

INTERVIEWS WITH M.A.K. HALLIDAY, CHRISTIAN MATTHIESSEN AND JAMES R. MARTIN

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INTRODUCTION

The transcriptions of the oral interviews that follow have the purpose of providing a current perspective on some central topics of Systemic Functional Linguistics by leading thinkers in the Australian context. Needless to say, Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday is also the founder of the theory and the inspiration for numerous recent developments of the systemic functional model. James R. Martin and Christian Matthiessen have worked and continue to work “close to the master” —“the boss,” as M. Gregory commented in Cardiff— and have brilliantly explored and developed some important threads of the theory. The interview with M.A.K. Halliday took place in the context of “The 25th International Systemic Functional Institute and Congress,” July 1998, at Cardiff University, U.K. The ones with Christian Matthiessen and James R. Martin in “The Tenth Euro-International Systemic Functional Workshop,” July 1998, at the University of Liverpool, U.K.

The first time I met M.A.K. Halliday was at a summer course in systemics given by Ruqaiya Hasan and himself, in the summer of 1994 at the University of Leuven (Belgium), where he approached me on one occasion and asked me the usual questions that every teacher asks students the first time they come to class. From then onwards I have admired the linguist and the man. During this brief encounter I asked him whether his theories have been applied to systems other than language and his immediate response was citing the title of a book published that same year: Michael O’Toole’s *The Language of Displayed Art* (that I read afterwards almost at one sitting).

During that course, while he was outlining the main elements of his theory, I thought to myself: “This man is a philosopher rather than a linguist or a semiotician.” Today some six years on from that time I realise I was wrong: he is all three things —linguist, semiotician *and* philosopher, although we all know that his contribution to linguistics and semiotics has been recognised as the central one. Starting from a social perspective of language, which has its roots in Malinowski and J.R. Firth among others, M.A.K. Halliday developed a comprehensive theory of linguistics which resulted in the creation of a new school called Systemic Functional Linguistics and he continues today to lead and inspire new developments even as we stand at the threshold of the

21st Century. If I were asked about M.A.K. Halliday's importance as a linguist, I would mention first—as a kind of exercise—his conceptualising of language as a social semiotic system, his consistent interest in education, his respect for all languages, the applicability of his theoretical conceptions to multiple areas of knowledge, and his penetrating analysis on the antecedents to language (origins of the metafunctional description). Secondly, and focusing now on the characterisation of his theory, I would point out the relevant role of the grammatical system of language at all ranks organised in terms of the three metafunctional meanings, the structural multilayered descriptions (polyphony), and the descriptions of the contexts categorising varieties of language.

It occurred to me that *Arms and the Man*, the famous play by G.B. Shaw, could have served as the title to Halliday's interview in various ways and for different reasons: First, because of his courageous independence against the prescriptive tendencies of linguistic transformational generative models led by Chomsky in the '60s and '70s, and his alignment with richer social linguistic traditions (M.A.K. Halliday 1978: 4; R. Hodge 144). Second, because although Halliday hasn't ever had the intention of universalising his theory, I think that nowadays we can affirm that his influence on today's scientific thought is all pervasive, a fact that is not always recognised by some scholars under the influence of generativist schools. Third, because of the applicability of his language theories to the description of many languages other than English, without privileging the English code: as Halliday himself puts it: "... there is a tendency to foist the English code on others. Modern English linguistics, with its universalist ideology, has been distressingly ethnocentric, making all other languages look like imperfect copies of English" (M.A.K. Halliday 1985: xxxi). Fourth, because nowadays the man and the linguist is not alone any more as the number of important linguists working on and reworking Halliday's theories is demonstrating, so much as the success of courses and conferences gathering lots of like-minded people from all over the world—from different language cultures, and from a variety of fields such as linguistics, education, sociology, psychology, computing, neurology, etc.—around a thinker of that stature.

The questions I put to Halliday follow this general pattern: Questions about the genesis of his theory of language, his beginnings in the hands of J.R. Firth, the people who influenced his thinking, the origins of the metafunctional description, and future perspectives of the theory. His words still resound in my ears and I discovered that his voice and his profound and lively conversation resemble the tones and repetitions that characterise some of his writings, in which it is sometimes difficult to know where "the hare" is going to jump—this is the impression I had when I first read *Learning How To Mean* or *Language as Social Semiotic*. While writing this introduction to the interview I was surprised on finding a similar impression in a perceptive paper written by R.Hodge, when he says that "the series of restatements form a polyphony, not a mere repetition" and that Halliday can combine new ideas with change "in such subtle proportions that it is often difficult to specify them" (R.Hodge: 156).

Martin's and Matthiessen's responses raise important issues related to Systemic Functional Linguistic's theoretical core and to its present and future perspectives and developments. At one point Jim Martin says that "the (systemic) functional linguistics will thrive because it can be valued by the community and can contribute to the

community.” I can only hope that his words become all the truer as we move into the 21st Century.

Finally, I would like to publicly acknowledge my gratitude to M.A.K. Halliday, and also James R. Martin and C. Matthiessen for their generosity and trust in agreeing to be interviewed for the *RCEI*.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL HALLIDAY: THE MAN AND THE LINGUIST



M.A.H.: I am very interested in the genesis of your theory of language. So, going back to the '60s and '70s, what do you remember of those days when you worked with Firth? How was it that you decided to begin exploring new roads out of the generativism and structuralism of those times? Do you think that you were yourself an *enfant terrible*, “a rebel” in a sense?

M.A.K.H.: No. I do not think I am a rebel in the sense I would understand the term! I would rather emphasize the continuity between my thinking and what I learnt from those who went before me and those who were around me. But I would like to push the beginnings a little further back, because, in fact, I began as a language teacher. I was instructed in Chinese by the British Army, on one of the many language courses that were required during the Second World War. I worked for some time in counter-intelligence, using my knowledge of Chinese; and then I was made an instructor in the language. So I was already beginning to teach a foreign language at a very early age—in 1945, when I was just 20 years old; and for 13 years thereafter I was mainly a teacher of languages. So my way into linguistics was very much with the experience of someone whose questions had arisen in the course of learning, and then of teaching a foreign language.

I was first taught linguistics in China, by two very distinguished Chinese scholars, one of whom in particular taught me the foundations of modern linguistics and phonetics. This was Wang Li. He had himself been trained in Europe, first of all as a phonetician; he was also very much influenced by Jespersen. He taught me a whole range of things including—this was very important—the tradition of Chinese linguistics. So that was my first input. Then when I came back to Britain I went to study with Firth, so Firth was the second major source. Firth placed himself very strongly within the European tradition.

M.A.H.: Can you add something more about the Chinese source influencing on your thought?

M.A.K.H.: There were two aspects to it: One was work in the history of Chinese linguistics, which goes back about two thousand years. The early Chinese scholars mainly were phonologists, and after about a thousand years they in turn borrowed many ideas from the Indians, who were also great phonologists but with a totally different orientation, because the Indian phonology was based in phonetics, whereas Chinese phonology was a highly abstract system with no phonetics at all. So what was interesting was what happened when the two came together. This was my way in, as it were, from the historical end. Simultaneously with that, the second aspect was through my teacher Wang Li, who was himself both a grammarian and a phonologist and phonetician, and also a dialectologist. He taught me dialect methods, which I found extraordinarily valuable. I worked on Chinese dialects with informants, and learnt to record their language and study both the phonology and the grammar, so that involved the field methods as well as the underlying theory which Wang Li himself was developing.

M.A.H.: What are then the main sources of your own theory of language? Why did you pick up the notions of context and text studied by Firth?

M.A.K.H.: Well, I was always convinced of the importance of, so to speak, looking in to language from the top, from the higher units, and the higher levels; and during the 1950s, as well as studying with Firth, I worked a great deal with some close colleagues at the time: Jeffrey Ellis, Trevor Hill, Dennis Berg, Jean Ure, Peter Wexler, and others. What we shared was a Marxist view of language. We were trying to understand and build up a theory of language which would be —as I put it in the other day— giving value to languages and language varieties which at that time were not valued either politically or academically: so, non-standard dialects, spoken as opposed to written language, unwritten languages, colonial languages, some of which were struggling to become national languages, and languages of lower social classes —all the varieties of language whose value had not formed the basis of linguistic theory. We were trying to bring these in, working for example, on the emergence of national languages in ex-colonies. That's where the theory of register became important.

There were two sources for this. The first was Firth's notion of a restricted language, which had been very important during the Second World War. What Firth said was that any typical discourse —he wouldn't have used the term "discourse" but, rather, "text"— belongs to some restricted language, so that the meanings that are expressed are not, as it were, selected from within the totality of the language, they are selected from within some fairly special subset. A critical example of this was taken from the war against Japan: The Japanese pilots would communicate with each other in plain language, not in code, because they assumed nobody else spoke Japanese. So Firth said, "We can train our people in the restricted language used by the Japanese aircrew to communicate with each other and with those on the ground." And they did this very successfully and in very short time. So that was one source of the notion of register. The other was our own work in the evolution of "standard" national languages, when we said, "Right, there are dialectal varieties, originally regional and now also social; but there are also functional varieties." We had debated a long time what to call these, and we got the term "register" from T.B.W. Ree, the professor of Romance Philology at Oxford. From these two sources together, we were able to

derive the notion of “register” in the sense of functional variation Michael Gregory, who did a lot of work in this area, introduced the term “diatypic” varieties. Now, the notion of context, how you actually investigate it, and how you bring it in to the domain of linguistics —that was from Firth. Firth himself, of course, had based his own ideas on the work of Malinowski, who was an anthropologist.

M.A.H.: I have a question connected to that: “What do you think makes your theory so attractive to people from so different linguistic and cultural backgrounds?”

M.A.K.H.: I hope that it does show its multiple origins. To follow up with my own history: when in 1958 I moved from teaching Chinese to teaching linguistics, I was immediately very closely involved with teachers, first in Edinburgh (Scotland) and then in London, and these, of course, were teachers in British schools, therefore with medium English. And they were not mainly foreign language teachers, but rather either teachers of literature, teachers of the mother tongue, or teachers of other fields, such as science, or history, or whatever. So my orientation naturally shifted: I had to work on English. And it is true that, as you noticed from here, in the meeting, the majority of the people in this group for one reason or another have concentrated on English, either in educational contexts or computational linguistics and so on. So we have to work always both to extend the domains so that the model is used for languages other than English and also to keep the doors open so that ideas are coming in from outside, not just from the Anglo-American world but also from other traditions. I don’t say we always succeed! —but we are at least aware of this problem, and certainly we are aware of the problem of being Anglocentric which so much recent linguistics has suffered from.

M.A.H.: Retrospectively speaking, do you feel that you could have worked more effectively to expand your theory in the way that other approaches to linguistics have done, such as generativism, pragmatics, etc.?

M.A.K.H.: Coming back to Firth. He required that his postgraduate students should read around in all schools of linguistics. His own orientation was primarily European, so we tended to know more about Hjelmslev and the Danish school, about the Prague phonology, about Martinet and the French linguists, and so on. So this was our main background. We also read American structuralism (Firth was not very keen on the work of the American structuralists; he was more impressed by Pike), and of course, we read the background in Bloomfield and Sapir... When Chomsky came along, I spent a lot of time reading Chomsky’s early work and that of those who worked with him, but I found they didn’t answer the questions I was interested in, so I continued to develop my own ideas and to look for others who shared the same concerns —such as my very good American friend Sydney Lamb, whose ideas were very close to mine. I worked with him.

Now, I’m not a missionary. I’m obviously very pleased if people take up what I’ve done. But it is not my aim to try to spread it around. If people find it useful, that is good, and I learn from them; but it was never part of my thinking to try to promote my ideas. Somebody once said to me, a few years ago, “Don’t you feel very distressed about being so much out of fashion?,” and I said, “Look, there is one thing that would worry me more than being out of fashion and that is being *in* fashion!” But of course, the theory has expanded into all kinds of new domains —through the work of other people. Look at the topics covered in this Congress!

M.A.H.: The next question is also related to your beginnings. Did you meet Whorf?

M.A.K.H.: No, he died very young. I think he died in 1943.

M.A.H.: Your notion that language does not reflect, but creates reality reminds me of B.L. Whorf's hypothesis. Can you please explain this for a minute? How was it that you came to think about this?

M.A.K.H.: I did read Whorf very early, relatively early; and in the '60s, when I was teaching at University College London, I gave one course over two or three years using Malinowski and Whorf, as a way in to functional theories of meaning. Now, what I took from Whorf, particularly at that time, was the notion that different languages hold different semantic schemata. The notion of constructing or constituting reality, as opposed to reflecting it, took me longer to work through (with the help of Bernstein, and also Berger and Luckmann). My early views were more attuned to classical Marxism, where in Marxist theory priority is given to the technological—to the material rather than to what we would now call the semiotic. Let me use a generalization and say that human history is essentially the interplay of two broad types of process, the material and the semiotic. "Semiotic" includes language, but of course it includes lots of other things as well; it covers all processes of meaning. Now, classical Marxism always gave priority to the material—it was "technology driven," or whatever you want to call it; in my early thinking I had accepted that perspective, and it took me a long time to reappraise it. You get involved in all kinds of details, trying to construct the model rather than reflecting on the underlying assumptions. But after working, through the '60s and '70s, with new groups of colleagues, like Michael Gregory, then Bob Dixon, Rodney Huddleston and Richard Hudson, then Ruqaiya Hasan, then Robin Fawcett, and in the '80s with Jim Martin and Christian Matthiessen, and many others... (I can't mention everybody that mattered!), naturally my thinking evolved. I had never taken language as a thing in itself, but only as part of human history; and I tried to reflect on it from the standpoint of the work of the British Marxist historians—Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson and others, which I greatly admire. This gives a perspective within which you can integrate the two, the material and the semiotic. Some people in the '70s and '80s jumped to the opposite extreme, they overplayed the semiotic as if everything in human history had been and was being determined discursively, as if there was nothing but discourse. I gave this view a label, I called it "naïve discursivism." What you need is a balance between the two. There is a dialectic relation, a dialectic in which the semiotic and the material are constantly interpenetrating, and what happens is the result of the tension between them. Given that perspective, then, you see the constituting effect of the semiotic, the extent to which reality is in fact constituted by language just as it is constituted by our material practices and the material processes that go on around us.

M.A.H.: I think that your reflections have made me understand much better why you call language a social semiotic system...

M.A.K.H.: In the '60s, when I was very much concerned with developing systemic notions of grammar within the system-structure framework set up by Firth and others, almost all the interest in grammar among linguists was in formal grammars. But these were not relevant to scholars looking at language from the outside—notably Basil Bernstein. A lot of the pressure to continue working within a functional semantic orientation came from Bernstein, and the linguists in his unit; then Ruqaiya

Hasan started working in his group in the late '60s. But the main stream in linguistics was so strongly focused on formal models in grammar, all based on structure, that I felt that, for a while, I had to back away from trying to study the grammar systemically; and so for about ten years I concentrated much more on the social aspects of language. Most of my work in the '70s was directed towards this notion of the social semiotic. The term and the basic concept, by the way, come from Greimas.

M.A.H.: You have mentioned Basil Bernstein, and I think that his theory of educational development and social classes had an important influence on your description of congruent and metaphorical language and in your approach to educational problems. Since you said in one of your lectures that he had been misunderstood, can you please explain just for a couple of minutes what you really meant?

M.A.K.H.: I got to know Bernstein in 1961, or so. In Edinburgh we read some of his early work and we invited him to come and give us a seminar. He had been a teacher in London and had faced the problem of children failing in school; and he was trying to understand why this educational failure was so obviously linked to social class. He worked through various theoretical models; but language, he saw from the start, played an essential part. He started to make a distinction between what he initially called "public language" and "formal language;" this gradually evolved into a theory of codes, recognizing that educational knowledge was construed (whether or not it had to be was a different issue; but in fact it was) in new linguistic forms —new, that is to say, in terms of the prior history of the child before the child comes into school. But if you then look at the family background of the children before they come to school, you find that there tends to be a significant difference according to social class, so that middle class children typically had already gained entry to the language of educational knowledge in their homes; therefore, they were all ready to go. As soon as the first day they got into school, they knew what was happening, they recognized the forms of discourse. The typical working class family, which at that time Bernstein related to the notion of personal and positional family structures —there were different types of role system in the family, in the way the child creates an identity— typically, had largely used what he first called the public language, later "restricted code," and therefore there was a disjunction, there was a big gulf to be crossed when they had to move into the language of education; the problem being, not that it can't be crossed, but that the teachers had no way of knowing this; they disvalued these children's language anyway, and had no conception of how to help them to build upwards from it. This was all totally misunderstood, particularly by American colleagues because they were... partly, I think, it was a panic reaction to the notion of social class, which rather frightened them. But, in any case, Bernstein was vilified and attacked as if he was denigrating the working class and saying that their language was inferior and they were inferior —which, of course, he wasn't. Mary Douglas, one of the British anthropologists who understood him very well, understood that, in fact, he was much more critical of the middle class than he was of the working class, but you have to read him with some intelligence. So, in any case, Bernstein was conducting this project throughout the 1960s, gathering data of different kinds, partly dialogue, partly narrative, trying to investigate this situation from different angles; and we were... —I myself, early colleagues I've already mentioned, and the teachers in the curriculum development project that I had initiated, such as

David Mackay and Peter Doughty— we tried to work towards a grammar that would be relevant for educational purposes. But we still had a long way to go, and so we really weren't yet able to provide the kind of resources that Bernstein needed, although we got some way, and one or two of the people here now, like Bernard Mohan and Geoffrey Turner, were working as linguists in Basil's team. This was where my wife, Ruqaiya Hasan, got into it. She started working with Basil Bernstein in 1968, and there she began to develop her own ideas first in relation to the analysis of children's texts (stories told by children were some of her main data at the time) to see what could be done to bring out the underlying grammatical and semantic patterns so that one could test whether there were significant differences between different groups.

M.A.H.: To finish this first part, I would like you to talk a little bit about Ruqaiya Hasan's contributions and mutual influences.

M.A.K.H.: You know she was one of my students. She came to Edinburgh in 1960, starting from a background in literature. She had been teaching English literature in Pakistan, and she was at first very sceptical about the relevance of grammar and linguistics towards what she did, but she went deeply into it and wrote a brilliant thesis on the language of literature, using two modern novels as the basis. Then she worked for some time in our (Nuffield / Schools Council) Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching, as one of the linguists working along with the teachers; she started specializing there in the area of cohesion, which she was able to develop when she joined Bernstein's unit, and we worked on this together when we wrote the book *Cohesion in English*. She backed off for a little while because she had a baby and she was looking after the child; then when she got back to work she contributed substantially to the "core" levels of grammar and semantics and to sociolinguistics as well. What she's particularly brought to the work has been an immensely wide reading in areas around language and linguistics, in philosophy for example, and especially in sociology. Recently for example she has written some very good critical work about Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on language. She has always had this sort of perspective where she has been able to work on the inside of language but to look at it from round about; and I have certainly learnt a great deal from her.

In the 1980s Ruqaiya set up a research project, at Macquarie University in Sydney, with research colleagues David Butt, Carmel Cloran, and Rhondda Fahey—a very well designed project, in which she identified 24 mother-child pairs, where the child was always between three and half and four— well advanced linguistically but still just before schooling; and structured according to sex of child and social class, so the four sets were: middle-class boys—middle-class girls— working-class boys—working-class girls. She did a detailed analysis of many hours of spontaneous conversations between these mothers and their children. She explored the semantic variation; that is to say, what she was interested in was the systematic variation in the meanings that were preferred, the semantic options that were taken up in the various situations in which the mothers and the children were involved. She subjected the results to a particular kind of factor analysis, "principal components" analysis—derived from Labov's methods but which she modified in certain ways to suit this kind of material. What came out of this were some very remarkable findings. When she looked at particular domains within the total material, for example the way that mothers answered their children's questions, or the way that mothers gave reasons for instruc-

tions they were giving to the child on how to behave or how not to behave, she found that these mother-child pairs fell out into very clearly defined groups, and these groups were defined on two dimensions. In some cases, the difference arose between the mothers of boys and the mothers of girls, so the mothers of boys were talking to their sons in very different ways from the ways the other mothers were talking to their daughters. The other dimension was social class, so that the mothers in what she called the “higher autonomy profession” families, the middle-class group, were talking with their children in very different ways from the mothers in families of the “lower autonomy profession.” This was something that simply emerged from the analysis: the groups were part of the design of the original sample, of course; but they were not present at all in the analysis—they simply emerged through the principal components analysis in the computer and turned out to be statistically highly significant. What she was doing, you see, was essentially testing the basic theoretical hypothesis that had been developed by Bernstein, but using data which were much richer than those available to Bernstein in the '60s, because the techniques were not available in the '60s for doing very large scale recordings of spontaneous conversations. By the '80s they were; and furthermore our grammar and our semantics had developed immensely during that time; so, on the one hand, the resources for structuring the sample and collecting the data had improved, and, on the other hand, the grammar and the semantics had advanced to the point where she was able to set up a semantic model for actually investigating this sort of data. This has been a very major contribution.

M.A.H.: Referring to your description of the metafunctions, when did you realize that a good theory of language had to begin by studying language functions? I am referring to your brilliant research on Nigel, which implied a substantial modification of the well-known Bühler's and Jakobson's functions.

M.A.K.H.: I knew that work, and indeed I used to compare different concepts of linguistic functions, those of Malinowski, Bühler and others, but looking at them from another perspective—from the perspective of the internal organization of language. I always thought that these were important in helping us to understand the context of situation and the context of culture; but I was also not happy with the way they were interpreted only as functions of the utterance. It was Scalička, one of the leading Prague scholars, who actually raised that question—I didn't see the paper till much later—in relation to Mathesius's work, the question whether the functions should be regarded as functions of the utterance or whether they have some place in the linguistic system; in other words, did they belong just to *parole* or were they, in some sense, present in the *langue*? Now, I was unhappy with their assignment to *parole*, to the utterance, because when you actually looked at texts you could never say... well occasionally you could cite utterances which were clearly one thing or another, but most of the time all functions were going along side by side. So I thought they must in some sense be located in the system—I didn't know how. But, from a different standpoint, when I started using system networks, when I decided that for the questions that I was asking I needed to be able to model the total resource—what I called the meaning potential—as some kind of network of options, then I found—first of all on a small scale grammar of a particular Chinese text but then on a much larger scale when I came to be working on English—then I found... well: Imagine a large piece of paper like this, on which you're representing the grammar of the English clause by

writing networks for it: you stand back, and you find that there is a whole bunch of systems here that are closely related and then there is a kind of gap, not a total gap, with a little bit of wiring across it but much less dense, and then you have another big block here, and then you have another gap and another big block. And I thought, “Why? What is happening?,” and then I realized that these blocks were, in fact, very closely related to the notions of function that have come from outside linguistics. Remember that Bühler and others were looking at language from the outside, they weren’t grammarians. My grammar networks matched up closely with their concept of functions. There was clearly one component which was, let’s say, *Darstellung*, “representational” in Bühler’s sense —this is what I called “ideational;” then there was another component which combined what in the English translation are called the expressive and the conative. The grammar did not in fact separate these two. This is not saying that there is no meaning to the distinction between expressive and conative; but if you look at them from inside the system they are aspects of the same thing. For example, if I set up an interrogative mood, you can think of that in the expressive sense “I want to know something,” but you can also think of it in the conative sense, “you tell me something;” the grammar had what I called the “interpersonal” function. But then there was another component in the grammar which didn’t correspond to anything in Bühler: this was the function of creating discourse, which I then referred to as the “textual.” This included all the sort of things that create discourse, like cohesive patterns, texture, thematic and information structure... and they formed another block. These three functions were intrinsic to the system of a language.

Then, around that time (mid ’60s) the primary school teachers had been asking me about early language development; and very conveniently just at that time we had our own baby. I thought, “Right, I’m going to do a detailed study of the one child, so I can do it very intensively.” So for three and a half years I studied this child’s language. It was clear that he started off with what I called the “microfunctions,” as he built up a protolanguage before moving into his mother tongue. There were three or four distinct functional domains from about ten months onwards. So what I was interested in was how these get mapped into the functions that are present in the adult linguistic system. A lot of my book *Learning How To Mean* is about this mapping. So the functional model comes from these two sources: one, as a grammarian, trying to model the grammar and then matching it up with the functions proposed by others from the outside; and the second, working with teachers on early language development and trying to model the way that a child constructed the grammar.

M.A.H.: Why didn’t you write a book like the *Introduction to Functional Grammar* before 1985? I was very surprised when I began reading it and learned a lot. I have read “Notes on Transitivity and Theme” (1967-1968), *Explorations* (1973), *Language as Social Semiotics* (1978), and others, but it was not until 1985 that I became really convinced that your theory of language was powerful and really applicable.

M.A.K.H.: Well, as you know, in the 1960s I wrote “Notes on Transitivity and Theme” which contains many of those ideas. But I’m not very good at writing books; and also I tend to write in response to people who ask me. I tend to respond to the context rather than initiate it; people would ask me to give them a talk, and then to write it up as a paper, so I usually wrote little bits all over the place and it took me a very long time to get that *Introduction to Functional Grammar* written. It wasn’t that

I hadn't thought of it... it just took me a very long time, because I was doing too many things at once. I liked teaching, but I spent a lot of time preparing classes; and when I became the head of a department, I was very taken up with administration. Most of that book was written on the train going to and from work. This is why to me it was so important always to have a train trip —yes, seriously! But there is another reason also: As I said, I did back off during the '70s in order to work more in the area of the context of language, trying to get a sense of the relationship between language and society, linguistic structure and social structure... and moving from (as I was putting it earlier) the more classical Marxist position in which language was merely a reflection of material reality, towards a view that is perhaps more “neo-Marxist.” One person that I was exchanging ideas with was Jim Martin, who has developed a powerful model relating language to its social context.

M.A.H.: About Jim Martin. In 1997, he wrote, together with C. Matthiessen and C. Painter, a wonderful book with exercises “explaining,” in a certain sense, your *Introduction*...

M.A.K.H.: Yes —it is an excellent book. Jim Martin was always pushing more towards the constructivist viewpoint... I was already convinced of this, but I was also always aware of the danger of going too far, and you can go too far in this respect. The thing that was always important to me was to maintain a comprehensive viewpoint. The problem these days is that the subject (linguistics) has evolved so far that you cannot be a generalist any more. You have to specialize in this field or another... My mind was always saying, “Well, if I look at this bit of language in this way, how will it seem when I jump over to look at it from here, or from here, or from here?” It seemed obvious to me that whatever I did I had to keep in mind all the other aspects, I mean, if one looked at something in a certain way in adult language, could one still explain how children had learnt it? Could one still explain how it had evolved that way? This means that it takes a long time to sort out the major perspectives, but I think it is very important. Those who are very much leaders in the field, and have been all along, have tended both to share his view and also to complement each other in the aspects of language that they were primarily foregrounding. Jim Martin, for example, is an outstanding grammarian, working in the core of language; he has also done an enormous amount of work in language education, collaborating over many years with school teachers in Australia. Christian Matthiessen, also a brilliant grammarian, has done fundamental work in computational linguistics; Robin Fawcett is another leading theorist with expertise in this field. They can tell us what the grammar looks like when we're trying to operate it on a computer. I've already talked about Ruqaiya Hasan's work in the relationship of language to society. I could give lots of other examples. To me it is important that all these ideas feed back into our notion of language. So we are not just asking questions from the inside, the sort of questions set up by linguists, but we're asking questions that are set up by people around about, who are interested in language from other angles. That's what I've tried to bring about.

M.A.H.: Something you want to add? Are you asking yourself any new questions?

M.A.K.H.: I think I'm too old to be asking any new questions!.

M.A.H.: I don't think so! You can yet inspire a lot of new questions to all people around the world!

M.A.K.H.: Well, new questions will come up. I think that if the theory that has come to be known as “Systemic Functional Linguistics,” if it is still a living organism, as it were—and I think it is—this is partly because we are not simply going over the same ground. We are always asking new questions, and new people are always coming in with questions of their own. So it’s not so much whether I myself ask new questions but whether there are people who do; there are, and they do. And this is why it is so important what’s going on in a conference like this, because a lot of people around have new questions to ask of each other. There is another point that I just want to add here. We have had two plenary sessions now: by Erich Steiner, and by Michael Gregory. Erich is another major formative thinker in these areas, someone with a very strong sense of social accountability.

M.A.H.: Do you agree with Steiner’s perspectives of Systemic Functional Linguistics in philology, technological fields, education, cultural studies...?

M.A.K.H.: Indeed. I agree with his perspective very much. I’m not sure I would divide it up in the same way, and there are one or two specific points that he made where I would want to say, “Well, actually, it wasn’t quite like that.” Just to give you an example: Erich talked about where systemics, or maybe scale and category, met up with strata and levels. But, in fact, it wasn’t a meeting: the strata and the levels were always part of the theory from the start. So there I would say, “Well, look, no, that was not the order of things; this was part of the original architecture.” But the basic picture is as he set it out.

I think the only final thing I want to say is this. For a lot of people who are coming across our work now, this may look to them as if it is some huge edifice that was suddenly spontaneously created. But, of course, it wasn’t. It evolved very slowly, it evolved over a very long time, it continues to evolve and there is nothing fixed about it. We have worked towards certain concepts, certain methodologies which seem to us to be useful in taking on certain tasks and in addressing certain questions. But it has always been part of a much wider setting: others’ functional approaches to language, and beyond these the whole field of linguistics. All these are permeable, and I very much agree with Michael Gregory that one should be all the time interacting with what is going on outside. This sets up a tension, because if you are running a linguistics programme you are taking students through a course, through one, two, three or four years, and most of those students are not going to be professional linguists. They are going to be any number of things: teachers, computer scientists, specialists in law or in medicine, information technologists, journalists, librarians... What they want is to be able to engage with language. Some people would say, “Right; you’ve got to tell them a little bit about everything that’s going on: a little bit about government and binding, a little bit about West Coast functionalism, a little bit about mainstream European linguistics, a little bit about pragmatics, a little bit about systemics, and so on.” And, of course, one can agree with this: it is a good liberal principle! However, that doesn’t teach the students to engage with language. What it means is that a course in linguistics, instead of being a course about how to study language, becomes a course about how to study linguistics. It becomes a totally meta-operation... Now, that is fine for those who are going on to become linguistics specialists; by the time they get, say, to third or fourth year, you can start doing all this. But to my first and second year students I want to give them tools, resources to work

with. That is how I came to work towards this kind of model: I just had to work out something to meet my own needs. I wasn't thinking at all of being a theorist, or an innovator, or a rebel as you suggested at the start. I tried to find out what theory and methods were available. But there were certain gaps, resources I couldn't find... so I started to develop my own ideas because I needed to engage with language. Now, if we choose to say, "Right, to begin with, we're going to teach you one particular model," this is not because we think that we have the monopoly of truth, but because we want to give them tools. You can start analysing texts, you can start looking at your own language, you can apply this to whatever you teach in the classroom: literature, English as a foreign language, or whatever. I think it is only fair to the students to do that. Of course, it has its dangers: They may then go away and think that there is only one truth. One way to get around this, in my view, is to teach it historically. You can't range over every particular model that's around today, that's too much. But you can say, "We're selecting this way of doing it, so you can engage with language; but I want you to know where it came from, and why." And that will give them the perspective. That's all I wanted to add!

M.A.H.: Thank you very much, Dr. Halliday.

**TALKING WITH JIM MARTIN:
FROM SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS TO
SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL SEMIOTICS**

M.A.H.: Michael Halliday told me in his interview that he had been pushed, in a certain way, by Jim Martin to write his *Introduction to Functional Grammar* in 1985. What can you tell me about this?

J.M.: I was working in the same department as Michael and I suppose I was the discourse specialist and he was the grammarian. I think that when he started he had only fourteen pages of handouts or something to support his lectures, and it just seemed to me as a discourse analyst that the grammar was so valuable as a base for anything we wanted to do, and I think I was just very very concerned that he hadn't documented or packaged this material in a way that we could use it in Sydney and that anyone could use it around the world. He had not done justice to his ideas by putting them into a form for other people to use, so I suppose that on a day to day basis I was always at him to get things together and consolidate them.

M.A.H.: I think that this book has been very useful mainly for scholars working outside Australia and familiar with other theories...

J.M.: Yes, Halliday's theory needed a *lingua franca*, it needed a basis, you know. Even though people speak different dialects, different grammars, we need one grammar that everyone shares.

M.A.H.: You mean that we need a point of departure...

J.M.: Sure, you need a basic grammar, a common language that people share.

M.A.H.: How was it that you and your colleagues decided to *translate*, as it were, Halliday's book in your *Working with Functional Grammar* (1997)

J.M.: I think it came from my experience teaching the grammar and the experience of Clare Painter. We knew that the students needed certain kinds of help to actually understand and use Halliday's grammar. We knew after his lectures they were inspired, but in practical terms they found it difficult still to operationalise the grammar to analyse texts. I think I knew from the tutorials. I could predict after several years of experience that every year students had the same problems, they made the same mistakes. I was so tired of correcting these mistakes. I wanted to write down all the little short cuts and trouble-shooting and things that would stop them from having to get through the same mistakes over and over. I think also I wanted to provide a resource for people who didn't have an opportunity to work with a systemic linguist. My experience was that when people read Halliday on their own, they may be very interested but there are still obstacles to them actually using the grammar, so we wanted also something for people as individuals to practically get their hands on the ideas.

M.A.H.: And do you think that it is still necessary to write another book where you can find more ideas about lexical and grammatical structures, contexts...?

J.M.: Yes, Suzanne Eggins and I are working on a discourse workbook. The workbook we were talking about is for analysing clause grammar. But I still think it is hard for people to operationalise the analysis for the whole texts and do text-context analy-

sis, so we are planning another book which will be more discourse in orientation, again to help people who perhaps only have Halliday's grammar or they are in a programme which only gives a few hours to systemic grammar... they do not get any other support in terms of register, genre, cohesion, all the other things you need to study. We try to fill that gap.

M.A.H.: I think that you have already published a book where you refer to the relationships between lexicogrammatical elements and the semantic elements beyond the clause...

J.M.: Well, I think my book *English Text* is an attempt to articulate a discourse plane, with the kinds of things that you would analyse there, but I think it's written at a very inaccessible level, even more inaccessible than Halliday's grammar book, so the book I was talking about, a discourse workbook, I think, is needed to show people how to use the grammar and analyse various discourse patterns, and interpret texts generically. I think the grammar needs a lot of scaffolding to be used to analyse texts.

M.A.H.: I think that although *English Text* (1992) is sometimes difficult to follow, it has a lot of creative thinking.

J.M.: Well, yes, I hope so! But I don't usually see people referring to it or using it; people refer all the time to Halliday's grammar and take that as the basis of discussion.

M.A.H.: But it seems to me that it offers all kinds of valuable clues to solve the problems that are found while analysing discourse. For example, I remember that you speak there about a semantic level.

J.M.: Yes, this book is about a semantic level, a discourse semantic level—more abstract than grammar—and part of the discussion is why you need such a level and I think one of the arguments for such a level is that there are many semantic patterns that are spread across the grammar: causality, and attitude, and all kinds of meanings you don't find in one place in the grammar but all around, so it makes it difficult to talk about them because they are so diffused grammatically, so one reason to have a semantic stratum is to try to pull a number of disparate grammatical resources together and integrate them and begin to think about them in a more integrated way.

M.A.H.: Does Halliday agree with that?

J.M.: I think Halliday is generally very generous and open. I think that, fundamentally, he is a grammarian, and he has built a richer grammar than anyone has ever done before. He's looked farther out than any grammarian has ever done, but I still feel fundamentally he's not a discourse analyst.

M.A.H.: Oh, yes, well, in the Cardiff Conference, I realized that Halliday only mentioned once the word *genre* in the last session, and this was only because he was asked a question about it. Why do you think that he prefers to use *type of text* instead of *genre*. Is it that he distrusts this term?

J.M.: He never says explicitly what he thinks, so I can only judge implicitly from the way he behaves, and I see that he takes the metafunctional organization of the grammar and he uses that to organise his conception of context as field, mode and tenor, and for him it seems he doesn't feel an overriding need to recognise something like genre, that would be integrating field mode and tenor, and showing which combinations are used in a culture and for reasoning about how genres are related to each other, etc. —that doesn't seem to be a priority in his system of analysis.

M.A.H.: According to you, then, what differences can we see between terms such as *genre* and *type of text*?

J.M.: I think it would be more a question of whether his field, mode and tenor framework is adequate to cope with the kind of things that we analyse from the perspective of genre and again I don't think he has ever said so, I don't really know what his position is. I think he values having different models of grammar and different models of discourse and I don't think he would want to be stopping anyone. But, you know, we have been much more directly engaged in education and applied linguistic practices than he has ever been. So I've been more closely involved with people working to build syllabus and curriculum and design pedagogies for school, and, you know, that was one context in which the genre work was just the handle that we needed to really make an impact in Australia. My general feeling is that genre is a very fundamental concept at the level of discourse and has tremendous explanatory power and logic to get a handle on discourse. The way the clause works in grammar or the syllable in phonology and, you know, without those key critical ideas, things are much more unmanageable, so for me analysing discourse and context without the concept of genre would be like analysing grammar without the concept of clause.

M.A.H.: What about the appraisal system? Does it cut across genre?

J.M.: I think it's part of the interpersonal semantics, so it is at the level of discourse semantics. In *English Text*, as far as interpersonal semantics goes, I worked mainly on speech function and exchange structures so more focusing on dialogue patterning. This aspect of interpersonal meaning was very much underplayed. It was really since *English Text* that I began to work on this area, again to take a set of resources that are diffused throughout the grammar and build a more integrated semantic picture about what is going on: so that's the relation with interpersonal semantics.

M.A.H.: Do you think that this system on which you are working, the appraisal system, is going to be one of the main areas of development of SFL?

J.M.: I think that in terms of my own work, the work on appraisal will have a comparable impact to the work on genre in the eighties. I think genre was really an initiative in the eighties that I worked on with many people and it had a lot of applications in education. I think the appraisal work will have a similar kind of impact on genre and register analysis.

M.A.H.: By the way, why did you call that system *appraisal*? Why not *evaluation*?

J.M.: Well, we struggled with this, I think; we knew that we were working on the area of evaluative meaning but the term *evaluation* had been used by many people and, in any case, it was used as part of a narrative structure, an element of narrative structure, and we felt that in the work that there was confusion between evaluation as an element of structure and evaluation as a prosodic motif running through the narratives. I think at the time we were working on narrative, we wanted another term that we could use that wouldn't be confused with evaluation, and then I think we just hunted around until we found something that settled. *Affect* was too narrow because we were going beyond emotion into judgements and evaluations of other kinds.

M.A.H.: I tend to mistrust some of the so-called "new developments" of Halliday's theory—it doesn't matter how well they are explained—because actually they depart from the very basis of a system so well constructed by Halliday. But I feel that your

work on the appraisal system —distinguishing affection, judgement and appreciation— has a lot of sense inside Halliday's theory, hasn't it?

J.M.: Yes, you know, Halliday is a grammarian and he doesn't work much on lexis so that remains undescribed. Appraisal complements his grammar book as it's more of a lexical resource. Also remember I'm primarily a discourse analyst and he is a grammarian. I have tried to adapt the model, so there is plenty of room for both of us —so that the grammar work remains at the level of the grammar but we add an additional stratum to deal with how discourse semantic works; so I mainly try to elaborate the discourse semantics. But I take his grammar as the basis for every thing I do and then I try to expand it in a way that's more sensitive to discourse and context considerations.

M.A.H.: And what are the boundaries between pragmatics and systemic functional linguistics? I have read that most of what Halliday really does is pragmatics...

J.M.: There are too many problems with pragmatics. One is that it remains very sentence-based. It asks questions about the meaning of the clause and then it asks questions about how the clause is used in social settings. For me it's too narrow, I think. Once you move into questions of pragmatics, genre, or discourse, or text is the critical unit, so pragmatics is too narrowly focused on the clause. Another problem I have with it is that it is usually organized in respect of formal models: you do phonology, syntax, semantics, and then, after that, you do pragmatics. I think that puts the use of language at a level of abstraction that is too far away from the phonology and syntax, that is the real heart of language. I have a more Firthian perspective: I like to see the phonology and grammar and discourse semantics all generating meaning; all levels are contributing to meaning. I like to do pragmatics *in* the phonology, *in* the grammar, *in* the semantics wherever it needs to be done, and show how it's integrated. So I don't like it as an extra. I like it to be at the heart of language, as part of the explanation of language function.

M.A.H.: Oh, yes, so you mean that this perspective of yours belongs to the very foundations of the Hallidayan system: language as social semiotic.

J.M.: Yes, sure!

M.A.H.: Now, a few more questions. Within systemic functional linguistics, what do you think the main lines of development will be?

J.M.: For me, the most exciting developments will be in multimodal analysis. It'll be using systemic theory to move across different semiotic systems. I think the work that Theo van Leeuwen and Gunther Kress have done on images, and Theo again on sound and music is critical. Radan Martinec is working on the theory of action. There are people working on performance; so I think what we are going to find is not so much a systemic functional linguistics, but a systemic functional semiotics: metanguage that describes other semiotic systems in comparable terms. I think that will put us in a position to analyse multimodal texts, where you have a combination of wording, images, sound, action; it will embody language in a way that it cannot be embodied as long as you have a single discipline of linguistics. So I would say over the next ten years that will be one very exciting area. I think the other will be the functional analysis of different languages in many different language families; we're starting now for the first time to get rich descriptions. I see now almost a dozen different language families with descriptions comparable to Halliday's grammar and I think for the first time we are starting to see the way in which a functional interpretation can give you a picture of those languages where you don't see them as English

and you don't see them as Latin, however they have been described before, but you start to generally see them in terms of their own functionality and their culture. For me I just find this so exciting. I have worked on Philippino and other people have worked on Australian languages and languages around the world. To me it's a revelation to have French or a language that has been described in so many ways—to have that described in systemic terms. I think the whole area of functional language typology will be another very exciting area of development.

M.A.H.: And has all this stemmed from Halliday's theory?

J.M.: Yes, certainly! The work across different semiotics is attempting to translate his conception of meaning and metafunctions to these other systems and it's surprising how well it works! It seems to be his ideas are fundamental to the nature of semiosis, not just to linguistics. You know, he started originally working on Chinese and moved to English, so he's always had an interest in working across languages and I think that again has inspired many of us to move on and describe the other languages in which we are interested, in comparable terms.

M.A.H.: And now, the last question: What do you think is the future of linguistics?

J.M.: I think linguistics is in serious decline. I think that, in general, it has been dominated by formal paradigms and now universities find themselves in a situation where economic rationalism determines what happens and we have most of the linguists in the world doing things that cannot be valued by the community and are not productive for the community and it's been tremendously damaging to the discipline. Linguistics departments in Great Britain, in Australia, in North America are shrinking and they are beginning to disappear. I think that under the grip of formalism, the discipline probably is finished and we are expecting in another generation, there will be linguists, but there will not be linguistics departments. They will be working in other kinds of institutional position—in communications, in English departments, and language departments; that's certainly the drift of things. That's tragic, but the domination of the formalists has made that happened; it's been very naïve of them to let that kind of damage happen to the discipline. But I think especially the functional linguistics will thrive because it can be valued by the community and can contribute to the community and, as long as people can do that kind of work, whatever happens, they'll fall on their feet and carry on developing new ideas; but as for many of linguists' traditional concerns with the formal analysis of exotic languages and so on, I think this work will be severely curtailed. So, it's very discouraging on the one hand but, I think, very exciting in other ways.

M.A.H.: After this *impressive* finale, I have to thank you for having taken the time to speak to me. You are the creator of one of the most important lines of development of SFL in the world, and I believe that your ideas are going to be very interesting for the readers.

J.M.: I also thank you very much for this interview. As I have said before, my research found its inspiration in Halliday's work. It is a trajectory, and we must bear in mind that many people are constantly taking his ideas and recontextualizing them in all kinds of different sites. I think it's his very generative ideas, I mean, just very productive and exciting ideas. I think the kinds of meetings we've been at for two or three weeks demonstrate this. It's fascinating the range of work that is going on with sets of new ideas.

M.A.H.: Thank you very much!

**ORGANISING PRINCIPLES AND EXPANSION OF THE
SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL MODEL: A CONVERSATION
WITH CHRISTIAN MATTHIESSEN**

M.A.H.: After having listened to several lecturers discussing their own ideas concerning the use of different varieties in the analysis of language within SFL, may I ask you what your view on this issue is?

C.M.: Well, it seems to me, thinking about the different varieties of analysis, that there is an interesting theoretical challenge here — the question of how to conceptualize such variation. We have been thinking about this for quite some time now, since the eighties, trying to think explicitly about the systemic functional theory as a metalanguage — a resource for describing language that is itself like language (this line of thinking goes back to J.R. Firth, who characterized linguistics as language being turned back on itself). This conception of the theory has been helpful, you know, when thinking about what are the features of the organization of SFL, but also when thinking about the contexts in which it has been developed, or is being developed, and the contexts of application to a range of tasks, including educational, clinical and computational ones. And so the notion of dialects of SFL, of course, follows directly from this metaphor of metalanguage. But in addition to dialectal variation, there is also the other kind of variation we find in language itself — variation according to context of use: functional variation, where we can recognize families of functional varieties or “registers.” It’s an interesting issue how to sort out this kind of variation within SFL — the registers of the systemic functional metalanguage. I mean, I think some of the variation we find within systemic functional linguistics has developed as functional variation because scholars have faced different research questions, different demands of application. Just as an example, a number of the features of the model that Jim Martin has developed — e.g. his development of additional strata within context — can be related to his concern with educational context. I think a number of the features of the model Robin Fawcett has presented — e.g. his reduction of the full axial organization within the strata of semantics and lexicogrammar — can be related to the computational context. That doesn’t mean that if you are addressing educational issues the model has to be like Jim Martin’s model, for instance, or if you are addressing computational concerns, it has to be like the Cardiff model; and it does not mean that their models cannot be applied to different contexts: they can be and they have been — for example, John Bateman has found Jim’s work very significant in the computational context. Rather it’s a question of how different contexts of application will foreground different aspects of the total systemic functional metalanguage. I think one of the strengths of this metalanguage is that, as far as I know, it’s the only theory of language that spans such a wide range of concerns and applications; other theories tend to be contextually more restricted, even to the point where they have essentially been designed for single context of research (as has arguably been the case with the Chomskyan program of research). I can’t think of any other theory that, for instance, would both have a strong engagement with educational concerns, with computational modelling

of language, with clinical work and then also with literary stylistics, multimodal semiotics, and so on. I think this is one of the fundamental strengths of systemic functional theory: it has this wide range of applications and they can enrich one another.

M.A.H.: If scientific research in these fields is not based on strong back-bones within SFL whereby things may begin to drift away and disappear, would we not be running an important risk?

C.M.: Yes! I think that point is important. We must keep returning to the theoretical “back-bone” —interpreting it all the time as a resource (rather than as a set of rules), i.e. as a meaning potential enabling us to construe language. The potential danger is that people working within particular research contexts continue to develop functional varieties specific to those contexts without considering other contexts and without feeding the work back into the general metalanguage of systemic functional theory; the result might be divergence and fragmentation, thus decreasing the power of the general theory. One thing I often argue we should be doing is to say: “Well if we have this experience from the educational context, the computational context, and so on, let’s make sure that this is part of the “back-bone,” so that these experiences available as resources also for other people.” Since we can actually theorize the specialization within different contexts in systemic functional terms and since systemic functional theory is inherently holistic in orientation, I think we can avoid the danger of the fragmentation of knowledge that has concerned many 20th century scholars such as the quantum physicist David Bohm. So far I don’t think that the functional varieties of systemic functional theory have diverged much. Interestingly, Michael Halliday’s own “back-bone” of systemic functional theory has, in my opinion, been very successful in both being elastic enough to move into different contexts but also being thought-through enough, systematic enough, to leave the general outlines of the theory clear. This seems to me to be a possible difference between the very highly elaborated model that Robin Fawcett presents, the Cardiff model, and the kind of model that Michael Halliday and other people in and around Sydney have been developing and elaborating. Halliday’s model specifies a small number of general semiotic dimensions such as stratification, instantiation, axis and rank so anything that you put in the model must be placed relative to all of these dimensions; there are no *ad hoc* categories floating around in the account. Thus any interpretation of a linguistic phenomenon will be located along one or more of these semiotic dimensions; in interpreting it, you say: “Okay, this is a matter of stratal organization, this is a matter of the cline of instantiation, this is a matter of metafunctional organization, and so on.” So everything will be placed in this multidimensional semiotic space, and I think this kind of metaphor of the multidimensional space constructed in modelling language is helpful (just as the multidimensional thinking in physics has been) because it ensures that you are always asking where you are, if we are changing something, adding something, then the implications are always very clear. It’s certainly pedagogically useful, helping our students build up clear, systematic maps of the dimensions of language.

M.A.H.: And do you think that research on the series of system networks to make explicit the language potential is one of these back-bones?

C.M.: I think system networks will continue to play a very important role, certainly in our own work. Before Robin Fawcett and his group started their computa-

tional work here in Cardiff in the mid 1980s, some of us were involved in computational research at an institute in Los Angeles, “The Information Science Institute.” Our work was started by William C. Mann in 1980. The main focus was the development of a computational text-generation system (which came to be known as the “Penman” system) building on Michael Halliday’s account of the grammar and of language in general. He was a consultant on the project and provided us with the first system network of the English clause. The system network was the “back-bone” of our work right from the beginning: unlike the structure-oriented grammars that had been used in computational parsing in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. so-called transition network grammars), the system network made explicit how the grammar is organized as a resource for making meanings and therefore we were able to specify how grammatical choices could be controlled in a meaningful way in the course of the generation of a text. The system we developed is still in use around the world; John Bateman, Elke Teich and others have taken it further in the form of the KPML (Komet-Penman, MultiLingual) system. John has developed a very user-friendly interface and made it available to researchers together with an excellent user manual. In Sydney, we have also built on the Penman foundations, developing a new generation of system functional system for producing text in various languages accompanied by contributions from other semiotic systems such as maps and diagrams. The system network has been central in making this possible because it allows us to abstract away from structural differences among languages — and among different semiotic systems — and to specify the multilingual and multimodal meaning potential in an integrated way. The systemic functional approach to language (and to semiotic systems in general) is fairly unique in foregrounding the systemic, paradigmatic axis of organization, and the main resource for modelling this organization is the system network.

M.A.H.: To explore another important characteristic of SFL, what distinguishes its *functional* approach to language from other approaches also called functional, like that in Simon Dik’s grammar?

C.M.: It has now been over ten years since I talked with Simon Dik before he passed away and their work keeps developing; but from those discussions and from reading seminal work within his framework, I had a sense that one difference is that the Dikian functional grammar has focused mainly on “lexicogrammar,” to put it in systemic functional terms — that is, with the stratum of wording: lexis and grammar (including both “syntax” and “morphology”— “morpho-syntax” as it is sometimes called nowadays). (What they call “semantics” corresponds most closely to ideational — more specifically, experiential — lexicogrammar; and what they call “pragmatics” corresponds most closely to textual lexicogrammar; the interpersonal metafunction has been backgrounded in their work on lexicogrammar, as it was in the Prague School. Like Danes’ work beginning with his proposals in the early 1960s, the Dikian framework equates stratification and metafunction; but in systemic functional theory, stratification and metafunction are two distinct dimensions so that where the Dikian framework has three “components” — pragmatics, semantics and syntax, we have a two-dimensional space of six regions: ideational [logical & experiential], interpersonal and textual semantics; and ideational, interpersonal and textual lexicogrammar. This means among other things that the functional “components” in Dik’s framework are ordered (pragmatics > semantics > syntax), like the strata of a stratal theory, whereas

the metafunctions of systemic theory are simultaneous.) They've not been concerned very much with the other content systems —discourse semantics and context, nor with the expression system of phonology (graphology or sign), so in that sense their focus is narrower one, and from the systemic functional point of view that's significant, because a good deal of the functionalism in the systemic functional approach to lexicogrammar derives precisely from the fact that it's related to higher levels of organization —to semantics and context— and because the full range of lexicogrammatical systems can only be seen if the phonological system of intonation is taken into account as an expressive resource. The systemic functional approach is holistic in character (as opposed to “componential”); it is based on systems-thinking (as opposed to Cartesian Analysis). I think that's one difference. Another difference is that Dik's grammar is oriented more towards the syntagmatic axis, focussing on function structure whereas systemic functional theory is both systemic or paradigmatic and structural or syntagmatic and foregrounds systemic organization as the basis for interpreting language. The Dikian framework has nothing that is equivalent to the system networks of systemic functional theory. A third difference, I think, is the sort of the range of things that people are looking at. I mean, all through the 1980s and early 1990s I think it's true to say that in Dik's functional grammar there's been a strong connection between functionalism and typology so they have tended to look at particular areas of language in a typological perspective, thus cutting across languages, whereas in systemic functional work there's always been a very high priority on developing comprehensive accounts of particular languages first. This is tied up to the systemic functional view of how you would compare and contrast languages and do linguistic typology. In systemic functional work on typology there is, I think, a commitment to an approach that is based on very comprehensive descriptions of particular languages so that you don't export the description of English to other languages (as happened with descriptions of grammars of various languages before the 20th century done by missionaries on the basis of Latin, etc.). This systemic functional approach is illustrated by a new book on systemic functional typology being edited by Alice Caffarel, Jim Martin and me; the book contains systemic functional descriptions of a range of languages (French, German; Telugu; Tagalog; Pitjantjatjara; Chinese; and Japanese) and these form part of the base for typological generalizations across languages.

M.A.H.: In your opinion, what are the main lines of expansion within SFL?

C.M.: I think existing areas such as educational linguistics, literary analysis, social semiotics, and computational work will continue to develop. Within the educational area, I would hope to see the development of systemic functional work on second language teaching and learning as an alternative to non-systemic work on language “acquisition” (most of us avoid the metaphor of “acquisition,” because of the unfortunate implication that language is a commodity to be acquired rather than a meaning potential to be constructed interactively by the learner). I think that the computational area —with the general development of the computational work and so on— will continue to expand. I hope myself to see much more interaction between, say, the computational and the educational lines of work, so that the computational work within SFL can provide resources for educational work, modelling in the classroom, helping in the construction of educational knowledge and so on. I think there

are many opportunities here. I also see that the computational work can make more contact with corpus-based work in linguistics and provide systemic functional tools for analysing corpora. We're trying to do this at Macquarie University; Wu Canzhong is developing tools for supporting linguistic description; and there is similar work in Hong Kong and Singapore. I think that this will be a very significant continued development. I think there are some new areas where important work is likely to develop further, for example, multimodal work, forensic linguistics, clinical work related to language disorders, language in the changing workplace, and what Jim Martin calls PDA —positive discourse analysis, which can be seen as part of a general program for construing all the institutions that make up a culture by analysing text against the background of the social diversification and distribution of the overall meaning potential; but also the interesting area of language evolution and the study of the semiotic systems of our close relatives such as the bonobos.

M.A.H.: Would you say that the so-called trinocular vision of language description may remain as definitive not only for the description of languages but also for the description of other semiotic systems?

C.M.: Yes, I quite agree with you that the kind of approach that the trinocular perspective represents will continue to play an important role for the interpretation of language but also for the interpretation of other semiotic systems. And I think that the trinocular perspective relates to the whole attempt to view semiotic systems holistically, always construing them in terms of the multidimensional semiotic space that we were talking about earlier: instead of being locked into a “monocular” perspective, we keep shunting along the various semiotic dimensions, so that you can take a view “from above,” “from around” and “from below” —prototypically in relation to the dimension of stratification, but also in fact by reference to other dimensions such as instantiation and rank. If you have that as part of the methodology, if you keep shunting along semiotic dimensions to obtain a trinocular perspective, then you ensure that you are always getting a rounded picture of whatever you're looking at, and I think in particular when we began working on other semiotic systems in the 1980s, the trinocular approach was very important because we had much less experience with looking at semiotic systems other than language. So if you keep shunting and looking at them from different angles —trinocularly, as it were, I think that we will get a balanced rather than an unbalanced picture. While a good deal of work on “multimodality” in the computational context has been concerned with the view “from below,” trying to solve problems of digitizing different expression systems, the systemic functional work by Michael O'Toole, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and others has foregrounded the views “from above” and “from around” by exploring the metafunctional spectrum of meaning and by trying to map out the systemic organization of the meaning potential of different semiotic systems. Another aspect of the concern with “ocularity” is to try out different dimensions in the interpretation of semiotic phenomena. For example, if we also have the dimension of instantiation as part of our overall semiotic space, then that dimension can actually do a lot of work for us and then maybe we would need fewer strata than in e.g. the classical “genre model,” where context is stratified into “register,” “genre” and “ideology.” We thus play the different semiotic dimensions off against one another. I think that's important, and it relates to the trinocular perspective.

M.A.H.: One last question, at the moment, are you working on languages other than English in Australia?

C.M.: Yes, one thing we've been trying to push very hard is work on languages other than English and also, based on this, translation studies and typological work. I mentioned above the new book on systemic functional typology that we are publishing; and two scholars who have guided work on translation, Erich Steiner and Colin Yallop, have just edited a book with systemic functional contributions to the study of translation. In our own context in Australia, we have ongoing work on French (undertaken and directed by Alice Caffarel), Tagalog (Jim Martin), Vietnamese (Van Van Hoang—now back in Vietnam, Minh Duc Thai), Chinese (M.A.K. Halliday, Ed McDonald—actually now at NUS in Singapore, and other as well), Japanese (Kazuhiro Teruya, who has produced a general account of the lexicogrammar of Japanese, Keizo Nanri, Midori Fukuhara, Elizabeth Thomson, and others as well), Pitjantjatjara (David Rose); and other descriptions of other languages are in progress (e.g. Korean, Indonesian). There is naturally an orientation towards the Australia-Pacific region, but we lack work on Spanish, Portuguese, etc. and it would be wonderful if scholars interested in these languages were to do research on them. There has been very valuable work on different aspects of Spanish, including the work reported on at the systemic congress here in Cardiff; but we do not yet have a general systemic functional overview of Spanish of the kind developed for the languages mentioned above. I hope that the new systemic functional typology book I mentioned earlier can serve as a guide for scholars developing systemic functional descriptions of Spanish and of many other languages as well. Such work will of course be of value in the context of general typological work—and this is of considerable interest and significance; but my point has always been that a systemic functional description can be so much more than material for consumption within linguistics—it can serve to answer central questions about language within education, literary studies, clinical work and so on.

M.A.H.: Thank you very much for your time. I hope this interview with you and the two that I have held with Michael Halliday and Jim Martin will lead to a better understanding of SFL's theoretical value and its applicability to a wide range of fields and languages.