Book Review


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Since the publication of *Language Typology: A Functional Perspective* by Cafrarel et al. (2004), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has offered a dynamic world of interest to language description across languages. Articles, theses, and monographs have been published delineating descriptive principles and demonstrating the application in various contexts (see Mwinlaaru and Xuan 2016). *Systemic Functional Language Description: Making Meaning Matter*, edited by James R. Martin, Yaegan J. Doran, and Giacomo Figueredo, is a timely and long-overdue addition to this field. It makes a major theoretical contribution to the growing body of literature and provides an excellent introduction to the new advances in SFL in language description. In addition, it offers an invigorating perspective, as it expands systemic functional typology (SFT) to a higher stratum of discourse semantics and relates SFT to a wider field of application.

Following the introductory chapter that offers an overview of the methodology, content, and context of the volume, the collection is organized into two parts. Part I (Chapters 2–6) explores the variations in the encoding of semiotic resources across languages using up-to-date methods. Pursuing a generalized description of verbal groups in Chapter 2, the remaining chapters in Part I have specific metafunctional realms as their descriptive focus: *Mood* from interpersonal metafunction in Chapter 3, process types from experiential metafunction in Chapter 4, and textual organization in Chapters 5 and 6, all informed by principles introduced in the first chapter – axial argumentation and/or cryptogrammar. Part II (Chapters 7–10) applies the methods of the systemic functional description to the analysis of lexicogrammar and examines text patterns in context, highlighting the value of developing semiotic typology within the framework of SFL. Following a general introduction to language typology from a discourse semantic perspective in Chapter 7, the ensuing chapters revolve around specific contexts: Chapter 8 around explanation genre in scientific
discourse, Chapter 9 around story genre, and Chapter 10 around discourse in classroom interaction. The ultimate chapter, with its discussion of formalisms, advances the study further to a semiotic typology.

An introduction written by two editors, Yaegan J. Doran and James R. Martin, paves the way for the following chapters. They set out the scope by providing the theoretical underpinnings, methodological principles, and appliable realms. Cryptogrammatical reasoning, metafunctional organization, and stratal perspectives are underlying principles in the systemic functional description of language. Rather than simply indicating their status as organizational principles in a functional study, the two editors lay out a smooth reading experience by explaining their motivating relationships and working logic. Along with a brief introduction to every chapter, the two editors conclude their introduction with the contributions this volume might offer to the linguistic community. Through its methodological innovations, it is committed to developing a functional semiotic typology oriented to discourse semantics.

The second chapter, contributed by Dongbing Zhang, explores how axial argumentation informs language description at ranks below the clause through an account of the verbal groups in Khorchin Mongolian and demonstrates that axial orientation is a fruitful way of illuminating the significance of grammatical categories. By identifying the system of VERBAL GROUP (VG) DEIXIS in the indicative and the imperative mood, and VG TYPE with respect to transitivity types, Zhang explores the role of the verbal groups in enacting interpersonal meaning and construing experiential meaning in discourse. A trinocular perspective on the verbal groups brings to light the paradigmatic interactional environment of the systems and the syntagmatic organizational patterns that realize the systems. A common feature in both Khorchin Mongolian and Spanish is found – the conflation of function structures, which demonstrates axial argumentation a productive approach to explicate the valeur of a grammatical category.

Pin Wang’s chapter examines verbal groups in Classical Tibetan language. The author focuses on the patterns of verbal groups in the lexicogrammatical stratum that realize the MOOD system. Wang’s study, consistent with the collection, is oriented towards the discourse semantic stratum, more specifically, towards contrasts in the moves of the NEGOTIATION system. It is distinguished from earlier studies of MOOD, which hypothesize MOOD as the grammaticalization of the semantic system of SPEECH FUNCTION (Teruya et al. 2007). Since language description necessitates a focus on the contrast of a grammatical category that informs semantic meanings, to avoid a simple duplication from another language, the principle of cryptogrammar is essential to SFL, or to any other linguistic approach that is modeled on particular languages.
In her chapter, Beatriz Quiroz attempts to tackle and unravel the complexity in the establishment and analyses of experiential types by paradigmatic reasoning. Paradigmatic reasoning, which runs through the entire volume, is motivated by Whorf’s notions (‘overt’, ‘covert’ category, and reactances) and by Gleason’s concepts (‘enation’ and ‘agnation’). Whorf’s methodology focuses on the analysis of morphologies and words; Gleason’s approach, on the other hand, extends further to sentences. Together, they constitute an extensive formula for SFL. Process types are cryptotypic and their value can be identified by the reactances motivating the agnation paradigm, which is exemplified by Quiroz with patterns in Spanish mental clauses. The research finds that experiential grammatical categories in Spanish and English are motivated by different underlying agnation patterns. A cross-linguistic survey may reveal other useful patterns as well, offering an inviting prospect in this field.

After familiarizing readers with the concept of axial argumentation and cryptogrammar, Chapter 5, contributed by Giacomo Figueredo, extends these concepts to the analysis of Theme in Brazilian Portuguese. He interprets Theme from the standpoint of clause and discourse, adopting a traditional SFL approach – a trinocular perspective. Approaching from above, the thematic structural resources are matched onto the textual organization of discourse with the model of periodicity, and by positing a system for messages – CONTEXTUALIZATION. It is then set off by an approach from below in terms of the elements that realize Theme. An approach from roundabout adds a final touch to the trinocular perspective, with an examination of three grammatical systems of THEME: the system of TEXTUAL THEME, the system of INTERPERSONAL THEME, and the system of THEME SELECTION.

Diverging from the traditional trinocular account of the thematic structure, Randy J. LaPolla examines the textual grammar with a different focus in Chapter 6. Drawing on various perspectives about theme, topic, and related criteria, LaPolla argues that Theme is the initial element in the clause and questions the legitimacy of conflating Theme with Topic. LaPolla’s argument emerges differently than Halliday’s interpretation, which says the point of departure is not necessarily a positional reference, expatiated in Chapter 5 (p. 129). LaPolla argues that Topic, as a resource for contextualizing the clause, is not necessarily included in the starting point. He supports his argument using examples from Tagalog and Chinese, where immediate motivations for the conflation of topic and theme – which prevails in English – are not found. LaPolla brings in an invigorating view and demonstrates an unfulfilled potential for a cross-linguistic survey in the field of thematic structure.

Language typology aims to discover the universals as well as the variations of language. Chapter 7, contributed by James R. Martin and Beatriz Quiroz,
acts as a bridging chapter connecting Part I and Part II, and aims to develop language typology from a functional perspective with a special focus on discourse semantics. They give a glimpse of the five dimensions of functionality in SFL and the discourse semantic systems that inform a multifunctional language description. The *valeur* of the linguistic systems is explored in terms of their paradigmatic opposition. Ranks and axial argumentation provide a vantage point to survey the commonalities and variations of structural configurations that realize the discourse semantic systems across languages. They remark that the analyses are fundamentally defeasible (p. 228) since reconsidersations are needed from different perspectives. This chapter demonstrates a plausible way for developing language typology within SFL by striking a nice balance between complementary perspectives across ranks, systems, metafunctions, and contexts.

Jing Hao, in Chapter 8, intends to develop pedagogical materials for the teaching of Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP). Her description of the language has the specialized context of biological scientific discourse as domain and focuses on the logical meaning. To reveal the logical relationship (implication relations) between scientific activities, Hao explores the configuration of discourse patterns realizing contextual choices and their realization in grammar. Instances of implication activities are configured through a series of occurrence figures and logical connection which establishes the implication relationship. In terms of grammatical realizations, distinctions are made between embedding and clause complex, and within clause complex, parataxis and hypotaxis are differentiated. Verbal aspect and modality in Chinese interact with causal and temporal sequencings and thus contribute significantly to the meaning construal in Chinese texts. This chapter provides an exciting overview of the logical meaning in Chinese, which is productive to the teaching and learning CSP, and also models research in comparable contexts.

The general aim of Chapter 9, contributed by David Rose, is to examine the object and purpose of typological linguistics, in terms of the criteria proposed by Firth a century ago. More specifically, Rose looks into the meaning potentials up at the strata of register and genre, along the cline of instantiation and individuation, with three stories in different languages from diversified cultures. Foregrounding the instances of register, Rose finds that the lexicogrammatical resources co-evolve with register potentials and that linguistic instantiation interacts closely with instantiation in register and genre. Languages and cultures share a rather consistent functional potentiality and disparity appears mainly in register and their grammatical configurations. A story is a negotiation
between the narrator, characters, and listeners; the interpretation of the story is a collaboration between the text, culture, and individuals, and this is where the cline of individuation and cline of instantiation make an impact on each other. Thus, instead of parting language into a dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*, a stratified perspective prioritized by the systemic functional language description enables the survey of the general meaning potential of language in context.

Chapter 10 develops the description of code-switching for a specific pedagogical purpose to explore their potential for enabling a successful knowledge acquisition during classroom communication. Harni Kartika Ningsih analyzes a bilingual intervention program, where Reading to Learn (R2L) pedagogy is utilized. It is organized as a curriculum sequence, as a three-layered concentric circle. The functions and patterns of code-switching of classroom interaction are explored in terms of R2L learning exchange and the discourse semantic system of negotiation. The strategies adopted by teachers in classroom interaction are described in terms of the system of language shift. The research finds that well-designed code-switching strategies with specific purposes in each step of the learning cycle are productive to the effective imparting of instructions and knowledge to students. The measured procedure paves a smooth way of transferring the focus from L1 to L2, and from the teacher’s instructions to the contents of the texts. The program is an exciting contribution to the pedagogical language teaching approaches which manifests a strong potential for SFL appliability in a wide context.

Chapter 11, contributed by Yaegan J. Doran, explores the functionalities of the formalisms deployed in multiple disciplines and attempts to develop a semiotic typology from the systemic functional perspective. Each formalism provides an effective way of concentrating an intricate aspect of knowledge in a synthesized symbol, commonly used in academic disciplines. Four types of formalisms are explored: system networks and tree diagrams from linguistics, nuclear equations in physics, and equations in mathematics. By Highlighting their commonalities in their grammatical patterns that realize meaning-making potential, formalisms are found to encode field-specific meanings only – the content of technical knowledge. Albeit they encode different relationships, they share the same structure of univariate organizations – academic knowledge is construed and expanded through the repetitive realizational configurations. This chapter serves as a model for the study of formalisms in academic discourse, highlighting their universalities – field specification and iteration, thereby providing a principled way to the survey of the typology of semiotics.
This volume has a number of strong points both in terms of methodology and language coverage. First, it pushes the description and application of systemic linguistics further than phonology, lexicogrammar, and semantic stratum to that of discourse in context. Each author focuses on a particular type of context, orienting towards a contextual typology. Second, this collection not only foregrounds languages frequently studied in SFL, such as Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, English, and Tagalog, but also brings into focus a wide range of languages seldom studied by SFL or other linguistic schools such as Pitjantjatjara (Australia) and Oromo (Africa). It also highlights languages in a specific period, such as Classical Tibetan spoken around the ninth century, and languages spoken in particular areas, such as Brazilian Portuguese and Bahasa Indonesia. The inclusion of the research on formalisms deployed in a number of academic disciplines in the final chapter positions this volume into a broader perspective of multimodalities, and pushes the foci of language typology to a further realm of semiotic typology. Third, brought together both acknowledged and promising systemic functional linguists, this collection offers a wide scope of perspectives, covering diversified themes. Owing to the close interaction amongst the contributors, the contents are coherently organized, and chapters are frequently co-referred. Last, most authors in their concluding section shed light on the issues that need further attention and point out directions and prospects for future study.

Each chapter contributes in its own way with specific themes and questions. Chapter 4 explicates cryptogrammar and axial argumentation, and Chapter 7 introduces discourse semantics. These concepts inform the entire collection, and suggestions could be offered to those who are less familiar with these concepts to read them prior to other chapters. The merits of the collection may turn into drawbacks as well. Every chapter, informed by unified principles, fits tightly together and contributes to the integrity of the whole volume, which inevitably gives rise to the overlapping of information. Furthermore, there are also a few misprints, such as errors in the section number – ‘2.2’ should be ‘2.3’ (p. 136); ‘2.2.2’ (p. 290) and ‘2.2.3’ (p. 291) should be ‘2.2.1’ and ‘2.2.2’ respectively and mistakes in word order – “modal and assessment interpersonal functions” should be “modal assessment and interpersonal functions” (p. 145).

These are minor flaws compared to the overall value of the outstanding selection of works. This edited volume demonstrates an exciting research outlook for the systemic functional language description today. It covers not only theoretical and methodological developments, insightful analysis, but also a wide-range coverage of semiotics in specific contexts. It makes a timely and instructive contribution to the field and will be indispensable to the systemic functional language description and semiotic typology.
References

