

# ***AN INTRODUCTION TO FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR*** **(Third Edition)**

**M.A.K. Halliday & Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen**

*London: Edward Arnold, 2004/2014*

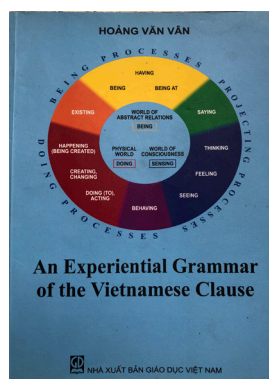
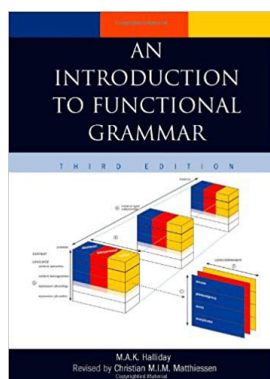
# ***AN EXPERIENTIAL GRAMMAR OF THE VIETNAMESE*** ***CLAUSE***

**Hoang Van Van**

*Hanoi: Education Publishing House, 2012*

Nguyen Thuy Phuong Lan\*

*Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, VNU University of Languages  
and International Studies, Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*



## **1. Introduction**

The books under review are both about systemic functional grammar. The first book is *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, third edition by M.A.K. Halliday & Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen (2004/2014). The second one is *An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause* by Hoang Van Van (2012). As will be seen, in his *An Experiential*

*Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause* Hoang Van Van based himself on the systemic functional grammar framework as proposed by Halliday (1985/1994, 2012) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2004/2014). Therefore, in what follows, we will examine Halliday & Matthiessens' book first.

## **2. An Introduction to Functional Grammar**

*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, third edition is 689 pages long. It was

\* Tel.: 84-912210707

Email: ntplan1011@gmail.com

originally written by Halliday himself and the first edition came out in 1985 with many subsequent printings. In 1994, the book was re-edited by Halliday and was published under the second edition also with many subsequent printings. In 2004, the book was revised by Matthiessen and was published under the third edition. In this edition, although the title was retained, much of the book was expanded, providing more texts for illustration and more figures and diagrams to talk about systemic dimensions of grammar in terms of both functions and systems. The book includes two parts with ten chapters. The first part (consisting of five chapters) is concerned with the description of various aspects of the clause; and the second part (also consisting of five chapters) describes aspects of other grammatical units which are referred to by Halliday & Matthiessen respectively as above the clause, below the clause and beyond the clause. An overview of the ten chapters in Halliday & Matthiessen's book is provided below.

Chapter 1 analyses the relationship between text and grammar. What really captures my attention in this chapter is that the authors see texts as a specimen or an artefact and I find their view justifiable when they state that some understanding of grammar can help analyse and interpret texts. In this chapter, the authors introduce basic theoretical concepts for what they call "architecture of language". The concepts discussed include axis, stratification, instantiation, metafunction, and composition. The compositional structure that is called 'constituency' is mentioned at phonological, graphological, and lexicogrammatical levels.

Chapter 2 is interesting to read, especially when the authors analyse how semantic relationships are construed by grammatical items via the analysis of Mandela's speech, enabling readers to uncover the issue and

learn how to "unfold the text as logogenesis" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 18). The chapter also introduces some new concepts including explanation of the concept lexicogrammar which embodies the unity of lexis and grammar. The authors explain that lexis and grammar form two poles of a single cline with lexis, viewed from grammatical perspective, "appear as medium of delicacy grammar" Halliday & Matthiessen (2004). In addition, as mentioned by the authors, "systemic grammar is organized around the concept of grammaticalisation whereby meanings is construed in networks of interrelated contrasts", and grammar system is characterized by three properties namely closure, generality and proportionality.

Chapters 3, 4, 5 represent different functional aspects of the clause and different "functional configurations" which make up different strands of meaning including clause as a message, clause as exchange and clause as representation. The three kinds of functions or meanings are described thoroughly in each of the chapters mentioned. It is noticeable that the illustration and explanation of the meanings are presented visually, bringing more scientific touch to the book. Furthermore, these infographics provide the reader with a simpler and systemic look at grammar rather than intricate information as it is normally presented. Examples can be found on pages 80, 82, 108, 135, 158, 165. I also feel that the detailed analysis of the corpus in the chapters can be great guidelines for novice text analysts like me.

Part II of the book describes grammatical units such as below the clause, above the clause and beyond the clause. Below the clause consists of nominal group, verbal group, adverbial group, prepositional and conjunction groups. These below-the-clause units are included and discussed in Halliday &

Matthiessens' *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* since they "serve different functions in the clause" (p. 310). This is important in mapping between classes at phrase/group ranks and functions at clause rank, showing the one-to-one relationship between classes. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004/2014), if traditional grammar helps show each component in the clause structure, systemic functional grammar also focuses on the functions of each component in relation to the clause functions.

The clause complex is explored in Chapter 7. This is a unit above the clause. In this chapter, Halliday & Matthiessen look at grammar "from above" the clause, as stated by the authors, via which they investigate how (simple) clauses are linked together and how texts are organized in the rhetorical-relational way. Based on the Hallidayan systemic functional framework (Halliday, 1973, 1978; Martin, 1992; Hasan & Parrett, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995; and many others), Halliday & Matthiessen (2004/2014) distinguish the clause complex along three dimensions: metafunction, rank, and stratification. The authors (2004, p. 369) state: "In terms of metafunction, it (the clause complex) is organized by the logical mode of the ideational metafunction, constructing with circumstantial argumentations of the clause (experiential) and cohesive sequences (textual). This means that the organization of the clause complex is based on a univariate model rather than a multivariate one, just like complexes at other ranks and like groups – clause rank; and it is thus related to the clause in terms of logical complexing rather than in terms of experiential constituency. In terms of stratification, a clause complex realizes a semantic sequence of projection or expansion;...". Thus, in a clause complex, two major types of relationships are recognized

and discussed systematically in Halliday & Matthiessens' grammar; they are, degrees of interdependency and logico-semantic relation. What is really impressive is the discussion is visually described with abundance of analysis of the texts as examples, enabling the reader to systemize types of relations between clauses as well as the underlying meanings of each. Chapter 8 is, as intended by the authors, an addition to chapter 7, thus for the most part of the chapter the authors exemplify the group and phrase complexes via detailed analysis of the corpus.

Chapter 9 is concerned with cohesion and discourse, what Halliday & Matthiessen refer to as: "around the clause". This is also an interesting chapter to read. First, the authors confirm that texts and systems are not different phenomena, but different just when seen from up close (appears as texts) or distance (appears as system). Text and system form a "*cline of instantiation*". The chapter, as mentioned, centers on cohesion, but it focuses not just on the system of cohesion, but also its relation to semantics. Halliday & Matthiessen confirm that lexico-grammar has evolved textual resources (system of cohesion) for creating logogenetic patterns and cohesive links (p. 586).

Chapter 10, which is also the final chapter, looks at grammatical features beyond the clause. The authors discuss metaphorical modes of expression. Semantic domains are clearly defined before the discussions of the metaphorical expressions (metaphor of mood, modality, and ideational metaphors). The most interesting part to read, however, is the first one in the chapter, which provides a deep insight into the relationship between lexico-grammar and semantics with the confirmation that the clause is a "tri-functional construct" (p. 589). Overall, as confirmed by Halliday and Matthiessen, "sometimes the effects of metaphorical

expression is all what is needed” to understand a text and “metaphorical interpretation ... suggests how an instance in the text may be referred to the system of the language as a whole” so it is significant to study grammatical metaphor – a kind of grammar that lies behind a discourse or ‘text linguistics’ (p. 658).

### 3. An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause

*An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause* was first published in Vietnamese in 2002. It was reprinted in 2005, and in 2012 the full and revised English version was published by Vietnam National Education Publishers. As a student of the late eminent Prof. Emerita Ruquaiya Hasan and influenced by the systemic functional theory developed by M.A.K. Halliday, Hoang Van Van has applied successfully insights of systemic functional linguistics to the analysis of one aspect of the Vietnamese clause: the experiential meaning realized in the transitivity system (or system of process types) in Vietnamese. In other words, the book, as stated by the author, is “a functional description of the Vietnamese experiential grammar” (p. 12) based on systemic functional grammar theory developed by Halliday and other systemicists.

The book is organized into three parts. Part 1 provides a foundation for the author’s description of the Vietnamese experiential clause in the second part. This part includes four chapters to introduce the Vietnamese language, Vietnamese grammar, systemic functional linguistics framework by Halliday as the basis for investigation into the Vietnamese clause, as well as the notion of clause in Vietnamese. Part 2, consisting of five chapters, is an in-depth investigation into the transitivity system in Vietnamese. Part 3 is the conclusion in which

the author summarizes what has been explored, makes some suggestions for further research. Details of each chapter in the three parts are presented as follows:

The first chapter provides some introductory information about Vietnam, the language and its people, aims and scope of the book, data and descriptive strategies, and conventions on glosses and symbols.

Chapter 2 provides information about the history of Vietnamese language and concludes that Vietnamese grammar was strongly influenced by French grammar, then American structuralist approach in the South and European structuralism in the North. The author also reviews *An Outline of Functional Grammar of Vietnamese* by Cao Xuan Hao (1991/2004), via which the Vietnamese readers can capture a better understanding or, for some, a new look at the Vietnamese language. From the review, four major drawbacks of the reviewed grammatical studies have been pointed out: (1) clause is one of the most important categories in the grammar of any language, seen from the view point of functional linguistics but is not pointed out; (2) meaning is often dealt with in terms of lexis (word-based) rather than grammar both lexis and grammar; (3) language is seen as a set of rules rather than a resource for making meaning; and (4) social aspects of language is largely neglected (p. 71).

From important remarks in chapter 2, Hoang Van Van devotes the whole Chapter 3 to reviewing systemic functional linguistics as developed by Halliday and other systemic linguists. In particular, he re-examines Halliday’s important concepts underlying systemic functional theory and comes to the conclusion that it is useful to apply systemic functional linguistics to the description of Vietnamese grammar since it lays emphasis on

both the potential and the actual or the system and the instances of language, thus providing deeper insights into the nature of language.

Based on the systemic functional framework, Hoang Van Van explores the notion of clause in Chapter 4 and acquaints the reader with this critical notion (which, to him, is somewhat similar to the notion of simple sentence in traditional grammar). He concludes that like English the clause in Vietnamese is one of the most important grammatical categories which can be conceptualized along three dimensions of stratification, rank, and metafunction.

In Part Two, the whole of Chapter 5 is devoted to the exploration of the basic notions that are related to the description of the Vietnamese experiential grammar. Here Hoang Van Van starts his chapter with a review of the basic concepts of transitivity and the transitivity frameworks as developed by Halliday (1985, 1994, 2012) and Matthiessen (1995) for English, Shore (1992) for Finnish, and Martin (1996) for Tagalog. Hoang Van Van then develops a framework to describe the transitivity system (system of process types) of the Vietnamese experiential grammar, which consists of three super-ordinate options: doing process (consisting of material and behavioural processes), projecting process (consisting of mental and verbal processes), and being process (consisting of relational and existential processes). These process types, their participants and incumbent circumstances are described in detail in Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Chapter 10 wraps up what has been discussed, points out some limitations of the research and makes some suggestions for further studies.

Overall, it can be seen that although *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* is

concerned mainly with the description of the English clause, it lays theoretical foundations for the development of *An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause*. From the review above, we can see that the two books share some similarities and differences as follows:

The focus of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* is Grammar, with consideration of below, around and beyond the clause, while the focus of *An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause* is on only one aspect of the Vietnamese clause - the experiential meaning realized in the transitivity system and the theoretical framework for this study is from the former one.

The two studies show that the clause in both English and Vietnamese can be seen from around or within, and from above. However, while the English clause can be seen from below (i.e., phonological unit clause relation), this may not be the case for the clause in VN. In fact, the mode of expression for MODE choices in Vietnamese clauses are prosodic rather than segmental as in English clauses as stated by Halliday (1984) and Matthiessen (1990) and the reason may be due to “language-specific” Hoang Van Van (2012, p. 111).

The main difference may be, as stated by Hoang Van Van, while Halliday and other systemicists foreground either systemic or structure, Hoang Van Van strikes a balance between two by providing system networks and presenting examples to illustrate how various systemic choices are realized by the structures.

## 4. Evaluation

### 4.1. Contribution

The third edition of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* by Halliday and Matthiessen, is an invaluable scholarly reference for teachers, students and researchers



of linguistics, especially those who are concerned about functional grammar and discourse analysis. The book provides readers with a better understanding of the relation between grammar, meaning and discourse. It also provides the reader with key concepts that form functional theory. It is a must-read for those who want to analyse, compare and interpret texts in large corpora. It is noticeable that the authors could employ an application of a software (**Sysfan**) to the analysis of the corpus. In terms of visualisation, the book represents concepts in a visually friendly and systemic way. Following are some of the comments on the book by scholars:

*An Introduction to Functional Grammar* is “...an invaluable presentation of, and rationale for, the central descriptive apparatus of Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar of English... essential reading for all students of English textual structure, teeming with insights.” (Michael Toolan, University of Birmingham, UK)

‘It is hard to imagine anyone in the field of applied linguistics or ‘linguistics applied’ that does not recognise the ever increasing insights that this edition of SFG continues to give in seeing language from so many different perspectives. Its value for teachers and researchers is immeasurable.’ In his book reviews, he also states that “Not just in text analysis already alluded to but also as a source of insight into children’s language development.” (Foley, 2005)

The book has also been considered to bring “great joy and comfort to see a theory keep renewing itself while sticking to its basic views about the relationship between language, text and society” (Zhanzi, 2004).

*Studies in Second Language Acquisition* - a journal of international scope devoted to the scientific discussion of acquisition or use of non-native and heritage language confirms

that “Anyone who claims any interest in practical grammar and its relationship to theoretical grammar should certainly familiarise themselves with it (*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*)”.

*An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause* is a reader-friendly reference book. It is useful and practical to those who want to explore in-depth into Vietnamese grammar from systemic functional approach. With the easy-to-read writing style, Hoang Van Van walks the readers from abstract to concrete exemplification, and what is appreciated is the well-written concluding remarks of each chapter, enabling readers to round up his discussion in the chapter. His visualization and method of rendering the abstract concepts is also a commendable point of the book.

#### 4.2. Critique

This third edition *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* by Halliday & Matthiessen has been considered a great improvement from the first and the second editions, and a must-read book for teachers, students, researchers working with functional grammar. It, however, appears to be hard to handle here and there due to its abstract concepts. As Foley (2005) comments, though the concepts such as ‘instantiation’ (p. 26) is important, it “can cause some difficulty when it comes to giving an explanation in the classroom or lecture theatre are substantially fleshed out in this new edition.”

Another minor point to look at is the use of the diagrams which may need further adjudgment as mentioned by Foley (Ibid.): “In the actual book itself, there are diagrams which are also functionally questionable. No doubt this is partly due to the quest to show the delicacy that is involved in a particular grammatical network. The diagram (p. 302) is an example of this. There are also some minor

errors in some of the diagrams (p. 32) as on ‘morpheme’ for morpheme..... and..... also the availability of a website to further one’s explorations of areas of the grammar.”.

In *An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause*, as Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh et al (2017) comments, Hoang Van Van notes “some troubles (indeterminacy) that need to be shot. He suggests classifying ambiguous behavioural clauses in Vietnamese into paramaterial (clauses that lie on the borderline between material and behavioural processes), para-verbal (clauses that lie on the borderline between behavioural and verbal processes), and paramental (clauses that lie on the borderline between behavioural and mental processes). However, Hoang Van Van does not go into detail to show how the troubles should be shot”. It is expected that this will be dealt with in his next edition or a new book on Functional Grammar of Vietnamese. Moreover, admire the book much as I do though, I feel that it would be ideal if the author added some further synthesis or some guidance to the possible readers on how to apply the book to their own work rather than just the chapter summary in the CODA. This would, as I feel, create an echo to a great deal of work he has done.

## 5. Application of the books

These books are, as mentioned above, highly recommended to those who work in the field of language education and functional linguistic research. They have successfully depicted the panorama of the “architecture of language”: the language dimensions, the language strata and the realisation relationship between the strata, the making meaning functions of language via the meta-function, and the clause (from below, around/within/and above). Every chapter of both of the books is useful to my investigation into and comparison of the discourse and grammar

of Economics specialized journals, especially Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 of the former and chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 of the latter. They can be invaluable scholarly references for discourse analysts, researchers and classroom teachers as well.

To conclude my review, I would like to state that personally, I find Halliday & Matthiessens’ book extremely interesting and illuminating. This is because it provides us with deep insights into the relationship between grammar, meanings and discourse semantics. The book brings to the reader the whole range of corpus analysis, assisting them as they make their way into the theory of systemic functional grammar. Hoang Van Van’s book can also be a highly recommended reading for those who are interested in the study of Vietnamese grammar from the systemic functional perspective. This is because it offers an overview of the history of Vietnamese language, factors affecting Vietnamese language, the concepts and the role of the clause in Vietnamese as well as an in-depth analysis of the experiential grammar of the Vietnamese clause, paving the way for the description of other aspects of Vietnamese systemic functional grammar.

## References

### Vietnamese

Halliday, M. K. A. (2012). *Dẫn luận ngữ pháp chức năng*. In lần thứ 3. Hoàng Văn Vân dịch. Hà Nội: Nxb. Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội.

### English

Foley, J. A. (2005). Book Review: An Introduction to Functional Grammar 3rd edition. *Regional Language Centre Journal*, 36(3), 387-388.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1973). *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. London: Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. K. A. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. First Edition. London: Edward Arnold.

- Halliday, M. K. A. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Second Edition. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. and C. M. I. M. Matthiessen (2004/2014). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Third Edition. Great Britain: Hodder Arnold.
- Hasan, R. & G. Perrett (1994). Learning to Function with the other Tongue: A Systemic Functional Perspective on Second Language Teaching. In T. Odlin (Ed.), *Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar* (pp. 179-226). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoang Van Van (2012). *An Experiential Grammar of the Vietnamese Clause*. Hanoi: Education Publishing House.
- Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (1995). *Lexicogrammatical Cartography: English Systems*. Tokyo: International Language Sciences Publishers.
- Martin, J.R. (1992). *English Text: System and Structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Martin, J. R. (1996). Transitivity in Tagalog: A functional Interpretation of Case. In M. Berry, C. Butler, R. Fawcett & G. Huang (Eds.), *Meaning and Form: Systemic Functional Interpretations. Meaning and Choice in Language: Studies for Michael Halliday*. Vol. LVII. Norwood, NJ.: Ablex.
- Shore, S. (1992). *Aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar of Finnish*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
- Zhanzi, L. (2004). Review of An Introduction to Functional Grammar. Third Edition. *International Linguistic Community Online*. Retrieved from <https://linguistlist.org/issues/15/15-3129.html>
- Nguyen Thi Tu Trinh et al. (2017). Some Suggestions on How to identify and Classify Behavioral processes in English and Vietnamese. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 33(3), 120-132. Retrieved from <http://www.vjol.info/index.php/NCNN/article/viewFile/30176/25657>

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**M.A.K. Halliday** (1925-2018) was a renowned British-born Australian linguist, teacher, and proponent of neo-Firthian theory who viewed language basically as a social phenomenon. He was professor of linguistics and then emeritus professor in linguistics at the University of Sydney, Australia. He is well-known as the chief architect of the world-widely recognised systemic functional theory. He worked in various regions of language study, both theoretical and applied, and was concerned with applying the understanding of the basic principles of language to the theory and practices of education. For more detail, visit <http://www.ello.uos.de/field.php/TheoryModelMethod/MAKHalliday>.

**C.M.I.M. Matthiessen** is currently professor of linguistics at Hong Kong Polytech University. His research interests include systemic-functional theory and metatheory, modelling of the meaning base of a text processing system, multilinguality, systemic functional typology and the application of functional theory and description in discourse interpretation. He has had many studies in languages, discourse analysis, and systemic functional linguistics. For more detail, visit <https://www.polyu.edu.hk/eng/people/academic-staff?staffid=3>.

**Hoang Van Van** is currently professor in linguistics at VNU University of Languages and International Studies. He is known for his research in the application of systemic functional theory to the description of Vietnamese and to the analysis of the translation process. He is the translator of Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Second Edition) and several other linguistics monographs from English into Vietnamese. He is general editor and author of the two English textbook series for schools in Vietnam: the English textbook series for Vietnamese upper secondary schools (currently in use throughout Vietnam) and the 10-year English textbook series for schools in Vietnam under the Vietnamese Government's National Foreign Languages 2020 Project (currently being trialled in selected schools throughout Vietnam). Hoang Van Van can be emailed at [vanhv@vnu.edu.vn](mailto:vanhv@vnu.edu.vn) or [vanhv.sdh@gmail.com](mailto:vanhv.sdh@gmail.com)