been described at length in earlier volumes. The metafunctional concept, and the specific metafunctional categories, then helped to explain various other phenomena.

2.12 The problem of **context of situation**

It was clear that a text had to be "contextualized", that is, located in one or more "moments" in eco-social space and time. Firth had taken over the "context of situation" from Malinowski, who had built it in to his anthropological linguistic model (originally a model of the translation process in fieldwork); and had suggested certain headings for its description:

> A. The relevant features of participants: persons, personalities.
>   (i)   The verbal action of the participants.
>   (ii) The non-verbal action of the participants.
> B. The relevant objects.
> C. The effect of the verbal action.   (Firth, 1950 / 1957a)

Firth commented that "The context of situation is a convenient abstraction at the social level of analysis"; but it is more than that: where the "context of culture" is the environment of the language system, the context of situation is the environment of the linguistic instance, the text. But there were indefinitely many ways of characterizing it; I found a threefold categorization in terms of *field*, *mode* and *tenor* to be helpful, where "field" was what was going on – the nature of the social action; "tenor" was who were taking part – the

statuses and roles of the interactants; and "mode" was what the text was doing – the part the discourse was playing in the whole event. These started out as just convenient abstractions; it was only later that they proved to be motivated in metafunctional terms, thus helping to explain the two-way predictions that speakers are able to make, from the text to the context or else from the context to the text. By and large, there was a tendency for ideational meanings to be associated with the field of the discourse, interpersonal meanings with the tenor, and textual meanings with the mode. This "metafunctional hook-up", as it has been called (Martin, 1984), seems to be a significant factor when children begin to learn their mother tongue.

2.13 The problem of **dimensions of structure**

The problem here was to explain how the different components of meaning (in metafunctional terms, the experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings) were all realized at once in the structure of the clause. In the laundry card grammar I was trying to reduce them all to one dimension, deriving from the "S,P,C,A" (Subject + Predicator + Complement(s) + Adjunct(s)) which stayed closest to the syntactic tradition. This was complex and unsatisfactory. A much better explanation was to assume that each metafunctional component generated its own distinct dimension of structure. Experiential meaning was realized in structural configurations of process, participant(s) and circumstance(s), such as the Actor + Process + Goal of a transitive material clause: textual meaning by some form of the organization of Theme + Rheme and Given + New; while the S,P,C,A type of structure realized interpersonal meanings of mood and modality. None of these three had any kind of priority, whether analytical or historical or in terms of semantic significance: one did not "first" choose a representational content and "then" dress it up in the appropriate speech function – all choices were simultaneous. If they had to be ordered for some particular project, pedagogical, say, or computational, this was a function of the task in hand, not an inherent property of a multi-dimensional structure.

Daneš (1964), working within the tradition of the Prague school, interpreted the experiential dimension as "semantic structure", in contrast to the "syntactic structure" of the Subject + Predicate kind; he regarded the latter as a level of organization internal to the

grammar. My own view was (and is) that both are equally "semantic" – that is, components of the grammar's overall construction of meaning; the "Subject" is as much a meaning-construing element as the "Actor", but the two construe different kinds of responsibility (Halliday, 1985/1994).

2.14 The problem of **types of structure** (continued)

The logical structures realizing expansion and projection did not enter in to this multidimensional mapping because they were structures of the clause complex, not of the clause; cf. under (2.6) above. Those that did, the experiential, interpersonal and textual, could be treated as configurations of elements that could be mapped on to each other in many different ways. The same item – some nominal group – might function simultaneously as Actor, as Subject and as Theme; but any of these functions might be dissociated from the other two, or indeed all three might be realized as different items; e.g.

those bowls	we	were given	by the children	for our anniversary
Theme	Subject		Actor	

In fact, however, there was some distortion involved in representing all three dimensions as compositional structures of this kind. The constituency model, with structure set up as an organic configuration of discrete parts, worked well enough for experiential meanings, where even in a language with a high degree of fusion (e.g. of pronouns into the structure of the verbal group) the basic pattern of process and participant stands out. But the interpersonal and textual contributions to the structure were not ideally represented as clumps of constituents. Interpersonal meanings are often construed prosodically, by intonation; but even when they are lexicalized they are often spread broadly around the discourse rather than being enumerated item by item. Textual meanings, on the other hand, tend to occur periodically, setting up the flow of discourse as a series of smaller and larger wave-like movements of which the Theme + Rheme pattern of the (English or Chinese) clause is just one cycle. It was precisely this variation in the modes of meaning – the syntagmatic patterns by which the different functional components of meaning are construed – that made it possible for them to be combined in indefinitely many ways. The immense power of discourse derives from the interplay of these

dimensions of discursive movement (see Hasan (1985) on the "texture" of a text).

2.15 The problem of **complex systems**

Metafunctional components were clusterings of the meaning potential; they were (like most linguistic categories) fuzzy and permeable. Most systems in the grammar do have an "address" within one or other of the metafunctional clusters. If a system is said to be "complex", this does not imply that it is particularly problematic, but only that in some way or other it implicates more than one metafunction. For example, the system of VOICE is a system which assigns status – some or other form of prominence – to certain elements in the clause; in this respect it is clearly a "textual" system. But the **potential** of the voice system, in any given instance, is constrained by the experiential structure of the clause: you cannot choose, say, between Actor and Goal as Theme if you then select a one-participant process.

A different kind of "complex system" is polarity, which seems to slip between the ideational and the interpersonal. If "yes / no" means 'you are right' / 'you are wrong', it is functioning interpersonally; if "yes / no" means 'the answer is positive' / 'the answer is negative', it is functioning ideationally; forms like French *si*, German *doch* have the complex sense of 'you are wrong; the answer is positive'. Polarity is probably best thought of as a "pre-metafunctional" system, enshrining a "moment" in linguistic history before the metafunctions became differentiated. This accounts for the diverse manifestations of modality, the cluster of systems which set up different trajectories across the space defined by 'yes / no'.

2.16 The problem of **complementarity**

Within the ideational metafunction, some aspects of human experience turned out to be extraordinarily complex and difficult for the grammar to construe. Some are semantic domains whose construal involves a rich array of lexical and grammatical resources (cf. Part 4 of Volume 7, on 'teaching' and on 'pain'). Others are highly general areas within the grammar, such as agency, substance and time, where languages seem to vacillate between different constructions of experience, wanting (naturally enough!) to have things both ways. Thus agency: if two participants are somehow

involved in a process, is it a happening, in which some external causer is involved (Process + Medium, with addition of Agent – the ergative view), or is it a doing, which got extended to involve some other entity (Actor + Process, with addition of Goal – the transitive view)? Or time: we experience a 'before' and an 'after'; but is this a current flowing out of past through present into future, or perhaps the other way round (the tense view), or is it a movement out of the virtual into the actual (the aspect view)? Is the essential nature of substance that it is discrete and countable (the number view), or that it is concrete and uncountable (the type view)? Are processes inherently conative, so that they require to be marked if they are completed; or are they inherently reussive, so that they require to be marked if only attempted (different "phase" views)? Different languages will go for different mixes; but usually the grammar will build in some kind of complementarity, construing the phenomena in more than one perspective.

2.17 The problem of **intonation**

Anyone who has taught a spoken language is likely to have faced the problem of intonation: how it functions in the language being taught, and how it differs from intonation in the learners' first language. If the L_2 is a tone language and the L_1 is not, the issue will obviously get foregrounded: intonation "means" in a very different way, being part of the phonological make-up of the morpheme. The difference is most stark when a speaker of English learns Cantonese, both languages being fairly extreme specimens of their type; Mandarin comes somewhere in the middle, having intonation contours with lexical tone on the salient syllables.

The lexical function of pitch movement ("tone") is clearly stated: it is part of the articulation of the syllable (and in Chinese is known to have evolved out of articulatory features such as final voicing). But what is its non-lexical function, as "intonation" in the more specific sense? It was usually represented, in a language such as English, as a kind of attitudinal colouring, an optional extra whereby the speaker expressed some nuance of personal involvement; even if recognized to be systemic (i.e. in an opposition such as "falling / rising", or some more complex but still closed system of contrasts), it was not admitted into the grammar because its meaning was typically inter-personal and so had no place there. But investigating intonation in English (on one of the rare occasions when I was going to teach

English as L$_2$), I was led to conclude that not only was it systemic but also its meanings were closely bound up with (the rest of) the grammar: some were interpersonal (though not all) – but that was already a component of the grammar as I understood it anyway – and, more significantly, they were dependent on their **grammatical** environment. For example, the meaning of a particular tone choice depended on whether the *clause* was declarative or interrogative (i.e. Subject + Finite or Finite + Subject), rather than on whether the *speech function* was statement or question. It seemed clear that intonation in English had to be treated as one of the grammar's strategies for making meaning, along with the various other strategies: choice of wording, formal marking of categories and ordering of elements into a structural hierarchy.

In other words, intonation is a semogenic resource available anywhere in the lexicogrammar. Where it functions to mark specific grammatical relationships in the clause, or in the group, as it does in certain languages of West Africa, this is another way in which this general potential may be exploited. Systems of intonation are of course phonological, like syllabic systems of onset and rhyme; but systems **realized by** intonation take their place among the meaning-making strategies of the lexicogrammar.

2.18 The problem of *dimensionality*

One advantage of intonation as a grammatical resource is that it can intersect freely with other variables: a clause may be, at the same time, either declarative or interrogative (i.e. Subject + Finite or Finite + Subject, in English) and, independently, either falling or rising in pitch; giving four distinct possibilities:

they dò   dò they   they dó   dó they

It may be that two of these combinations (say, they dò and dó they) qualify as in some sense unmarked: they are the default choices, on the "good reason" principle, or they are significantly more frequent than the others. If so, these might once have been the only possibilities – one simple opposition, marked by two contrasting features; these features then became partially dissociated, adding a new dimension to the meaning potential.

This decoupling of associated variables is a powerful semogenic resource, extending the dimensionality of the lexicogrammatical space. We may not be able to trace it as a historical process,

especially in a spoken language; what we observe is the presumed reflex of such processes as seen in the language's present state. Let me give one more example from English intonation, in this case in its textual function whereby some element is given intonational prominence in the discourse flow, as the "focus" of the New information. This focus typically comes at the end of the clause, on the final lexical item:

|| // tigers can't climb **trees** // ||

– where || marks clause boundary and // marks the boundary of the tone group (or "tone unit"). We may postulate a general principle: a clause in English begins with a Theme, the speaker's point of departure (here *tigers*) and ends with a focused New, the point marked out for attention of the listener (here [*can't climb*] *trees*). This is the prototypical discursive wave form, a movement from speaker ('me') to listener ('you'). But here there is a twofold dissociation: (i) the focus can shift, including on to the Theme; we could say

|| // **tigers** can't climb trees // ||

('but leopards can'); (ii) the information unit can decouple itself from the clause, as in

|| // **tigers** can't climb **trees** // ||

It doesn't matter whether the simpler state of affairs ever actually obtained or not; we may postulate it as a way of pointing up the dimensionality of the grammar. This dimensional thinking is an essential feature of the way the grammar achieves its power.

2.19 *The problem of* **stratification**

A language was a construct on different levels; so much was clear. How many, and what they were, was less clear, but that was not the issue: the linguist could shift the borders, within limits, to meet the needs of the context of description. (There had to be at least three.)[2] The problem was that the concept itself was not clearly distinct. In the first place it was confused with rank, the two being reduced to a single compositional scale, as if grammatical units were the same kind as those of phonology only bigger. (At that time this typically meant just morphemes and phonemes; cf. Ebeling, 1960). Since "levels" was being used in both these senses, I switched to

Lamb's term **strata**, with **stratification** as the name for this property of language (again following Lamb, who called his theory "stratificational grammar" at the time; cf. Lamb, 1966a). Stratification and composition were two different dimensions, with each stratum having its own compositional structure.

In fact the stratal boundary between content and expression (Hjelmslev's "planes") was clear: it was the line of conventionality (or "arbitrariness") in the linguistic sign – not impermeable; there were plenty of non-conventional cases, but with conventionality as the unsabotageable norm, without which language would be impossible. The other "boundaries" (between Hjelmslev's "substance" and "form") were much more fuzzy, because essentially non-arbitrary. Phonology as the formal organization of phonetic substance was well worked-out. The problem lay with lexicogrammar: the formal organization of – what? Whether or not one accepted "meaning" in Firth's sense, as a property of language at every stratum (Lyons (1966b) found it problematic, but it seemed to me a valuable insight into (what I would later call) language as a semogenic system-and-process), meaning was obviously a property of the lexicogrammar as a whole – of grammatical systems as much as lexical items. I remember being surprised to find "semantics" defined as the meaning of words, and therefore avoiding using the term; in any case I had thought at first that one could represent meaning by relating lexicogrammar directly to context, though it soon became clear that that wouldn't work. My notion of a semantic stratum took shape first from working with Sydney Lamb in his research projects at Berkeley and at Yale, and then from interacting with Basil Bernstein and trying to meet the conceptual demands made by his theory of linguistic codes (Lamb, 1964, 1966b; Bernstein, 1971; Hasan, 1973). (But it was not until the 1980s that it started to get fleshed out, with Hasan's work in semantic variation, Martin's work in discourse and genre, Matthiessen's experience in text generation and my own excursions into grammatical metaphor: Hasan, 1989, 1992; Martin, 1992, 1993; Matthiessen, 1983, 1988; Halliday, 2005.)

In the second place, stratification was confused with instantiation; and these took much longer to tease apart, because in real life neither can ever happen without the other. I shall not say anything more about this here (cf. Volume 3, Introduction and *passim*), except to make the general point that our modelling of language can take after language itself: just as in theorizing human

experience the grammar has recourse to "thickening", adding to its power by moving on to new dimensions, so in theorizing human language we may have to factorize out phenomena that we have first tried to explain in terms of just a single variable.

3

In these rather heterogeneous notes I have tried to give some background to the chapters in Volumes 7 and 8, most of which were written in the two decades between 1950 and 1970. They were written in a variety of professional and personal contexts, but always with some specific task that was being addressed. I referred at the beginning to the various chapters on Chinese; the basic work in Chinese grammar and phonology was carried out in the context of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, though it developed along the way as resource for my doctoral thesis. The study of English grammar that went into 'Notes on transitivity and theme' (Volume 7, chapters 1–3) was instigated in particular by the demands of two research / development projects, both of which needed a grammar for the analysis of discourse: the D.S.I.R. / O.S.T.I. Programme in the Linguistic Properties of Scientific English (see Huddleston, *et al.,* 1968) and the Nuffield / Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching (Mackay *et al.*, 1970; Doughty *et al.*, 1971; Mackay *et al.*, 1989). The fact that both of these projects involved text analysis, even though in very different ways, explains the concentration on transitivity and on theme: to analyse discourse effectively we needed a characterization of the different types of process that were distinctively construed in the grammar (the material, the mental and the relational) and of the mechanisms of discourse flow in the thematic and informational systems. I had also undertaken a number of more specific studies, such as one on deixis and "phoric" reference when teaching a class in stylistics for the first time, and on tense in the verbal group for a course I was giving on typology. In the longer term, of course, these efforts evolve into bigger projects, such as the detailed study of cohesion in English by myself and Hasan (1976) and my own *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985 / 1994); but the initial enterprise was nearly always driven by an orientation towards some definable task.

If I emphasize this point it is because it explains the underlying quest, which was descriptive and not theoretical. It seemed to me

that what was needed to enable us to engage more effectively with language was not so much new theories but new descriptions. We were still sadly lacking in data (the age of the corpus was only just beginning), which set limits on possible theoretical perspectives; but we had an increasing number of demands on what descriptive capabilities we had, and in order to meet these demands we had to re-examine the descriptions inherited from the past and be prepared to see things differently, to find other patterns that were more helpful in explaining the text – why the text means what it does, and, if possible, why and in what ways it is (or is not) effective. I spent a lot of time in the early 1960s going into the new "transformational –generative" grammar, which by then was dominating the scene, at least in the circles with which I was familiar; but it didn't help me to answer any of my questions; so I stayed with the system and structure model that I had, extending it as new problems came up demanding to be addressed. If the picture of language that emerges seems forbiddingly complex, as people sometimes tell me, I have to say that language **is** complex, and I don't think it helps in the long run to pretend that it isn't. Our **grammatics** can attempt to explore and explain the complexity, it can celebrate it, as a wonder of evolution, but it cannot change it, or claim that it isn't there.

Notes

1 The paper on 'Temporal categories in the Modern Chinese verb', co-authored (at his initiative) with Jeffrey Ellis, would have been my first published work, as it was accepted for publication in Asia Major – but the editor died suddenly, and his successor rejected the paper on the grounds that "one's first published article should not be a review of others' work". Amazingly it has survived, and is included in Part II of Volume 8.

  The somewhat later work of Ellis and Berg on the grammar of Russian was more in a "scale-and-category" framework. Their analysis of contemporary spoken Russian, co-authored with the Russian specialist Denis Ward, appeared as the final report of the Contemporary Russian Language Analysis Project at the University of Essex (1972).

2 William Mackey amused himself by counting the number of levels postulated by all the different linguists he knew. When he came to see me, I hedged, because I already regarded the answer as indeterminate; he pressed me as to whether I would accept a particular number – I forget which it was, but it turned out to be the one gap in his record, so I was happy to fill it in for him (Mackey, 1965).

PART ONE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The first three chapters are in fact from one paper, 'Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English', originally published in three parts over three consecutive issues of the *Journal of Linguistics* (3.1, 1967; 3.2, 1967; 4.2, 1968). Professor Halliday adopts a 'systemic' description of English grammar representing the choices associated with a given constituent type in the form of a series of system networks.

In the first part (Chapter One), Professor Halliday describes transitivity as a series of system networks "concerned with the type of process expressed in the clause, with the participants in this process, animate and inanimate, and with various attributes and circumstances of the process and the participants". As he explains further,

> A system is a set of features one, and only one, of which must be selected if the entry condition to that system is satisfied; any selection of features formed from a given system network constitutes the 'systemic description' of a class of items. Such a 'selection expression' is then realized as a structure, the structural representation being fully derived from the systemic; each element of the structure is a point of entry into a further system network, so that constituency is based on the concept of 'rank', with minimal bracketing.

The point of origin for this system of networks is the English major clause, where what is predicated is one's "extralinguistic experience, whether of the phenomena of the external world or of feelings, thoughts and perceptions".

The second part (Chapter Two) deals with grammatical options relating to theme and the information structure of the clause. The focus here is on the internal organization of the text, signalling the relationship between "what is being said and what has gone

before in the discourse". In particular, Professor Halliday discusses three sets of options within the theme system complex, including "those realized by phonological features of intonation, those of thematization by the sequence of elements in the clause and those of identification by certain specific patterns of clause structure".

The third and final part (Chapter Three) revisits transitivity in the light of the previous discussion about theme. Transitivity and theme represent two different types of options in the grammar of the English clause, one related to experiential meaning, the other to discourse organization, or what may also be referred to as (intra)textual meaning. Corresponding to a third set of grammatical options related to mood is interpersonal meaning. How these grammatical options cluster together into a small number of subsets around a particular kind of structural realization, whether transitivity, theme or mood structure, "provides a syntactic basis for the concept of language functions, and suggests how the diversity of functions recognizable at the semantic level may be organized in the course of realization".

In addition to the experiential, interpersonal and intratextual functions, in Chapter Four, 'Options and Functions in the English Clause' (1969), Professor Halliday identifies a fourth component, "the logical, concerned with the 'and's and 'or's and 'if's of language". The logical component looks at how simple clauses combine to form a clause complex.

The fifth chapter, 'Functional Diversity in Language as Seen From a Consideration of Modality and Mood in English', was first published in the journal *Foundations of Language* in 1970. Here Professor Halliday discusses how we use language for "a variety of different ends, and its meaning potential can be understood only as relating to those ends". The choices we make in language, whether to use declarative or interrogative, what to make thematic, which modalities and modulations to employ, these choices are determined by what we want to mean, and meaning is purposeful. The purpose for which we use language is its function. As Halliday notes, "the internal organization of the linguistic system has itself a functional basis, so that in order to understand the nature of language it is necessary to start from considerations of its use".

Chapter One

Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English – Part 1 (1967)

It is planned to publish this paper in three parts, in this and the two subsequent issues of the *Journal of Linguistics*.[1] The three parts will consist respectively of the numbered sections 1–3, 4–7 and 8–10; references to section 4 onwards are thus to forthcoming parts of the paper. Sections 1–3 contain observations concerning transitivity; 4–7 deal with what is here referred to as **theme**, a general term for all those choices involving the distribution of information in the clause; in 8–10, transitivity is reconsidered in the light of certain further problems and of what has been said about theme, and some generalization is attempted.

The formulation is in terms of a **systemic** description (Halliday, 1964a, 1964b, 1966; Henrici, 1966; Huddleston, 1965a, 1965b, 1966; Hudson, 1967), in which the grammar takes the form of a series of **system networks**, each such network representing the choices associated with a given constituent type: clause system network, nominal group (noun phrase) system network and so on. A system is a set of features one, and only one, of which must be selected if the entry condition to that system is satisfied; any selection of features formed from a given system network constitutes the **systemic description** of a class of items. Such a **selection expression** is then realized as a structure, the structural representation being fully derived from the systemic; each element of the structure is a point of entry into a further system network, so that constituency is based on the concept of **rank**, with minimal bracketing. A more explicit

presentation of transitivity and theme in these terms is attempted in the third part of the paper (section 9).

The notational conventions are as follows (references as in previous paragraphs; also Halliday, 1963a, 1963b):

$\longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{a} \\ \underline{b} \end{array} \right.$	there is a system of features a/b (either a or b must be selected)
$\underset{(1)}{\longrightarrow} \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{a} \\ \underline{b} \end{array} \right. \underset{(2)}{\longrightarrow} \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{x} \\ \underline{y} \end{array} \right.$	system (I), features a/b, and system (2), features x/y, are ordered in delicacy such that a in system (I) is the entry condition for system (2) (if a is selected, either x or y must be selected)
$\underline{a} \longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{m} \\ \underline{n} \end{array} \right. \\ \longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{x} \\ \underline{y} \end{array} \right.$	systems m/n and x/y are simultaneous (having the same entry condition a)
$\begin{array}{c} \underline{a} \\ \underline{c} \end{array} \Big\rangle \longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{x} \\ \underline{y} \end{array} \right.$	The entry condition for system x/y is compound, being the intersection of a and c (if both a and c are selected, either x or y must be selected)
$\begin{array}{c} \underline{a} \\ \underline{d} \end{array} \Big] \longrightarrow \left[\begin{array}{c} \underline{x} \\ \underline{y} \end{array} \right.$	system x/y has two possible entry conditions, either a or d
{}	enclose a selection expression, or a set of simultaneous features within a selection expression
$\underline{n}/\underline{x}$	n and x are simultaneous
$\underline{a}:\underline{x}$	x is ordered with respect to a (a 'dominates' x)
$\{\underline{a}:\{\underline{n}/\underline{x}\}\}$	selection expression in which n is simultaneous with x, both being dominated by a
//	tone group boundary, also always foot boundary
/	foot boundary
(bold type)	tonic syllable in tone group
(Arabic numeral following //)	tone
∧	silent ictus ("silent stress" at beginning of foot)

1 Transitivity

Transitivity is the name given to a network of systems whose point of origin is the *major* clause, the clause containing a predication; it is thus simultaneous at the point of origin with other networks such as those of mood and theme (Halliday, 1964b). The transitivity systems are concerned with the type of process expressed in the clause, with the participants in this process, animate and inanimate, and with various attributes and circumstances of the process and the participants. None of these is necessarily restricted to expression by transitivity in the clause; process and attribution, for example, may both be expressed in the nominal group, as in *a moving target*, *a happy girl.*

Process here subsumes both action, or *doing*, including perception, and ascription, or *being*, including description and identification. Structurally, the process is associated with the clause–element P(Predicator). Participants are associated with the elements S (Subject) and C (Complement); attributes and circumstances with the element C. Each of these elements may be further specified by the addition of superscripts: e.g. P^{act} (active Predicator), C^{int} (intensive Complement). Each element, alone or in combination, realizes a feature, or a complex of features, of the systemic network: thus the feature *operative* (see below, p.16) is realized by the element C^{ext} (extensive Complement).

The primary elements S and P are inserted in the clause as realizations of features outside the transitivity network, though they may be further specified (superscripted) by certain transitivity features. The element C, however, is inserted by the transitivity network; it is not obligatory, but will be present or absent according to the features selected. The terms *intransitive*, *transitive*, *single transitive* and *double transitive* are used to refer to clauses with no C, at least one C, one C and two Cs respectively; they are thus structural and not systemic terms, and they do not figure in the underlying systemic description.

For purposes of presentation, it may be helpful to build up the transitivity network in stages, beginning with what would probably be considered the more fundamental distinctions. Four examples will serve as a starting point:

(i)   she washed the clothes
(ii)   the clothes were washed
(iii)   the prisoners marched
(iv)   she looked happy

To characterize these in informal semantic terms: (i) and (ii) involve directed action, action on a goal, with one or both of two participants, an Actor and a Goal; (iii) involves non-directed action, with one participant, the Actor; (iv) involves ascription, with one participant, the Attribuant, and one Attribute. These labels are not intended, or required, to determine the assignment of items; they refer rather to general notions in terms of "nuclear" instances (cf. Lyons, 1966a: 214, 230). Altogether seven such general notions have been postulated here: three process types, directed action, non-directed action and ascription; three participant types, Actor, Goal and Attribuant; and one Attribute.

Two of the three process types are each associated with only one participant, non-directed action with Actor and ascription with Attribuant; structurally, that participant is the Subject in each case.[2] The third, directed action, is associated with two participants, Actor and Goal, either of which may be the Subject. The four examples could thus be grouped as follows:

Process type:	(S = Actor)	(S = Goal)
directed action	(i) she washed the clothes	(ii) the clothes were washed
non-directed action (S = Actor)	(iii) the prisoners marched	
ascription (S = Attribuant)	(iv) she looked happy	

Let us now represent these in terms of grammatical features of the clause, using the following labels:

extensive   clause with **action** process-type
effective   clause with **directed action** process-type
operative   clause with **directed action**, subject as actor
receptive   clause with **directed action**, subject as goal
descriptive   clause with **non-directed action** process-type
intensive   clause with **ascription** process-type

These features may be organized in systems ordered in delicacy as follows:

major clause ⟶ ⎡ extensive ⟶ ⎡ effective ⟶ ⎡ operative
                                      ⎣ receptive
                              ⎣ descriptive
                 ⎣ intensive