

Jonathan J. Webster (ed.). 2015. *The Bloomsbury Companion to M. A. K. Halliday*. London: Bloomsbury. Pp. xiv + 512.

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1 Introduction

Bloomsbury Companions is a series of single volume works providing an accessible resource to specialized fields in the humanities. *The Bloomsbury Companion to M. A. K. Halliday* gives a nineteen-chapter overview of the career and thinking of Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (1925–2018), linguist, teacher, and developer of *systemic functional linguistics* (SFL). *Companion* proceeds in four thematic parts, each concentrating on a different segment of Halliday's career. Beginning with a biographical sketch of Halliday's life and early career in Part I, proceeding to his influences in Part II, and his most important theoretical contributions to linguistics and semiotics in Part III, the work ends in a section on the later application and development of his theories by others in Part IV. Although it would be impossible to encompass the full breadth and depth of Halliday's work in a single volume, the *Companion* performs admirably in delivering a roughly chronological representation of both Halliday's life and career.

2 The making of a mind: Influences

Consisting only of one chapter by Jonathan J. Webster, Part I opens the volume with a biographic sketch discussing Halliday's youth, early interest in linguistics, and studies in China. Building partially on Chapter 1 and mixed with further biographical notes to explain the motivations behind Halliday's theories, the following five chapters forming Part II focus on the most noteworthy influences upon Halliday's thinking and the epistemological issues forming the basis of Halliday's views on language.

Chapter 2 by David G. Butt opens Part II with a consideration of Halliday's work as a natural science of meaning. Butt critically investigates Halliday's scientific principles and the methodology applied in his theoretical output. In Chapter 3, Xuanwei Peng discusses the philosophy of Halliday's teachers in China, Luo Changpei and Wang Li, and their effect

upon Halliday's theories of language. The chapter concentrates on the influences on SFL, more specifically on the speech function categories and process types. Xuanwei Peng also explores the more extensive interconnectedness of the epistemology of SFL and the "holisticity" of Chinese thinking.

Chapter 4 by Braj B. Kachru discusses the British tradition of linguistics, and the work of Halliday's supervisor, J. R. Firth. Kachru discusses the backdrop from which the Firthian tradition sprung, Firth's work, and the rather extensive criticisms levelled upon him. The chapter opens with a discussion on the search for a socially realistic paradigm of linguistics which sprung from the rejection of the transformational-generative grammar during the late 1960s and 1970s. Firth, whose interest in the social aspect of language was apparent as early as in the 1930's, was re-evaluated in light of this new view of linguistics. Firth viewed language as *function* – a position which, Kachru notes, is reminiscent of Hallidayan *meaning*, despite the difference in terminology. Firth's work on prosodic analysis has also been applied extensively, even before his "re-discovery", but his concept of *context of situation*, and its suggested position in linguistics, had largely been ignored. Adopted from the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, the concept denotes the contextualization of linguistic data. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the relevance of Firthian linguistics to the present-day discussions.

Halliday himself has written Chapter 5, which discusses the influence of Marxism on his thinking. Subsequently, the chapter reads as something in-between an autobiography and epistemological overview. Halliday's Marxist linguistics developed initially as a result of his contact with the Chinese linguists Luo Changpei and Wang Li, and later, with the British Communist Party Linguist Group. The group critically examined "bourgeois" assumptions about language, such as thinking written language superior to the spoken varieties and sought to bring attention to previously understudied and underappreciated languages and language varieties. Although Halliday admits that Marxism did not have direct influence over his work on linguistics, he does connect the development of applicable linguistics and functionality to Marxist ideologies.

Much like the other chapters of Part II, Ruqaiya Hasan's discussion of the development of SFL in Chapter 6 is founded on the description of Halliday's life events and influences. The evolution of SFL is presented as "a reading of something that has come into being by the repeated and timely conjunctions of a number of 'naturally occurring' events" (p. 103).

The foundation of SFL is traced back to a 1942 course in Chinese, inspired by J. R. Firth. After taking the course, Halliday continued his studies of Chinese in Peking and Guangzhou until returning to Britain for a postgraduate degree at the University of Cambridge under the direction of J. R. Firth. Hasan identifies two themes of SFL which can be traced back to these early years of Firthian influence: giving equal value to different language varieties and viewing language as social action. Hasan connects the work on *Categories of the Theory of Grammar* (1961), declaring Halliday's separation from the principles of transformative-generative grammar, to the teaching experience Halliday gained during his early Edinburgh years. The development of a social semiotic theory of linguistics was slow during the following years, in University College London, where Halliday arrived for a position as the Director of the Communications Centre in 1963. Halliday's early work on register and tenor was conducted here, and he made contact with scholars such as the sociologist Basil Bernstein. Halliday's early work on systemicity and the identification of the metafunctions of language Hasan traces back to discussions with Alex Henrici, a mathematician with an interest in computational linguistics. The rest of the closing chapter of Part II concentrates on a discussion on the metafunctions in relation to linguistic meaning, theorization of the process of language, and linguistics as a discipline.

3 Ideas about language: The theories

Part III of the *Companion* discusses Halliday's most well-known and recognized ideas on language. Prominent scholars have come together to discuss different themes and topics within Halliday's work, such as the axial rethink and the probabilistic nature of language, child language development and language teaching, intonation, text linguistics, and stylistics.

Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen opens Part III in Chapter 7 with a consideration of Halliday's views on language. Halliday's perspective to language as a meaning-making resource is contrasted with the traditional approach to language as a collection of rules. The contrast is explored in connection to linguistic organization, grammatical modularity, relationships between theory and application, grammar and lexis, and system and text. Matthiessen proceeds to point out that while the approaches are quite different, they are, at least in theory, complementary. SFG's position in the family of unification grammars is discussed briefly

before moving to Halliday's *axial rethink*. The axial rethink refers to Halliday's view on the significance of the relationship between *paradigmatic* and *syntagmatic* axes in linguistics. The different axes relate to different types of linguistic relationships: syntagmatic axis refers to the horizontal structure of elements, for example, the relationship between words in a sentence, while paradigmatic axis refers to the vertical system of units, or the relationship between words which may replace one another in a sentence. Previously, the axes had been given equal weight, but Halliday's view of the paradigmatic axis is rather more intricate. The units are seen as a network of simultaneously occurring systems. Language and linguistic analysis is given a 'paradigmatic base', the consequence of which is the opening of several important theoretical considerations which Matthiessen explores for the rest of the chapter. These include, for example, the clustering of systems, modelling of lexicogrammar as a continuum instead of as isolated modules, and the interpretation of language as a probabilistic system; a system of units implemented at certain, measurable rates in a language. Matthiessen closes the discussion with an overview on the reception of Halliday's ideas on language, which reveals that although Halliday's theories were not initially well received, many of them have been accepted, in the decades since, as an integral part of our view of language.

Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen continues the examination of Halliday's conception of the probabilistic nature of language in Chapter 8. According to Matthiessen (p. 204), Halliday (2003/1964: 40) defines his work on language as the description of "patterns inherent in the linguistic performance of the native speaker", an approach which necessarily involves an identification of primary patterns in register of choice, the description of the linguistic patterns, and their statistical analysis. Thus, language may be described as a *meaning potential*, or a system of potential meanings available to the speaker. After this initial description of the theory, Matthiessen proceeds to describe the *cline of instantiation*, which describes the relationships between text, system, and context. The chapter ends in an investigation of some probability types and their application in corpus linguistics.

In Chapter 9, Jane Torr discusses Halliday's work on child language development. Torr begins with an overview of the relevant theories at the time of publication of Halliday's *Learning how to mean* (1975), which presents a detailed analysis of Halliday's son Nigel's language acquisition. The chapter concentrates on key features of the work, including the

theoretical foundations of studying child language development in the light of metafunctions (interpersonal, ideational, textual), the data, methodology, and results. Halliday recorded Nigel's language by hand, for 15 months, when he was 9–24 months old. Six-week intervals were analyzed and a series of system networks established for the description of Nigel's language. Halliday's networks reveal six linguistic microfunctions (instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, imaginative, heuristic) in use at 9–18 months, while at 18–24 months, the child's language may be divided to two macrofunctions (pragmatic, mathetic). At 24 months, Nigel's language had moved beyond macrofunctions, towards adult language.

Chapter 10, by J. R. Martin, describes Halliday's grammar. The chapter concentrates on Halliday's systemic views on language, foundations of which were narrated by Matthiessen in Chapter 7. Martin presents different types of approaches to linguistic description, including tree diagrams known from generative grammar, function labels, and class labels. The differences between formal and functional theories are explored, as are types of approaches adopted according to the language studied. Later Martin discusses constructing a network to represent the systems of choice taken through language. The exploration of grammatical description is accompanied by discussions of the theoretical motivations for the approach.

In Chapter 11, Bradley A. Smith & William S. Greaves's description and discussion on Halliday's work on intonation opens with a reminder of Halliday's approach to data in intonation research. Rather than restricting the research material to spoken language, Smith and Greaves note, Halliday maintains that written text – more specifically, plays – may be used for the study of intonation. They continue on to discuss Halliday's work on punctuation, which he showed to have evolved to answer for the loss of intonation in writing – although Halliday found punctuation is a poor substitute for the variance achieved in spoken language. The chapter further recounts Halliday's work on intonation in infant language, and the position of intonation in SFL. Choices of *tone*, or the selection of, e.g., rising or falling pitch are found to be functional in English, and to form a system, much like selections in their location (*tonicity*), and grouping (*tonality*). Systems of *rhythm* and *salience* deal with sections of speech stream and the location of accented syllable, respectively. Such detailed model requires meticulous transcription of realizations, which Smith & Greaves present before a short section modelling the analysis. The chapter ends in a

consideration of the application of Halliday's intonation description in linguistics.

Jonathan J. Webster's discussion on Hallidayan text linguistics in Chapter 12 approaches the topic from the perspective of the SFL metafunctions. Text is viewed as a semantic entity which is a construct of meaning, whereas the clause, the basic lexicogrammatical unit, is a construct of wording. Hence textual meaning, Webster (p. 317) notes, refers to the creation of discourse. Textual meaning is expressed through *texture*, or the organization of clauses of a specific theme to form a coherent whole. Halliday (2002/1990: 187) stresses the need to analyze text using the same theoretical approaches regardless of genre or text type, arguing that otherwise, the approach is *ad hoc* type of private commentary. Webster ends the chapter with a discussion of Halliday's works applying the presented text linguistic approach to fictional and non-fictional texts.

In Chapter 13, Geoff Williams discusses Halliday's contribution to language education. His approach is a rather practical one, as is befitting of applicable linguistics: in the beginning of the chapter he asks, "what key insights about education [...] might Halliday's work offer" to language teachers (p. 327). The chapter first focuses on some key concepts, such as education and language, and their impact on the classroom environment. He then proceeds to explore Halliday's educational initiatives and their potential for curriculum development. Halliday's *language-based theory of learning*, specifically, is explored in some length.

In Chapter 14 Annabelle Lukin discusses Halliday's approach to the linguistic analysis of literature. The chapter begins with an exploration of Halliday's history of interest in the analysis of literary texts in his early career. The linguistic analysis of texts is typically restricted to non-fictional texts; Lukin reminds the reader that Halliday has criticized this restriction based on genre, as well as the close readings of literary texts, and maintained that any text analysis, regardless of the text type, should have a linguistic component to it. Similarly, a linguistic analysis should contain a consideration of the context, else the analysis is left incomplete. In the analysis of a literary text, language ought to be studied much like any language of any other text, "as the selection by the individual writer from the total resources at his disposal" (Halliday 2002/1964: 17), while the analysis of context of situation and context of culture are conducted utilizing the concepts of field, tenor and mode, again, as when analyzing any other text. Lukin ends the chapter with a description of four of Halliday's studies applying approach described to literary analysis. These

include an analysis of the grammatical patterns of Yeats' *Leda and the Swan*, transitivity in Golding's *The Inheritors*, lexicogrammatical patterns in Priestley's *The Inspector Calls*, and the metafunctions in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

4 Directions of development: Later applications

Part IV of the *Companion* contains five articles discussing the application of Halliday's theories to other areas of linguistics and to other semiotic systems. The part opens with Michael O'Toole's comparison of two uses of 'function' in the analysis of different modes of art in Chapter 15. The Hallidayan metafunctions and Yuri Tynyanov's concept of *function*, i.e. the correlation of a factor of a piece of art to its other factors, are utilized for the analysis. O'Toole substitutes the well-known systemic functional terminology with *representational*, *modal* and *compositional functions* to reflect the differences created by the differing semiotic systems. The analysis following explores the applicability of the functional model to the analysis of painting and music.

In Chapter 16, Kay L. O'Halloran, Marissa K. L. E. & Sabine Tan apply systemic functional theory and concepts to produce a multimodal semiotic analysis of the way architectural design is presented in two video texts. The texts chosen for analysis are three-dimensional computer generated imagery (3D CGI) animations of walkthroughs in houses appearing in *Grand Designs*, which is a British reality show focusing on unusual homes. As there is still much to learn on the patterns of semiotic choices, as well as on the application of multimodal semiosis, their chapter is constructed so as to provide tools and practices for the future analyses.

Erich Steiner's discussion in Chapter 17 on Halliday's contributions to translation theory opens with a consideration of the influences upon Halliday's thinking about translation and linguistics. For example, Malinowski's orientation to linguistics, inspired by translation methodologies, is connected to Halliday's early scale-and-category grammar. The chapter proceeds to Halliday's influences upon the translation theory, such as the problematization of machine translation and the exploration of the relationship between translation and second language teaching. Later parts of the chapter discuss the impact of systemic functional thinking, register studies, and Halliday's own theory of translation to translation studies and translation pedagogy.

Kazuhiro Terua & Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen's discussion in Chapter 18 presents an overview of SFL based approaches to language description and comparison. Beginning from Halliday's own work during his early career, Kazuhiro & Matthiessen proceed to early 2000s contributions and the renewed interest in the systemic description of languages.

Finally in Chapter 19, John Bateman & Mick O'Donnell discuss Halliday's connection to the field of computational linguistics and its development. The focus of the chapter is on the interaction between Halliday and the early computational linguists developing machine translation, natural language parsing, text generation, and corpus linguistics. Bateman and O'Donnell note that Halliday not only conducted cooperative work with the early computational linguists but also actively contributed to the development of the methods of computer analysis.

5 Conclusion

The Bloomsbury Companion to M. A. K. Halliday is a collection of short overviews into central themes within the works of M. A. K. Halliday. *The Companion* discusses his influences, theories and publications, as well as the practical application of his theoretical contributions to linguistics and semiotics. It also provides a meta-narrative of the development, reception, and impact of Halliday's work. The structure of *The Companion* and the chapters themselves have been constructed so as to follow Halliday's career somewhat chronologically, which allows for a fresh perspective to Halliday's epistemological development. Covering of all of his main research areas, the central chapters allow the reader to trace the development of the linguistic ideas, as well as the logic behind their development.

For a reader new to Halliday's work, *The Companion* might be best digested if used together with a previous editorial work by Webster, namely *The Essential Halliday* (2009), which contains a collection of thematically ordered key texts by Halliday. But should the reader already be somewhat familiar with Halliday's work, the *Companion* is a wonderful resource for a deeper understanding through the tracking of the logic behind, as well as the development of Halliday's theories about language.

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