

# Discourse Studies

<http://dis.sagepub.com>

---

**Book review: M.A.K. HALLIDAY, *Studies in Chinese Language*, ed. J. Webster. London and New York: Continuum, 2006**

Hui Lai and Hailong Tian

*Discourse Studies* 2008; 10; 581

DOI: 10.1177/14614456080100040603

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://dis.sagepub.com>

---

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Discourse Studies* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://dis.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

- McHoul, A. (1987) 'Why There are No Guarantees for Interrogators', *Journal of Pragmatics* 11(4): 455–71.
- McHoul, A. (2005) 'Aspects of Aspects: On Harvey Sacks's "Missing" Book', *Human Studies* 28(2): 113–28.
- Sacks, H. (1970) 'Aspects of the Sequential Organization of Conversation', unpublished typescript.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1968) 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings', *American Anthropologist* 70(6): 1075–95.

**Alec McHoul**

School of Media Communication & Culture,  
Murdoch University, Perth, Australia

M.A.K. HALLIDAY, *Studies in Chinese Language*, ed. J. Webster. London and New York: Continuum, 2006.

*Studies in Chinese Language* is one of the 10 volumes in the book series The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday. It consists of four parts: medieval Chinese grammar, modern Chinese grammar, Chinese phonology, and grammar and discourse, which cover the various facets of Halliday's Chinese language studies.

The first part refers to the research Halliday has done in his PhD dissertation 'The Language of the Chinese "Secret History of the Mongols"'. 'Secret History' is a personal biography of Genghis Khan and this dissertation abstracts a systematic descriptive grammar of (Chinese) language out of the 'colloquial' story (the Chinese version). The analysis is made at six levels: contextualization, graphic analysis, script and language, grammar, lexis, and phonology and transcription. It is notable that by looking into contextualization in his research, Halliday inherits the idea from J.R. Firth that '[t]he complete text has meaning in the social context in which it operates' (p. 10). This could be taken as a great move in setting up later his theories of 'language as social semiotic'. (For a detailed review of the dissertation, see pp. 376–8 in Robins, 1961.)

The second part comprises three articles. Chapter 2, 'Temporal Categories in the Modern Chinese Verb' (co-written with J.O. Ellis) studies temporal categories in Chinese, that is, aspect, phase, tense and mood. The research is based on an examination of Pekingese compared with Dungan dialect and Cantonese. Halliday does not agree with some linguists that the Chinese verb lacks a system. He argues that one could not apply general principles of the tense-system in Latin to Chinese language studies. By giving detailed analysis to several particles, like *le* 了 and *zh* 着 that indicate aspect, *le* 了 *guo* 过 *laizh* 来着 that indicate tense, and the neutral aspect in Pekingese, he points out that post-verbs (suffixes and other adjuncts) in Chinese are indicators of its temporal categories.

Chapter 3, 'Grammatical Categories in Modern Chinese', constructs the grammatical categories of modern (standard) Chinese, which is based on Modern Pekingese formal colloquial, by classifying them into three types: unit, element and class. Units consist of sentence, clause, group, word and character, while

(structural) elements and classes describe the units. Among the five units, character 'is merely the raw material of syntactical classes' (p. 236) and group is a 'distinctive feature' of the Chinese language.

Chapter 4, 'Some Lexicogrammatical Features of the Dialects of the Pearl River Delta', probes into the dialects of Cantonese spoken in 36 cities in southern China, of which the lexicon and syntax are investigated, with city Cantonese being the norm. Several words are taken into account as examples to show similarities and differences among these dialects.

Chapter 5 in Part 3, 'The Origin and Early Development of Chinese Phonological Theory', reviews in great detail several classics that have contributed a lot to the evolvement of Chinese phonology in its history. Among the techniques in phonological analysis, one is *fānqiè* (countersegmentation), which divides a syllable into an initial and a final. This technique is considered by Halliday a milestone in setting up the basic framework of analyzing pronunciation of a Chinese character, and Halliday's review of Chinese phonological theory further develops to his systemic interpretation of Peking syllables, which is Chapter 6.

Part 4 might be of great interest to readers of this journal as all the three chapters here are comparatively recent researches on Chinese language and all bear a turn from the theoretical construction of Chinese lexicogrammar to its application in various aspects of real life. Language has been approached from the perspectives of cognition (metaphor), register (scientific language) and discourse.

Chapter 7, 'Grammatical Metaphor in English and Chinese', studies metaphor grammatically instead of taking it as a traditional 'lexical phenomenon'. For example, 'The fifth day' in 'The fifth day saw them at the summit' functions as an unmarked Theme as the Subject, which would become marked if the phrase is turned into 'On the fifth day'. Thus it might lose the prominence the writer wants to give to the message (p. 326). According to Halliday, there are processes, participants and circumstantial elements in a metaphor. By studying several examples of everyday metaphor in both English and Chinese, he argues that when the metaphorical structures are similar, it would be easier for a language student to acquire an expression in the target language though not all expressions could find equivalent metaphorical expressions. He also analyzes the similarities and differences in English and Chinese metaphorical structures by classifying everyday metaphors into the interpersonal and the ideational. The study of grammatical metaphor is important in conveying the foregrounded messages in clause structures.

Chapter 8, 'Analysis of Scientific Texts in English and Chinese', studies 'scientific language', aiming to illustrate 'some of the similarities and differences between English and Chinese in the way their lexicogrammar constructs scientific reality' (p. 336). Taxonomies, objectification and complex nominalization are examined, and it has been found that the two languages have different implicitness and explicitness in scientific writing. Halliday also accounts for the massive use of nominalization in scientific language from a linguistic perspective.

Chapter 9 reports Halliday's research 'On the Grammatical Foundations of Discourse'. According to Halliday, the grammatical foundations include: 1)

'certain resources in the grammar, both in Chinese and in English . . . were . . . "textual" in function' (p. 347), like the *ba* (把) construction and the *shi . . . de* (是.....的) construction in Chinese; 2) various 'cohesion' systems in grammar realize unity in a text semantically; and 3) the logical-semantic relations also work on a textual level. By identifying these foundations, Halliday emphasizes the close relationships between text and lexicogrammar and the importance of discourse analysis. As 'text is made of lexicogrammar' (p. 347) and 'meaning potential' always resides in lexicogrammar, it becomes possible and necessary to relate grammar studies with discourse studies.

The papers selected in this volume show that Halliday has made a comprehensive study of Chinese language, ranging from medieval Chinese grammar to modern Chinese grammar; from systematic study of grammar, temporal system and phonology to comparison of Chinese and English, modern standard Chinese and dialects and later developments in linguistics like metaphor and discourse. The volume is of great value not only to linguists who are interested in studies of the Chinese language, but also to those who are keen on language teaching and cultural communication.

Two other features of the volume are worth mentioning. First, like the other volumes in this series, there is the Editor's Introduction at the beginning of each part, which gives the reader an overview of the coming chapters, brief but very useful for the reader. Second, the book has a CD-Rom attached. The reader might find some useful information in it, such as the scanned book – 'Secret History of the Mongols 元朝秘史'; 'Field notes from the Pearl River Delta Dialect Survey Project'; 'Maps from Pearl River Delta Dialect Survey Project' and the abridged parts of the dissertation on 'Secret History'. Complementary to the book, it helps the reader achieve a better understanding of the articles and would be very useful if he/she wants to have a further study into them.

#### REFERENCE

- Robins, R.H. (1961) 'Review of the Language of the Chinese "Secret History of the Mongols"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London) 24: 376–8.

**Hui Lai and Hailong Tian**

English, School of Foreign Languages,  
Tianjin University of Commerce, Tianjin, P.R. China

HELEN SAUNTON and SAKIS KYRATZIS (eds), *Language, Sexualities & Desires: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007.

Sociolinguistic research exploring sexuality, as Cameron (2005) states, 'has shifted towards the *diversity* of gendered and sexual identities and practices' (p. 482, original emphasis) and local investigation (p. 489). Following other recent books (Butler, 1990; Cameron and Kulick, 2003; Hellinger and Bussmann,