

Preface to the 2010 paperback edition

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.206.05pre>

Pages xxv–xxviii of

A Theory of Syntax for Systemic Functional Linguistics

Robin P. Fawcett

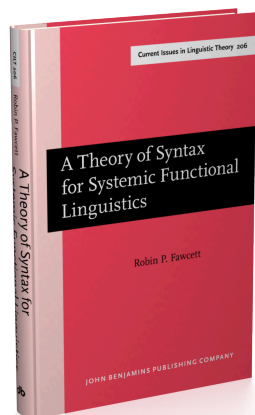
[Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, 206]

2000. xxviii, 360 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Preface to the 2010 paperback edition

I was delighted when John Benjamins informed me that they “are selectively bringing out reprints in paperback of successful books” and suggested including the present work. This decision reflects the steadily growing interest, over the ten years since this book was first published, in the “Cardiff Grammar” (CG) version of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

There are two important points that need to be made. The first is that virtually everything that I say in the book still holds good, so that it is an up-to-date guide to the CG position on all the matters it covers. This doesn’t mean that there have been no developments in the intervening years; there have, as one would expect in any living theory of language. But these have been in the details of description (for these, see Fawcett forthcoming 2011a and 2011b and other works listed in the select bibliography below). In other words, this book gives a good account of the theory of syntax (exemplified here largely through English) that I consider to be needed for SFL in the twenty-first century.¹

1. In his generally welcoming 25-page review of this book (2002: 80), Butler writes that “on occasion” it includes theoretical statements about syntax that do not apply to certain non-Indo-European languages — with the result, he suggests, that what is presented here is not a general theory of syntax for SFL (as the book’s title appears to claim). Butler cites just one example, but one is enough to justify his criticism — and there may well be others.

However, the explanation of this discrepancy between the title and the contents is less theoretically significant than his criticism implies. It is that I first wrote the book, and only then tried to find an appropriate title. And titles are notoriously problematical! Certainly, a more accurate title would have been “A Systemic Functional Syntax for English”, with the subtitle of “and the Concepts of the Theory of Syntax that Underlies it, with Some References to Other Languages”. But this would have been far too long, so we settled for the riskier — but shorter — title that the book in fact has. However, I don’t think that it is seriously misleading. The experience of the COMMUNAL team in building (with native speakers) — or simply considering — grammars of languages other than English (including Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Swahili) suggests that the vast majority of the theoretical categories specified here and their related generalizations do in practice hold good for most languages — and perhaps for all languages.

Butler’s second major criticism is related to the first. It concerns the set of criteria to which we should attach importance as evidence when describing a language — and so ultimately for constructing a theory of language. He states his own preferences (most of which I share, especially the value of the evidence of real data) in a 5-page section of the review. Ultimately, the criteria in which linguists place their trust are derived from their experience of what feels as if it has worked well in the past, and I have to say that I continue to give relatively greater weight than Butler would to the two criteria for evaluating a theory mentioned in pages xvi to xviii of the main Preface. (See Section 1.6 of Fawcett 2008 for an account of the full set of factors that have shaped the development of the Cardiff Grammar.)

The second point is that, in the decade since this book first appeared, there has been a flowering of books and papers that either contribute to the Cardiff Grammar or describe and evaluate it in positive terms — e.g. books by Bache (2008), He (2007), Huang et al (2008) and Wang (2008). But the major landmark was Butler's impressive 2003 survey of the three current "structural-functional" theories of language that he considers most valuable, one of which is SFL.² And, significantly, in many sections he provides separate accounts of the proposals of the Sydney and the Cardiff versions of SFL. Then, in his "final assessment", he states:

In my view the Cardiff model represents a substantial improvement on the Sydney account. [...] There can be no doubt that SFG has lived up to its claim to be a text-oriented theory of language; [...] it has achieved a much wider coverage of English grammar than other approaches, this being especially true of the Cardiff grammar.' (Butler 2003b: 471)

A second landmark was the publication in 2008 of my *Invitation to Systemic Functional Linguistics through the Cardiff Grammar (Third Edition)*.

And a third as the fact that translations (of the Second Edition) into Chinese and Spanish appeared in the same year — so giving us introduction to the CG in three of the world's great languages.

There have been many other CG publications since 2000, including the many papers in the selected bibliography below. Most noteworthy, perhaps, are (i) those by Gordon Tucker, which provide the most specific and most rigorous of current proposals in any theory of language for modelling the interface between the lexicogrammar of English and those phenomena that are often assumed to be formulaic uses of language, and (ii) the welcome advent of publications by Chinese scholars.

And there are more CG-related publications to come, some being listed below.

A selected bibliography 2001–2011

- Bache, Carl, 2008. *English Tense and Aspect in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar: A Critical Appraisal and an Alternative*. London: Equinox.
- Ball, F., and Tucker, G., 2004. 'On the preferential co-occurrence of Processes and Circumstantial Adjuncts; some corpus evidence'. In Foley, J. A., *Language, Education and Discourse*. London: Continuum, 305–24.

2. The two theories of language that Butler describes, other than SFL, are Dik's Functional Grammar (e.g. 1997a and 1997b) and van Valin's Role and Reference Grammar (e.g. 1993).

- Butler, C. S., 2003. *Structure and Function: An introduction to three major structural-functional theories. Part 1: Approaches to the simplex clause. Part 2: From clause to discourse and beyond.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Castel, Víctor M. (2006) ‘Generating Abstracts from Genre Structure through Lexicogrammar: Modelling of Feature Selection and Mapping’. *Signos* 39(62): 327-356. Chile: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso.
- Castel, Víctor M. (2007) ‘Rule Types in a Systemic Functional Grammar: An XML Definition of the Cardiff Lexicogrammar Generator’. In Barbara, Leila and Tony Berber Sardinha (2007), *Proceedings of the 33rd International Systemic Functional Congress, PUCSP, São Paulo, Brazil.* 270-299. Online publication at <http://www.pucsp.br/isfc/proceedings/>.
- Castel, Víctor M. (2008) “A Systemic Functional Micro-Grammar of Spanish Clitics”. In Wu, Canzhong, Matthiessen, Christian, and Herke, Maria (eds.) *Proceedings of ISFC 2008: Voices Around the World. ISFC Sydney, July 2008.* 7–12.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2006. ‘Establishing the grammar of “typicity” in English: an exercise in scientific inquiry.’ In Huang, G., Chang, C. and Dai, Fan (eds.), *Functional Linguistics as Applicable Linguistics*, Guangzhou: Sun Yat-sen University Press, 159-262.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2007a. ‘Auxiliary Extensions: six new elements for describing English’. In Hasan, R., Matthiessen, C. and Webster, J., *Continuing Discourse on Language: a Functional Perspective: Vol 2.* London: Equinox, 921-52.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2007b. ‘Modelling “selection” between referents in the English nominal group: an essay in scientific inquiry in linguistics’. In Butler, C.S., Hidalgo Downing, R., and Lavid, J., *Functional Perspectives on Grammar and Discourse: In Honour of Angela Downing*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 165-204.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2008a. *Invitation to Systemic Functional Linguistics through the Cardiff Grammar: an extension and simplification of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar* (Third Edition). London: Equinox.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2008b. ‘Invitation to Systemic Functional Linguistics: the Cardiff Grammar as an extension and simplification of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar’ (Second Edition). In Chinese, trans. Huang Guowen, He Wei and Liao Chuyan. In Huang Guowen, He Wei, and Liao Chuyan (eds.) 2008, 108-200.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2008c. *Invitación a la Gramática Sistémica Funcional. La Gramática de Cardiff como extensión y simplificación de la Gramática Sistémica Funcional de Halliday* (in Spanish, trans. José María Gil and Adolfo Martín García). Mar del Plata, Argentina: University of Mar del Plata Press. In Spanish.
- Fawcett, Robin P., 2009. ‘Seven problems to beware of when analyzing Processes and Participant Roles in texts’. In Slembrouck, Stef, Taverniers, Miriam, and Van Herreweghe, Mieke (eds), *From ‘will’ to ‘well’: Studies in Linguistics offered to Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenbergen.* Gent: Academia Press, 209-24.

- Fawcett, Robin P., forthcoming 2010. *Alternative Architectures for Systemic Functional Linguistics and Other Theories of Language*. London: Equinox.
- Fawcett, Robin P., forthcoming 2011a. *The Functional Syntax Handbook: Analyzing English at the Level of Form*. London: Equinox.
- Fawcett, Robin P., forthcoming 2011b. *The Functional Semantics Handbook: Analyzing English at the Level of Meaning*. London: Equinox.
- Fawcett, R.P., Tucker, G.H., and Castet, V.M., 2006. *Software for GENESYS: Prototype Generator 3*. Cardiff: Computational Linguistics Unit, Cardiff University, Cardiff.
- He, Wei, 2007. *On English Tense*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Huang, G.W., 2002. *Enhanced Theme In English: its Structures and Functions*. Shangxi: Shangxi Educational Press.
- Huang Guowen, He Wei, and Liao Chuyan (eds.) 2008, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Grammar: The Cardiff Model* (in Chinese), Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Neale, A., 2002. *The Process Type Data Base*. Available on request via amy.neale@gmail.com.
- Neale, A., 2006. 'Matching corpus data and system networks'. In Thompson, G., and Hunston, S., (eds.), *System and Corpus: Exploring Connections*. London: Equinox, 143-63.
- Neale, A., forthcoming 2011. *Process Types and Participant Roles in the English Clause: a New Systemic Functional Approach*. London: Equinox.
- Tucker, G., 2006. 'Systemic incorporation: on the relationship between corpus and Systemic Functional Grammar. In Thompson, G., and Hunston, S., (eds.), *System and Corpus: Exploring Connections*. London: Equinox.
- Tucker, G., 2007. 'Between lexis and grammar: towards a systemic functional approach to phraseology'. In Hasan, R., Webster, J., and Matthiessen, C. *Continuing Discourse on Language: a Functional Perspective: Vol 2*. London: Equinox, 953-79.
- Tucker, G.H., 2009. 'In search of the grammarian's dream: Locating lexis in systemic functional grammar'. In Slembrouck, Stef, Taverniers, Miriam, and Van Herreweghe, Mieke (eds), *From 'will' to 'well': Studies in Linguistics offered to Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg*. Gent: Academia Press. 415-26.
- Wang, Yong, 2008. *A Functional Study of the Evaluative Enhanced Theme Construction in English*. London and Singapore: Pearson (Prentice Hall).