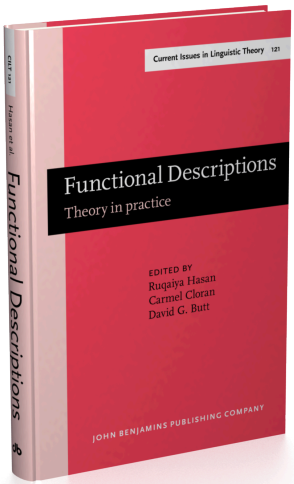
Current Issues in Linguistic Theory
121

Theories, Maps and Descriptions

An Introduction

https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.121.02the



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Functional Descriptions: Theory in practice
Edited by Ruqaiya Hasan †, Carmel Cloran and David Butt
[**Current Issues in Linguistic Theory**, 121]
1996. xxxvi, 381 pp.

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Theories, Maps and Descriptions: An Introduction

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1. Function and description

A grammatical description is functional when it is organised around the tasks language fulfils in human interaction and when the categories of description themselves are arrived at on the basis of the semantic consequences of each element of a clause or sentence. This book, however, is not only about such uses of *function* and *description*. Certainly, each chapter addresses issues of description and offers illustrations which bring out the social semiotic perspective of language, and more specifically, of grammar — the way the linguistic form serves a speaker to share in a cultural tradition, in a way of seeing the world, and in the construction of relevant meaning. Such a functional description is, then, one attempt to map the meaning potential of a particular group or society.

But beyond these notions of what counts as a functional description, there is also another level of function, namely, the purposes to which we can put the meta-description itself. One does need to ask about the usefulness of the work linguists do as linguists or simply as grammarians: what is the meaning potential of the linguists' grammar as a tool for developing and resolving issues about human interaction, cultural practices, educational policy, cognitive modelling, computation and natural language processing, stylistics ... In raising these issues, we are in fact asking about the relevance of the meanings created by grammarians themselves: how functional are the descriptions that linguists produce and use? And, to what extent do linguists'

descriptions serve "consumers" in domains beyond the discipline of linguistics?

These senses of the term *functional* are intended in the title of this volume, whose chapters are informed by systemic functional linguistics (SFL) — a model that explicitly addresses these different meanings of *functional.* The SF model proposes that there is, first of all, *function* in the sense of a relationship between language and human interactive goals — how language connects with, and constructs the outside or non-linguistic environment. In fact language stands in a reciprocal relationship with non-linguistic human affairs; it is motivated by socio-cultural pressures but, at the same time, the socio-cultural patterns are themselves constructed by the patterns by which one can make sense. This view with respect to the **outside** might be referred to as the social meaning of *function.*

Then there is *function* in relation to the "intra-linguistic justification" of grammatical categories (Hasan 1987a) — how the categories of description are established by interpreting the values of elements in a formal pattern. This is the functional perspective from **within** language, a semantic view of function based on the formal relations by which speakers construe meaning. *Functional* here should contrast with an approach which simply imposes normative, external categories on the formal patterns, that is, any approach derived from the expectation of 'universal' categories or from the assumption of categories from the description of other languages.

A third meaning of *function* concerns the theory of description itself. The grammarian needs to evaluate the appropriacy and usefulness of the grammatical model, examining how the theory constructs and interprets linguistic behaviour. This is function between different meta-linguistic proposals. It includes establishing the value of the meta-linguistic theory for the investigation of semiotic issues **beyond** the immediate statements of the description. This aspect of functional descriptions might be referred to, following Martin in this volume, as the issue of *meta-linguistic diversity.*

2. Functional descriptions: some fundamental concepts

The functionalists represented in this volume are all extremely self-conscious about semiotic theory — what can and cannot count as signs within a sign system; the nature of semiotic organisation or order; the way grammar

changes the character, status, and meaning potential of a sign system. In particular, there is a continuity of debate which goes back to Saussure's *A Course in General Linguistics* and to Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Yet both these foundational texts are seen in the light of Firth's critique of the Saussurean tradition. Throughout his career, Firth kept up a debate with Hjelmslev's attempt to produce a semiotic "calculus which would function for linguistics in the way mathematics functions for the material sciences" (see Matthiessen and Nesbitt, this volume). At the same time, he maintained Saussure's central tenet of relativity between different semiotic systems and between the elements of the same system, namely the importance of *valeur*. In Firth's work, *value* became "meaning in context" at each level of the description. But, rather than maintaining the Continental commitment to a global system and an extended idea of potential across a natural language dissociated from a communicating speech community, Firth brought back the heterogeneous actual of speech and speech fellowships. In Halliday's work we find a coming together of these two traditions (Hasan 1995; Matthiessen 1993). Following Firth, Halliday has elaborated a theory of meaning varieties or registers serving the role that "restricted languages" did in Firth's linguistics. But whereas Firth did not appear comfortable invoking any homogeneity of speaking above that of a particular group of the speakers of a particular language, from a particular speech fellowship in a particular speech context, Halliday has extended Firth's "polysystemic" approach to model the "meaning potential" of language in terms of such abstractions as the system of transitivity for the speakers of English. Firth's emphasis on system is, naturally, a tool deriving from the associative/paradigmatic axis of Saussure and Hjelmslev.

The notion of paradigmatic system underlies all the functional descriptions of this volume. In fact, the grammar is conceptualised as a network of options, a network of environments within which specific choices are available. In SF grammar, these environments are the coming together of a grammatical unit from the rank scale — that is to say, clause complex, clause, group/phrase, word, morpheme —and the meta-functional division of the description — that is, the division of the choices according to whether or not they relate to experiential, interpersonal or textual meanings. The experiential is the function concerned with representation and ideational aspects of meaning construction — so, for instance, transitivity choices at the clause rank. Interpersonal meanings are constructed through choices of, for example,

mood and modality, involving speech function, grading of commitment, probability etc. The textual meta-function is, in a sense, derivative, integrating the other two strands of functional choices, for example, at the rank of clause in English, the choice one can exercise over the relative order of clausal elements in order to signal thematic status or psychological subject.

3. Universal descriptions: Vision without perspective?

This functionalist development of twentieth century linguistics is in serious contrast to the formalist tradition which has, by and large, required of its proponents a renunciation of the past. Chomskyan linguistics has been fashioned into a kind of Kuhnian academic revolution with the only historical antecedents conceded being breathtaking in their distance from contemporary work (Déscartes, Port Royale). Saussure is mentioned — but apparently not read, or at least not read with any understanding — in order to legitimise the dichotomy of competence and performance through a radical misreading of the langue/parole distinction (on this aspect of misreading Saussure, see Butt 1985; Hasan 1984a; 1987b; 1993). While the Bloomfieldian tradition was lampooned for its structuralist preoccupations with phonology and morphology as well as for its associations with behaviourist learning theories, in fact, one viable reading of the Chomskyan revolution would be that American structural linguistics simply moved up one stratum in terms of its descriptive fixation. But the revolution that proclaimed the complexity of syntax and the necessity of language acquisition device, the virtues of simplicity, and the clarity of categories, was soon overtaken by other revolutions. Linguists struggled against the narrow conception of the essential nature of human language; rather than being constrained within the bounds of syntax and the lexicon-based semantics of Katz and Fodor (1964), they moved on to wider concerns; they engaged in the study of discourse rather than being bound by the infinity of sentences; and ultimately language claimed its social origins in the move to the exploration of context and pragmatics. Linguists like Lyons and Leech are useful reference points for tracing these historical movements. Compare for example Lyons 1968 with Lyons 1977 and 1981; and Leech 1974 with Leech 1983 — these publications give some indication of how British and North American linguistics drifted away from the earlier narrow

focus of 1960's formalism. The scientific methodology which was so much part of the formalist and nativist approach seems also to have dissipated somewhat; for instance, the pursuit of a universal grammar which would display the human linguistic faculty — or "mental organ" — no longer has the visibility it once had in the working world of linguists. As for the scientificity of the original enterprise, no one has been able to say what would count as refutation of Chomsky's hypothesis whether about innateness or about the necessary form of a universal grammar. Then, again, conceptions of what counts as scientific method have changed so that the long-standing functionalist concerns with *complexity, indeterminacy, dynamic open systems* and *fuzzy categories* have found support in the drift of science, that is, in the description of complex systems in biology and ecology (see, for example, Waddington 1977; also Halliday 1995), in physics through the notions of randomness and implicate order (cf Bohm 1980; see Shore's discussion in this volume, following Butt 1988), as well as in the non-Cartesian accounts of the mind (Vygotsky 1978; Luria 1976; Dennett 1991).

Part of the SF self-consciousness about theory has been a strong stand against the idea that there are theory-free or theory-neutral approaches to grammar. One strategy of linguistic domination has been the notion that certain "facts" about a grammar are pre-theoretical and therefore undeniable or that there is a core of agreement and shared perspective to which all "reasonable" grammarians must subscribe. This situation in linguistics is at the centre of Matthiessen and Nesbitt's contribution to the present volume and I will return to it directly. What might be urged at this point takes us back to Saussure and meta-description. Just as Saussure illustrated with respect to a natural language that its units had their particular, distinct values depending on their place amongst all other units, so too one needs to apply this idea with respect to meta-linguistic units. The concept of value, when applied to the meta-linguistic categories, helps in discourse across theories: if Subject in one theory does not have the same role as Subject in another then we are dealing with two significantly different phenomena (Hasan and Fries 1995). Linguists and many 'consumers' of grammatical descriptions have failed to appreciate the relativity and indeterminacy inherent in describing a language. There is no star chamber or court of appeal that is anything more than the categories derived from a particular tradition and a particular natural language. Consequently there is no fixed notion of Subject or Nominative or Finite or what-

ever just in the same way as there is no inherent up and down in cosmic space. And again, it was Firth as something of a precursor to Halliday's *On the ineffability of grammatical categories* (1988), who urged this point repeatedly, often to the bewilderment of other linguists. Langendoen (1968: 68-9), for example, seems vexed in his report on *The London School*, by Firth's "unwillingness to accept the logical consequences of the denial of universal grammar". When Firth suggests that "Every analysis of a particular 'language' must of necessity determine the values of ad hoc categories to which traditional names are given ...", Langendoen's reaction is to claim that Firth can, therefore, only assign category names **either** "at random" **or** on "the basis of universal grammar". He overlooks other conclusions that an objective, scientific linguistics could adopt: for instance, category names could be assigned from one tradition or language to another utilising the terms which included the most characteristics shared across elements from the two languages. So too characteristics would be accorded different degrees of centrality (or prototypicality; see Shore, this volume). Curiously for one coming out of a theory which had rejected most of what occurred in linguistics before 1957, Langendoen saw the logical consequences of denying universal grammar as "the complete abandonment of the conceptual and terminological tradition of grammar, which had been built up over the preceding two millennia" (Langendoen 1968: 68). It is not surprising that generativists found so much 'evidence' for universal grammar, since its presence was taken for granted — an article of faith — at least so it would seem from Langendoen's claims. Science, we know, has a way of finding what it goes in search of.

This problem of 'self-fulfilling' categories, whose self-fulfilling quality is mistaken as a fact in nature, is a disturbing aspect of the generalising, universalist pressures in formal grammars. For example, it is an unreasonable imposition of theory to assume that in each sentence or clause of any natural language there is an underlying Subject. As Hasan (1984b) has pointed out with respect to Urdu, it makes a nonsense of description to assume this as part of the linguistic reality and then to claim that the majority of speakers' sentences undergo Subject-deletion. The same arguments have been presented in regard to Japanese by Hori (1995). In such cases, English becomes the instrument of an intellectual colonisation which defends its hegemony on the impeccable grounds that it treats all languages equally — just like English.

There remains an impasse of theory concerning the same-ness of phe-

nomena across languages and, in particular, across languages with contrasting semiotic styles (see Hasan 1984b for a discussion of implicitness, implicit devices and ellipsis in Urdu; see Hasan 1984b and 1986 for a discussion of semiotic and semantic styles). In SF theory this inherent relativity and incommensurability has been recognised as a theoretical issue which has a direct bearing on the way description is developed and interpreted. Different ways of saying are different ways of meaning (Hasan 1984b). And in differences *per se* there is no threat, neither within the status of linguistics as a rigorous, scientific discipline, nor without, to the equality of different cultures and languages; values attached to different ways are in the last resort not logically entailed by the nature of those differences as such. This concern with and respect for the specificity of each language, especially attention to the differences languages display in their experiential and representational meanings, has meant that the SF grammarians have also been close readers of Whorf — one of the few linguists to give semiotic relativity sufficient attention both in theory and description. In a powerful theory curtailed prematurely by his untimely death, Whorf emphasised the semantic interconnectedness of different domains of grammatical choice, especially when this kind of "configurative rapport" involved covert grammatical categories — linguistic patterns where grammar does not work through an overt realisation but rather by some covert constraint e.g. which verbs can function only intransitively, or what reactances have become elements of culturally restricted knowledge e.g. the reactance of the proper noun *Jane* or even the common noun *woman* with the feminine reference item: *she* (cf *lioness, empress, poetess...*). With respect to description, Whorf's emphasis on "configurative rapport", "fashions of speaking" and on deep habitual patternings which remain latent — ie. cryptotypic — even for the native speaker, means that his approach is both relational (in the Saussurean sense) and functional: for instance he dismisses the idea of "exact meanings" for words by stressing that "the reference of the words is at the mercy of the sentences and the grammatical patterns in which they occur" (1956: 258-259).

To calibrate the languages of the world, to bring them face to face with each other, to see their similarities and dissimilarities does not inevitably necessitate the use of a theoretical vision that obsessively denies the relevance of multiple perspectives.

4. About the chapters in this volume

The various chapters of this book do celebrate the richness of description that derives from adopting multiple perspectives. Halliday, and Matthiessen and Nesbitt, as also Martin, are particularly concerned with interpreting the process of meta-linguistic description itself. While working from the concepts and goals of systemic functional theory, the three go about their interpretation in quite distinct ways. Nevertheless, in each, the practice of grammar is problematised and reviewed along with the consideration of new demands and technological possibilities for the production of grammatical descriptions.

In *On Grammar and Grammatics* Halliday takes up the subtle consequences of the odd task before the linguist — the problem of turning language back on itself (cf Firth's famous characterisation of linguistics). Of deepest concern is the way in which a meta-language is used to define grammar, for the study of grammar "has no domain until it defines one for itself" (p.3). Halliday proposes the term *grammatics* as a way of removing the ambiguity between (1) *grammar* as the level of wording in a natural language as, for example, in "the grammar of a natural language", and (2) the use of *grammar* to refer to the systematic study of that level as, for example, in "Jespersen's A Modern English Grammar". It is the latter use for which Halliday prefers *grammatics* — a notion which he problematises in his contribution. The oddity about *grammatics*, however, is not merely its ambiguity: while all theories of any science "are made of grammar (to the extent that they can be construed in natural language), one which is a grammar about a grammar has the distinctive metaphoric property of being a theory about itself" (p.32). One of the consequences of this self-description is that the grammatics needs to be a semiotic construct with properties unlike the generalising and abstracting, self-contained, mathematical model. Rather, a grammatics needs to have the same characteristics as the object it is theorising. It thus has a "mimetic character: it explains the grammar by mimicking its crucial properties. One could say that it is based on grammatical logic rather than on mathematical logic" (p.20). Of course, Halliday points out, there is an element of design in a grammatics by contrast to the totally evolved nature of grammar. But it is essential for the grammatics to be able to accommodate growth and to have a potential for managing indeterminacies and fuzziness. It should be emphasised at this point that the latter are in no way a compromise on rigour or

objectivity. They are part of the fundamental character of a dynamic open system and they must also be part of a dynamic open meta-system. The role of indeterminacies is particularly evident where a number of simultaneous perspectives are not only possible but functional. A straightforward instance would be the description of a grammatical unit, say a clause or a group/phrase. This may be approached from below or from above — ie. from a consideration of meaning or of form; it may be interpreted in terms of its own constituents or in terms of its function in a syntagm, from the perspective of constituency or of functional prehension; the evidence for its description may be phenotypic or cryptotypic; and again its description may focus on just one of its functional identities or more — so the clause may be seen simply as representation or as interaction or as message (see Halliday 1985 for these terms). Clearly these distinct perspectives will not always produce the 'same' interpretation, and it is questionable for the grammarian to take one version as privileged, as the only correct one. At least, there is no justification for adopting one single perspective on an unexamined assumption that only one way of looking is valid, as has often been the case in linguistics. In fact, our concern as linguists should not be with meaning **or** form, but with meaning **and** form; not simply with constituency **or** functional prehension but with **both** constituency **and** functional prehension; not with phenotypes **or** cryptotypes but with phenotypic **and** cryptotypic patterns; and certainly as linguists we should not confine ourselves to considering the representational function alone simply because this practice is ratified by tradition; as linguists we have to be concerned also with its interpersonal and textual functions. The descriptive chapters of this volume display this maxim of the theory in practice.

Returning to Halliday's discussion, how does the oddity of grammatics, with its reflexive use of grammar, bear upon the relationship between theory and description? Halliday emphasises the major problem, in his view, for linguistics: "probably no other defined sphere of intellectual activity has ever been so top heavy, so much theory built overhead with so little data to support it" (p.24). This situation is, however, in a state of change. The grammarian's work has changed as a result of certain technological advances, e.g., the ways a grammatics might be presented, for example through a form of hypertext, together with the ways in which it is developed through the use of a very large corpus of diverse registers. The corpus provides new opportunities of authenticity; revelations with respect to the latent proportionalities of use, and so the

chance to develop descriptions of the unconscious patterns of ideological make-up; the chance to introduce probability profiles for grammatical systems; an opportunity to test realisation statements; and the possibility of investigating "register variation in grammatical terms" (p.24ff).

The central importance of theory to description is one dimension of functionalism that is not changed by the power of the corpus and other technological developments. Unfortunately, as Matthiessen and Nesbitt show, across linguistics more generally, influential linguists have clung to the notion that there can be "theory neutral" descriptions and pre-theoretical facts. This kind of notion takes various forms; and Matthiessen and Nesbitt follow up what amounts to a kind of syndrome in the practice of linguists. By carefully examining statements by some significant linguists of our times, by analysing the stated aims of reference grammars, and by reviewing contemporary American reactions to the formalist period of linguistic theory, they show how the complementary goals of theory and description have become polarised for many linguists. They identify a number of "motifs" in the syndrome that their review reveals. The motifs begin in the mistaken opposition between facts and theoretical interpretation; between comprehensiveness of description and consistency of theory; and between commonsense and theoretical explanations. On the one hand, linguistics is viewed as a science and yet paradoxically it is as if this science cannot be permitted to have the same range of explanatory levels, the same degrees of complexity as other sciences. For example, no physicist would claim for physics as does Dixon for linguistics that in this subject "... if something can be explained it should be explainable in simple everyday language, which any intelligent person can understand." (see extracts on p. 48.)

These motifs indicate that there is a "disjunction between theory and description" (p.48) and that this disjunction involves certain attitudes to theory, professional attitudes which appear much like populist prejudice: for example that theory involves "fashion"; obscurantist "jargon"; arcane "symbolisations"; "constraint on what we can say descriptively"; "impractical" specialisation; and that theory is just one approach — merely an optional way of doing linguistics.

Matthiessen and Nesbitt interpret this syndrome as an understandable reaction against the climate of disillusionment with theory in the 70's: TG, the

theory of theories, had failed to deliver, and clearly after that nothing else could be expected to succeed. Matthiessen and Nesbitt cite the problems experienced by Stockwell et al in their *Integration of Transformational Theories of Syntax*, in particular the assessment that it did not constitute "a grammar" but rather "an attempt to integrate partial data of heterogeneous origins" (quoted from Gross 1979). So too, Givón is representative in charging that the "transformational-generative revolution....remained at the dead centre of structuralist methodology." Another form of the syndrome is to become eclectic in theory or to seek models based on cognitive or perceptual theories.

Matthiessen and Nesbitt's aim is a positive one, namely, to offer an alternative solution, "to reconstrue theory and its role in description". And it is to this task that they direct most of their chapter. The motif for their own argument is derived from Halliday's metaphor for modelling language: **not** as formalist rules, but as "resource". Matthiessen and Nesbitt show how Pike, Firth, Hjelmslev, and Halliday have clarified what it means to see meta-language as a resource for construing language in context. The meaning potential of a meta-language needs to be described in the same way that one needs to describe a natural language. The grammar of a natural language is a "theory of experience"; and the grammar of a meta-language is a theory about semiotic experience.

The elaboration of the metaphor of a resource resonates well with what Halliday has here referred to as the "mimetic" character of theory — the ways in which the language for describing language would exhibit some of the same characteristics as those of natural languages, displaying grammatical rather than mathematical logic. Matthiessen and Nesbitt explore a range of subtle issues concerning the construction of theoretical meaning — in particular, the illusory aspects of invoking only commonsense categories and non-technical vocabulary.

In common with other papers in this volume, Matthiessen and Nesbitt use case marking systems as a means of illustrating the potential of SF theory. This strategy initiated early in the volume gives necessary background for all the chapters to follow. They place the description of case marking within the overall system of grammatical theory; and this involves 5 major concepts, each corresponding to a dimension of the meta-linguistic system:

(1) axis:
the relation between paradigmatic and syntagmatic organisation;
(2) rank:
the relation of units on the constituency scale of the grammar — from clause complex and clause down to morpheme;
(3) metafunction:
the place of the system with respect to the abstract functions around which the choices in the grammar can be interpreted — namely, ideational (representational) meaning; interpersonal meaning; and textual meaning;
(4) delicacy:
the roles of grammar and of lexis as different poles of the stratum of form;
(5) instantiation:
the relationship between the generalising statement of the potential in the system and the actual selections displayed by register profiles and particular texts.

To explore the issues of metalinguistic diversity, Martin in his contribution, examines the theoretical bases of the description of transitivity/case grammar offered by Halliday, Fillmore and Dixon. His discussion of case from the perspective of comparative grammatics follows the same strategy of locating description against major dimensions of theory: namely, stratum; metafunction; rank and class; axis; transitive and ergative orientations in the description; and more generally taxonomic versus prototypic approaches to description. All of these concepts, like the theoretical dimensions cited by Matthiessen and Nesbitt above, are the principal cartographic tools in SFL for mapping the lexico-grammatical topography — the meaning space by which speakers of English construe causation, extension, and change of doing and being.

While the opening two chapters by Halliday and Matthiessen and Nesbitt focus mainly on theoretical issues, Martin's contribution, to which I return later (see section 5), concludes this volume with a synthesis of concerns with theories and with the consequences of descriptions derived from them. In the vast conceptual space created by these contributions lie the other chapters of this volume, showing a coherence of purpose and orientation which arises from shared perspectives. The contributions by Davidse, Downing, Degand, Shore, McDonald and Rose take up description from within different lan-

guages: English, Dutch, French, Finnish, Chinese and Pitjantjatjara. The focus on the description of a particular language does not mean that theoretical considerations are irrelevant. Attention is drawn in various ways to the meta-linguistic issues raised above, as, for example, when English translation enters the discussion of another language at two levels — first, by way of the translation of meanings and wordings in the actual examples, and then also "at higher levels of abstraction as descriptive categories" (Rose, this volume), or in the insistence that the "form-meaning isomorphism" so popular in some approaches fails to do justice to the subtle and complex patterning of language (cf Davidse, Degand and also Shore). Davidse in her chapter on *Ditransitivity and Possession* offers an elaborate investigation of dative alternation: the fact that with many ditransitive processes the dative comes either as nominal group or as a prepositional phrase. She finds the traditional accounts of this phenomenon incomplete and involving "undetected ambiguity". After exploring the experiential and textual accounts of this problem, Davidse works towards a more delicate picture by first subclassifying ditransitivity into *event transitivity* and *relational transitivity* and by introducing the insights of Seiler which show that possession is a broad category in languages, dealing "with more than literal ownership". Her subtle analyses produce two paradigms of ditransitivity with only a small set of verbs able to function in both (p. 119ff). Davidse's work also re-examines the treatment of relational identifying processes within the systemic functional model and illustrates how "cryptotypical reactances" need to be scrutinised in the interpretation of formal patterns.

Tucker takes the problematic expression *Haven't the faintest idea ...* as a challenge to, and an opportunity for, grammatical theory to explore in particular the interdependence between grammar and lexis. This exploration combines two technological resources, the COBUILD corpus and the COMMUNAL grammar (Fawcett 1988; 1992). Clearly *not to have the faintest idea* is not a single lexical item but rather one of the "multitude of semi-fixed expressions which pervade language use": *faintest* could be *slightest* or *foggiest*; but negation cannot be tampered with; the expression cannot be positive **to have the faintest idea* (cf p.164). Drawing on COMMUNAL, Fawcett's "computationally implemented model, one which reconciles complementary perspectives on linguistic form, namely from grammar and from lexis" (p.174), Tucker attempts to reconcile lexically based and grammatically based descriptions on the level of form, thus attempting to ratify the theoretical abstraction *lexicogrammar*. In so doing, he too draws attention to the develop-

ments discussed by Halliday and Matthiessen and Nesbitt: corpora and computation are changing what we have so far taken as the working relationship between theory and descriptions.

In *The Semantics of Get-Passives*, Downing sets out from a corpus check of the conventional view of the *get*-passive construction: essentially that it is a relatively rare form, mainly associated with informal, spoken settings. Downing looks more closely at both the sources of corpus data and sociolinguistic investigations to revise the assumptions about the frequency and the significance of the pattern. She offers five semantic features (see p. 183) of the *get*-passive, which tend to distinguish its forms from the *be*-passive, and which explain her earlier observation that these two patterns can not be freely substituted for each other; nor do they make equally acceptable clauses (p. 180). Each of the semantic distinctions is thoroughly explored showing how fine shades of meaning concerning kinds of agency, responsibility, and attitude are consistently construed through the use of *get*-passives.

Degand's contribution on *Causation in Dutch and French* explores the relationship between categories of experience and forms of language. She reiterates the principle dear to the systemicist's heart that every variation in form has a consequence for meaning —in fact, that the relationship between meaning and lexicogrammar is not arbitrary but motivated, or "natural" as Halliday (1985 and elsewhere) has claimed. Focussing on what she calls "analytic causatives", Degand shows how certain causative constructions express interpersonal control and can be addressed through the interpersonal metafunction as "metaphoric realisations of the basic causative situation" (p. 232). Besides the significance of Degand's chapter for illustrating how commonalities of function can be explored across languages, without overlooking structural realisational differences, her underlying motivation for engaging with this description is a "multilingual grammar for text generation" (p. 208) in which the relations between semantics and different realisations of causation can "play a constraining role on the selection of one structure over another" (p. 232).

In Shore's *Process Types in Finnish...*, considerable attention is given to the general, epistemological bases for proposing categories. She investigates a variety of metaphors and techniques from various disciplines by which linguists have tried to manage the "disorderly order" (p. 239) of linguistic structure. She claims with Harris that linguistics has been misled too often by "mechanistic metaphors" (p. 237ff) and "devices" which cannot do justice to

the subtle, covert and "implicate" (Bohm 1980) forms of patterning by which speakers express their meanings (p. 240). Shore explores the idea of prototypes, quite separate from common associations with universalist and cognitive justifications — she applies the concept to the clustering of grammatical features by which types and sub-types of experientially defined clauses can be proposed for Finnish. She finds Halliday's process types important "umbrella categories" for handling the grammatical ensembles which "are distinct enough at the centre, but shade into one another at the edges" (p. 258). Ultimately the justification for the whole analysis is to be found in the "internal consistency" of the theoretical framework, since there is "no universally valid way of comparing [different] schemata and the theoretical assumptions on which they are based".

By adopting a multifunctional approach to *The Complement in Chinese Grammar...*, McDonald is able to bring greater internal consistency to the confusing range of grammatical phenomena which have been subsumed under the category of *buyu* (complement). Not surprisingly, the term had been derived from the description of European languages, and applied to Chinese despite the lack of "close parallels" (p. 265). In his description of the Chinese complement, McDonald turns to SFL, for he believes that it is "good at questioning the accepted traditional views of grammar", and the crucial advance provided for him by the theory is the disentangling of an experiential and a textual role. The grammatical debate has, McDonald argues, confused "a kind of 'extension' to the main verb" with the textual role of unmarked New. The ability to separate out these two roles — the experiential and the textual — enables McDonald to discriminate between "disparate clause elements" which have typically been grouped together due to their "textual similarity" (p. 283). His functional description enables him to obtain a better picture of the "organisation of the (Chinese) clause as a whole".

In examining *The Pitjantjatjara Processes...* Rose shows how, despite the geographical and cultural remoteness of the two languages, the deepest semantic categories of English transitivity (mainly process types) do have parallels or correspondences with the grammatical resources of Pitjantjatjara, on the one hand, and how, on the other hand, as one moves down into the realisations of meanings in the specific systems of lexicogrammar, the differences between the two systems become as insistent as the similarities. Rose argues that apparently contradictory phenomena in formalist accounts of Pitjantjatjara can be re-interpreted without resorting to the machinery of deep

and surface structure. At the same time, by setting out from the experiential modelling of English, he is also able to bring out the important contrasts with English — for instance, the way Pitjantjatjara, unlike English, has "distinct structural realisations" for mental reaction processes in contrast to perception processes, the way that perception itself is more delicately either *concrete* or *abstract*. In other words what is "cognition" in English 'is' another way of 'seeing' in Pitjantjatjara. Rose suggests that this distinction constitutes an alternative modelling of consciousness. His position, then, is neither that of a traditional universalist nor of one seeking to "exoticise difference".

In his argument with formalists Rose raises many of the previously mentioned issues. After noting at the outset that English enters the discussion through the very names of the categories invoked by current grammatical models, Rose examines the established formalist positions and his own functionalist proposals, in relation to: (i) the **rank** at which the description is set; (ii) the degree to which interpersonal and textual **metafunctions** are brought into understanding the motivations of categories like Subject and Agent; (iii) the **stratum** to which the description is allocated (showing how semantic/functional categories enter formalist descriptions implicitly); (iv) the priority one gives arguments from the morphology 'up' by contrast with the perspective from the semantics 'down'; (v) the role given to register in ensuring connection of the system to actual instances of use and proportion of users. Rose stresses that many of the specialist technical registers of written English are "unintelligible to the majority of English speakers", and that it is also in this area of grammatical metaphor in written English "that the semantic potential diverges most dramatically" between Pitjantjatjara and English.

5 Conclusion

With Martin's stimulating discussion of *Metalinguistic Diversity*, we come to a reflection of what it means in practical terms to subscribe to a theory. The reader can be in no doubt that the functional descriptions offered here represent a specific perspective —the perspective of a multi-functional, stratified social semiotic. The analogy with a map is most probably the best idea around which to explain the functionality of all the "functional descriptions". A map is a resource; in fact, a map is a tool. It involves an idealisation

and in that sense, a necessary simplification or selection of the reality it represents — it is a metatopography. But, as Martin shows, there are many decisions (or selections) one needs to make in constructing a map and these decisions have a determining relation with respect to the final meaning of the map. Furthermore, Matthiessen and Nesbitt have shown that there is no neutral position on the decisions. By comparing the different proposals put forward by different grammarians with regard to such decisions, Martin obtains a clear view of the problems which need to be accommodated in the metarepresentation of case relations. To extend Martin's own argument (by extending the analogy of maps) we can say that one kind of map cannot serve every user, or consumer. Why, Martin asks, has the diversity of grammatical representations proven such "cause for concern" when diversity of languages has been regarded so widely as something to be celebrated.

By taking the analogy with map making to greater detail, a number of characteristics of systemic functional linguistics can be better understood. Maps are constructed for particular purposes; and in accordance with each purpose maps are, of necessity, constructed through specific conventions — conventions of scale; of orientation; of perspective; of iconicity; of dimensionality; of grid lines. All these conventions are environments of choice, points about which decisions must be made in the making of the appropriate meaning, that is, in the making of the appropriate map. Some decisions or options necessitate particular choices elsewhere (i.e. they are dependent). Others can be selected over again at each scale or rank in the map's construction.

All the decisions we make about a metarepresentation constitute an ideological position with respect to the description. It is not difficult to deduce why the small countries with big navies (England, Holland) changed the 'orientation' of maps, removing the 'orient' from its original place at the top and replacing it with North. One extra consequence of this is, on Mercator's projection, that the small non-equatorial nations are 'bigger'. The iconic or mimetic character of the symbolisation privileges shape over size (by contrast with the Peters projection). In his analysis of case relations, Fillmore (1968) privileged universalist, notional categories. This may be compared to forcing a single set of "grid lines" (case frames) over a map of human experience. Certainly we may want to settle on some cross cultural conventions about maps for the purposes of borders, navigation etc. But we also need to be aware

of the pitfalls — the likely misreadings — from our way of representation. This is to say that we need a theory concerning our representations. For example, how many users of Mercator's projection fail to realise that Greenland, which looks much bigger than Australia, is actually only a third of the area of that continent. How many of us initially trained in the traditional grammatics of Greek and Latin have found it difficult to cast off the expectation that a clause or sentence has a canonical form: nominative, accusative, dative etc. More deeply, concerning the background of conventions that we incorporate into our metarepresentations, certain ideas persist despite their limited usefulness: for instance, that the verb in English is either transitive or intransitive despite the fact that it is more useful to change rank for transitivity and deal with it as a clausal phenomenon. Not only do the empirical explorations of English suggest then that transitivity has a different "value" in English (since the most commonly used verbs can participate in both a transitive and an intransitive pattern), but the grid of conventions by which the metarepresentation is organised must itself be re-evaluated — the phenomena of one rank in one natural language may need to be pursued in a quite distinct way (by rank, or even by stratum) in another. Martin's paper is especially focussed to this kind of metalinguistic issue, namely, establishing the 'settings' by which the semantic space of the metalanguage is organised. Like Halliday, and Matthiessen and Nesbitt, Martin is clarifying the metaphor of "resource" as it may be used with respect to grammatical theory. His argument for "diversity" is both emphasising perspectivism in theory (the importance of adopting a number of points of view: vide Bateson 1980) and the possibility of greater self-consciousness in the theory-building itself. In the chapters of this book the principles of resource and of mapping are applied to the description of natural languages as different as Chinese, English, Finnish, and Pitjantjatjara.

The arguments of this volume continue a long standing difference in approaches to the Western linguistics, philosophy, and ultimately theories about the artefacts of the human mind; are the categories of human experience and representation tightly constrained, given by the structure of the human brain? Or are the categories of experience and symbolisation worked out in the interaction between a relatively open system of mental organisation and cultural patterns? Much of contemporary linguistics, following Chomsky, has

assumed the first — the species specific wiring. SFL, on the other hand, delays the verdict on the human mind; rather it favours exploring the kind of theory that will emerge when a number of complementary perspectives are adopted, in particular the picture that emerges when the fundamental concepts of semiotic theory (e.g. stratification, system, metafunction, rank ...) are brought to bear upon the variation across natural languages and upon the functional variation within what is generally taken to be a single language. Consequently, the view one arrives at about the origins, development and structure of language is not only the product of data concerning the syntactic growth of children between the ages of two and four years. The whole registral repertoire of a community member, and of the culture needs to be accounted for, at least in the way that grammar supplies the central resources for new ways of expression and thinking. An insistent problem here, and one which changes the developmental profile of the human being dramatically, is the second grammatical apprenticeship which, Halliday shows, comes around puberty when alternative couplings between semantics and lexicogrammar are demanded by the texture of technical/specialist registers — for example, the orientation of process to thing (class verb "becomes" class noun) in clauses such as *On an atomic scale the slow* ***growth*** *of* ***cracks*** *corresponds to the sequential* ***rupturing*** *of interatomic bonds at rates as low as one bond* ***rupture*** *per hour* (quoted in Halliday 1995: 72). This leap forward in the semantic potential of the individual as a member of the culture challenges our theories of grammar, our understanding of human mental growth, and any doubts one has as to how a semiotic system can extend its power to mean by creating new heuristic or virtual realities. The appearance of grammatical metaphor, as Halliday (1985) calls it (see also Halliday and Martin 1993) is a criterial reference point for the individual (ontogenetically), for the culture (phylogenetically), as well as for the development of an instance of actual text (logogenetically). It illustrates how the creativity of human languages and thought must be understood quite differently from what Weinreich (1966) aptly described as the banal and arid strings which have often been cited as evidence of linguistic creativity.

Ultimately, *Functional Descriptions* is about modelling language as a dynamic open system, or more precisely as a dynamic, open, semiotic, system — a resource which permits the practice of description to be functional.

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