BOOK REVIEW

TOM BARTLETT and GERARD O’GRADY, eds., *The Routledge handbook of systemic functional linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. xxiv + 682 pp.

Reviewed by (Bo Wang and Yuanyi Ma)

The *Routledge handbook of systemic functional linguistics* (hereafter the *Handbook*), the latest handbook on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) edited by Tom Bartlett and Gerard O’Grady, provides various perspectives on SFL – interdisciplinary (both within linguistics and within SFL), cross-linguistic and critical – based on the contributions of more than 40 young or junior scholars, with each study shedding light on the various theoretical persuasions within SFL. As stated by the editors in the introduction, the *Handbook* aims to be “complementary to, rather than competing with, the existing works” (p. 1), and its distinctiveness lies in four ways: interactions between SFL and other linguistic theories, exchanges among the three different SFL models (the Hallidayan model, the Cardiff model and the Sydney model), expansion and strengthening of SFL through a critical stance as well as a focus on languages other than English.

In terms of the overall schematic structure of the book, it ‘borrows’ the hierarchical arrangements from *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014), and the first part (Part I) gives a theoretical overview, while the last part (Part V) focuses on applications of SFL. The rest of the *Handbook* is comprised of three parts – at the clause rank (Part II), above the clause (Part III) and below the clause (Part IV).

Part I is theoretical in nature. It opens with Bateman’s four points of departure for SFL and other linguistic strands, a critical view on syntactic differences between SFL and non-SFL studies as well as an interdisciplinary view on SFL and pragmatics. In her chapter on system and function, Asp highlights the syntagmatic and paradigmatic features in formal and functional grammars, and compares functions in general linguistics, in different strands of SFL as well as in the minimalist program – a formalist and anti-functionalist theory. In discussing stratum, delicacy, realization and rank, Berry upholds the ‘mainstream’ SFL (the Hallidayan model) in comparison with other approaches. However, she problematizes realization between strata and within strata in the model, and criticizes the pure syntagmatic nature of rank scale. The chapter by Fawcett builds on the previous chapters by presenting the concepts and systems in Cardiff Grammar, which derives from the Hallidayan model but also differs greatly from it.

Part II is concerned with topics at the clause rank. Davidse starts by drawing on Halliday’s view on experiential metafunction, and compares the Hallidayan model with the Cardiff model in terms of locative constructions. In the chapter on logical metafunction, Butt and Webster highlight the significance of this topic both cross-
linguistically and cross-disciplinarily. Anderson deals with interpersonal meaning by comparing the Hallidayan model with the Cardiff model in terms of speech function, mood type and modality. Moving on to textual metafunction and theme, Forey and Sampson define the two concepts drawing on both the Hallidayan model and the Sydney model, and base their discussion of thematic organization on general linguistics. As far as intonation is concerned, O’Grady builds his chapter on a critical view of both the Hallidayan and Cardiff models with respect to the functions of intonation and an introduction to ToBi, a major paradigm for studying intonation. Two chapters in Part II are specifically concerned with Cardiff Grammar. In his presentation of theme, Huang clearly points out the major differences between the concept of theme in the Cardiff model and the Hallidayan model, coupled with detailed explanation of theme in Cardiff Grammar. In his chapter on transitivity, Neal situates his discussion within the SFL context and other linguistic approaches, focusing mainly on the Cardiff model. The next two chapters deal with languages other than English: the one by Hita provides an analysis of the thorny issues in Spanish such as Complement and Adjunct as Theme; the other by Teruya takes a ‘trinocular’ perspective to the mood system in Japanese.

Part III comprises topics on the ranks below the clause, and is significant in its focus on both English and languages other than English. One of the two studies that centers on English is by Fontaine, who considers different strands of SFL in describing developments in the nominal group, and offers a detailed exploration of each elements of the nominal group. In his chapter on ‘adjectival phrase/group’, Tucker considers the Cardiff model as the opposite of the Hallidayan model on the basis of Halliday’s non-recognition of adjectival group. Casting doubts on the Hallidayan model, he presents the Cardiff model of nominal, adjectival and adverbial groups. Four chapters in this part of the Handbook deal with languages other than English. First, Tench adopts a Hallidayan perspective in describing the system network for mono-morphemic words in Etkwen, a Jukunoid Benue-Congo language spoken in Nigeria. Foregrounding a critical view of both the Hallidayan and Cardiff models, Quiroz offers a full-fledged systemic description of the verbal group in Chilean Spanish. Caffarel-Cayron outlines the system and functions of the verbal group in French, while Li presents a systemic description of the nominal group in Chinese from perspectives of Thing, premodifiers of Thing as well as Qualifier of nominal group. Two general discussions are offered by McDonald and Taverniers. Interdisciplinarily, both adopt a balanced view among the three models. Cross-linguistically, McDonald cites examples from Old English, Chinese and Gaelic, while Taverniers focuses on English. In his discussion on form and function in groups, McDonald deals with the relation between form and function with examples of inflections and their functions in several languages from the perspectives of both the Hallidayan and Cardiff models. Taverniers ends Part III with definitions of grammatical metaphor based on the Hallidayan tradition, general linguistics and other models of SFL.

Part IV focuses on the rank above the clause, and explicates such topics as context, cohesion, register, and genre. In his chapter on context, Bartlett traces the concept of context in SFL back to contributions by Malinowsky, Vygotsky, Bernstein, Halliday and Hasan before introducing his own work. On the topic of field, tenor and mode, Bowcher builds her discussions on Halliday and Hasan’s work while drawing on theories of the Sydney model and the Cardiff model, as well as highlighting Matthiessen’s ‘field of activity’. Clarke starts his chapter on cohesion by summarizing and
comparing two prominent strands – one by Halliday and Hasan, the other by Martin – based on which he presents his investigation into the use of ellipsis. Before citing her own research on register analysis with examples from healthcare communication, Moore provides a background based on Halliday’s concept of register, Hasan’s works on context and semantics, and Matthiessen’s long-term project of registral cartography. In Tann’s chapter on context and meaning in the Sydney model, a sharp contrast is found in terms of his constant criticism of Hasan’s notion of context and his high praise for works from the Sydney School. Oteiza follows up to introduce the appraisal framework based on the Sydney model, and elaborates on the cross-linguistic application of the theory. In her presentation on genre analysis, without mentioning Matthiessen’s seminal works on register and disregarding the reasons behind Halliday’s refusal to use the term ‘genre’, Gardener argues against the absence of genre in the Hallidayan model, elaborates on Martin’s model, and highlights the applications of genre to educational linguistics.

Part V primarily focuses on applications of SFL, including such topics as clinical linguistics, verbal art, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and translation studies. Two chapters mainly deal with discourse. First, Ferguson, Spencer and Armstrong give an overview of the development of SFL in professional discourse analysis in clinical settings, which involves the applications of SFL concepts like cohesion and appraisal. Then, for political discourse analysis, Hodge exemplifies his views by analyzing a presidential speech, highlighting Halliday’s contributions, but he keeps the ‘critical issues and topics’ section of his chapter surprisingly short and devoid of details. Two other chapters have connections with verbal or other forms of art. Miller’s chapter focuses on language as verbal art, probing the area through linguistic and critical lens, and presents the analysis of the foregrounded patterning in a poem. Taylor bases his work on the Sydney model in researching static images, and follows up with an introduction to Thibault’s study of moving images and his own work on multimodal transcription. Two chapters deal with corpus and translation studies. Focusing on translation, Kunz and Teich foreground SFL as a major framework for modeling and theorizing translation studies, and introduce different research methods in relation to different types of corpora. Quite unique is Sharoff’s chapter, which mainly discusses the possibilities of the cooperation between SFL and corpus, but fails to mention some essential corpus-based studies such as Hasan’s work on mother–child discourse and Steiner’s application of corpus in translation. Two more chapters are concerned with language education and child language development. McCabe first provides a thorough theoretical background of the influence of SFL on language teaching. Painter then presents examples of adult-child interactions during different phases of child development which she analyzes both in terms of the Hallidayan model and the Sydney model of stratification. It must be stated that some chapters are more theoretical in nature than others. Maton and Doran’s chapter explores the relationship between SFL and Legitimation Code Theory, and considers the two as mutually shaping each other, with the former profoundly influencing the latter in its developmental history. With regard to syntax, O’Donnel reports on the promising progress in the area, and reiterates the strong influences of SFL on both natural language generation and machine translation.

O’Grady and Bartlett conclude the whole volume by recounting the contributions of the chapters in terms of four respects: i.e. interaction with other linguistic theories, a
revisiting of the existing theory, extension of the descriptions to more languages, and constant engagement with other disciplines and areas of application.

Comparatively, the major existing companions on SFL are different from the Handbook herein reviewed in various ways. For instance, Continuum companion to systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Webster 2009), which was published around a decade ago, focuses on the Hallidayan tradition of SFL and incorporates chapters by leading scholars such as Michael Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan and Christian Matthiessen. It features chapters whose topics are seldom seen elsewhere, including Benson and Thibault’s work on the relationship between language and other primate species, Halliday’s theoretical accounts of the architecture of language as systems of meaning-making, a list of the key terms in SFL as well as various resources and courses in the SFL community. Continuing discourse on language: a functional perspective (Hasan, Matthiessen & Webster 2005), published in two volumes, orients towards the evolution of SFL theory. Its chapters are masterly organized according to their relations with language, i.e. around language, with language, and inside language. In terms of the topics included, it has a wider coverage, including chapters on Halliday’s early years in China, the development of SFL in China and a typology of mood system across different languages. The Bloomsbury companion to M.A.K. Halliday (Webster 2015), as one of the recent companions, provides a comprehensive resource of Halliday’s life and works, informing readers of his early professional development, the origin of his thoughts about language as well as an encyclopedic account of all his research areas. The Routledge handbook of systemic functional linguistics is similar to these three companions in its inclusion of most major areas in SFL, but it differs in its invitation of various young scholars as contributors and its up-to-date elaboration of the SFL architecture. The publication of this handbook is timely in that it is one of the first handbooks that provides a general account of systemic functional theory and its applications, and is credited for its comprehensiveness in its inclusion of different schools in SFL, i.e. the Hallidayan approach, the Cardiff model initiated by Robin Fawcett and the Sydney School led by James R. Martin and his colleagues.

Despite the merits above, this handbook also has some limitations. First, organized according to the rank scale in lexicogrammar, the chapters in Part II, III and IV of the handbook are grouped into three main category headings: ‘at clause rank’, ‘below the clause’ and ‘above the clause’. In this regard, it would have been more appropriate to characterize some chapters in Part III and IV according to stratification, such as Chapter 15 ‘The phoneme and word phonology in systemic functional linguistics’, Chapter 23 ‘Context in systemic functional linguistics’ and Chapter 24 ‘Field, tenor and mode’. By so doing, the structure of the handbook will be much clearer. Also, some theories and perspectives in SFL which could have made important contributions to the theoretical overview of SFL found in Part I were not given enough attention. These include Matthiessen’s register typology based on field of activity, Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) that explores the semantic systems of logical relations for organizing texts, instantiation, paradigmatic axis as well as the conception of language as probabilistic system. In addition, a chapter on language description and typology from the perspective of SFL would have made an interesting addition to Part V and its focus on SFL in practice. Such a chapter will not only be complementary to Chapter 34 on translation studies, but will also be closely associated with the chapters that describe different languages. The notion of multilingual studies that relates
various areas on language description and translation can also be emphasized in this way (e.g. Matthiessen, Teruya & Wu 2008). Moreover, as previously stated, many contributors of this handbook are junior scholars, while one would have wished to see contributions by some senior scholars, whose works are highly valued in this area, such as Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, Erich Steiner, James R. Martin and Geoff Williams.

In sum, despite the potential areas of improvement mentioned above, the Handbook is to be highly recommended for its wide coverage of the major areas of SFL, its up-to-date discussion on SFL and its inclusion of the different schools in SFL.

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