Review

Applying Systemic Functional Linguistics: The State of the Art in China Today
Jonathan Webster and Peng Xunwei (Eds) (2017)

Reviewed by Nana Zhou

This edited collection of papers *Applying Systemic Functional Linguistics: The State of the Art in China Today* depicts the endeavors made by the functional linguists, state of the art and future prospect of systemic functional linguistics in China. The sources in the volume consist of the outside voices from Halliday’s ‘The contribution of Systemic Functional Theory to linguistics in China’ and Martin’s ‘Teaching and learning SFL in China: Pedagogy and curriculum’ and the inside ones from the Chinese linguists to explicate their researches in SFL from different perspectives. This volume aims to show the latest researches as well as the tendencies in the relevant theoretical and applicable fields of SFL in China and offer the insights to the linguists who devote to the research on SFL.

As the outside voice, Halliday teases out the introduction, widespread and developments of SFL in China through the endeavors of the Chinese functional linguists. He emphasizes the necessities of clarifying SFL as the theory for the description of any recognizable language, of making the distinction between theoretical and descriptive categories by answering ten questions concerning the passive/active voices in Chinese and English and of involving the great quantities of descriptive, comparative and typological studies since ‘knowledge is … a process of continuous open-ended dialogue’ (Halliday: 12). These function as the blueprint for the readers to acquire the close relations between SFL and China. As the other voice, Martin mentions his travel to China to deliver seminars and intensive teaching for PhD students...
from around China and the active responses he has received. He gives priority to ‘Sydney School pedagogy to renovate literacy pedagogy in the direction of a curriculum genre with the potential to successfully apprentice all students into high stakes genre writing, regardless of their background’ (Martin: 23). By pointing out the challenge in the academic writing the Chinese students are faced with, Martin encourages to deepen and broaden the curriculum with the application of Sydney School TLCs (teaching/learning cycle) in China.

The inside voices in the following 19 papers are categorized into graphology and phonology, lexis, word group, clause and clause complex, text, typology, semiotics, multimodality, stylistics, translation, teaching, lexicography, and register variation respectively. Along with the stratum of graphology and phonology, Peng Xuanwei in ‘Stroke Systems in Chinese Characters: A Systemic Functional Perspective on Simplified Regular Script’ explicates the invalidity of Vochala’s stroke classification and grants the systematic description of the stroke systems of Chinese characters in simplified regular script by reference to the experiential, interpersonal and textural functions of SFL among which interpersonal function mainly involves appraisal category, especially the appreciation of attitude with the aesthetic effect of configuration. And Liu Chengyu in ‘A Corpus-based Systemic Functional Phonological Approach to Modern Chinese Modal Particles’ demonstrates the interaction between the semantic features and lexicogrammatical and phonological patterns. He focuses on the eight core modern Chinese modal particles, i.e. a 啊, ba 吧, bāle 罢了, de 的, le 了, ma 吗, ma 嘛, ne 呢 with data from the Modern Chinese Corpus along with the concepts of rank and metafunctions and delicacy in SFL.

With respect to lexis, Song Chengfang in ‘Emotion Verbs and Emotional Verbs in Chinese: Their Distinctions and Sub-classifications Based on Configurative Facts’ distinguishes two types of verbs expressing emotions – emotion verbs and emotional verbs and illustrate the distinctions in grammatical patterns and grammatical behaviors based on the data from Modern Chinese Corpus of the Center for Chinese Linguistics at Peking University by means of the cluster analysis. He also discusses other verbs in the candidate list, including modal verbs, verbs expressing desires, verbs construing verbal processes and verbs expressing judgement and appreciation. In ‘Verb Types, Process Types, and Incident Structure: From Lexis to Discourse Semantics’, Lv Guoyan and Gao Yanmei articulate the dependency of choosing the verbs, participants and circumstances in transitivity system upon the macrophases of the short story Folie à Deux by means of the statistical analyses. The contributors argue the indeterminacy of identifying process types when discussing the negated processes, grammatical metaphor involved, the polysemy of the verbs, which leave room for further studies. They conclude that ‘clausal constituents mark the different phases of an incident’ (Lv and Gao: 101).
At the rank of word group, Yang Bingjun in ‘Structure and Function of Measure Nominals in English and Chinese’ analyzes the measure nominals in English and Chinese in terms of experiential, logical and interpersonal meanings. He proves the proposition that Chinese is the typical classifier language and that English is the typical non-classifier language. And the choice of measure words in measure nominals depends on the context. In ‘of noun’ that follows the measure word in a measure nominal in English, Yang holds that ‘of noun’ does not function as Postmodifier to modify the measure word and that ‘measure word +of’ functions as an adjectival group, which are contrary to Halliday’s explanations concerning the same configuration in nominal group. Halliday claim that the Thing gets embedded in a prepositional phrase with of, which then functions as post-Head Qualifier (Halliday, 2004: 332, Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014: 392). And He Wei and Ma Ruizhi in ‘A Systemic Functional Study of Marked Chinese Tenses’ construct the Chinese temporal system by identifying the temporal deictic meaning of an event with reference to the event time and the reference time, and categorizing the Chinese tense auxiliaries into three groups indicating simultaneity, posteriority and anteriority according to the functions of the grammaticalized and semi-grammaticalized resources.

Within clause and clause complex, Yang Guowen in ‘Range Characteristics in Material Clauses in Mandarin Chinese’ finds that in Mandarin Chinese compared to Range rarely found in both the process-disposal bǎ把 construction and the process-unexpected bèi被 construction for the lack of patient property, Range has the more possibility in the bǎ把 and bèi被 constructions of result-descriptive and occasionally thing-gain/loss types, because of the less semantic restraints of the nominal element after the preposition bǎ把 in the bǎ把 construction and the thematized element in the bèi被 construction. And Hsu Fumei in ‘Chinese Characteristics of Clause Complex: An SF Perspective of Achievements from Former Accounts’ discusses the logico-semantic relations of the clause complex in Chinese, specifies the interrelations between zero anaphoric reference with taxis and concludes that parataxis is more commonly used than hypotaxis in Chinese. Besides, she explicates the specific characteristics of nominal groups as clauses in Chinese by distinguishing three types: nominal group of de-constitution, that with a particle le and that with numeral and classifier/quantifier.

With respect to text, Yu Li and her colleagues in ‘Generic Distributions of English Appraisal Categories Based on Appraisal Corpus’ study the generic distributions of attitude, engagement and graduation and 26 subcategories in each genre with the statistic support and find the differences of distributions in both Chinese and English by developing an annotated corpus of meanings:
the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Appraisal Meanings. Their results also imply the wide application of appraisal among different languages and cultures (Martin and White, 2005: 40).

From the typological perspective, Wang Pin in ‘Lexis-grammar Complementarity and System of Person: A Systemic Typological Perspective’ proves that lexis and grammar constitute a balanced entirety for the system of person and demonstrates the complementarity between the lexis and the grammar via the analyses of lexicalization of person, process and quality as well as grammaticalization of person, clitic, affix and zero form across languages.

With respect of semiotics, Hu Zhuanglin in ‘Issues Concerning the Disciplinary Status of Semiotics’ tackles the issues about the lack of a unified theory in semiotic research proposed by John Deely and the rebellion against current semiotic research by J. L. Lemke, and invokes five afterthoughts concerning the disciplinary status of semiotics in terms of perspectives, criteria, the effect of science and technology on semiotic flourishing, the inspiration of the concepts of integration and merge, and the necessity of unifying general semiotics and applied semiotics.

With respect to multimodality, Zhang Delu in ‘Lexicogrammar and Text in Multimodal Discourse Analysis’ considers all semiotic systems as three-level systems of a medium level, a form level and a meaning level. He identifies an image as a text or segment of text, recognizes the constituents of different functions at lexicogrammatical level in generic structure and illustrates his points by analyzing two multimodal samples from the experiential, interpersonal and compositional perspectives. The contributor proposes the general procedures for the analyses of the multimodal texts involving context, lexicogrammatical realization and interaction among different modes. Apart from the theoretical research on multimodal discourse analyses, multimodal practices have been explored such as multimodal pedagogy and multimodal visual narrative. As for multimodal pedagogy, Chen Yumin in ‘A Study of Multimodal Engagement Resources and Voice Interaction in Pedagogic Discourse’ identifies four types of multimodal engagement devices – labeling, dialog balloon, joint-constructed text and illustration, and summarizes the interaction among editor voice, reader voice and character voice when analyzing the multimodal EFL textbooks discourse. These results benefit the teachers to construct the heteroglossic harmony in multimodal pedagogic context. As for multimodal visual narrative, Yang Xiran and Jonathan Webster in ‘Meaning-making in Multimodal Visual Narrative: Patterns of Visual Weaving’ illustrate the corresponding relations between meaning-making in on-line and off-line manga and reader’s eye movements by means of eye-tracking experiments and software support via articulating the experiential, logical, interpersonal and compositional layers of fixations and saccades.
Within the scope of stylistics, Liu Shisheng and Song Chengfang in ‘Ways of Illustrating and Ways of Explicating: Multimodal Symbolic Articulation in Illustrated Shi Shuō Xin Yǔ’ distinguish four types of illustrations – exposition, extension, enhancement and metaphor when image and text tend to be independent to each other, and two groups of multimodal symbolic articulation – compound articulation and inflectional articulation. They illustrate the intersemiotic relations via the data from Liu Yiqing’s Shi Shuō Xin Yǔ.

Within translation, Huang Guowen in ‘Searching for Metafunctional Equivalence in Translated Texts’ proposes to explore the equivalence in translation by deploying the experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual metafunctions in SFL and demonstrates his point by analyzing the data from Confucian Analects. He advocates two goals of translation understanding of the text and evaluation of text and emphasizes the necessity of translation studies in both the source text and the target text.

As for teaching, Sun Yinghui and Ju Zhiqin in ‘Genres in Chinese MA Theses: An SFL-based Contrastive Analysis and Implications for Teaching’ elaborate a detailed cycle schema to the teaching/learning of specific genres in MA theses for Chinese students of English by studying the properties in the phases in five genres of Introduction, literature review, research design, result and discussion, as well as the elements in these phases in Chinese MA theses. The viewpoints are illustrated by the contrastive analyses of 20 Chinese students of English from the database PQDD and 20 Native English students from a full-text database from a university library in China. The contributors recognize genre to ‘be structured by its obligatory phases and elements in a genre-phase-element hierarchical pattern’ (Sun and Ju: 308), which is different from Martin’s and Rose’s claim – ‘different types of texts that enact various types of social contexts’ (Martin and Rose, 2007: 8).

As regards lexicography, Chang Chenguang in ‘Defining English Idioms in a Bilingual Learner’s Dictionary: Applications of Systemic Functional Linguistics in Lexicography’ explains his research on the English idioms from ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions and discusses the macrostructure of an idioms dictionary from the semantically-oriented perspective. The results are expected to benefit the compilation of the dictionary of English idioms and the decoding and encoding needs of the learners.

Concerning register variation, Yang Xinzhang in ‘The Linguistic Features of Knowledge Construction in Chemistry Textbooks’ studies the constructions of the chemical knowledge in three widely-used undergraduate chemical textbooks linguistically from ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions, which are expected to instruct the textbook writing and invoke active learning.

The 21 papers contributes to SFL in five ways: first, they showcase the state of the art of SFL in China from the outside by Halliday and Martin and
from the inside in the voices of the Chinese contributors who present their latest researches on SFL in a systematic way in the 19 papers among which ten involve the relevant studies in the Chinese system; second, they cover the main research fields in SFL with the overt indexes – graphology and phonology, lexis, word group, clause and clause complex, text, typology, semiotics, multimodality, stylistics, translation, teaching, lexicography, and register variation; third, the theories involved stretch from ranks, strata, metafunctions, instantiation, semiotics, genre, register, appraisal to multimodality, covering both the classical concepts and the latest developments in SFL; fourth, the research methods extend from case studies to corpus-based approach; finally, the data are ascribed to either the single language system or the comparative analyses of different languages.

This volume is a meticulous and valuable resource of articulating the state of the art of SFL in China for the linguists and the students who are fascinated with Chinese and/or SFL. The contributors not only lead the way to SFL founded by Halliday who ‘grew up with two fascinations: one is being to go to China … His other fascination was language’ (Webster, 2015: 3), but also show their specific scenes that they have cultivated rooted in China. The 21 papers illustrate the insightful points of the developments of SFL in different areas in China as to be considered as an invaluable academic collection.

References


