

SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

M.A.K. Halliday's work has been hugely influential in linguistics and beyond since the 1960s. This is a collection of interviews with key figures in the generation of social semioticians who have taken Halliday's concept of social semiotics and developed it further in various directions, making their own original contributions to theory and practice. This book highlights their main lines of thought and considers how they relate to both the original concept of social semiotics and to each other. Key themes include:

- linguistic studies, multilinguality and evolution of language
- text, discourse and classroom studies
- digital texts, computer communication and science teaching
- multimodal text and discourse analysis
- education and literacy
- media work and visual and audio modes
- critical discourse analysis.

Featuring interviews with leading figures from linguistics, education and communication studies, a framing introduction and a concluding chapter summing up commonalities and differences, connections and conflicts and key themes, this is essential reading for any scholar or student working in the area of social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics. Additional video resources are available on the Routledge website (www.routledge.com/9780415712101).

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Key Figures, New Directions

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PREFACE

In an interview that two of the editors of this book conducted with Michael A.K. Halliday in 1998 he underlined the importance of a versatile approach to the study of language and semiotic processes. Even though he regarded his systemic functional description of language as a coherent whole, he was well aware that not all aspects were fully developed, and anticipated further work to move in different directions in the future.

This book aims to present ideas from a generation of scholars who have been inspired by Michael Halliday and his social and functional approach to language and semiotics, and who have added their own ideas and academic interests, developing original works of their own. By presenting their thoughts and ideas in the form of interviews, we want to highlight their main lines of thought and discuss how they relate to both the original concept of social semiotics and to each other. It is our hope that the dialogical form of the interview can serve as a door opener to complex theories and make connections across fields. Some of these connections we shall discuss in the final chapter.

The interviews have been carefully prepared, videotaped, transcribed and edited, and in the end the final version of each interview has been approved by the interviewee. We wish to express our profound gratitude to the five scholars who so generously shared their time, knowledge and experiences with us, and responded to our questions in the meticulous follow up procedures. They have strengthened our belief that academic work is not primarily about competition, but rather about sharing.

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CENTRAL THEMES

In this chapter, we shall take as the point of departure some central themes covered by the interviews *in toto*. These themes shall be discussed by combining answers from the five interviewees, and, as such, this concluding chapter shall create a (kind of artificial) dialogue among them. If used as an entry to the interviews, this chapter will serve as a guide to the various thematic similarities and differences among our five scholars. At the same time, the discussion of similarities, differences and nuances highlights major motifs in the thinking of the five scholars, and, as such, this chapter may function as a more generally usable companion for understanding the somewhat diverse field of social semiotics. The themes in this chapter cover such diverse areas as systems and concepts; multimodality; social critique and design; functions and applications; future challenges; and hopes and aspirations. We close the chapter with some meta-reflections.

Key figures, new directions

The scholars we have interviewed are all inspired by Michael Halliday's work, and three of them did their doctoral work under his supervision. In their own academic careers, however, they have taken this inspiration in different, new directions. Christian Matthiessen is the one who has worked most closely on developing Halliday's systemic functional linguistics along the lines thought by Halliday, expanding and clarifying it with a strong emphasis on the systemic part; as Matthiessen states in relation to the latter: "in Halliday's grammar, it is dimensions all the way. I find the relational-dimensional thinking very appealing. [...] I think the great power of relational-dimensional thinking is that you have to work out how everything is placed in relation to everything else in terms of a small well-defined set of dimensions, and if you posit something, then you have to see how it relates to other phenomena." Matthiessen has, since his early academic life, been inspired

to “read around”, and he lets himself be inspired by many different perspectives on human meaning making, but he is not “fond of eclectic models”, so he generally puts a lot of effort into translating findings into systemic functional terms, simply because “once the insights have been translated into SFL, I know how they fit into the overall model”.

For Jim Martin, it is the more functional part of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics he identifies most strongly with, and Halliday’s idea of the intrinsic and extrinsic functionality of language has been a major source of insight in Martin’s work. Jim Martin’s contribution to social semiotics includes discussions and (re)formulations of context and discourse semantics, and development of a nuanced theory and description of the language of evaluation. Martin’s work has, to a large extent, been done in the realm of education; an interest that he shares with Halliday. For Martin, good scholarly work is work that gets used by others, and, as he says, from the very beginning he “wanted to make a contribution to society through my linguistics; and Halliday’s aspiration to have a socially responsible linguistics motivated me”. Martin’s extensive work with experienced teachers over the years has resulted in practical and inspiring models for teaching reading and writing, such as the genre pedagogy presented, for example, in the book *Learning to Write, Reading to Learn* published in 2012 together with David Rose. Genre pedagogy is used in the teaching of both beginning and advanced literacy in schools all over the world.

The other three scholars represented in this book associate most closely with the social semiotic legacy from Halliday. Jay Lemke, himself a scientist, has entered the field of discourses of learning from the inside, as it were. In his search for a theory of language that would enable him to analyse communication and meaning in the science classroom, he found Halliday’s book *Language as Social Semiotic*: “and it seemed to me that Halliday had exactly the approach to language that I needed in order to do research on science classrooms.” From Halliday’s linguistic approach he could develop tools for critical social analysis of the interaction and communication in science classrooms. This led on to work with other modes that are central in science communication, such as diagrams, graphs, maps, charts and pictures, and how they are all integrated. The semiotic approach was the core he could employ “to expand the application of systemic linguistics [...] to the analysis of multimodal activity and multimodal texts”. Following the development of technology, Lemke added an interest in computer-based communication and game research, moving into informal sites of learning. This has led him to further reflections on the connections between cognition and emotions in meaning making: “you cannot understand the process of learning without including the emotional component. My most recent work is therefore oriented to integrate the analysis of cognitive or ideational dimensions of learning with the affective or emotional and interpersonal dimensions.”

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have been in the lead of developing the field of multimodal research based on Halliday’s understanding of how the social underpins all kinds of meaning making. In other words, Kress, and to some extent

van Leeuwen, connect more with the semiotic than the linguistic perspectives from Halliday's theory, as this has been described in *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978). Gunther Kress explains his move into social semiotics with his interest in other modes than language. One result, among others, was the book that he co-authored with Robert Hodge in 1983, where they aimed at exploring "all the other ways in which meaning was made". As a tribute to Halliday and his influence on their work, they chose to title their book *Social semiotics*, thereby emphasizing the links to Halliday's seminal 1978 publication. Kress comments, in afterthought: "That was for me then a kind of decisive step. Really, now I was doing semiotics more than linguistics. Because linguistics could not provide the tools that we needed in order to account for the whole domain of meaning."

Van Leeuwen pays tribute to linguistics as a way into his work within multimodality, since for him it has been a training of the mind to analyse things very thoroughly and very systematically. However, like Kress, he is concerned with domains of "meanings that are neither specifically visual nor specifically verbal, but belong to the culture as a whole". Therefore, especially the systemic functional emphasis on meaning and semantics (over form) has intrigued van Leeuwen. He claims that "what social semiotics needs to do, [is] bringing linguistics and social theory together". This points to a major motif in van Leeuwen's thinking, namely the idea of semiotics as part of social practices, and he is regretful that too often "[t]he social in social semiotics is not always sufficiently kept in focus" and that "crucial notions have not been developed and fleshed out in a more sociological sense". Tying in with this interest in sociology and ethnography, he has made contributions in critical discourse analysis, and he is strongly concerned with making a "positive contribution to thinking about what needs to be done differently" in society as a whole.

In short, the legacy of Michael Halliday's work on language and semiosis has been developed in what could be regarded as three main directions: a) further work on the *systems* for describing language and meaning making, b) *multimodality research*, i.e. taking semiotics into modes other than the verbal, and c) *discourse as social practice*. In addition, these perspectives have been applied to a variety of social fields. *Systemic* work can be seen in the further refinery of Halliday's grammar. Christian Mathiessen is a key figure in this direction, particularly contributing to a detailed description of linguistic systems. Jim Martin's interest in systemic perspectives is mainly directed in a more overarching level, expanding the systems of stratification with register and genre.

Halliday's social semiotics has been expanded both in terms of a more general semiotics and a social critique. The linguistic system has been expanded into other modes of expression in *multimodality* research, where the semiotic perspectives are foregrounded and more or less cut loose from the linguistic systems, though still inspired by the connections between meaning and form in SFL. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen are the key figures in this direction, working closely together in both Australian and European contexts, with Jay Lemke entering the scene from his American and natural sciences background.

The third direction we will highlight is inspired by Halliday's ambition "to provide a tool for critical social analysis", as Lemke puts it. This is a logical expansion of the "social" in social semiotics, and it has developed into various forms of discourse analysis, coined respectively as "Critical Discourse Analysis" with Theo van Leeuwen as one of the key figures, and "Positive Discourse Analysis" with Jim Martin as a key figure. In the work of Gunther Kress we see a move from analysis to design as a central perspective on how the individual interacts semiotically with the social world.

The *functional* perspective is underlined by all the scholars in the book and is a basic approach to their understanding of all kinds of meaning making. It enters into their theoretical work, methodologies and analyses in different ways, which come to the fore in various applications of SFL and social semiotics. One very prominent field of applied research is education, with Jim Martin, Gunther Kress and Jay Lemke as central figures. Other fields are health care, computer gaming, music and media discourse.

These directions are not separate in the sense that they develop independently of each other, and the scholars we have interviewed are all involved in more than one direction. But in the following these directions will serve to structure our discussions and the dialogues we attempt to create among the five interviewees.

Systems and concepts

In this section, we shall describe and discuss how Halliday's systemic work on language has been the point of departure for developing SFL and social semiotics into new directions. First we shall approach the concept of *meaning*, which is central to all the directions we shall discuss afterwards.

On meaning

Meaning is at the heart of social semiotics, and meaning in this sense is rooted in the social, in the real life experiences of the people who make meaning. Gunther Kress describes how he was initially drawn to Halliday's kind of linguistics because it did not separate meaning and form in the way that he had found dissatisfactory in transformational grammar. Social semiotic scholars do not enter into philosophical discussions about where meaning is situated or how it can be understood. They seem to take as a starting point that meaning exists in people's lives, and performs its work through their social practices; in Matthiessen's words, "the social, the interactive is central and essential" when we want to explore semiosis. Van Leeuwen is in line with this when he states that "knowledge is ultimately based on doing".

The theoretical anchoring of meaning in the social is shared by all the scholars, but they have slightly different takes on how this works for the individual meaning maker. Matthiessen and Martin do not see the advantage of taking in a cognitive component in the paradigm and connecting with concepts such as mind and

cognition; instead they advocate a holistic, all-encompassing semiotic approach to meaning making: the cognitive component gets embedded in a social framework, and there is a tendency to talk about brain, not mind. This resonates with Firth's idea:

... such dualisms as mind and body, language and thought, word and idea (...) are a quite unnecessary nuisance, and in my opinion should be dropped.
(Firth, 1957, p. 227)

Matthiessen states that he and Halliday connect language with the brain, but put the mind aside, and try to explain the functioning of the brain through language instead of assuming something like the mind or cognition, and using that to explain language. Their approach resonates with the ideas of a number of neuroscientists like Gerald Edelman. Matthiessen goes on to suggest that "knowing and thinking are semiotic processes. From this follows a semiotic understanding of sensory motor systems".

Martin is in line with Matthiessen in this sense, since he objects to a tripartite model of semiosis (a model where you have brain, mind and language) and advocates for "a Hallidayan project, which develops a rich theory of social semiosis alongside a rich theory of neurobiology and interfaces those two directly". For Martin, the dialogue with cognitive theories is futile, and in this sense he is critical towards the efforts made by Halliday and Matthiessen in their book *Construing Experience Through Language* (1999) to build a semantics that might convince cognitive linguists and psychologists that the semiotic project is a reasonable alternative. In Martin's opinion, a project like that is never going to succeed because it is impossible to convince people who believe in the mind that there is no mind. Martin pinpoints his position when stating that: "Halliday is more tolerant of cognitive approaches than I am. He has tried to position his relationship with Lamb as a complementarity; but I am a radical Hallidayan, so I do not do that."

Jay Lemke does not share the scepticism to the concept of "cognition", but this does not mean that he believes in "an immaterial realm of mind". He is in line with the other interviewees in this book in positioning meaning making as semiotic processes in the social and the material by going "outside of the head, make it culturally specific, make it situated in interactions in an environment in a context". Consequently, when he opens up a discussion on the relationship between cognition and emotion, he anchors his thinking in "a kind of materialist rather than a formalist view of semiotics". His view is inspired by Paul Thibault's work on embodied cognition and also by bio-semiotics as it is outlined by Jesper Hoffmeyer. This way of thinking leads to questioning the traditional distinction between affect and cognition, and Lemke concludes "that the traditional distinction between thought and feeling is an ideological distinction. It is a distinction that has to do with gender stereotypes. There is, however, no meaning-making without feeling". Lemke gives examples from the field of academic work: "In scientific texts, scientists also get quite emotional about a beautifully designed

experiment in the laboratory, or a beautiful mathematical formula or expression of an idea or generalization. Perhaps the thing that is most often overlooked is that even the so-called neutral academic objectivity is itself a feeling. It is not the absence of feeling, it is a *particular* feeling that one has and cultivates.”

This socially grounded way of looking at meaning also connects to the understanding of learning, and may account for the common interests in educational matters among the five scholars. Kress states that learning is a result of semiotic action. Learning he understands as engaging in semiotic resources in a way “that changes my inner resources. I have changed meaning for myself. [...] in that process also I have changed my capacities for action. I have changed my identity. These things are *so* closely related”. Talking about meaning and learning in these terms, Kress does not use concepts such as thinking and cognition, but rather he explains this process in terms of external resources being made to inner resources. He does not explain the concept of “inner resources” or connect it to established theories of cognition.

Summing up, we can say that all five scholars share an understanding of meaning as rooted in the social, which can be seen as a fundamental conception of meaning in social semiotics. We find some differences when it comes to how this takes place in and around individual meaning makers, with Kress and Lemke representing an interest in the individual. In Kress’s work this is articulated as the interest of the sign maker, while Lemke understands cognition and emotion as embodied processes situated in the social. In Matthiessen’s and Martin’s work, concepts such as mind and cognition are not deployed; instead, they connect the brain directly to socially organized semiosis.

On the sign

The sign is a fundamental concept in all kinds of semiotics, although Halliday is more concentrated on the notion of sign system, not on the sign itself (see the next section). The concept of the sign was primarily taken up in the interviews with Gunther Kress, Jay Lemke and Theo van Leeuwen, and they approach the concept of the sign slightly differently. For Kress, meaning ties very closely in with sign making: “making motivated signs is, I think, a kind of given for many species”, and he regards the sign as “the basic unit of semiotics”. In his view signs are *made*, and anything can be made into a sign: “We are constantly remaking existing resources, to do the job we need to do at a particular moment.” Theo van Leeuwen is more reluctant to use the word “sign”, mainly because it has a history of being understood as stable and divorced from the context. He goes along with Gunther Kress in talking about the making of signs. His point is to underline that the relations between signifier and signified is “much more flexible and fluid”. In many cases he prefers the notion of “semiotic resources” because they are not seen as signs, which have specific meanings.

We find more difference in opinion between the two when it comes to the understanding of *how* signs carry meaning, though this is a matter of nuances.

Gunther Kress has made it his mission to reject the notion of arbitrariness in sign making: “[T]he notion of arbitrariness in the Saussurian sign just didn’t fit with a social notion. It fitted in one respect, namely that the power of the social was essential to keep the relation of form and meaning together. So we kept the conventional part, and we developed the notion that arbitrariness is not a feature of sign making. Conventionality *is*, because it is the power of the social that keeps these things stable.” This notion of the motivated sign first appeared in *Social semiotics* (1988), and later Kress found inspiration in Charles S. Peirce’s notion of the iconic sign, when he understood it not merely as a visual sign, but as a metaphor for a more general phenomenon: “So I thought: well, it is actually motivated, a deliberate act. Deliberate is a very strong way of formulating it, but I mean something which is not accidental in the combination of form and meaning.” Theo van Leeuwen agrees: “Signs are always motivated. If people decide to have arbitrary signs, they will have them. But it is not because the *sign* is arbitrary, it is because people have decided they want an arbitrary system, and in a sense not even that is arbitrary.” Jay Lemke also regards arbitrariness as “a little bit of an exaggeration”, and prefers to talk about “degrees of conventionality and degrees of naturalness”.

Jay Lemke is the only one of the five interviewed scholars who is significantly inspired by Charles S. Peirce’s semiotic thinking. This includes his distinction between icon, index and symbol, picked up by many who are interested in multimodal semiotics. Lemke makes the connection to Peirce’s thinking about “firstness” (similarity of form), “secondness” (relationship through causality) and “thirdness” (relationship through convention). While Kress, as mentioned above, connects to iconic signification in his reasoning about all signs being motivated, Lemke is particularly interested in the indexical basis of meaning making: “[A] lot of the meaning that we ascribe to signs or to acts and actions as signs come not simply from their denotation, but from another way of thinking of connotation. I may be talking about icons, indexes and symbols, but I am talking about it in English, and that tells you something about me. And I am talking about it in American English, and that says something more about me. You may even hear certain throatiness in my voice because I have been talking a lot, and that also tells you something about me. As a system of interpreting from your point of view, there are many layers of meaning in the words I say, which have some kind of physical or causal relationship to me as the speaker. You can take that even further, not just to me as the speaker, but to the culture and historical period from which I am speaking.” He concludes that indexical meaning is a very powerful tool.

Lemke points to Peirce’s tripartite model of the sign, including not only a signifier (the representamen) and a signified (the object), but also “a third element, ‘the interpretant’, which I think of as ‘a system that does the interpreting’”. In other words, no signifier, no sign in the sense of the material expression points to the signified or the meaning it is supposed to stand for. *You* have to make that connection! You have to do what Halliday calls ‘construe’, and of course you construe according to systems of social convention.” Lemke claims that semiotics is very

good at describing those systems of social convention. That is, in some ways, what the grammar is doing, but he underlines that there has to be a third element that actually does this construing. For Peirce, it is not the semiotic relation that is fundamental; it is the process of semiosis, something Lemke agrees with. Coming from physics and from a notion that if meaning making takes place, semiosis takes place, because material beings are engaged in material processes and are doing things that make the meaning happen. “I certainly understood from a very early point that the Peircian perspective had an advantage over the Saussurian one”, Lemke says. He explains the lack of interest in Peircian semiotics among social semioticians as “a strong sense of loyalty to the Hallidayan tradition and its way of formulating ideas. Halliday did not rely very much on Peirce. He relied a lot more on Hjelmslev, who in turn relied on Saussure”.

Kress does not, in the same way, choose between Saussure and Peirce. He finds points he supports and points to criticize within the work of both. Like Lemke, he finds the process of semiosis as described by Peirce interesting, and connects it to the interpretant, introducing agency in the act of interpretation: “I could then see that that’s what is central in the Peircian scheme for me: the infinite, kind of constant transformation. And what is important in the Saussurian scheme is the notion of convention, and the notion of reference.”

On the semiotic system

One axiomatic idea in Halliday’s thinking is to operate with semiotic systems, not in the sense of systems of signs, but in the sense of systems of meaning; as he states: “‘semiotic’ means ‘having to do with meaning’ rather than ‘having to do with signs’.” (Halliday, 1995b, pp. 198–99). In other words, in a Hallidayan perspective, there is no usage of the concept sign. Instead, meaning and form – content and expression – are treated in the light of stratification.

Stratification is an interesting and debated concept in the sense that the five scholars in this book have approached it differently, and for different purposes. The one who is most true to Halliday’s own thinking of stratification is Matthiessen, who organizes the description of language according to the stratal organization as it is theorized by Halliday, i.e. through the following strata: context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology. Martin evaluates Halliday’s idea of stratification in the following quotation, which also points to the areas where his description of stratification has expanded upon Halliday’s and also where it is different from Halliday’s: “There was quite a lot of ambiguity in Halliday’s writing about strata during the seventies. You could perhaps see the ambiguity reflected in the Cardiff grammar tradition, where the difference between semantics and grammar is conflated with the difference between system and structure. That is a reasonable reading of some of Halliday’s writing in the 1970s. What perhaps evolved under my influence, and under the influence of Christian Matthiessen in Sydney, were distinct system/structure cycles on the different levels of language.” Martin points to Firth and says that Halliday reworked Firth’s ideas about phonology into grammar. Martin

reworks Halliday's grammatical theory into theory of discourse semantics. "If you are a discourse analyst you have to push on and worry about context; co-text is not enough", Martin says.

Martin does not operate with a stratum for semantics but with a stratum for discourse semantics, thereby emphasizing textual patterns and not grammar as his main concern. And he stratifies context into context of culture and context of situation in order to accommodate for purpose in his model (see below for a discussion of context).

Jay Lemke's answer to the question of how context can be described and understood is his concept of meta-redundancy. This can be seen as a reworking of Halliday's stratification model into a hierarchy of relations. Lemke's aim is to give a systematic account for the role of context in meaning: "When you study the signifier and the signified, you will see that the same signifier does not always point to the same signified. The same word, the same sentence, the same gesture does not always have the same meaning. So what determines which meaning it has? We usually say that the context determines it. The next question is, what is the context, and how do you know which context is relevant to use to determine the meaning in each case? Logically, you would answer that the norms of your culture tells you which context is the one in which this particular sign should be interpreted as having this particular meaning. You begin to build up a meta-hierarchy." This provides a tool to consider what the most relevant context is. Given all the possible interpretations of the given signifier, the interpretations have different probabilities of being the most useful or most shared interpretation, depending on the context.

Halliday himself connects to Lemke's notion of meta-redundancy (Halliday, 1992) this, however, is not something that Martin does – instead he builds on Hjelmslev's ideas of a connotative and a denotative semiotic in order to explain interstratal relation. Lemke himself makes the connection to Hjelmslev, but also to Peirce: "In some ways, connotative semiotics has something in common with my concept meta-redundancy, and with Peirce's notion of infinite semiosis or chains of signification, where the first signifier points to some signified for an interpretive system, but that in turn can point to another one, and that can again point to another one and so forth."

Kress and van Leeuwen have transformed the notion of stratification from linguistics to a setting of social semiotics and communication in their book on *Multimodal discourse; the modes and media of contemporary communication* (2001), and they suggest the following four strata: discourse, design, production and dissemination. Van Leeuwen characterizes strata as a "geological metaphor" where "the main thought was to actually reformulate that in a way that is related to practice, so you have a more social semiotic idea". These four strata are very different to the strata – and in fact to the idea of stratification – as suggested by Halliday, since they do not describe the overarching organizing principle of a semiotic system (such as language). Instead, they are a model to understand the practices of multimodal communication. Kress is not happy with the notion of strata, since he is in doubt whether his

and van Leeuwen's suggestion of their four strata was indeed a fruitful way to understand multimodal communication: "We had endless problems in saying what these four things that we want to talk about are. They can be described as being in a sequential relation, chronologically. They can be described in a hierarchical relation of some kind. And actually now they are for me insufficient, and I think even at the time we were not actually that keen. In as far as it suggests the kind of structural linguistic notion of stratification, I would not actually be very happy with that now." However, he cannot offer a better way of labeling these relations for the time being. His best suggestion is to draw an analogy to Halliday's way of talking about the metafunctions: "These are simultaneous semiotic domains."

Stratification is a fundamental principle in Michael Halliday's functional linguistics, and so it is in the work of all the five interviewees, although Kress and van Leeuwen are more sceptical of the notion than Matthiessen, Martin and Lemke.

On text

In all five interviews, the concept of text was discussed, and different properties of text were taken up by the interviewees. Matthiessen defines a text according to the systemic functional architecture at large, i.e. as a location in terms of different dimensions: "One dimension is the cline of instantiation, where the text is located at the instance end. Another dimension is the hierarchy of stratification, where the text is located as a unit in semantics, which is in turn realized as acts of wording – so a text is not only meaning, it is also wording, which is in turn realized as sounding – and the meaning and the wording are located within context. So text is meaning, or content, unfolding in a context of situation: language functioning in context".

For Martin, the text is a "unit of meaning", which instantiates systems on all strata – including contextual properties. A text, therefore, is a complex theoretical concept, combining stratification and instantiation, and taking into account the relationship between the paradigmatic properties of the system and the syntagmatic qualities of the instance. Martin explains text – and how this concept is interwoven with the concept of context – with the following words: "Context for me is a higher stratum of meaning on the realization hierarchy; and if we stratify context, we are looking at genre as a pattern of register patterns, register as a pattern of discourse semantics, discourse semantics as a pattern of grammatical patterns, grammatical patterns as patterns of phonological or graphological or gestural patterns as we come down. There is no text there. We are just at the level of system all the way down. The system/structure cycles are specifying the syntagmatic output of the choices on different levels. You have to move to the instantiation hierarchy to talk about the text in relation to system. The text is an instance of all these systems, an instance of every one of them." Martin stresses that, for him "the text is a unit on the instantiation hierarchy and context is a unit on the stratification hierarchy".

Gunther Kress makes the connection to communication when he suggests to use "the term *text* for any semiotic entity, which is internally coherent and framed, so

that I can see this entity as separate from other entities". He regards the text as a result of processes of communication: "Communication is a process, and the result of the process is the production of a text."

Theo van Leeuwen sees text as "resources for practices", and he brings a historical perspective into the use of the concept: "'Text' was a useful word in the seventies: as with many of our terms, like literacy and grammar, it served to legitimize a field, to say 'We are just as legitimate as you, we also analyse texts'. The text linguistics of the seventies was an important move. We moved from the sentence to the text. But then 'text' became a ubiquitous and very loosely applied term, and now, in relation to the new media, is even confused with resources. So I prefer to talk about practice, and about communicative practice as one kind of practice, and about the text as part of that – sometimes a big part, sometimes a small part." Today, van Leeuwen questions the way the concept of text has been expanded indefinitely: "'text' has been extended so much and applied to so many things. I have not actually written anything about this as yet, but I have begun to say here and there that maybe the use of the term should be restricted back to actual 'textual artefacts'. So a conversation would not be a text. It would be a practice, done by people in specific contexts. It only becomes a text when we turn it into an artefact (e.g. by transcribing it) and insert it as a key resource into another interpretive practice (e.g. conversation analysis). Thus texts become resources."

Jay Lemke's understanding of text follows on the one hand from his understanding of meaning making based in material action, and on the other hand from his interests in the interpretative sides of meaning making: "I have usually distinguished between an objective meaning of text, by which I mean the actual physical, material text, the ink on the paper or the lights on the computer screen, versus the *meaning text*, by which I mean the meanings that are interpreted by some interpreter from the objective text." Like van Leeuwen, Lemke also places text in close connection with activity. To him texts are placed and function within an activity or an activity genre. To nuance the concept of text, Lemke has introduced the concept of "text scales" as an answer to questions about how meaning is organized above the level of the sentence: "what I wanted to know was what kind of meanings you can make with longer texts that you cannot make with shorter texts. This seemed to me to be really a fundamental question." Text scales are connected to "activity scales" or "time scales". These concepts open up to interesting studies of cross-scale relationships, and Lemke has developed a model for such analyses, which he characterizes as a "sandwich model": "The meanings you make or the actions and activities you do that typically take place at the level in focus are themselves organizations made up of smaller activities and actions or units of words or sentences, and they are subject to the constraints and affordances of the longer term activities that are going on at the time."

The interviews show how the five scholars agree on seeing text as a semantic unit, but they approach it from very different angles. Matthiessen and Martin both define text according to systemic dimensions, and, although especially Martin is committed to bring context into the picture, emphasizing the interdependency

between text and context, both put a lot of weight on the internal – both grammatical and cohesive – structures and patterns of the text. This marks a difference to Kress and van Leeuwen, who are more preoccupied with the way in which texts are situated in a social practice. So is Lemke, but he introduces a different kind of systematic thinking in hierarchies of semantic action through his notion of meta-redundancy, a kind of thinking inspired by his background in natural science.

On text analysis

Martin and Matthiessen have different – and to some extent complementary – aims with their work. Taking all the nuances aside – and there are many, of course – one could argue that Martin is concerned most with the perspective from above, i.e. working in from context down to discourse semantics and then to lexicogrammar, while Matthiessen more than anything is interested in the lexicogrammar, and therefore working in from below, i.e. from lexicogrammar to semantics and then out to context. Martin justifies his position as follows: “What I do is to try to reinterpret cohesion as a higher stratum of meaning. This is different from Halliday’s ‘grammar and glue’ model. He is a grammarian and as a grammarian you work with clauses, and you think beyond grammar in terms of how you can stick those clauses together. This gives rise to what I think of as the grammar and glue perspective. I think not in terms of glue sticking clauses together, but in terms of discourse semantic system/structure cycles realized through lexicogrammar. The unit of meaning we need to worry about in semantics is the text, an unfolding discourse, so we need to think about systems at that level.” Martin regrets that “most systemic work considers, however, texts to be bags of clauses. People analyse the clauses and add up the results and divide them by the number of clauses, and think they have the meaning of the text. That is rather ridiculous, but it is standard practice in SFL meetings. It comes in part from Halliday’s comment in his grammar book that if you are not doing a grammatical analysis of the text, you are just doing a running commentary on the text.” For Martin, therefore, there is “too much clause semantics floating around”. To this, Matthiessen responds: “I would say: ‘not too much clause semantics, but too little text semantics’ [...] I think it is important to develop semantic descriptions ‘from above’ (top-down), from context, as well, but I do not actually see much of that happening: truly locating oneself in context and thinking about semantics strategically, thinking in terms of context, but also in terms of other systems, including sensory motor systems – sort of semantics as strategies for transforming what is not meaning into meaning.” Matthiessen advocates that “as far as accounts of semantics are concerned, we have to find a way to make them as detailed and explicit – as ‘hanging together’ – as accounts of lexicogrammar; if we are serious about our understanding of the centrality of language, if, as Martin said to me over three decades ago ‘I don’t think we think, we mean’ [...] then we have to have accounts of semantics that are explicit enough to support this.” This is a missing piece in the systemic functional puzzle. Matthiessen states: “There has been a

certain tendency among SFL researchers not to value explicitness and modelling of this kind, and this has been detrimental to progress in work on semantics and context.”

Van Leeuwen stresses the importance of a contextualized understanding of texts, and in his view, contextualizing means connecting to insights not only from within social semiotics but also from academic fields adjacent to social semiotics: “what social semiotics needs to do, to bring linguistics and social theory together, as I tried to do in my thesis, and as Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress had done earlier. Another thing, of course, is history. If you want to understand and explain things, history is fundamental. It has been neglected and it has therefore become a great area of ignorance amongst linguists.”

Jay Lemke stresses the importance of intertextuality in the work with texts. Early in his career, he read Riffaterre, Kristeva and Bakhtin. Lemke says that the notions of intertextuality led him to his analyses of hypertexts. His fundamental question in such analyses was whether the meaning relations between the sources of the link and the target of the link are the same as the intertextual relationships we normally talk about in analyses of verbal texts.

In his work in semiotics Gunther Kress is advocating perspectives more independent of the linguistic model. When asked about important challenges for the future he notes that he is searching for general semiotic features that can be deployed across modes: “This is relevant to everything that has become modal, which is recognized by at least a group in the social as being a means of communication, a resource with some degree of regularity that is understood by its members in some way. I think then we can say what kinds of semiotic categories are essential. *Not* – and this is the difference on my part to other forms of semiotics – *not*: Does it have clauses? Or does it have clauses of this kind or that kind; morphemes of this kind; does it express past time morphemically or lexically? Not those questions, but: Is it important to have deixis? What would it be like not to have deixis? Those are my questions.”

On context

The theoretical modelling of the notion of context has played a central role in the work of both Martin and Matthiessen, and their work differs significantly in this area. While Matthiessen largely has stayed loyal to Halliday’s ideas of context, remodelling context and applying the concept to text analysis and text production has been a major motif in the work of Martin throughout his entire career. Martin has stratified what is one contextual stratum in Halliday’s thinking into two contextual strata, which he labels register and genre. Unfortunately this labelling has caused a lot of confusion in systemic functional circles. Martin explains this terminological confusion as follows: “I could not call my approach to context ‘context’, because I have two strata. Halliday has one, so he calls it context. I had split it up and so had to give the levels different names. I chose genre and register to be those two names.” Martin states that a further confusion arises because, for Halliday,

register is a linguistic notion and refers to the way in which systemic probabilities in language are pushed about by field, mode and tenor systems. It is only the realizations of his context stratum that he calls register. “The only really substantial issue is whether you stratify context or not. I do; Halliday does not”, Martin says.

Matthiessen, whose approach to context and the notion of register is similar to Halliday’s, also sees a terminological problem in the changing sense of the term register: “[...] register was a functional variety of language in terms of what you do relative to settings of contextual variables – field, tenor and mode [...] But then Martin exported the term register up to context and took register to mean field, tenor and mode, rather than the functional variation that lives in the environment of varying settings of values of field, tenor and mode.”

Taking the terminological confusion aside, Martin argues for his dual stratification of context, and explains that his notions of genre and register were developed in his teaching. When he started to teach in the MA Applied Linguistics programme in Sydney, he offered a course called “Functional varieties of language”, in which he introduced Gregory’s model with field, mode, personal tenor and functional tenor. Halliday used in his courses field, mode and tenor. The students found the alternative views confusing, and two of Martin’s students, Joan Rothery and Guenter Plum, suggested to push functional tenor deeper because it seemed to influence all of ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. They wanted to keep Halliday’s notion of ideational meaning construing field, interpersonal meaning enacting tenor, and textual meaning composing mode, which was difficult if purpose (functional tenor) got in the way. According to Martin, stratifying could solve the problem. There were, however, still two terms – personal tenor and functional tenor – on two different levels of abstraction. To avoid confusion, the term functional tenor was changed to genre. For Martin, Halliday’s neat model of the relations between the three metafunctions and the three context variables was not sustainable. Martin’s genre model has been widely used and discussed. A genre is, for Martin, a configuration of all three kinds of meaning, and the configurations themselves can then be organized into systems. We can map a “level of emergent complexity” beyond field, mode and tenor, and so Martin articulates a culture as a system of genres. Martin points to Matthiessen and says that he has more recently developed a “pie model” where he maps the genre relations as slices of a field pie, where he assumes that ideational meaning construes field. Martin disagrees with this: “I think that decades of work show that ideational integration of genre families of this kind is not the case. The slices are not tied together because they are ideationally related; they are tied together as configurations of all three kinds of meaning. So either you stratify context and stop trying to put genre into one of the three register categories or you give up the intrinsic and extrinsic functionality hook-up notion. I want to hang on to this hook-up as part of our heritage.” Martin claims that he and his colleagues have pushed harder at the question of genre relations and, by doing this, the systems of relations started to sort themselves out as four systems, not three, with one system – genre – as more abstract than the three others: field, tenor and mode.

Matthiessen's evaluation of Martin's model of genre and register is – not surprisingly – different to Martin's. Matthiessen sees the notion of genre as something coordinating field, tenor and mode problematic for two reasons: "One problem is that the purposes are functionally diversified, not unified as in genre theory. So I think there is insight into exploring them in terms of field, tenor and mode." Matthiessen says that until someone has worked out an explicit model of how genre actually relates to field, tenor and mode, he will not reify the model. In Martin's work, there are certain combinations of genres occurring together with certain combinations of field, tenor and mode. Matthiessen claims that there are other ways of accounting for co-occurrence: "The closest to genre seems to me to be situation types, which are somewhere mid-region on the cline of instantiation, between context of culture and context of situation." According to him, there is a tendency for genre to become synonymous with text structure, which leads to confusion. Matthiessen emphasizes, however, that the confusion is not Martin's fault, but comes from the way in which people have used the concept of genre. On Martin's critique of his (and Teruya's) recent "pie model", Matthiessen comments that he and Kazuhiro Teruya have discussed the fields of activity, and worked with the rich amount of papers on genres and genre agnation, and differently from Martin have come to the conclusion that the account of genre is to a large degree field oriented, and that there is a kind of complement in tenor and in mode.

In light of stratification and instantiation, Matthiessen explains the theoretical difference between his (and Halliday's) model and Martin's by emphasizing that Martin and his colleagues have mainly explored the questions of context, ideology, genre and register through the hierarchy of stratification. For Matthiessen, another dimension is also of great importance: the cline of instantiation that Halliday explored in an early work, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (1973). Matthiessen says: "it is true of Michael Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan and a number of us, that we have not stratified context, but instead, in our work, context is, just like language, extended along the cline of instantiation; it is extended from the context of culture at the potential pole of the cline via institutional and subcultural domains and situation types to contexts of situation at the instance pole. So, different contextual patterns have different locations along the cline of instantiation; interpreted contextually, genre corresponds roughly to the range of the cline of instantiation explored under the heading of situation type. This is a way of exploring the same territory, but in a two-dimensional way."

On communication

Kress sees communication as closely linked to the production and reception of texts: "I think that in communication we produce texts. I would make that kind of distinction. Text is a material thing, which is a result of semiotic work; communication as semiotic work."

For Lemke, however, the result of communication is a community: "Communication is the processes which bind a community together. People within a

community communicate more often and more intensely in more important ways with each other than they do with people who are not part of that community. I do not believe that communication is the transfer of the same meaning from one person to the other. I believe that communication comprises the social processes by which communities bind themselves together, and it does not have to be in language. I think in general it is in joint collaborative or interactive action that communication take place.”

In the section on meaning, we highlighted how Matthiessen suggests that interaction is central and essential when we want to explore semiosis. It is therefore striking that Matthiessen – as Halliday – is not comfortable with the notion of communication: “when people link language and communication they tend to operate with this notion that language is there to ‘clothe’ ideas that arise somewhere else, so it leaves out the ideational component; it misses out on what Whorf has emphasized: language as a resource for construing experience. Communication is the exchange of meanings, and part of what meanings do is to construe our experience.” The last bit of Matthiessen’s statement contains a definition of communication that takes into account both interpersonal and experiential meaning; the exchange of meaning points to the interpersonal perspective, while the construal of experience points to the ideational perspective on meaning. Matthiessen’s definition bears some resemblance to the way that Martin defines communication, although Martin stresses the interpersonal perspective on communication rather than the ideational perspective, when he states that communication “is using your semiosis, using your semiotic systems to negotiate meaning”.

In line with Matthiessen’s reluctance to theorize about communication, van Leeuwen prefers to talk about semiotic practices over communication. Gunther Kress has included the concept in some of his titles, e.g. *Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication* (2010). He uses “communication” and “semiotics” more or less as synonyms, explaining communication as semiotic work (similarly to van Leeuwen), and states that “[s]emiotics would be the theoretical frame in which I look at communication”. Both Kress and Lemke see teaching and learning in the classroom as a form of communication. However, Lemke admits that “[c]ommunication is one of those terms, like context or culture, that is useful mainly because it is vague”.

On the Sydney grammar versus the Cardiff grammar

In systemic functional linguistics, there exist two main approaches to the description of lexicogrammar: the approach known from Halliday’s and Matthiessen’s *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2014), which is sometimes labelled the “Sydney grammar”, and the approach known as the “Cardiff grammar”, whose main exponent is Robin Fawcett.

Martin and Matthiessen may disagree on how one most appropriately may theorize the concept of context, and they may have different takes on the stratum between context and grammar – discourse semantics for Martin, and semantics for

Matthiessen – but they agree that Halliday’s approach to grammar is the one to advocate. Comparing Halliday’s approach to the approach taken by Fawcett and the Cardiff grammar, Matthiessen states: “a key difference between the Cardiff grammar and the Sydney grammar is that in Halliday’s grammar it is dimensions all the way. I find the relational-dimensional thinking very appealing.”

This view can be seen as a contrast to modular-based grammatical thinking, which has been and still is prominent in many linguistic models. Matthiessen sees greater advantages in a relational-dimensional thinking that allows you to see how every unit is in a system, and where one phenomenon always is related to other phenomena, both globally and locally. For Matthiessen, the Cardiff grammar is closer to modular thinking.

Martin also points out that the dimensions in Halliday’s thinking provide for a richer description and model of language than does the Cardiff grammar, since the Cardiff grammar “conflates axis and stratification (with system conflated with semantics and structure with grammar)”. To Martin, the advantage of stratifying language into two distinct strata – discourse semantics and lexicogrammar – is that it gives room for both clause semantics and text semantics: “if we conflate axis with stratification as in the Cardiff model we can only have a clause semantics”, Martin states. Another issue with the Cardiff grammar is that its semantic categories are neither motivated by grammatical structures, nor co-textual patterning. Martin says: “If you look carefully, Fawcett’s systems for MOOD and TRANSITIVITY, or whatever he calls them in a particular phase of his research, are not based on or motivated by structure (in the way that they are for Halliday and Matthiessen and others).” Martin points at Fawcett’s recent MOOD networks (e.g. Fawcett, 2008), where he has speech function labels for what Halliday would classify as imperative, interrogative, declarative and exclamative clauses. Such labelling does not, according to Martin, make generalizations about structural patterns, and a wide variety of grammatical syntagms realize most of Fawcett’s features. Martin also criticizes that there is no co-textual reasoning either by Fawcett in terms of the discourse semantics of exchange structure. This turns Fawcett’s description into a kind of speech act theory. The advocates of the Cardiff grammar have a philosophical notional perspective on meaning, not a social semiotic one, and of course, naturally enough, this is set in a cognitive framework.

The Sydney and the Cardiff grammar both build on a systemic and functional approach in their description of language, and they are often labelled as “two dialects of the same language”. Matthiessen and Martin, however, find this labelling misleading, since the two approaches to language description hold significant differences. While Matthiessen mainly criticizes the Cardiff grammar for being too modular oriented, Martin, among other things, takes up the lack of co-text reasoning.

Multimodality

Among the scholars in this book, Kress and van Leeuwen are the main exponents – and to a large extent the founding fathers – of multimodal social semiotics.

Multimodality has played a central part in Jay Lemke's work too: "once you look at things in terms of multimodality, there is no going back", he states. With his interest in the history of mathematical and scientific language, and how it had diverged from everyday language, he soon became "dissatisfied with looking only at language. It was clear that you also had to look at other semiotic modalities, certainly diagrams, graphs, maps, charts and pictures. What seemed to me most important was how they were all integrated".

Kress and van Leeuwen have taken up the semiotic perspective in Halliday's work and applied it to several forms of expression; Kress acknowledges this legacy in this way: "social semiotics, I think, has taken something from his linguistics, namely the semiotic organization and the semiotic principles, and attempts to apply them to the affordances of materials in specific social environments." He points to Halliday's distinction between speech and writing as one inspiration for this move. Van Leeuwen, coming from a background in film production, originally searched for a way of theorizing language and image, and also language and media, and he found inspiration in the systemic functional concern with meaning over form: "now the question could be asked in a different way; not "Does film have words or clauses?" which it does not have, but "Is there something in film that fulfils the function of words and clauses?" Modality is a prime example. Language has specific resources for expressing modality: the modal auxiliaries. Film does not have these, but it can express modalities, degrees of realism, in its own ways."

Both Kress and van Leeuwen stress that multimodality is a field of research, rather than a theory or a discipline. As such, it can be approached from different theoretical perspectives. Choosing to coin the phenomenon as "multimodal" creates an expectation of explanations from language and semiotics, van Leeuwen points out. This leads him to look for "a more integral and coherent picture of multimodal communication and all its resources, and all of the ways in which these are integrated". He found (in *Introducing Social Semiotics*, 2005) "that social semiotics needs to describe semiotic resources, the practices in which they are used, as well as the histories of these semiotic resources, their meaning potentials and the discourses that surround them in particular practices – the discourses that regulate them, evaluate them, criticize them, teach them, change them and so on".

Working with multimodality may shed light on similarities as well as differences between modes, Kress claims. One side of semiosis that becomes apparent when one looks at meaning making across modes, is that the materiality of the sign makes a difference: "Theo van Leeuwen and I also said that the materiality of the stuff that gets turned into the resources for communication, semiotic resources, has an effect on how a higher level category such as metafunctions gets articulated."

Van Leeuwen notes how *Reading images* has become a reference work for the multimodal, especially visual analysis, and he admits being proud of that: "the idea of the 'language of the image' [...] I have been lucky enough to realize that dream, I actually did it, and successfully so. When I look back I feel that something has been achieved".

Jay Lemke presents his notion of multiplicative or multiplying meaning as his most important contribution to the tool box of multimodal analysis. This accounts for the “combinatorial explosion of possible combinations” in multimodal communication, in short pointing out how multimodal communication does a lot more than adding up modes. He says that if you have several different codes, or several different sets of alternatives, and you are deploying them simultaneously, then the set of all the possible combinations of them is the relevant set for deciding the information value of any particular choice or instance.

In the section above on meaning, we touched upon Halliday’s view that it is from language and language use that we understand cognition, not the other way round; in his own words, what is at stake is the following:

When people reason through talk, they are actually reasoning with **meanings**; but these meanings are not a separate “cognitive” universe of concepts or ideas – they are patterns of semantic (that is, linguistic) organization brought about, or “realized”, by wordings.

(Halliday, 1995a, p. 246; orig. emphasis)

So, to Halliday, language is fundamental to man as a semiotic being, although he occasionally takes other semiotic systems – or modes – into consideration:

Some people claim that [...] anything that can be meant in any way at all can also be meant in language. ... *I am not sure*. Some semiotic systems may be incommensurable with language; witness the sometimes far-fetched attempts to represent the meaning of a work of art in language (but, again, cf. O’Toole, 1994). But while the question is important, and deserves to be tackled much more subtly and fundamentally than this rather simplistic formulation suggests, it is not necessary for me to try to resolve it here. All that needs to be said in the present context is that other human semiotics are dependent on the premise that their users **also** have language. Language is a prerequisite; but there is no need to insist that language can mean it all.

(Halliday, 2003, p. 4; orig. emphasis; cf. Halliday, 1978, p. 99, and Halliday, 1989, p. 10)

As Halliday’s close associate, Matthiessen, too, is primarily concerned with language, but he reaches out to other semiotic systems and advocates for the idea of multimodality: “We certainly know things in other semiotic systems as well. I think probably people vary in terms of the nature of the complementarity of the semiotic systems they operate with, but obviously there has been research into image schemata and so on, and I think mathematics is a way of knowing. It is obvious that these semiotic systems differ considerably in terms of the extent to which we share them across the human family. Some are very specialized in terms of human cultures and the division of labour within a given culture, while others are much more general: language is a very general kind of semiotic system.” As

Matthiessen, Martin has also primarily worked with language as a mode of meaning, and he reiterates Halliday's point that language is the only modality that can talk about other modalities. Language is also, according to Martin, the only mode that is a stratified system. Attempts have been made to impose concepts like rank, metafunctions and strata on other modes of meaning, but Martin is of the opinion that we do not really have system/structure cycles for, for example, images. When Martin talks about the future challenges for social semiotics he raises among other questions the following: "How can we build the theory that enables us to understand how the meanings from different modalities come together into a single text?" Martin thinks that we are still stuck in a linguistic theory.

On mode

The definition of mode is functional and rooted in the social in the thinking of Kress and van Leeuwen. Gunther Kress's definition is: "A mode is that which a community, a group of people who work in similar ways around similar issues, has decided to treat as a mode." Jay Lemke relates his definition to a semiotic resource system in the original sense presented by Halliday (1978): "It is a system of meaning potential, a system of meaningful contrasts between forms in a community that has conventions for the interpretation of those forms and contrasts, as paradigms, as syntagms, and this can be done through multiple expression planes." In this way Lemke connects mode to Martin's thinking presented previously on paradigmatic properties in a system, and syntagmatic qualities of the instance.

It has been debated whether modes, regarded as systems of semiotic resources should be defined in terms of certain systemic features. One possible requirement would be that a mode should be able to express all three metafunctions. This can be seen as a question of what the basic unit of analysis is: the single mode or an instance of multimodal communication. Theo van Leeuwen makes this point: "You could say that in multimodal communication we always need the three metafunctions, so that all three are present in any act of multimodal communication, but which metafunction is mostly or solely carried by which kind of mode in the mix may differ. And when looking at modes separately, you may find that some develop the ideational metafunction more than others, and others the interpersonal. Multimodality requires the metafunctions to be rethought and not taken for granted."

The point that the multimodal ensemble is the most fruitful unit of analysis is also made by Jay Lemke when discussing the problems of analysing language (rather than speech and writing) as a separate mode: "It seems to me that it is more productive to ask the question: What does language add to the multimodal mix? What are its special strengths or the special purposes for which we tend to use language more than the other modes?"

A possible disagreement between Kress and van Leeuwen appears in the further theorizing of the concept of mode. As we have seen above, Kress stresses the materiality of modes, and how that affects the affordances of modes. Van Leeuwen, on the other hand, calls for a rethinking of the concept of mode in *Multimodal*

Discourse: “We defined mode essentially as an immaterial semiotic resource, a semiotic resource that is abstract enough to be applicable across different means of expression, or different media, as we called it. And, of course, we said that language is such a resource because it can use writing or speech. Narrative, too, would be a mode, because it can be realized in many different media.” Van Leeuwen points to history when he claims that multimodality may work in different ways in new and old media: “I think that with mode we have to catch up with what has happened with the semiotic practices around us and readjust our terminologies and theorizations accordingly, and in a way that can both capture the traditional idea of mode, since it still operates in practice, and the new types of semiotic resources that are coming into being.

Matthiessen’s concern is mainly of a practical kind. He notes that “‘mode’ has come to have so many senses: it is one of the variables in context, but we also have modes of meaning, modes of expression; and we have it in description – we talk about modes of a verb”. Therefore, he is not comfortable with the term multimodality and prefers the term “multi-semiotic systems”, which originally is coined by Eija Ventola. Martin normally uses the term “mode” as a register category parallel to field and tenor. He refers to meaning-making systems not as “modes of meaning” but as “modalities”. There is, according to Martin, confusion in the use of terms here because, as “mode”, “modality” is used in different ways. Halliday uses, for example, “modality” for probability and usuality. Martin emphasizes that there is a need for more precise terms in this area.

To the ambiguity of the definition of mode, van Leeuwen adds that, with mode, there lies a theoretical problem in the fact that “[m]ost of the time it is quickly and perfunctorily defined by a few examples, as I have done many times myself: ‘Modes’, and then between brackets, ‘(e.g. image, music and text, or image, music and language)’.” Van Leeuwen thinks that this is now becoming far more complex because, despite multimodality, the modes are both able to exist separately as well as in combination.

Social critique and design

Theo van Leeuwen reiterates Halliday’s strong impetus that we need to explain language and the use of language through an understanding of context, and he stresses the necessity of understanding and analysing context in terms of social practices, as do sociologists; this gives a deeper understanding of (the social) context than is available if utilizing only systemic functional/social semiotic concepts. To van Leeuwen’s regret, such a deep sociological understanding is missing in a lot of social semiotic work. In his own work, he finds inspiration in critical discourse analysis, and he mentions scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak who “engage with social theory and relate it to the detail of language, in the way that I believe Halliday intended. There are some sociological references in social semiotics, principally Bernstein, and Berger and Luckmann, but more is needed”.

Gunther Kress agrees with van Leeuwen that social semiotics does not have a fully articulated social theory to account for the social context: “It is located in the

social, rather than claiming to be an articulated social theory.” Instead of developing such a theory on its own, he suggests that a complementarity of approaches is the best solution. Then the social semioticians may collaborate with social scientists of different kinds, depending on the aims of each particular project. In his own work, he has worked with ethnographers who have provided a fruitful social framework for understanding the context. Where Kress turns to ethnography, van Leeuwen turns to sociology in search for a complimentary approach to fill in the gaps in social semiotics. This choice may mirror a slight difference in emphasis in their work: Kress combines an interest in the sign maker, and what motivates individual semiotic choices, with an understanding that all meaning making is situated in the social. Van Leeuwen has shown an interest in sociology from the very beginning of his academic career, which can be seen from his dilemma whether to choose linguistics or sociology as the subject of his PhD. He points to social theory, and also to history, as helpful disciplines for understanding the social practices in which meaning is made.

Jay Lemke also underlines the social, and comments how the lack of social theory was an initial weakness: “The social semiotics in the beginning was very strong on the semiotics, and had only good intentions on the ‘social’. There was not an equally sophisticated social model to go with the sophisticated linguistic model, and you needed both in order to bring them together as social semiotics.” This can be seen from the very first paper he presented in Michael Halliday’s linguistic department in Sydney, entitled “Action, Context and Meaning”. This sums up how he understands “language as one component of human action and human communication in a situational context and a context of culture”. In contrast with Martin and Matthiessen, he pays tribute to eclecticism: “I am eclectic and believe in bricolage, where you borrow ideas and tools and ways of thinking from everyone that you can, and you put them together in your own way for your own purposes”. Lemke, as well as van Leeuwen, points to the Newtown Semiotic Circle as an important arena for “broadening out the enterprise from linguistics to social semiotics”, as Lemke puts it. To this arena Lemke brought his background in physics and cybernetics, as well as readings of Gregory Bateson’s anthropology and Pierre Bourdieu’s work in the sociology of culture.

Jay Lemke points to critical perspectives as the most important innovative perspectives through the last decades, besides multimodality: “the political and social dimension and the ideological dimension of analysis, which still remains on the agenda.” In particular he has turned these perspectives towards his own field of science: “I think that critical discourse analysis is important for understanding science as a social phenomenon. Science is not a purely isolated, neutral, arbitrary or even objective activity. It is culturally and historically situated, and it is deeply interdependent on economic interests and even to some extent on political ideologies.”

On analysis in relation to design

Van Leeuwen and Kress both support the idea that knowing is based on doing (as van Leeuwen puts it), and that social semioticians look at what people can do (as Kress

points out). Therefore, design and reflections on design play a crucial role in their work. However, there is a difference to their views on design in relation to analysis. Van Leeuwen propagates a practice where both design and analysis play a role, while Kress has distanced himself from critical analysis and today is only interested in design; this is summed up by van Leeuwen as follows: “when he moved to the Institute of Education, Gunther Kress to some extent distanced himself from CDA, and began to propagate the idea of design, which is a contribution that had to be made, though for myself I cannot see why it should be antithetical to criticism. If you want to change things, you need to analyse what is wrong with the way things are now. And being critical is not necessarily being negative, it just means that you are critical, and you are open to what the outcome of that will be.”

Kress justifies his practice by saying: “Design is prospective, and in education that seems to me essential. Critique says: What has happened? Usually what it analyses is not the work of the powerless, but the work of the powerful; that is one problem.” Kress also sees another problem, and he refers to his own experiences doing critical linguistics in East Anglia in the early seventies. At that time the world was more stable. Although it was already beginning to be shaky, Kress says, certain social forms and power relations were still in place. The aim of the critical analyses was to show how these relations worked, and “then everybody would want to change their relation to power and their use of power”. Critique was, according to Kress, a means of producing crisis, and out of crisis would come change. Time has changed, and in the mid-to-late eighties there were crises around, and nobody needed to produce them, he claims. When Kress moved to education, he rather wanted to give young people the tools that they needed to design their imaginations about the world so that they could function in relation to their own wishes in society. Kress says that this also became a feature of the work in the New London Group.

We see that, for van Leeuwen, a critical approach is still needed and such an approach can be combined with an interest for design. For Kress, the concept of design is, to a large extent, related to his work in the field of education, and the aim is to give young people the tools that they need to be active voices in the modern society. Kress has used the concept “design for learning” in recent publications. Critical analysis is not necessary to reach this aim.

Functions and applications

There is a strong tradition in social semiotics for working closely with real life problems in applied research. In this section, we shall reflect upon examples of such applications, and how they, in turn, have inspired further theoretical development. Jay Lemke and also Christian Mathiessen have been involved in work on new information technology, Mathiessen in computer assisted descriptions of language and Lemke more in the field of computer assisted learning and computer games. Theo van Leeuwen has applied social semiotics in the study of software, film and toys. Jim Martin and Gunther Kress have both applied their insights in studying

health communication; Martin has studied the discourse of schizophrenic speakers while Kress has used multimodal communication in the operating theatre as case. These are but a few examples of how the application of social semiotics has entered into dialogue with a broad spectre of social experiences.

On education

First and foremost, social semiotics and SFL have proved applicable in studies of education, and studies on the construal and communication of knowledge. In this field, especially Jim Martin, Gunther Kress and Jay Lemke follow in Michael Halliday's footsteps. Kress makes a clear connection between learning, semiotic processes and communication: "Learning is, of course, communication, and if you called it teaching and learning, it would be one specific instance of communicational process. [...] Learning happens, the way I see it, through one's own making of signs in relation to the world in which one is." Kress points to education being "in the firing line" since he moved into the field of education in 1990: "What is happening in terms of the government's response to curricular things is deleterious to social futures, in a much more significant way than, say, the things that might appear within cultural studies or media studies. Not that they are unimportant. Not that they are not educational, but they are seen differently."

Jim Martin started his work with education in the 1970s, and over the years he has developed a genre-based pedagogy in close collaboration with school teachers, inspiring teachers all over the world. The stratified model of context was the basis of the pedagogy, and the starting point was a reaction to process writing, which strongly dominated the teaching of writing in the 1970s and 1980s. In certain varieties of this paradigm, knowledge about language is seen as useless and even harmful, and the teacher is seen as a guide more than a teacher. Martin and his colleagues were inspired by the work Halliday had done with young children in the 1970s, and by the work of Clare Painter in the 1980s and 1990s. Halliday and Painter both studied how adults were scaffolding young children in their language development. Scaffolding became a principle idea of the genre pedagogy as well. Through the use of model texts in a wide range of genres, the students develop their writing together with the teacher. The teaching of writing should, according to Martin, be explicit, and the teacher should actively teach, not only guide, the students. "[T]alking about language is a part of learning language", Martin says. He makes the point that knowledge about language and genres is necessary; and that students need "resources of knowledge that they could draw on", and not only diffuse ideas of what texts look like. The genre pedagogy also has a social side as students from less privileged classes need more explicit teaching to master the school genres, normally built on middle-class ideas and ideology. In the interview, Martin talks about a "socially responsible linguistics" inspired by the visions that Halliday had for SFL from the very beginning.

Jay Lemke defines his perspective on the teaching of science as a "sociocultural perspective". Gunther Kress also points to the science classroom as an interesting

field of study: “The science classroom is a very, very good laboratory for semiotics and multimodality”. Both of them have felt the need for a multimodal approach to the semiotic processes going on in the science classroom. When asked about his contribution, Lemke states: “Some of my notions about the application of the multimodality approach to multimodal scientific text, the integration of mathematics and various kinds of representations such as tables, charts and diagrams, along with the linguistic text in the genre of the scientific article, have been useful. For very many people, this has been a model of how to look at those interrelationships even in other genres.”

In Gunther Kress’s work on the role of texts in education “literacy” seems to be an important concept, appearing even in book titles such as *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003) and *Multimodal Literacy* (Jewitt and Kress, 2003). Yet today he tries to avoid using the concept because he is worried about “metaphors like *literacy* disseminated promiscuously throughout the world, because I regard that as kind of sloppy thinking”. Lemke seems to share this scepticism in his comment that “literacy” is one of those notions that work best if you do not define it too precisely: “The meaning of literacy has changed so much over my lifetime, from being almost exclusively the ability to read print text and gain basic information value from doing so, to the use of written language for your own purposes. Once one goes to a *multimodal* view on literacy, then literacy and multimodal semiotic competence are more or less the same thing.” He suggests to talk about *literacies*, and mentions specialized literacies, like a mathematical literacy in the register of differential calculus.

Education and politics

There is a social drive in social semiotics that we will discuss further below. This has played a particular role in the interests in education. Behind Jim Martin’s work on educational genres as well as Jay Lemke’s interests in formal and informal sites of learning, there is a deep engagement in empowering young people. Gunther Kress regards his move to education as moving into a field that is shaping the future: “I am very glad to have moved into education. When I was in Sydney, before I came here, I was in a place that focused on media studies and media production, cultural studies, cultural production. Of course that is enormously important; it’s a vast educational site, but not seen in those terms. And then I came here, and because of the Neoliberal agenda matched with its profound social changes, education has been in the firing line since then. And so I was forced to think very hard about those kind of things. There is less need for serious consideration or the same intense consideration when you are looking at an advertisement, or a film or something; even a debate on pornography or violence is less severe.”

This is also an area where Christian Mathiessen sees the benefits of collaboration across fields of expertise: “Later on in the 1980s, people came from education with real expertise in education and worked with Martin, Halliday and Hasan. I am thinking of people like Joan Rothery, Frances Christie, Beverly Derewianka, Geoff Williams, Len Unsworth and a number of other people. These are people who

worked specifically on what got identified as educational linguistics. So you had very good conditions for a dialogue between different areas of expertise, and you had people who understood the important and essential move from basic research to the development of materials to implementation. I think understanding these phases is very important, also for other areas.”

The engagement in education illustrates Halliday’s thinking about the purpose of academic research in a more general sense, Christian Matthiessen explains: “the engagement with education issues was very central from early on; it was very much part of what those who were members of the linguistic group in the British communist party were concerned with. They were concerned with what Halliday has now found a term for: applicable linguistics – meaning that linguistics, just like other branches of science and scholarship, could actually have an engineering application, address problems in the community and make a positive difference to the human condition. It was part of the thinking from the beginning that SFL should be scientific in the theoretical sense, but also in the engineering sense and, as Halliday said somewhere along the line, there should be more emphasis on the engineering sense of science than the philosophy sense of science. In that sense, it was applicable, and so it should be applicable to the education context.”

Academia and politics

Some of the scholars presented in this book are clearly driven by social consciousness in their work, mirroring as it were Halliday’s communist/Marxist upbringing. It is very explicit in Martin’s work, and also in his answers in the interview. He says: “I have always wanted my linguistics to do something in the world. This is very different from Chomsky, who is very famous for his politics but claims his linguistics has nothing to do with that work.” We have also seen that social consciousness was an important motivation for his work in school and in the development of genre pedagogy. In addition, the recent studies of young offenders in New South Wales show his social engagement. Also van Leeuwen’s work – he has had a long run in Critical Discourse Analysis – was driven by social consciousness. In CDA – and in Martin’s idea of Positive Discourse Analysis – discourse is, among other things, defined by the way it articulates aspects of power and oppression in a society. When looking into future challenges, van Leeuwen underlines a motivation for projects that may make a difference: “projects that pay equal attention to semiotic resources and to their uses, in the context of practices that really matter in today’s world, like consumerism, corporate power, the new poverty, the way public services change as they are sold out or corporatized even without being sold – those kind of issues. I believe that our kind of social semiotic approach has things to offer here that escape the big brush thinkers who do not bother as much with data as we do.”

Gunther Kress also wants to be in dialogue with social development, even though he realizes that academic understanding often lags behind in a rapidly changing world: “So, I think, the social does stuff anyway, and academics always

run behind the horse that has left the stable. We are not leading anything; we are attempting to understand what has happened. I am not politically active, except in the sense that I attempt to produce a theory of learning which gives significance and dignity to the work of very, very many people in a way it never did before. Is that a significant political action? Yes it is. That is how I would think about that.”

Jay Lemke is more engaged in how scientific knowledge can be communicated to the public, not only in education, but also in matters of relevance to political decisions: “One of the problems is that scientists are not very good at making their case to the public. In designing better scientific representations, a key feature is to find ways to make them more friendly to non-experts, so that, for example, many issues of probability and statistics, which are fundamental to the scientific representation of controversial issues, such as environmental policy issues, simply is understandable for the average person.” However, he warns against too close relations between academic analysis, politics and ideology: “Sometimes they go too much hand in hand, as when some people using a critical discourse analysis approach may have already decided about the political analysis before they do the linguistic analysis or the multimodal analysis of their texts. As a result, learning how to understand the political situation from the analysis of the texts will not be the case.”

The social indignation/motivation is less salient in Matthiessen’s work; he seems, to some extent, more occupied with language description, typology and the more systemic part of SFL, and lesser occupied with the more broad, contextual issues. And Matthiessen’s definition of the concept discourse as “text in context” (Matthiessen, 1992, p. 18) does not in any way emphasize power relations; it is not a purpose-driven definition, it is a definition that is generally applicable to all context-sensitive studies of text.

Future challenges, hopes and aspirations

The scholars interviewed in this book have contributed immensely to social semiotics and systemic functional linguistics. Even though they can all look back over a long academic career, they do not give the impression that they have arrived at an end point; there is still more work to be done to develop the fields that they have devoted their lives to. There are new areas to cover, previous concepts to reconsider and new challenges to be met. In this section we will sum up what the scholars see as important challenges for the future.

Refining theories and concepts

Theories and concepts prove their usefulness when tested in analytical work on semiotic and social practices, which may in turn lead to revisions. After two decades of work in the field of multimodality, van Leeuwen believes that it may be time to reconsider some of its concepts from a more principal and theoretical point of view. He points to historical and strategic reasons for some of the choices made in an early phase, such as when concepts like *text*, *grammar* and *literacy* in the field of

multimodality were used to claim a field. After an indefinite expansion of the concept of text, he calls for a more well-defined and theoretically grounded understanding of this concept. Gunther Kress, too, is open to reconsider the extent of the concept of text. When giving his definition of a “text” as an internally coherent and framed semiotic entity, he adds: “At the moment I am happy to call these things text. But somebody might come along and give me a good reason to say that actually there are too many problems with that.” Jim Martin also takes up the concept of text and mentions intermodality as one of the major challenges for the future. He says: “We have created a huge crisis for ourselves by proposing simultaneous realization hierarchies for the different modalities, and then you are faced with the problem that you have a multimodal text.” Martin asks how we can, in the future, build a theory that enables us to understand how the meanings from different modalities come together into a single text as it unfolds.

Another central concept that needs rethinking, van Leeuwen claims, is the concept of *mode*. The semiotic resources contributing to the multimodal ensemble are mostly explained through examples, which leave theoretical understandings of how they work as a semiotic system in the obscure. Kress, too, reflects that the way he defines mode has changed: “It is important to locate when you have done something, because it reflects what was available, and what the issues were.” In the early stage the important point was to situate the understanding of mode in the social: “if a community decides to articulate a particular set of material things, or conceptual things, into mode, then that is a mode for that community”, Kress says with reference to his and van Leeuwen’s work in the late 1990s. The wide range, including both the material and conceptual in the understanding of what makes up a mode, seems to be one of the reasons why van Leeuwen calls for rethinking. Through his own work on modes, ranging from sound through image to colour, he has encountered problems with defining single modes with an independent material base: “But now we have realized that many modes, despite being able to realize all three metafunctions, cannot be used on their own. Colour for example, has to go with something else that it is the colour of – with dress, with architecture, with images and so on. If it is a mode, then it is a different kind of mode from, say, the image or architecture. At the same time we began to discover that some of the things we thought were specific for images are not, and that many of the principles of the so-called grammar of images, for instance framing and salience, could also be applied to other ‘modes’. They are semiotic principles, resources or ways of doing things that cut across modes. So what are they? As I mentioned before, modality is also one of these. It can also be applied across modes. We have a problem here that needs to be addressed theoretically, better than we have done so far.”

Other concepts may enter into the field and need to be theorized in a way that makes it possible to integrate them into the larger theoretical framework; in other words, to translate them into a concept with a clear place in the relational-dimensional thinking, which Matthiessen advocates. Typically these are concepts used in a very general sense across scholarly fields. A case in point is the concept of *medium*, which tends to be taken for granted, Lemke states: “the *material* medium,

meaning the technology and the conventions for operating and using that technology, are a part of the context of the text that we usually background. We usually do not pay attention to it, unless it stops working.” In multimodal semiotics it has been used on several levels, as “semiotic media”, the material substance of expression, but also about media for production and distribution (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, pp. 6–7). When reflecting on this, Kress calls for differentiation of levels and more careful articulation: “The distinction that I want to make shows that there is now a problem with terminology. Partly because we are confusing or conflating quite distinct domains – sound as carrier of meaningful entities, and as a ‘means for disseminating messages’ – and partly because of the convergences in technology. So when people talk about *multimedia*, quite often they conflate the resources for representation with the resources for dissemination. They conflate mode as representational resource [...] with medium as disseminational technology.”

Van Leeuwen also points to how changing technologies lead to the need for further theoretical development. The challenges from new technologies may also lead to new understandings of the traditional media, in a historical perspective, van Leeuwen states. One point, which appeared already in *Multimodal Discourse*, was that media do not just “realize” meanings, they add meanings of their own. “The difference with the new technologies is that they have artificial intelligence built into them. Things that you had to know how to do before can now be outsourced to the machine. This was not reflected in our definition of ‘medium’ in *Multimodal Discourse*. There we saw media as purely material, as tools and materials. In modern media, the immaterial – knowledge – has become material.”

Another concept to reconsider is identity. In the postcolonial, globalizing world, Martin claims that identity becomes a major issue. He says that resources that enable us to work more seriously with identity are needed and have to be developed. We need to be able to talk precisely about how people negotiate their identity through discourse. This may be an important trend in SFL in the future.

On the idea of social semiotics as a grand theory

The scholars interviewed to this book have different opinions as to whether social semiotics – and systemic functional linguistics – should be regarded and deployed as an all-encompassing theory and methodology, or whether it is one perspective among a number of equally fruitful perspectives. Matthiessen propagates systemic functional linguistics as an all-encompassing model: “I like to translate findings into systemic functional terms, since I am not very fond of eclectic models – Frankenstein models where you are not quite sure how the parts fit together.” This is also Martin’s position: “I personally like to bring as much as I can into our orbit.”

Kress and van Leeuwen represent a contrast to this position. Van Leeuwen states that “The grand theory is something that we strive for but never achieve, because by the time we have achieved it the world has already changed and the theory is no longer applicable. And if you then continue to work on it, you will be a has been before your life is over. Yes, we need to build theory, but we also need to be

flexible and build our theories so that they can move along with the times.” Kress explains his and van Leeuwen’s position as one of asking questions of a general kind that call for complementary approaches, including social theories: “At a certain point, what social semiotics might possibly be able to do takes too much effort, and ethnography of a certain kind does it better. And so maybe complementarities of approaches are a better idea than talking about weaknesses, which might lead you to articulate a theory beyond a point of usefulness.” Within multimodal research he points to the need for more detailed work on modes. He claims that we need “intense descriptions of what these things are, and what they afford, and what they can’t do. Affordance and constraint: what is better done for this audience with these kinds of resources? We need to work more on these sorts of relations of the social and the modal, of the social and the substantial.”

Jay Lemke also advocates a greater openness to perspectives from outside SFL: “it tends to be rather inward looking. People in the field tend to talk mostly to other people in the field and may not look as much outside to other flavours of functional linguistics. They could look more into cultural anthropology and political sociology, and also into other areas of semiotics like biosemiotics and new paradigms like embodied cognition and embodied meaning making, as Paul Thibault, and not many others, has done.”

Matthiessen’s devotion to the systemic functional project means that he holds the idea of the system axiomatic; hence the descriptive model of the system network is central. One could argue that he represents the most systemic thinker among the scholars in this book. His thinking is contrasted by Kress, who finds the notion of system problematic; as he points out: “the notion of system–structure had too much of what I think can be shown to be an ideological or a mythic attempt to indicate – and insist on – stability where there isn’t actually stability.” Martin is somewhat in line with Kress – though not so sceptical about the notion of the system itself, more about the way systems are depicted – when he states that “[o]ur representations of system and instance right now are very static and synoptic. We use essentially a two-dimensional page to configure the systems and a two-dimensional page to show the structure of a text – both as synoptic ‘fait accompli’. We are stuck in our linguistic theory now, and I think we have fallen far behind where the biological and physical sciences are in terms of animated modelling and multidimensional visualization”.

As we have seen, the key figures in the generation after Michael Halliday have taken his social semiotics in several directions, developing ideas on meaning in systems, modes and social relations according to their own interests. In the interviews they demonstrate reflections which may lead to reworking of established concepts, as well as a constant scholarly curiosity which may lead to further development.

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