

# Editorial

We welcome all readers to the first issue of *Language, context and text: The social semiotics forum*.

The journal has been introduced for the exchange and development of theoretical and applied ideas within social semiotics. It has a general, though not exclusive, focus on language as social semiotic. We use the term 'social semiotics' broadly in the sense first proposed by the British-Australian linguist Michael Halliday in *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning* (1978). His initial ideas for linguistic theory, expanded both by his subsequent work and that of many other scholars internationally, is now known as systemic functional linguistics (SFL), but the more general term 'social semiotics' is used here to include closely related work in other modalities such as visual images, film, architecture and so on.

The journal aims to provide scholars with more access to contemporary work in SFL. It thus complements the purview of other journals that, while regularly including SFL-based articles in their scope, have a broader theoretical range. While explanations of SFL concepts will be included where they are crucial to a discussion, the journal will not repeat explanations of basic SFL theoretical assumptions, models and principles of description. References will of course guide readers to such explanations if and as needed. The specific focus on SFL should therefore enable scholars to deepen and expand their arguments beyond what is possible where extensive explanation is required.

It is fortunate that an agreement with John Benjamins to publish the journal was reached a few weeks prior to Michael Halliday's death. Such a journal specifically devoted to social semiotics was something he and his partner and colleague Ruqaiya Hasan had long advocated. We were pleased to be able to tell Halliday about finalization of the agreement shortly before he died on April 15th, 2018, a few days after his 93rd birthday.

A great deal has been written recently in tribute to the work of both Halliday and Hasan, including attention to their warmth, generosity, inclusiveness, strength in the face of great adversity, humour and breadth of intellectual interests, inter alia. (On the latter point, for example, Halliday privately published a collection of his own poetry shortly before he died.)

Here, in the context of this journal's first issue, we wish to draw attention specifically to their scholarly integrity. Our determination is that the journal will

strive to maintain the creative, direct, robust and respectful exchange of ideas that was so important to Halliday and Hasan. Halliday will long be remembered for his integrity in producing both a comprehensive theory of language as a meaning-making resource, together with analytic frameworks designed to make linguistic research in his term 'applicable'. He did so at a time when the principles from which he built SFL theory, striking out from meaning-making in social contexts, were widely and actively excluded from linguistics.

Hasan's scholarly integrity and courage were equally extraordinary. She ensured that nothing could be excluded from her critical analysis, based on very careful reading: not Halliday's, her colleagues', her students', scholarship produced in other linguistic paradigms, nor her own work. All had to be subjected to on-going critical analysis. Her basic commitment was to the continuing refinement, extension, even 'revolutionary' change to human understanding of language. Her courage also requires remark, especially in carrying out research in semantic variation. This, too, was initiated against the flow of contemporary thinking in linguistics.

While the orientation of the journal is decidedly towards the future development of SFL (and its semiotic relatives), there is a sense in which we also wish to hold firmly to the extraordinary scholarly legacy of both Halliday and Hasan.

The papers in this issue are atypical in that they were all invited. As soon as practicable – we anticipate no later than the fourth issue – all papers published in LANGCT will have been submitted and blind reviewed by two experienced scholars. However, the papers published in this issue are a selection from presentations to the *Second Halliday-Hasan International Forum on Language* at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China in December 2017. The theme of this Forum was SFL Registerial Perspectives on Disciplinary English (DE). We proposed this theme because we had observed that, despite extensive work on academic literacy based on SFL theoretical and analytic models, there is a continuing and urgent need for better understanding of the use of English in disciplinary practices themselves, together with studies of broader social and institutional factors influencing academic uses of English: rapid on-line publishing in some disciplines is one such factor. Papers presented linguistic thinking at the forefront of a specific aspect of DE from a registerial perspective.

The first paper in this issue, by David Butt, begins by observing that DE is now 'a way of meaning which has become associated with objective authority'. Butt's paper includes a discussion of Halliday's important distinction between the limited sense of something being 'abstract' and the broader notion of 'abstraction', typically achieved in DE through grammatical metaphor. Based substantially on conversations with Halliday in the last part of his life, Butt presents the concept of the 'knight's move' in abstraction and illustrates with examples from a range of

scientific disciplines. As appendix 1 to his paper he includes Halliday's (typed and hand-annotated) notes on processes of grammatical metaphor, which provide a particularly accessible path into the concept.

The following three papers present discussion of DE in a range of disciplines and cultural contexts: Alex Garcia on nursing textbooks, from Nightingale to contemporary examples; Sheena Gardner and Xiao-yu Xu on engineering in its various sub-branches and its publications in an on-line journal; and Rosemary Huisman, a critical perspective on changes in DE in English Literature. The following paper, by Federico Navarro, makes a different kind of contribution, exploring the emergence of a new academic discipline in Spanish, educational linguistics, across contrasting national contexts. Navarro proposes that educational linguistics is still negotiating its position in relation to such other disciplines as linguistics and education in Spanish. To chart this process, Navarro finds it necessary to further explore relations between Theme and Subject in Spanish.

The final paper, by Alfredo Ferreira and Sandra Zappa-Holman, presents a detailed account of an SFL-based initiative to teach DE in a new institutional context, the Academic English Program at Vantage College, University of British Columbia. The college has been established to provide support with the development of DE to alternative-entry students. Their paper is a careful reflection on register-curricula relations, using Christian Matthiessen's context-based register typology.

This issue concludes with Annabelle Lukin's review of Christopher Hart's *Discourse, grammar and ideology: Functional and cognitive perspectives*. Lukin considers Hart's book against a number of assumptions basic to cognitive linguistics.

Finally, we welcome submissions of papers from all scholars interested in SFL through the journal's online submission portal. Guidelines and instruction can be found at <https://benjamins.com/catalog/langct>.