

The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series

Edward McDonald

Grammar West to East

The Investigation of Linguistic Meaning
in European and Chinese Traditions

 Springer

The M.A.K. Halliday Library Functional Linguistics Series

Series editors

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About the Series

This series focuses on studies concerning the theory and application of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It bears the name of Professor M.A.K. Halliday, as he is generally regarded as the founder of this school of linguistic thought. The series covers studies on language and context, functional grammar, semantic variation, discourse analysis, multimodality, register and genre analysis, educational linguistics and other areas. Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional model of language inspired by the work of linguists such as Saussure, Hjelmslev, Whorf, and Firth. The theory was initially developed by Professor M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues in London during the 1960s, and since 1974 it has held an international congress every year at various continents around the world. It is well-known for its application in a variety of fields, including education, translation, computational linguistics, multimodal studies, and healthcare, and scholars are always exploring new areas of application.

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Edward McDonald
Sydney, NSW, Australia

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MAKH

凱茹 韓
禮
德

To Michael and Ruqaiya

*“with increasing admiration, wonder, and
affection”*

τῷ Μιχαίλῳ τῷ γραμματικώτατῳ
à Ruqaiya, la plus saussurienne

ORTA OCCIDENTE	Grammar	西
ORIENTE ASCITA	West	文
	to	東
	East	漸

<p><i>Grammar West to East</i> ‘grammar [moving from] west to east’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cf “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet” (Kipling) – simple grammatical structure, lexical parallelism
<p><i>Orta occidentē orientē ascita</i> ‘risen from-falling by-rising adapted’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lexical head (<i>grammatica</i> ‘grammar’) omitted, implied by the feminine gender of the verbs (Latin abstract nouns mostly feminine) – nominative + ablative (source) + ablative (agent) + nominative: complex interlocked grammatical parallelism via noun cases – <i>orta</i> & <i>orientē</i> two forms (participles) of the same verb <i>orior</i> ‘rise’: <i>orta</i> ‘risen’, <i>orientē</i> ‘rising = east’ – <i>orientē</i> & <i>occidentē</i> lexical opposites: <i>orientē</i> ‘rising = east’, <i>occidentē</i> ‘falling = west’
<p>西文東漸 <i>xī wén dōng jiàn</i> ‘west pattern east infiltrate’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cf 西學東漸 <i>xī xué dōng jiàn</i> ‘west learning east infiltrate’ – very simple grammatical structure: modifier + modified, modifier + modified – lexical parallelism: location + process, location + process

Acknowledgements

The whole enterprise of research is a communal one, and I have relied on a number of different communities in the writing of the current book, something that has been particularly important for a project undertaken, for various reasons, in a degree of academic isolation. I am grateful to all the following, as well as to other people I haven't been able to mention, for bringing their encouragement and expertise to bear on a process that has required a substantial amount of learning on my part.

Pride of place here must go to the dedicatees of this book, the late (as of June 2015) Ruqaiya Hasan and (as of April 2018) Michael Halliday, academic twin souls as well as life partners, who were not only my teachers and supervisors at bachelor's and master's levels at Sydney and Macquarie Universities but generous and understanding mentors throughout the peripatetic academic career of what I have previously referred to as "this academic outlier". This book is dedicated not to their memory but to their living presence in the ideas and framing of the questions addressed by the book, an influence all the more important for rarely being explicitly noted. Michael was, as he liked to say, above all a grammarian, Greek *grammatikós*; and I have borrowed a superlative originally applied to Aristarchus (c.217–145 BCE), the teacher of Dionysius Thrax (c.170–90 BCE), in hailing him as *grammatikótatos* 'the most grammarian'. That this is no mere empty praise can be seen by selecting, from within the impressive range of his body of work brought together in the 11 volumes of his *Collected Works*, only his work *On Grammar*, appropriately enough Volume 1, and including his *Studies in English Language* (Vol. 7) and *Studies in Chinese Language* (Vol. 8). From the point of view of linguistic and intellectual history, we can clearly trace the process by which Michael reinvented ancient ideas about grammar in the European tradition and applied them to modern needs, as well as incorporating insights from the modern Chinese linguists who were among his first teachers of linguistics in the late 1940s, Luo Changpei 羅常培 at Peking University and Wang Li 王力 at Lingnan University. Michael often stressed how attentive Wang Li in particular had been to the importance of understanding the history of thinking about language, and this was an emphasis Michael matched and developed throughout his long scholarly career, something that must count as one of the key influences in the gestation of this book.

The other key influence has been the ideas of Saussure, and although Michael followed his teacher J.R. Firth in remaining rather reserved in his enthusiasm for Saussure's work, Ruqaiya was convinced that the ideas of this "Father of Modern Linguistics" repaid more serious attention than they commonly received. Although as a University of Sydney undergraduate, I did not have the good fortune to take the course on the *Cours* Ruqaiya taught for many years at Macquarie University, I was lucky enough to sit in on a BA Honours course taught by her when we were colleagues at the National University of Singapore in 1999–2000, a course that placed Saussure's contribution firmly in the context of the most rigorous thinking about language, society and mind in his time and ours. In the intervening decade and a half, I have found myself increasingly drawn to his work, no doubt helped by the upsurge of interest in the Genevan Master sparked by the publication of his own notes for a textbook on general linguistics discovered in the Saussure family mansion in Geneva in 1996, and along with numerous other scattered writings published as *Ecrits de linguistique générale* in 2002, and in English translation as *Writings in General Linguistics* in 2006. In fact I had the pleasure of introducing Ruqaiya to that book and a popular guide to Saussure's work that draws heavily on the new materials, *Saussure: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Bouissac 2010); as well as some of the more interesting new responses to Saussure's ideas, such as a study by an Australian literary scholar I think many linguists would have liked to have written, *What if Derrida was wrong about Saussure?* (Daylight 2011) (When I showed this book to Ruqaiya, her immediate response was: "There is no 'what if!'"). The more complete picture of Saussure's ideas that emerges from these writings shows him to be a supremely critical and self-critical thinker, worrying away at the issues until he has explored all of their implications; and I think in this regard we may legitimately draw a parallel between Saussure and Hasan, something which no doubt at least partly accounted for her consistent attention to and respect for his ideas and in my eyes at least makes her more than worthy of the superlative "the most Saussurean".

The immediate spur for this book came from a request from Prof. J.R. (Jim) Martin in Linguistics at the University of Sydney to teach a postgraduate course in the history of linguistics. This formed part of a lecture series that since the mid-2000s has been offered to postgraduate students working in systemic functional linguistics (SFL) from universities around Sydney. In the first semester of 2013, I offered a 12-week course under the title "Grammar West to East: Graeco-Roman and Sinitic linguistic traditions and the development of modern grammatics", and the members of that class, who keenly took up the challenge of applying a historical perspective to their own areas of research, were the following, listed by alphabetical order of surnames: Jennifer Blunden, Yaegan Doran, Talia Gill, Hao Jing, Inako Ayumi, Harni Kartika, Mohammad Makki and Kent Ramos.

Taking place immediately afterwards and in the first semester of 2013, just down the hall from the SFL postgraduate course were the regular Friday afternoon SFL seminars hosted by the Linguistics Department at the University of Sydney. In that particular semester, Dr. Jo Lander of the School of Public Health at that university was the welcoming and inclusive organiser, who, after putting up with me for a number of weeks raising questions that managed to relate the ideas of Saussure to every imaginable context, generously suggested I speak to the group myself on the

topic, which I did on 31 May 2013 under the following title: Do We Need to Revive the Concept of a “General Linguistics”? Historical Reflections on the Shared Tenets of Modern Linguistics Since Saussure.

Later the same year, a presentation under the same title at the Australian Systemic Functional Linguistics Association (ASFLA) Conference at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne on 1–3 October 2013 was a last minute addition to the program, kindly facilitated by conference organiser Dr. Kristina Love. In the following year, a follow-up presentation to the Friday SFL seminar group, reflecting the ongoing progress of the book, was given on 21 March 2014 under the following title: “Philology”, “Minor Learning (小學 *xiaoxue*)” and “Modern Linguistics: Interrogating the Current State of Linguistics Through the European and Chinese Traditions.

Further progress on the book was reported at another ASFLA Conference, this time at the Australian Catholic University in North Sydney on 27–29 September 2016, kindly inserted into the program by organiser Dr. Sally Humphrey, under the following title: How Latin Grammar Turned Chinese: A Test for an “International” Modern Linguistics.

In Ruqaiya’s home department at Macquarie University, A/Prof. David Butt and A/Prof. Annabelle Lukin, firm academic colleagues and generous and caring supporters of both Ruqaiya and Michael in their later years, as well as enthusiastic – and impatient – encouragers of this current research, hosted me for a research seminar on 4 October 2016 under the following title: Meaning as the Black Hole at the Centre of Modern Linguistics and Semiotics: Some Lessons from the History of Linguistics.

As the book was gradually taking shape in Sydney between 2013 and 2015, the project was hugely facilitated by a position as Honorary Adjunct Researcher in the School of Literature, Art & Media at the University of Sydney, supported by Prof. Martin and then Head of School Prof. Annamarie Jagose, which gave me access to the matchless facilities of Fisher Library. Dr. Nick Riemer of the Departments of English and Linguistics at the same university provided another academic home in the form of the reading group on the History and Philosophy of Linguistics coordinated by him. The weekly meetings of the reading group during semester time for much of this period provided a very important point of contact for this solo scholar. The group did in fact take an early draft of certain chapters of this book as readings for discussion, and many of the group members later read part or all of the pre-final draft. Members of the group during this period, again listed in alphabetical order of surnames, included Eran Asoulin, Derek Herforth, Sam Lewin, James McElvenny, Nick Riemer, David Scarratt, Thomas Raysmith, Vsevolod (Seva) Vlaskine, Simon Varey and Peter Wylie.

Two members of the group I need to single out for special mention are the following: Dr. Derek Herforth, formerly of the Chinese Department at Sydney University, for generously bringing his expertise on Classical Chinese grammar to the question of traditional Chinese conceptions of language, among many other issues; and Thomas Raysmith, then a Masters student in the Sydney University Philosophy Department, for so clearly and memorably distilling for this

non-philosopher Aristotle's ideas on the relationships between language, mind and the world. Also in 2013, James McElvenny launched his blog *History and Philosophy of the Language Sciences*, which since then has provided a regular and accessible online forum for discussions on the history of ideas about language, an opportunity he generously extended to me for my posting of 12 June 2013 under the following title: The Creation of 'Parts of Speech' for Chinese: 'Translingual Practice' Across Graeco-Roman and Sinitic Traditions.

When I moved to Sun Yat-Sen University in 2015, the very first master's course I offered was titled "Grammar West to East", which turned up on the course schedule under the title 西语东渐, an inspired riff on the common phrase 西学东渐 coined by Ms. Li Li 李莉, Secretary of Scientific Research and Graduate Studies of the School of Foreign Languages – acknowledged here with thanks – and which has been slightly modified (with the help of Dr. Wang Pin 王品 of Shanghai Jiao Tong University) to give the Chinese title of the current book. That group of bright, enthusiastic and multi-linguistically and multiculturally fluent students proved the perfect foil for me in focusing and clarifying the argument of this book, listed by alphabetical order of surnames as follows: Hu Yizhou 胡逸舟, Huang Jiamin 黄嘉敏, Li Ping 李平, Liang Lingfeng 梁灵枫, Mao Cheng 毛成, Tang Yifan 唐弋帆, Wang Kun 王坤, Ye Linlin 叶林琳 and Zhang Yue 张跃. I would particularly like to thank Wang Kun who, in a beautifully argued final essay for the course, drew my attention to the grammatical thinking contained in Liu Xie's *Wenxin Diaolong*.

My first academic presentation at Sun Yat-Sen University, also inspired by my research for this book, took place as part of a Symposium on 8–9 September 2015 in honour of then recently deceased Ruqaiya Hasan, under the following title: Reconciling Social Behaviour and Semiotic Patterning: The Historical Evolution of a Socially Responsible Approach to Language.

At the end of that year, I was honoured to be asked to present some of the results of my research for the book at an International Conference on Functional Language Typology held on 12–16 December 2015 at the Martin Centre for Applicable Linguistics at Shanghai Jiaotong University under the following title: From *Grammatica* to *Grammaire* to *Gelangma* 葛郎瑪 to *Wenfa* 文法 to *Yufa* 語法: The Background to Developing a Functional Grammar for Chinese.

In the following year at the 16th Systemics Week, held at Chengdu Ligong University on 3–5 November 2016, I gave a revised version of this presentation under the same title. Later the same month at Sun Yat-Sen University, I was honoured to be invited by Prof. Chang Chenguang 常晨光 to present at the 18th Symposium on Functional Linguistics and Discourse Analysis held in the School of Foreign Languages on 24–25 November 2016 under the following title: Debates on Word Classes in Modern Chinese Grammars: Background to Systemic Functional Descriptions of Chinese.

Then back at Sun Yat-Sen towards the end of 2017, my former colleague Prof. Wendy Bowcher, Director of the Functional Linguistics Research Institute, allowed me to explore some of Michael's intellectual affiliations in a paper comparing his ideas with one of the towering figures of the twentieth-century American linguistics:

Refurbishing our Foundations for Language as Social Semiotic: What We Can Learn from Letting Hockett Speak to Halliday.

Although I was only able to visit my old stamping ground of Beijing once during the progress of this research, it was my master's study at Peking University (北大 Beida) in 1990–1992 that represented my first serious exposure to the sinophone linguistic tradition, and the range and quality of scholarship I was exposed to then has continued to reverberate throughout my subsequent research. Co-supervisor of my master's research in the English Department and then Head of Department, Prof. Hu Zhuanglin 胡壮麟, one of the famous “Gang of Nine” who arrived to study linguistics and literature at the University of Sydney in 1979, has himself made substantive contributions not only to the institutional establishment of systemic functional linguistics in China but in exploring the Chinese intellectual roots of that school, in particular tracing Wang Li's influence on Halliday. My other co-supervisor in the Chinese Department, the late Prof. Ye Feisheng 叶蜚声, as well as his long-term collaborator and incidentally one of my master's examiners, Prof. Xu Tongqiang 徐通锵, were at the forefront of illuminating and critiquing the intellectual roots of Modern Chinese grammatics, and Prof. Xu boldly put forward a 字本位 ‘character-based’ model for understanding the patterning of sound and wording in Chinese, a blend of traditional Chinese and Western notions that demonstrates the potential, as well as some of the problems, with the kind of rethinking of “mainstream linguistics” recommended in this book.

During my time at Beida, the 语言学小沙龙 Linguistics Circle launched by then PhD candidate Gao Yihong 高一虹 provided one of the earliest forums for my developing ideas about the interaction between Chinese and Western linguistics, and I was delighted to be invited by Prof. Gao, now Director of the Institute of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University, along with Deputy Director Prof. Gao Yanmei 高彦梅, to present to the Circle on 23 October 2017 a deepened and broadened version of an earlier paper under the following title: Reconciling Social Behaviour and Semiotic Patterning: The Historical Evolution of a Socially Responsible Approach to Language.

The stimulus of talking at the 小沙龙 to old friends and serious scholars in the linguistics of English helped to clarify many of the key ideas that inform the conceptual structure underpinning the current book. A balancing stimulus in a sinophone context came from similarly old friends and serious scholars at Beijing Foreign Studies University (北外 Beiwai) with the invitation from Prof Han Baocheng 韩宝成 of the Institute of Linguistics there to deliver the annual Xu Guozhang Lecture on 24 October 2017 under the following title: 拉丁语法学如何适应于汉语:汉语语法学再思考.

Here I enjoyed the benefit of input from long-term friends and eminent contributors to these debates such as Prof. Yao Xiaoping 姚小平 from Beijing Foreign Studies University and Prof. Shi Youwei 史有为, formerly of the Central Nationalities University.

A long-term “foil” for my ideas about the linguistics of Chinese has been Prof. Shen Xiaolong 申小龙 of the Chinese Department of Fudan University, which along with the Chinese Department at Peking University, has been one of the key

historical sites for the evolution of Chinese grammatics. It was Gao Yihong who initially introduced me to Prof. Shen's work, and the whole Chinese Cultural Linguistics movement in which he has been a major figure, and she has continued to facilitate and have critical input into this exchange, one that has been productive of so much of my own research into Chinese grammatics. As I was nearing the completion of the current book, I was delighted to be approached by a PhD student of Prof. Shen's, Li Hao 李昊, whose queries relating to her PhD research entitled 中国文化语言学理论研究 reminded me how much I owe to the stimulus of Prof. Shen's ideas. In regard to the "major issues" of Chinese linguistics, and Chinese grammatics more specifically, Prof. Shen and I – if I may put it this way – agree on almost all of the questions, and almost none of the answers, a situation which has proven ideal for an ongoing stimulating and fruitful debate.

An even more direct influence on the genesis of the current book was the Creation of Modern Academic Disciplines in China project, a multidisciplinary endeavour launched and coordinated by Prof. John Makeham from the Australian National University. It was an old friend from his PhD days at that university, Andy Kirkpatrick, formerly of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, now at Griffith University, who brought me on to the Linguistics Node of that project and introduced me to K.K. Luke, formerly of Hong Kong University, now of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Both Andy and K.K. were inspiring and supportive colleagues in the effort to put together an edited volume on the creation of modern discipline of linguistics in China. Although various challenges – both scholarly and practical – have so far delayed the realisation of that project, I hope that the publication of this book, which owes so much to the stimulation and intellectual grounding it provided, may perhaps play a role in reviving it. K.K. along with Prof. Li Wei of University College London, as Editors of *Chinese Language and Discourse*, were also instrumental in facilitating the remarkably expeditious publication of a paper drawing directly on Part II of the book which came out in the December 2017 issue of the journal under the following title: The Challenge of a "Lacking" Language: The Historical Development of Chinese Grammaticals.

Saussure was adamant that linguistics needed to be understood in the wider context of a future discipline he dubbed "semiology", seemingly unaware that his older contemporary across the Atlantic, C.S. Peirce, was suggesting as similarly crucial for philosophy a comparable discipline he called "semeiotic". It was particularly timely then that, in the last couple of years while I was struggling to bring this book to a coherent conclusion, I was invited by Daniel Chandler, Emeritus Faculty Member at Aberystwyth University, to comment on the draft of the third edition of his exemplary guide through the tangled thickets of modern semiotics, *Semiotics: The Basics*. In donning my editor's hat and engaging closely with the wording of that draft, I was able to clarify many of my own ideas about a discipline that seems to offer promise and frustration in almost equal measure, and in particular to give Saussure, that more interpreted against – and edited against – than understood scholar his fair due.

Once the book had achieved a complete draft – to deliberately mystify the agency, as if this happy result was reached despite my own manifold doubts and feelings of inadequacy – it was then my task to find informed and critical readers whose role

was as much to point out areas in which I had claimed wrongly or too much, as to reassure me that the whole was not completely lacking in cogency. (Those who offered to read but for whatever reason found the task impossible to undertake may be reassured that, as the author of a book that blithely crosses millennia and numerous areas of expertise, I absolutely empathise with them!) My heartfelt gratitude goes out to those brave and generous souls who were able to bring their own areas of expertise to the task, crucial for a book that covers such a broad conceptual and chronological range. Those who read and commented on the final draft either in whole or in part were: Daniel Chandler, Helen Charters, Sam Lewin, James McElvenny, Wang Pin 王品, and Peter Wylie. In a rare privilege for the author of a historical work, Peter Fries was able to contextualise for me the ideas on meaning of his father, C.C. Fries. Graham Lock not only read and commented on the whole draft but went beyond the call of duty by putting me up/putting up with me in his house on Lamma Island for extended periods at the same time as he was working on the final draft of a book of his own: we were thus able to employ a Wodehousean trope “to encourage each other by word and gesture”, something that made the writing process a much more collegial and interactive one.

On one issue at least my readers were unanimous: that the framing of the argument as indicated by the original subtitle “European and Chinese traditions in the making of modern linguistics” was inadequate, and that it was in fact the issue of *meaning* that was key, an emphasis reflected in the revised subtitle. Many of the constructive suggestions they made I was able to take on board in revising the draft: those I was unable to deal with, I look forward to being elaborated or clarified in my own or others’ future research; whether within the fields of intellectual history and history of linguistics, or by the inclusion of a historical perspective in a much wider range of theoretical and descriptive work in the language sciences.

Ever since my absurdly over-extended period as a tertiary student – from whoa to go longer than my primary and secondary education combined – I have become used to doing academic writing wherever I could fit it in between teaching and other work commitments: while travelling on buses and trains, while waiting for friends to arrive or an event to start, in earlier years by way of an old-fashioned paper notebook and pen and in more recent times via the “notebook” (笔记本儿) of an increasingly battered laptop. Unlike other fellow academics who require strict peace and quiet for writing, I have always been much happier undertaking this task amid the clamour and bustle of a cafe, and three particular cafes have provided welcome space for a pensive figure sitting over a cup or two of coffee for hours on end. In Lane Cove in 2013–2015, it was the former Pablo and Rusty’s cafe, with manager Mark, chefs Liz and John, and wait staff Daniel, Hiro and Sophie; on Lamma in 2017–2018, it was Green Cottage in Yung Shue Wan, with manager Black 楠 and staff Ensie, Nancy and Zoe; and at Social & Co in Guangzhou from 2015 to 2018, owner Aaron McKenzie and staff Tiffany, Leslie, UD, Paddy, Tiana, Emile, Mary and Nicole. Many thanks to all for their friendly interest and care.

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Chapter 1

Briefing: Key Issues and Organisational Features of This Book



The problem

This book takes as its starting point three related claims: firstly, that the fundamental feature of language is **meaning**; secondly, that linguistic meaning can only be understood via **wording**; and thirdly, that modern **linguistics** has by and large failed to respond to the challenge of linking these two, and thus of putting the study of meaning on a sound theoretical footing. This is why, although this book is subtitled “An investigation of meaning...”, its main title contains the word **grammar**, because it is grammar that from its ancient Greek beginnings has been primarily concerned with wording, and hence with specifically linguistic meaning. The word “investigation” recalls the *historiē* ἱστορίη ‘enquiry, observation’ of Herodotus which gives us our word “history”, and denotes the fact that the chief mode of exploration employed here is a **historical** one, whereby the book goes back into the history of the study of language in order to illuminate the current situation of the language sciences. At the same time the mode of exploration is a **comparative** one, in that it puts side by side two different linguistic traditions, the Graeco-Roman or **European** one, and the **Chinese** one; on the grounds that the most effective way of understanding any one tradition is to compare it with another. These two traditions go back almost as long as each other, and for most of their history developed in isolation from each other. For reasons to do with the typological nature of Old Chinese, there was nothing corresponding to the study of grammar in the Chinese tradition, a state of affairs which persisted until the late nineteenth century when Chinese scholars deliberately and self-consciously took over the framework of Latin grammar to describe their own language, thus bringing the two traditions together in what has continued to be a close if frequently uncomfortable embrace.

As a guide for this complex historical and intellectual journey, the book uses the ideas of Swiss linguist **Ferdinand de Saussure** (1857–1913). This is not because Saussure provided all the *answers*, but rather that he came up with most of the relevant *questions*; and discussed them in ways that still make sense for contemporary

scholars, and so can be used to critique the current presuppositions of the discipline. Saussure was also, arguably, the first scholar to provide a usable model of meaning in language, although the implications of many of his ideas for the study of meaning have been resisted or ignored. Saussure's contribution to this age-old question may perhaps be most easily understood in the formulation of a contemporary American scholar John Ellis (1936–). While most theories of language would probably take the main purpose of language to be **communication**, Ellis argues that its prior function, both logically and practically, is **categorization**, in the sense that languages provide a set of usable categories for speakers to make sense of the world of their experience and function within it.

The implication of taking categorization as primary is that there is no language-common framework on which each language can draw, but rather that *each language provides its own framework* for making sense of the world of its speakers. Most contemporary theories of language, whether in linguistics or philosophy of language or other language-related areas of study, tend to downplay or even omit altogether the crucial contribution of individual languages in simplifying and ordering our experience, and hence are unable to account for the genuine complexity of how meanings are created through language. From a historical point of view, this book takes as its starting point the mutually influencing relationships between a **language**, its **writing system**, and **scholarship** on that language. That is to say, if each language effectively defines its own categories, by the same token it makes sense that ideas about language will derive from the particular patterning of the language(s) under examination as well as, in the case of the two traditions focused on here, from the writing systems that have been devised to represent that language in graphic form.

It is of course not necessary that a language have a written form in order for it to have a tradition of linguistic scholarship: the very highly developed tradition of Sanskrit linguistics, in origin and for much of its early history, seems to have been a purely oral one, buttressed by the religious importance assigned to the actual *sound* of the spoken word in the Vedic religion. However, for both the Graeco-Roman and Chinese traditions examined here, where learning to use the writing system was the first step in the educational process, it seems clear that the presence of writing provided an obvious visual metaphor for the language as a whole, and helped to bring into focus questions of the language's structure and meaning.

It is thus no accident that the fundamental unit of Greek linguistic scholarship was the *stoikheion* στοιχεῖον or 'element', which corresponded to the individual sounds of the language; and the same concept was seen as underlying the organisation of the physical world as well. Similarly in Chinese thought, the concept of *wén* 文 or 'pattern' was applied to most kinds of meaningful linguistic patterning, including 'script', 'writing', 'language', and 'text'; as well as seen to be a characteristic linking the human with the natural world. In both linguistic traditions, the method employed of building up larger structures out of smaller parts, commonly characterised in reverse as *reductive*, is one arguably based on the analogy of the written text as built up of individual graphic symbols, and this forms the basis of most traditional and modern analysis of language in these traditions.

As for the discipline of linguistics, inheritor of these traditions, it would probably be understood by most scholars in the contemporary language sciences to be both **modern** and **international**: that is, based on the most up-to-date thinking and empirical evidence; and not confined to any particular language or linguistic tradition but rather applicable to all human languages. In this book I hope to show that there are serious doubts about both of these claims. This book concentrates on what, following M.A.K. Halliday and to avoid ambiguity between the *object* under examination and its *study*, we may refer to as **grammar** and **grammatics** respectively: in Chinese, *yǔfǎ* 語法 and *yǔfǎxué* 語法學. Modern linguistics, at least in this sub-area of grammatics, and in the contemporary (mainly) **anglophone** and **sinophone** incarnations of the linguistic traditions examined here, has changed little in its fundamental categories and concepts since the days of ancient Greece and Rome. It is true that, at the turn of the twentieth century, the ideas of Saussure provided clear if somewhat schematic conceptual guidelines for the development of a modern discipline, which discipline indeed paid him the compliment of identifying him as its “Father”. However, in practice most linguists since Saussure have quietly resisted the more radical implications of his ideas, particularly with regard to grammatics, where the main concepts and terms still in use are for the most part the direct descendants of those introduced by the Greek grammarians starting from more than 2000 years ago.

The history

The overarching historical conclusion reached in this book is that current approaches to grammatics, as a central part of linguistics, are in no way universal but rather are rooted in the particular historical context of the Graeco-Roman world as filtered through subsequent European tradition. The book’s overall aim may be summed up as “using the past to serve the present”, but in a particular interpretation of that controversial motto. It attempts to respect the context and aims of past scholarship, but at the same time to use an account of how language has been “investigated” in different ways through history in order to relativize the current consensus. What this book sets out to do, therefore, rests on a pluralistic understanding of language scholarship past and present. Although it will be clear that as an individual scholar I have a particular view on what I understand language to be and what linguistics can do – which may be summed up in Saussure’s famous call for “[a] science which studies the role of signs as part of social life” – I am far from claiming this to be the only valid way of studying language. On the other hand, I have doubts as to whether the current mainstream of linguistics, which from a historical viewpoint has pretty much imposed a cognitive overlay atop a foundation of traditional grammar, fully merits the scientific status it claims for itself.

This is a history of ideas about language as much as a history of linguistics *per se*, and is concerned with ideas about language in relation to their social, cultural and ideological contexts, not just their strictly linguistic applications. It

draws on the thinking of philosophers, literary theorists, anthropologists, etc. as well as scholars of language, in order to get a broader sense of how an understanding of language was seen as relevant across the whole scholarly worlds of the Graeco-Roman and Chinese traditions. Such an approach helps us to avoid prejudging the scope or value of any particular model of language scholarship. For example, on the question of whether *graphology*, the study of writing systems, should be included in linguistics, linguists in the Chinese tradition would unhesitatingly answer “yes”, since graphology, *wénzìxué* 文字學, has been at the very core of that tradition since its beginnings. By contrast, while the European tradition is equally derived from the analysis of writing, and was for much of its history based squarely on the description of written texts, European linguists in the modern period have been rather equivocal about whether writing should enjoy a status equal to that of spoken language in the understanding of language as a whole.

In any case, the idea of an (autonomous) science of language is very much a modern invention: the pre-modern study of language was always directed towards some external goal. As Saussure reflected at the turn of the twentieth century, “[t]he notion of a *science of language* was postulated a little prematurely”; and it is debatable whether in the century since we have really become much more certain of its conceptual underpinnings. The notion of **the sciences of language** – which besides linguistics might be taken to include language pedagogy, translation and interpreting studies, phonetics and acoustics, speech synthesis and generation; alongside the modified or hyphenated “brands” of linguistics represented by cognitive linguistics, computational linguistics, socio-linguistics, psycho-linguistics and so on; and even taking in broader areas that are still crucially concerned with language such as literary studies, anthropology and ethnography, cognitive science, legal studies and so on – is probably still more well-defined than that of **a science of language**, i.e. linguistics. In other words, the fact that many areas of human life, and their associated areas of study, are deeply involved with language is much more widely accepted than is an understanding of what kind of thing language is, and how it should be characterised. I would argue that it is the reluctance to deal directly with meaning, and to see it as something actively constructed through wording, that largely accounts for this continuing fundamental uncertainty within linguistics as to its aims and methods.

Although the two traditions treated here developed in more or less complete isolation from each other, in the pre-modern period they began to impinge on each other: first from China to Europe, as the pioneering reports of the Jesuit missionaries in China began to filter back to European scholars; then from Europe to China, as the European powers began to take an increasing economic and then military interest in China. In European scholarship, the Chinese language took on a symbolic role as “the most other of other”, a language which represented the very opposite pole of the continuum of human language. In Chinese scholarship, the (Indo-) European language family took on, and to a certain extent still holds, a defining or baseline status for the Chinese language, almost as something that Chinese needs to “aspire to”.

To a significant extent, then, the two traditions have tended to define themselves negatively in terms of the other, and this has led to all sorts of dichotomous myth-making. In relation to China, a classic example is the European reinvention of Chinese characters as “ideographs”, or symbols of things or notions rather than of words, a myth that has developed great staying power over the past 400 years. In relation to Europe, a similarly persistent misunderstanding has been the idea, still very common in Chinese popular discourse, that grammar in the sense of word endings (in the sense in which “grammar” is contrasted with “syntax” in ordinary English usage) is largely a matter of meaningless or unnecessary elaboration, the usual examples being those of gender agreement or the use of articles and tense in many European languages, and that languages like Chinese that do without such “excrescences” are therefore more “efficient” or more “logical”.

Although such issues are often regarded as peripheral or even irrelevant in regard to the mainstream of the discipline, the position taken here would be that such “myths” do not take shape in isolation but rather form part of a whole ideological complex with broad cultural links, including links leading both to and from the scholarly realm. In attempting to move beyond such misleading dichotomies, this book sets out to compare point by point two sophisticated and long-lived traditions with very similar contexts and aims – the understanding and transmission of a canon of foundational texts – but with very different orientations. Although the importance of both spoken and written fluency was stressed in each tradition, in ancient Greece & Rome, where public speaking was a prominent aspect of the various republican systems in place for much of that historical period, there was more emphasis on the mastery of spoken rhetoric; whereas in China, where monarchical systems were the norm from earliest times and where the literate classes were almost always government officials, it was the mastery of bureaucratic written genres, and later those literary genres that featured in the entry examinations for the bureaucracy, that took precedence.

While these two traditions may not have had contact with each other before the modern period, they both influenced and were influenced by other traditions in their region. With China regarded as the undisputed cultural leader in its own region, its script and written language, as a prominent part of its rich cultural tradition, were much admired and taken over by neighbouring polities; in much the same way as Greek became the language of culture and scholarship in Western Asia in Hellenistic times, with Latin playing the same function later in Western Europe. The languages of the three polities neighbouring China – Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese – while typologically unrelated to Chinese, absorbed an enormous amount of vocabulary from it, and writing systems closely derived from the Chinese were developed for each language. The standard written language of the Chinese tradition, known in China as *wényán* 文言 ‘written language’ and in the region as *hànwén* 漢文 ‘Chinese writing’, commonly referred in English as ‘Classical Chinese’, was the main language of education and scholarship in the regions corresponding to modern day (northern) Vietnam, Korea and Japan up until the early twentieth century, and Chinese ideas about language formed the model for their own linguistic scholarly traditions.

In the centre of Eurasia, the Arabic world was both a benefactor of the European linguistic tradition and later a contributor to it. In the wake of the Arab conquest of the Middle East and North Africa from the mid seventh century onwards, the dynamic and wide-ranging tradition of learning that took shape inherited the Greek traditions of scholarship, including ideas about language, from the large portion of the Byzantine Empire which it had conquered. As a civilisation which reached from modern day Iran to southern Spain, it also enabled the spread of ideas from Asia across North Africa to Europe, and reintroduced many of the texts of Greek learning to Europe via Sicily and Andalusia (Muslim Spain) in the High Middle Ages from the eleventh century onwards.

The Sanskrit tradition based in Northern India was hugely influential in both North and South East Asia as the carrier of Buddhism. As one of the most sophisticated pre-modern traditions of language analysis, it had a significant influence on Chinese linguistics, particularly in phonology, from the third to fourth centuries CE onwards. A millennium and a half later, its “discovery” by British scholars attached to the British colonisation of India was of major importance: not only because here was a language which although half a world away from Europe was clearly intimately related to the European classical languages of Greek and Latin; but also because the sheer detail and sophistication of the analysis of the phonology and morphology of its own language, unequalled anywhere else in the world before the modern period, provided European linguists with a rigorous model they could adapt to their own uses.

In a comprehensive history of linguistics, these traditions, including the other East Asian traditions influenced by the Chinese, would be given equal prominence with those of Europe and China. I acknowledge the importance of these traditions here, but to incorporate them within the scope of this book would have made it too unwieldy, as well as going beyond my own personal areas of expertise. It is nevertheless important to stress that, despite the claim of the modern language sciences to be “international”, there is no good theoretical reason for giving the Graeco-Roman tradition priority over any of these other traditions. Likewise, although the modern language sciences based on that Graeco-Roman tradition claim to be (exclusively) scientific, they still have not radically interrogated their own fundamental categories, or moved far away from basic assumptions of that tradition on key issues such as what words and meanings are, and how they are created and defined.

In short, comparing two historical traditions of linguistics allows us to imagine how contemporary linguistics might look different as well.

Grammar

This book focuses on one main area within the facts of language – grammar, to use the traditional technical term, or “wording” to use a more commonsense formulation – in other words, the meaningful sound chunks that in English we normally call words, which vary and combine in different ways to express meanings. From the

point of view of language as a whole, grammar is where sound and meaning combine into **wordings**, that is, both the contentful words as well as the formal variations, including “endings” and / or “particles” that link them, in ways more abstract than sound patterns, but more graspable than semantic patterns, in that they are still tied to the linear ordering and layering of sound. The (Indo-) European languages that formed the basis of the European tradition of grammar, Classical Greek and Latin, were very rich in the grammatical use of sound in terms of variation of their basic words. Modern English, a (distant) relative to Latin and Greek in the Indo-European family, shows similar variation in forms like *swim – swam – swum* or *bake – baker – batch*. Latin and Greek, as also Old English, though not so much the modern language, were also very rich in the use of specific endings attached to words to indicate various grammatical meanings – e.g. *swim – swims – swimming* or *baker, bakers, baker’s* etc. There was therefore in these languages a large amount of grammatical “form” that needed to be explained.

By contrast, the focus of the Chinese linguistic tradition, Classical Chinese, is much more economical in its use of variation in wording, mostly only reflected in the remnants of historical processes used to derive different classes of word from the same lexical root: e.g. 長 *cháng* ‘long’, *zhǎng* ‘to grow (to become long)’; elder’; 傳 *chuán* ‘to transmit, pass down’, *zhuàn* ‘commentary, biography’ (such related words were often written with the same character, as in these examples). The grammatical work done in Greek and Latin by “grammar” in the sense of word endings was performed in Chinese by word order and small function words known as grammatical particles. The study of grammar in the European sense, i.e. grammatics, was therefore not necessary for the understanding of Classical Chinese; so Chinese linguistic scholarship, quite predictably, did not pay much attention to it: concentrating instead on compiling lists of these different particles, known as 助字 *zhùzì* or ‘helping words’, and studying the meaning of (normally difficult or obsolete) words in their textual contexts, a practice known as 訓詁 *xùntǔ* or ‘exegesis’. In the modern period, however, following on from the much closer contact between China and the outside world, the lack of a grammatical tradition was felt by Chinese scholars to be a gap that needed filling, and hence they began to devise grammatical frameworks to account for the different varieties of Chinese.

A more detailed focus on the concepts and analytical techniques of grammatics comes in the second half of the book (Chaps. 11–14) where we focus on the process by which what was in essence the framework of Latin grammar was adapted to the description of Chinese. What makes this account even more interesting, and more broadly relevant, is the fact that at the same period when Latin grammar was being “brought together” with Chinese, European scholars were attempting to “move away” from its influence. Thus the challenge faced by Western scholars to liberate the study of the grammar of their vernacular languages from the influence of Latin grammar corresponded very closely to the equal and opposite challenge faced by Chinese scholars in adapting Latin grammar to Chinese.

Such intellectual and cultural changes, as Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) showed in his influential study *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, take place not seamlessly, not according to wholly rational principles, but rather in the context of

competing ideological and political, as well as practical, pressures. Hence the “creation” of Chinese grammatics provides many useful lessons for the modern discipline as a whole. This is particularly the case since in the second half of the twentieth century, the scholar who was to become the most famous practitioner of grammar in the restricted sense of “syntax”, Noam Chomsky (1928–), in his second major work *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, casually called for a halt to the process of moving beyond traditional grammar by claiming that the conventional categories of the European grammatical tradition were “substantially correct and essential to any account of how the language is used or acquired”, and thus by implication usable for the analysis of any language. Hence for a large segment of the rapidly expanding discipline of the time who followed Chomsky’s guide, the fundamental categories of grammatics were henceforth set in stone, a development that has had a highly negative influence across the discipline, in particular on the description of many non-European languages, Chinese included.

How this history is told

This book spans about 2500 years of history from either end of Eurasia. Given this long scope, it is obviously not possible to provide sustained coverage of this whole period for both the European and Chinese traditions, and there is a danger of reducing both traditions, and the relationship between them, to lists of stereotypes. The book attempts to get round this problem by providing a series of “snapshots” which pick out key moments or ideas for more sustained treatment. In order to render this account more manageable, it focuses on the initial millennium and the final half millennium of this period. This does not imply that the medieval period was without significance: that is very far from being the case; but since the ancient ideas have proven of such enduring relevance, it is mostly possible to pick up their development more or less seamlessly from the early modern period, which in any case in both regions started by “going back to the ancients”.

This book proceeds through a mixture of explanatory narrative, on the one hand, and a series of “textual commentaries”, quoting a text extract by a particular thinker and then providing a commentary on it, on the other. The use of texts, even in translation, gives a much better sense of each scholar’s thinking, and the context of their tradition, than an “explanation” with “quotations”. In most if not all cases, each extract raises more issues than are dealt with by the commentary, and the latter should in no way be regarded as definitive. Readers may well find further issues raised in particular extracts which they would like to explore themselves; and such cases would also provide clear teaching opportunities, if the book is being used for that purpose. Such a method, of course, depends on existing detailed accounts by other scholars, and a recommended reading list is provided for each chapter to direct those interested in further exploring a particular era or scholar or concept.

Here I aim to give the reader even closer access to the original by providing many of the texts, particularly in Part I, with “word for word” glosses, which should

enable the reader to read through each text in a “shadow” English version, more or less sensically. This kind of **gloss** is somewhat different from the technical glossing familiar from linguistic analyses. It is designed to make the texts maximally accessible to the reader by providing a kind of “telegraphic” rendering that reflects as closely as possible the word choice and structure of the original. For full comprehension it needs to be read together with the accompanying **translation**, which is “contextually” oriented in the sense of providing for the original an English equivalent of each segment in context. Of course, both gloss and translation, like any kind of translation, reflect a certain **interpretation** of the original text, as suggested by the explanations provided for key terms from the original language, and this interpretation should not be regarded as either neutral, on the one hand, or definitive, on the other. On the contrary, gloss, translation, and interpretation are all part of the developing argument of the book, and should be read as such.

Apart from the **primary** texts that are the original texts, included in most chapters as well as in the Snapshots after Chaps. 4, 6 and 8, numerous **secondary** texts are quoted, sometimes at length, particularly in the second half of the book. According to the social semiotic viewpoint underlying the current study, which limitations of space preclude discussing here, meaning is understood to consist in a complex web of relations between the wording of a **text** and the **context** in which that text is embedded. Hence in tracing the evolution of ideas, the ideal method is to provide more or less coherent text extracts which allow discussion of the historical context in which those ideas arose. In the second half of the book, many of these secondary texts are given at length, and those by Chinese scholars, to which it is assumed many readers will not have easy access, are given in both Chinese and English; although since they are for the most part in modern Chinese, they are presented without the glossing provided for historical texts in Part I.

The book divides overall into two main halves: traditional language scholarship; (Chaps. 1–9); and the making of modern grammatics (Chaps. 11–14). The first half covers the pre-modern period, and looks at ideas about language from each culture in their social and cultural contexts, as well as adding some extra **snapshots** (Chaps. 4, 6, 8) of a selection of scholarship on language from both China and Europe, in order to give a sense of the range of thinking on language and the different intellectual currents to which it was connected. The second half treats the modern period, focusing on the adaptation of traditional grammatical frameworks in the European context, and the creation of grammatics in the Chinese context, both of which took place at around the same time. The same period also saw the rise of modern linguistics as an autonomous discipline, as both a continuation of and reaction against traditional grammar and philology.

This account is framed by a discussion of the broader issues of language and meaning guided by questions initially raised by Ferdinand de Saussure. This “frame” consists of a Prelude (Chap. 2), or overview of the key question of language and meaning by way of a comparison of the ideas of Aristotle and Xunzi with those of Saussure; an Interlude (Chap. 10) discussing more fully the “thought-sound” model introduced by Saussure, in its own way just as radical an overturning of the everyday worldview as Einstein’s “space-time” theory of a decade before; and a Postlude

(Chap. 15) which examines how linguistics has grappled with accounting for meaning in the century since Saussure's work. These “-ludes” are meant to remind us that discussing the history of linguistics is also necessarily theorising about language. What distinguishes different traditions or schools, past or present, is not so much their techniques or methodologies for analysing language, highly significant though these may be, but rather their general conceptualisation of language, their understanding of the kind of phenomenon language is, that lies behind any analysis. Finally, as a counterpart to the current Briefing, a Debriefing (Chap. 16) reflects on what the “investigation” has revealed, and argues that a historical perspective needs to be part of *all* linguistic theorizing.

Tracing the journey of grammar from traditional to modern, and from West to East, proves to be an enlightening case study for understanding the increasing sophistication of ideas about meaning through time, as well as throwing light on the evolution of linguistics generally. This process is normally presented as mainly or wholly a Western development, and regarded as having been initiated in the modern period with the study of sound, in the development of theories of the phoneme; while the study of grammar, normally divided between morphology and syntax, tends only to be brought into prominence sequentially several decades afterwards. The advantage of a grammatical focus, at least from the viewpoint adopted here, is that it keeps questions of meaning in the centre, and allows us to trace how scholars have grappled with the challenge of relating meanings to forms.

The author

With the increasing specialisation of all disciplines, and particularly with the rise of the history of linguistics as a recognized sub-discipline over the last few decades, the reader may well be justified in thinking that a book like this should be written by a committee of individual specialists. Nevertheless, I would claim there is still value in an attempt by an individual scholar to make sense of the whole landscape, as suggested several decades ago by R.H. Robins, who was also one of the pioneers in the field of history of linguistics, in his well-regarded outline of general linguistics:

[I]t has been said that it is now no longer proper or practicable for an introduction to general linguistics to be attempted by one author, as his own competence in the different branches now recognized must be very unequal. If this were true, it would be a great pity. The various approaches to language accepted as falling within linguistics are so accepted by virtue of some unifying theme or contribution to an integrated body of knowledge.

It must seem even more presumptuous for a single author to present an account of *two* different linguistic traditions, but it was necessary for the purposes of this book, i.e. to trace language scholarship's developing understanding of meaning in the broadest sense, that the attempt be made to present two traditions in some detail. It

would therefore seem relevant at this point to explain something about my own background in linguistics.

During my own undergraduate linguistic training in Sydney, I gained a firm academic grounding in one significant development of the Western linguistic tradition: namely, systemic functional linguistics, an offshoot of the so-called “London School” of J.R. Firth (1890–1960), developed by M.A.K. Halliday (1925–2018) and his colleagues and students around the world. Then in my Masters studies in Beijing I was introduced to various currents of contemporary Chinese linguistics, in particular the “structuralist” approaches championed by a number of scholars associated with the Chinese Department of Peking University including Zhū Déxī 朱德熙 (1920–1992) and Lù Jiǎnmíng 陸儉明 (1935–); and the “culturalist” approaches championed by various scholars including Xú Tōngqiāng 徐通鏞 (1931–2006), also of Peking University, and Shēn Xiǎolóng 申小龍 (1954–) of Fudan University in Shanghai. The latter pair indeed sparked one of my major lines of research into recent developments in Chinese linguistics which seek to negate Western influences and return to Chinese traditions: including the “character as basic unit” approach of Xu Tongqiang; and the various approaches grouped under the title of Chinese Cultural Linguistics.

From one point of view, the current book could be seen as a complement or counterpart to Shen Xiaolong’s *Humanism or Scientism?: A Critique of 20th Century Chinese Linguistics*, which through a close – if highly critical – reading of the discourse of modern Chinese linguistics argues that Chinese linguistics has achieved only superficial borrowings from Western linguistics while largely ignoring its own linguistic traditions, to which Shen recommends it should return. The current book, by contrast, is both a product of and a plea for linguistic and academic hybridity. It encourages an acknowledgment of the plurality of influences on modern linguistics rather than defending any particular orthodoxy. And as stressed more than once already, shifting away from the almost exclusive focus on the European tradition found in many histories of linguistics, both in the West and in China, allows us to question many commonly unquestioned givens.

Given the breadth of coverage attempted here, and the inevitable limitations in my own understanding, this book should not be understood as in any way as providing a definitive account of the Graeco-Roman or Chinese traditions of language scholarship. Rather what I am attempting here is the more modest goal of bringing together “maps” of these two traditions and seeing what can be gained from a comparison of their respective territories. As in effect a “meta-historical” work, that is, a “history of histories” (see Chap. 16), this book puts forward an account that is highly dependent on the range of linguistic studies referred to in the main text and included in the References, and in the Suggestions for further reading appended to each chapter. In generalising from these historical accounts to the meta-historical picture presented here, there are necessarily gaps and distortions involved. I apologise for these in advance and look forward to readers bringing them to my notice: in the phrase quoted from Lù Zhìwěi 陸志韋 (1894–1970) in Chap. 13, *xīwàng dúzhě pīpíng zhǐzhèng* 希望讀者批評、指正 ‘we trust our readers will offer critiques and corrections’.