Book Review

Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar (Fourth Edition)

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Revised by Christian M.I.M Matthiessen
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In this Fourth edition there are a number of changes that are immediately evident. The change in the title is one as in the previous editions it has been called 'An introduction to functional grammar'(IFG) and a second is the publisher, as before it was under the imprint of Arnold. A third is that there is specific reference to the revisions by Christian Matthiessen although he was also identified as collaborator in the third edition. More importantly are the changes indicative of the framework and descriptive work on English in systemic functional linguistics.

The Malinowski-Firthian tradition established the study of language as social interaction and communication within heterogeneous speech communities. This tradition later became known as 'British Contextualism' and more recently the Hallidayan tradition of 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL). This 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 (as did Vygotsky) 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 (and it could be any language, not just English) performs three simultaneous 'metafunctions' expressing three types of simultaneous meanings.

These 'metafunctions' are seen through the 'clause' structure as both spoken and written language can be analysed through the clause, while the 'sentence' is only logical in reference to the written form of the language. The first part of Halliday's grammar introduces his 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 in 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 classfication 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 Halliay did was to present an account of grammar and lexis with what he termed a lexicogrammatical continuum, rather than separate entities as to often presented in our language textbooks. In this theory of grammar, 'text' is realised by clauses at different levels, the semantic (meaning) and the lexicogrammatical (the wording).

Since IFG1 was published 25 years ago and subsequently followed by IFG2, 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 used many examples from

various corpora because of the increasing availability of computational tools. IFG4 has expanded the use of corpus based examples and has added a web site www.routledge.com/cw/halliday for further exemplification.

In IFG3 and IFG 4 Halliday's original introduction has been dropped. I feel that this was unfortunate in terms of teachers and beginners in the field of linguistic research as it is one of the most elucidating accounts of the use of a lexicogrammar that I have personally encountered. Indeed I am constantly referring to it with my research students. One could, of course, argue that with IFG 3 and 4 the emphasis is more on the book as a reference work rather than a textbook per se.

It is hard to imagine anyone in the field of applied linguistics or 'linguistics applied' that does not recognise the ever increasing insights that this 4th edition of SFG continues to give in seeing language from so many different perspectives. Its value for teachers and reseachers is immeasurable.

Reference

Halliday, M.A.K. 2008. *Complementaries of Language*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

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