

# ON HALLIDAY'S FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR: A REPLY TO MARTIN AND TO MARTIN & MATTHIESSEN

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The Editor has invited me to reply in a single article to the 1992 papers by Martin and Martin & Matthiessen published in this volume. The time allowed has been very short, but for reasons given below I do not think it would in any case have been appropriate to reply at length. I will consider the two papers in turn.

## 1. Martin's 'Price of reply'

Martin acknowledges (footnote 1) that his 'Price of reply' paper was written in a context where the Editor of the *Journal of Linguistics* had declined to consider for publication in that journal (for reasons of length) the paper that Matthiessen & Martin had written in response to my 1988 review of Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985, henceforth *IFG*). In this context it is not unnatural that Martin should have wanted to cover some of the same ground in another paper. The current context, however, is one where the Matthiessen & Martin paper has been published: it appeared in the 1991 volume of the present journal — which also contained my reply. In these circumstances, I am unable to see the justification for publishing the 'Price of reply' paper in its present form: it wastefully repeats the criticisms of my 1988 discussion of Halliday's concept of Theme and fails to address the answers to those criticisms made in my 1991 paper. For this reason I will make my reply a short one.

Martin castigates my review as belonging to what he calls the 'dismissal genre', whose 'basic argumentative strategy ... involves recasting another's work in one's own terms (usually under the guise of simply making "intelligible" or "explicit" what another scholar must have meant) and then rendering it absurd with respect to one's own "in-house" criteria' (§1). The example given of my alleged adoption of this strategy is that of my discussion of Theme — more particularly my focus on its interpretation as 'what the clause is about'. I simply reject the charge that I have recast Halliday's work in my own terms: he himself repeatedly explains Theme in terms of 'aboutness'. I made this point in my 1991 reply (p. 97), giving eleven examples from as many pages of *IFG* (33–44) of the terms 'about' or 'concern/concerned' used to explain Theme. The quotations are repeated here [with emphasis added]:

- (1) i [One of three broad definitions of the traditional concept of Subject] could be summarised as [...] that which is the CONCERN of the message
- ii The message [in *this teapot my aunt was given by the duke*, where the psychological subject is *this teapot*] is a message CONCERNING the teapot
- iii Psychological Subject meant 'that which is the CONCERN of the message'
- iv In *this teapot my aunt was given by the duke*, the psychological subject is *this teapot*. That is to say, it is 'this teapot' that is the CONCERN of the message — that the speaker has taken as point of embarkation of the clause
- v The Theme [...] is what the message is CONCERNED with: the point of departure for what the speaker is going to say

- vi The Theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is CONCERNED
- vii The Theme is the starting-point for the message: it is what the clause is going to be ABOUT
- viii There is a difference in meaning between *a halfpenny is the smallest English coin*, where *a halfpenny* is Theme ('I'll tell you ABOUT a halfpenny'), and *the smallest English coin is a halfpenny*, where *the smallest English coin* is Theme ('I'll tell you ABOUT the smallest English coin')
- ix So the meaning of *what the duke gave my aunt was that teapot* is something like 'I am going to tell you ABOUT the duke's gift to my aunt [...]'. Contrast this with *the duke gave my aunt that teapot*, where the meaning is 'I am going to tell you something ABOUT the duke'

(The term 'Theme' does not appear in (i)-(iii) because Halliday introduces the concept under the traditional label of Subject, more specifically 'psychological Subject': the relabelling of psychological Subject as Theme takes place on p. 35.)

Martin implicitly criticises me for not discussing the piece of textual analysis presented in *IFG's* Appendix 1, but here too we find the same kind of formulation:

- (2) i The Theme [of clause 1] is *in this job*: 'I'm going to tell you ABOUT the job that has to be done' (p. 347)
- ii Clause 2 has a two-part Theme: continuative *now* meaning 'relevant information coming' and topical *silver* meaning 'I'm going to tell you ABOUT silver' (p. 349)
- iii Thematic prominence is speaker-oriented: it expresses 'what I am on ABOUT' (p. 368)

Note the prominent position of these quotations in the appendix. (i) and (ii) deal with the first two clauses in the text being analysed, and as such provide a model for the later clauses. Thus (ii) continues: 'This is switched in Clause 3 to *the people that buy silver* — the customers'; Halliday does not gloss this as 'I'm going to tell you about the people that buy silver, the customers', presumably because that would be unnecessarily, unproductively repetitive. But there is nothing in the appendix to suggest that he would not regard that kind of explanation as appropriate for all the topical Themes in the passage.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the explanation of Theme in terms of aboutness is to be found in Halliday's writings from an early stage of his work in this area: compare the following quotations from Halliday (1967:212-213):

- (3) i 'theme' means 'what I am talking ABOUT' (or 'what I am talking ABOUT now')
- ii The theme is what is being talked ABOUT, the point of departure for the clause as a message
- iii In a non-polar interrogative, for example, the WH- item is by virtue of its being a WH- item the point of departure for the message; it is precisely what is being talked ABOUT
- iv Given that *what did John see?* means 'John saw something and I want to know the identity of that something', the theme of the message is that there is something the speaker does not know and that he wants to know; the rest of the message is explanatory comment ABOUT this demand: '(as for) what I want to know (it) is the interpretation of the "something" that John saw'
- v These [sc. the subject in declaratives and the finite verbal element in polar interrogatives] represent, in the unmarked case [i.e. when they are unmarked Theme], 'what the clause is ABOUT'

Martin's charge that I have 'recast [Halliday's] work in [my] own terms' is quite unfounded. What I have done is to take the explanation that Halliday himself gives of Theme and argue

that there are numerous instances of Theme that cannot reasonably be said to have the (kind of) meaning ascribed to it in these quotations. Why should such a line of argument be castigated as improper?

§3.1 of Martin's paper aims to 'unpack [my] reappropriation strategy in more detail'. He claims that I take Halliday's ideas out of context and translate them into another framework, more specifically that I 'rework' Theme as the more traditional notion of topic; this is said to involve a 'reductive distortion of Halliday's position in four key respects': (i) it restricts Theme to topical Theme, (ii) it restricts Theme to participant functions, (iii) it conflates the concepts of Theme and Rheme with Given and New, (iv) it excludes unmarked Themes. I will begin with (iv), then turn to (iii), and finally to (i) — what is said there will make it unnecessary to deal with (ii) explicitly.

**Unmarked Theme.** The issue here concerns the interpretation of clauses like

- (4)    i        *My wife couldn't stand the dog*  
      ii        *She broke it*

According to IFG these have respectively *my wife* and *she* as Theme, and the Theme is unmarked — in contrast to clauses like *The dog my wife couldn't stand*, where *the dog* is marked Theme. Given that Theme is explained as in (1)–(3), it is legitimate to interpret the IFG analysis as saying that these examples are about the referents of *my wife* and *she*. In my review I questioned the correctness of this account: my position was that this construction does not grammaticalise the concept "what the [utterance of the] clause is about", that such clauses can be used in contexts where the speaker is talking primarily about the referents of *the dog* and *it*, as well as in contexts where the speaker is talking primarily about the referents of *my wife* and *she*. This is a disagreement about the use or interpretation of such examples: I can't see how it qualifies as 'reductive co-option'. Where we do find co-option, 'recasting another's work in one's own terms [...] and then rendering it absurd', is when Martin writes:

- (5)    Note that what Huddleston is arguing here is that in texts 9, 10, 12, and 13 above [texts cited and discussed in the 'Price of reply' paper] the fact that the material recognized by Halliday as Theme is realised initially is not significant

That is a complete misrepresentation of what I said. To say that "what the clause is about" is not grammaticalised is not to say that the order of elements has no significance. That I do not subscribe to the position attributed to me in (5) is apparent from such passages as the following (Huddleston 1984:447):

- (6)    Although we argued in 2.2.1 that the subject [which is unmarked Theme in declarative clauses] cannot be defined as the element identifying the topic, it is nevertheless more closely correlated with the topic than are other elements of clause structure. Thus given an active-passive pair like *Kim interviewed Robin* and *Robin was interviewed by Kim* (spoken with the main stress on the last word), then the first is likely to be construed as being primarily about Kim, the second about Robin

To say that there is not a one-to-one correlation between subject or unmarked Theme and "what the clause is about" is not to say that there is no significant correlation at all.

**Conflation of Theme vs Rheme with Given vs New.** Martin says that it is 'clear' that I expect the topic notion 'to do the explanatory work distributed across Theme ^ Rheme and (Given) ^ New structure in Halliday's model; [my] position in other words involves an apparent conflation of (in systemic terms a confusion of) the concepts of Halliday's Theme and Rheme with Given and New'. This allegation is based on my remarks, cited here in (8), about the question-answer discourse example (7):

- (7)    i        A        *What's the new boss like?*  
      ii       B        *She seems O.K.*

- (8) One very counterintuitive consequence of Halliday's analysis is that natural question-answer pairs more often than not have a change of theme. Thus in the exchange [(7)] the answer will be analysed as being about the new boss, but the question won't — its Theme is *what*. (1988:159)

Martin writes:

- (9) Halliday's interpretation of (Given) ^ New structure, as realised by intonation, is not mentioned by Huddleston in spite of the fact that it provides a perfectly straightforward explanation of the sequence of constituents in the reply: the question asks for information about the boss and this information is placed last in the response where it can be realised prosodically as unmarked news

It is difficult to see how my failure to mention the Given ^ New structure when discussing the Theme of (7) can be taken as evidence that I am confusing Theme-Rheme with Given-New. The IFG analysis of (ii) has *she* as Theme, and here I have no quarrel with the claim that the utterance is about the referent of the Theme. My disagreement concerns (i): the IFG analysis has *what* as Theme, whereas my point was that it is natural to interpret A's question as being about the new boss, so that if the Theme expresses what the clause is about, in accordance with (1)-(3), one would expect *the new boss* to be Theme. (Note that Martin himself says, in (9), 'the question asks for information ABOUT the boss'.) Yet the prosodically unmarked reading of (i) has the tonic on *boss*, making *the new boss* New on the IFG analysis: if I were conflating Theme (the element expressing what the clause is about) with Given, I wouldn't be saying that the Theme was *the new boss*. Far from providing 'clear' evidence of a confusion between Theme and Given, (8) thus shows that those concepts are not being conflated. Notice, moreover, that the allegation is a serious one: Halliday has made much of the important distinction between Theme and Given from the beginning of his writings in this area, and no one who had made more than the most cursory study of his work could fail to be aware of it.

The same allegation was made by Matthiessen & Martin (1991:42-43) and refuted in my reply (1991:98-99). In their response (Martin & Matthiessen 1992) they admit they were wrong: 'We mistakenly assumed that intonation played a role in Huddleston's interpretation of topic in [(7)]'. But if they acknowledge that to have been a mistake, what possible justification can there be for Martin's repeating it in the 'Price of reply' paper? The discussion in the last paragraph shows that there were no grounds for making the allegation in the first place, but to repeat it, knowing it to be based on a mistaken interpretation of my review, seems to me inexcusable.<sup>2</sup>

**Metafunctional restriction on Theme.** Martin argues that my position 'involves a restriction of Halliday's Theme to topical Theme. Interpersonal and textual Themes are not recognized since they are not what the clause is about'. There are several points to be made in response to this charge.

The first point is that Halliday himself gives no hint when presenting the explanations of Theme cited in (1) that they might be intended to apply only to topical Theme. Martin quotes the passage from IFG:39 where Halliday explains why he prefers the Theme-Rheme terminology over Topic-Comment:

- (10) The label 'Topic' usually refers to only one particular kind of Theme (see section 3.5 below [where he introduces the term topical Theme for it])<sup>3</sup>

This passage occurs early in the Theme chapter — on the second page, in the paragraph following that containing (1vi). Note that having opted for Theme in preference to Topic on the grounds that it is not restricted to topical Theme, Halliday continues to explain Theme in general in terms of aboutness. Thus (1vii) occurs just eleven lines below (10): in such a context, the natural interpretation is that (1vii) applies to Theme in general, not just one particular kind of Theme. When, fifteen pages later, he distinguishes ideational, interpersonal and textual

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Themes and introduces the term topical Theme for the first of these, the explanation given is simply that topical Theme 'corresponds fairly well to the element identified as "topic" in topic-comment analysis' (p. 54). He does not offer any explication here or elsewhere of what is meant by 'topic' in topic-comment analysis (beyond what I have quoted in note 3), and does not suggest that the earlier explanations offered for Theme are intended to apply only to the topical Theme. Note in this connection that in the earlier work cited above the concept of aboutness is explicitly invoked in discussing interpersonal Themes — see (3iii-v).

Martin criticises me for concentrating on the explanation in terms of 'aboutness' rather than 'point of departure', with the implication that the latter is more general, the former restricted to topical Theme ('interpersonal and textual Themes are not recognized since they are not what the clause is about'). But that is not how the two explanations are presented in *IFG*: they are simply presented in apposition — see (1iv)-(1vii), with 'concern' coming before 'point of departure' in the first two quotations, and the order reversed in the second two; in two cases they are orthographically related by a colon, in one by a dash. The natural interpretation of these quotations is that 'aboutness/concern' and 'point of departure' do not represent different semantic properties of Theme but are different formulations of a single property. It is thus not valid to charge that in focussing on aboutness I am restricting the scope of Theme to one subtype.

A second point is that even if Halliday intended that the aboutness/concern explanations should apply only to topical Themes it would be perfectly proper for me to focus attention on the validity of that explanation of topical Theme. The topical Theme is arguably the most central or prototypical kind of Theme in Structural-Functional Grammar. In the first place, the topical Theme is obligatory, whereas the others are optional: 'There is always an ideational element in the Theme. There may be, but are not necessarily, interpersonal and/or textual elements as well' (*IFG*:53). In the second place, the topical Theme marks the end of the Theme: non-ideational elements are part of the Theme if and only if they precede the topical Theme. My review made clear that *IFG* has multiple Themes with non-ideational components, and hence I cannot see how questioning the account in terms of 'aboutness' of the (underlined) topical Themes in such examples as (11) involves co-optive reduction:

- (11) i        Nothing will satisfy you  
      ii        You could buy a bar of chocolate like this for 6d before the War  
      iii        There's a fallacy in your argument

I have already drawn attention to Halliday's remark that the topical Theme 'corresponds fairly well to the element identified as "topic" in topic-comment analysis'; the only factor mentioned that could account for the 'fairly well' qualification is the one quoted above, that topic is often used as a cover term for Theme and Given. Halliday does not suggest that the correspondence is only fairly good because he has a quite different understanding of 'aboutness' — one where (11i-iii) can be said to be about "nothing", "you" and "there". Note that in earlier work Halliday actually used the term 'topic' to explain Theme — see (16) below. We have now had three papers — Matthiessen & Martin 1991, Martin 1992, Martin & Matthiessen 1992 — dealing with my review; together they amount to some 120 pages and a considerable proportion of the space is devoted to Theme, but they have not addressed the problem of reconciling *IFG*'s account of Theme in terms of aboutness with such examples as (11).

Instead they criticise me for not taking up the account in terms of 'point of departure' on the grounds that 'it is not clear that "point of departure" or "starting-point" can sustain an interpretation that is independent of syntactic sequence'. My difficulty is in seeing how the claim that Theme expresses the point of departure for the message might be falsifiable: what sort of evidence could in principle count against it. As it happens, an example in Martin 1992 provides an opportunity to take up this issue of falsifiability. This is because it involves what I am confident is a mistake with respect to the syntactic analysis:

- (12) *and it seemed likely that an element which had been quiescent within it for years — the element of irresponsible administrative power — was about to become its predominant characteristic [= Martin's (9k)]*

*Likely* is 'treated as a marked Theme realising Theme predication (Halliday 1985:60)'.

The *it seemed likely that* construction is quite different, however, both syntactically and semantically, from Halliday's Theme predication. The account of Theme predication in *IFG* is given on pp 59-61. It begins:

- (13) There is one further structural pattern that frequently contributes to the thematic organization of the clause, and that is internal predication of the form *it + be + ...*, as in *it's love that makes the world go round*. Such instances are known in some formal grammars as 'left sentences'

Theme predication is a marked construction; clauses belonging to this construction are systemically related to unmarked clauses (unmarked on this dimension, that is) lacking the *it + be*:

- |      |    |   |                    |
|------|----|---|--------------------|
| (14) | i  | <i>the queen sent my uncle that hatstand</i>            | [Unmarked]         |
|      | ii | <i>it was the queen who sent my uncle that hatstand</i> | [Theme predicated] |

The *IFG* account relates the Theme predication construction to the intonationally realised Given-New structure. The intonationally unmarked reading of (i) has *that hatstand* as New, with *the queen sent my uncle* (which includes the Theme) as Given, but it would be possible, in a marked reading, to place the tonic accent on *queen* in order 'to make the queen the item of news', and in this case the New element is 'mapped on to the Theme'. Halliday goes on to observe that this, being a marked combination, 'tends [...] to be contrastive: it was the queen who sent it, not the local antique dealer'. He continues:

- (15) In order to make it explicit that this, and nothing else, is the news value of this particular information unit, the speaker is likely to use the predicated form *it was the queen who ...*. This has the effect of creating a local structure *it was ...* within which the tonic accent is in its unmarked place, at the end

A similar but somewhat fuller account is given in Halliday (1967:236-239) — compare:

- (16) Predication [...] is exemplified by *it was John who broke the window*; it is thus realized as an equative structure, with *it ... who broke the window* as identified, *John* as identifier, the relator being again the class 2 *be*. The meaning is thus very close to that of an identifying clause with the sequence identifier-identified, *John was the one who broke the window*, both being related to //John broke the window// [a tone group with tonic accent on *John*] and differing from it in respect of only one feature. Structurally predication maps the function of identifier on to that of theme, giving explicit prominence to the theme by exclusion: 'John and nobody else' is under consideration. There is however a difference between a clause with predicated theme and an identifying clause, in the meaning of the highlighting involved. In identification the prominence is cognitive: 'John and nobody else broke the window'; whereas in predication it is thematic: 'John and nobody else is the topic of the sentence'

He goes on to discuss the difference between the predicated Theme construction and marked Theme without predication:

- (17) The difference between *his earlier novels I've read* and *it's his earlier novels I've read* is again one of the type of prominence: the former implies the contrast 'but his later ones I know nothing about' [...], whereas the latter is not cognitively contrastive and means simply 'these are the ones I'm talking about'

[Note that we have here yet another example of Halliday explaining Theme in terms of aboutness — and it follows shortly after (16), where Theme is explained as topic.]

(12) is quite different from (14ii) and all the other examples of Theme predication: it does not contain the *be* that is an indispensable part of the realization of that construction, it does not express identification (*likely* is Attribute, not Identifier), and it does not stand in the same relation to an unmarked counterpart as (14ii) does to (14i): the only candidate is *that an element which had been quiescent within it for years — the element of irresponsible administrative power — was about to become its predominant characteristic seemed likely*, but the relation between this and (12) is quite different. There is nothing in IFG to sanction the analysis of *likely* as predicated Theme or as any other kind of Theme. If it is nevertheless *likely* that expresses the point of departure for the clause, it follows that we have here an example where Theme and point of departure do not correlate. Is this something Martin is willing to accept, or will he want to revise the interpretation of (12) or else the account of the formal realisation of Theme?

Martin writes with great bitterness and animosity about what he terms the dismissal genre. As noted, he defines this as involving 'recasting another's work in one's own terms (usually under the guise of simply making "intelligible" or "explicit" what another scholar must have meant) and then rendering it absurd with respect to one's own "in-house" criteria', but the charge that my discussion of Theme involves misrepresentation and reappropriation has no substance. As his paper progresses, one comes to have the impression that he understands 'dismissal' in a much broader sense. In the final section he says that 'Halliday's own response to dismissals over the years has generally been to ignore them completely and get on with his own work', implying a significant number of such works. In this context Martin quotes my reference to 'the unanswered criticisms of Bazell 1973:201', implying that Bazell's review likewise belongs to the dismissal genre. The section of the review dealing with Halliday's paper (1970) is short enough to quote in full here and relevant to clarifying what Martin means by dismissal:

(18) I found M.A.K. Halliday's contribution on 'Language structure and language function' (141–165) rather baffling, despite interesting observations. For instance I could not at all follow the argument that in an English interrogative sentence the 'theme' is a 'request for information' (161). Halliday continues: 'Hence we put first, in an interrogative clause, the element that contains this request for information: the polarity-carrying element in a yes–no question and the questioning element in a 'wh'-question, as in (30)

- (30) i        *didn't (Sir Christopher Wren build this gazebo?)*  
       ii        *how many gazebos (did Sir Christopher Wren build?)*

The suggestion is that 'in English there is a definite awareness of the meaning expressed by putting something in first position in the clause'. But surely this is just circular: the ONLY reason for regarding English as different from many other languages in what it treats as theme is precisely the initial position of the unbracketed part of the sentences above. The theme would even have to be different in *Did Sir Christopher Wren not build this gazebo?*, which for me at least is quite synonymous with Halliday's first example. One cannot DEFINE the theme in English in terms of initial position and then EXPLAIN how it comes to be in this position by a peculiar English awareness! Any suggestion so implausible at first sight as the suggestion that *didn't* could be the theme of an English sentence — it is, on the face of it, not even a surface-constituent — would have to be supported by very solid arguments indeed. It is difficult here to see any trace of a genuine argument.

Is this an instance of the dismissal genre? Again I see nothing that could properly be called 'recasting another's work in one's own terms', nothing that can be described as misrepresentation.<sup>4</sup> Bazell does use the expressions 'baffling' and 'implausible', which are similar to ones which Martin takes strong exception to in my review, but such expressions do not qualify either Bazell's review or mine for membership of the dismissal genre as defined. One's objection is not to the implausibility as such, but to the combination of implausibility and absence of argument. The same kind of criticism is forcefully made in Hudson 1986 (does this too belong to the dismissal genre?):

- (19) i Any book, whether introductory or not, should show how the analyses have been arrived at [...]. But in *IFG* it is hard to find any passage which suggests that the analyses presented are at all problematic, less still any which attempt to justify these analyses in relation to the alternatives which are available. (p. 796)
- ii nor is there any attempt to anticipate predictable objections to the less standard analyses (p. 798)
- iii There are many places in [*IFG*] where [Halliday] makes a claim which I, for one, was completely unable either to agree with or to disagree with because the categories concerned were so vaguely defined that I could not reliably identify instances of them. [...] those of us who can't easily pick out the parts of a clause which define 'what it is going to be about', or its 'point of departure' are simply unable to decide whether any of his claims about themes are right or wrong. What could one give as a counterexample? (p. 798)

Martin's response to this kind of criticism appears to be outrage. He asks 'what is to be done, in the face of reviews of this kind, by way of reply?' He suggests that 'one option would be to simply ignore these reviews, refusing to engage in debate with this order of reappropriation and misrepresentation'. But where is the reappropriation and misrepresentation in saying that categories in the work under review are not clearly explicated and that analyses are not supported by linguistic argumentation? Take, for example, the specific point raised by Bazell, a distinguished and independent-minded scholar. In

- (20) i *Didn't Sir Christopher Wren build this gazebo?*  
 ii *Did Sir Christopher Wren not build this gazebo?*  
 iii *Did Sir Christopher Wren build this gazebo?*

(ii), under Halliday's analysis, has the same Theme as (iii) but a different Theme than (i), whereas in terms of meaning it belongs with (i) rather than (iii). Was it improper for Bazell to ask for explanation and evidence? Martin chooses to describe my reference to 'the unanswered criticisms of Bazell' as 'baiting', as a 'lure', but he offers no reason — beyond the completely unsubstantiated implication of reappropriation and misrepresentation — for regarding the criticism as not worth answering.

I think it is fair to say that bafflement, an inability to understand clearly what is being said, is a not uncommon reaction among non-systemicists to Halliday's writings. I do not think it reasonable or productive to respond to this reaction with the animosity so evident in Matthiessen & Martin 1991, Martin 1992 and Martin & Matthiessen 1992: the time and energy spent on personal attacks might have been much more fruitfully directed to producing a constructive answer to the questions and criticisms raised.

## 2. Martin & Matthiessen's 'Brief note'

In their reply to my 1991 paper, Martin & Matthiessen have chosen to restrict themselves to 'commenting briefly on a few of the rhetorical ploys' I ascribe to their position; this seems to me a sad reflection of their priorities, but it hardly comes as a surprise after their 1991 paper. In view of this focus and limitation, however, I do not think that any worthwhile purpose would be served by replying to it point by point. Instead, I will offer, as it were, a sample reply, examining just the first issue they deal with — the simplicity and obviousness of their 1991 answer to the question raised in my 1988 review of *IFG* concerning the status of the adjectival group.

I had commented on their use of such terms as 'simple' and 'of course' to belittle the critic (1991:125), and Martin & Matthiessen now quote from this as follows:

- (21) Matthiessen & Martin certainly give the impression of being more interested in trying to belittle the critic than in answering the criticisms. They frequently use expressions



such as 'simple' or 'of course' to trigger derogatory implicatures ... I do not believe that this is a fitting way to conduct a debate in an academic journal: abuse is not an acceptable substitute for reasoned argument.

The part of my text suppressed from the place where the suspension points appear is as follows:

- (22) and in a couple of places they descend to what can only be described as a level of abuse: 'Halliday's interpretation of Subject in English differs sharply from the traditional notion and more recent notions and, predictably, Huddleston objects' (§II.3.2), where the 'predictably' implicates that I am objecting simply because the interpretation is new and different, or — more explicitly — 'the pathology of Huddleston's critique (i.e. if an idea is new and different it must be bad)' (§II.4.1.(ii)(3)).

Suppression of this part of my text drastically distorts the interpretation of the passage following the suspension points. As it stands, (21) conveys that I characterised the use of 'simple' and 'of course' as abuse, whereas it is clear from the text I wrote that the charge of abuse applies just to the two cases mentioned in (22). Similarly in (21) the 'this' will be interpreted as referring to the frequent use of such expressions as 'simple' and 'of course' to trigger derogatory implicatures, whereas in the original the reference crucially and centrally includes the descent into abuse. I submit that it is quite improper to use suspension points to suppress material that is so essential to the correct interpretation of the quoted passage.<sup>5</sup>

The instance of 'simple' and 'of course' that Martin & Matthiessen seek to justify occurs in (23), their response (1991:24) to (24), from Huddleston (1988:144):

- (23) Given Halliday's recognition of the adverbial group, Huddleston finds it strange that there is no adjectival group in the grammar. The simple answer is that of course there is an adjectival group; it is a kind of nominal group, with an adjective as Head, just as the 'substantival' group is a kind of nominal group with a 'substantive' as Head: Huddleston's puzzle is just a matter of delicacy.
- (24) A related puzzle is that although Halliday has a category of adverbial group, he no longer has an adjectival group. Thus whereas in earlier work the predicative complements of *she is very brilliant* and *she is a genius* belonged to different classes, adjectival group and nominal group, they are now both assigned to the nominal group class, the difference being a matter of their structure: *very brilliant* has the structure Epithet (filled by what is presumably an adjectival word complex with a  $\beta^{\wedge}\alpha$  structure), while *a genius* has the structure Deictic^Thing. No explanation is offered for this very unorthodox analysis. And given that adjective-headed expressions display a richer structure than adverb-headed ones, it is strange that we should have an adverbial group but not an adjectival group. One incidental consequence is that the difference in the treatment accorded to *very gently* [...] according as [it is] functioning in clause structure [as in *the stew was simmering very gently*, where it is an adverbial group] or within a nominal group [as in *the very gently simmering stew*, where it is not a group but a word complex] has no parallel in the adjectival area: *very brilliant* is treated alike with respect to its rank assignment in *she is very brilliant* and *a very brilliant student*.

Martin & Matthiessen attempt to justify saying that the answer was 'simple and obvious' by quoting what they call 'the relevant sections' of IFG. Their first quotation is (25), which they present as 'Halliday's definition of groups':

- (25) [The logical component] comes in at this point because a group is in some sense equivalent to a WORD COMPLEX — that is, a combination of words built up on the basis of a particular logical relation. That is why it is called a GROUP (= 'group of words')

But this is certainly not Halliday's definition of group. He says here only that a group is IN SOME SENSE equivalent to a word complex. The important point, however, that it is not wholly equivalent to a word complex: if it were, there would be no need for the theory to distinguish them. But distinguish them it clearly does: in *a very brilliant student*, for example, *very brilliant* is a word complex but not a group.

What I was concerned with in the section from which (24) is taken is precisely the question of how they are distinguished. Quotation (25) is not relevant to that question; the following passage from p. 192, however, is crucial, though Martin & Matthiessen fail to include it among 'the relevant quotations':

- (26) We said in Chapter 6 that a group — verbal group, adverbial group, nominal group — could be interpreted as a WORD COMPLEX: that is to say, a Head word together with other words that modify it. This is why the term GROUP came to be used. It meant 'group of words', or 'word group'; and it suggests how the group no doubt evolved, by expansion outwards from the word.

However, because of the very diverse ways in which phenomena can be subcategorized, groups developed their own multivariate constituent structure, with functional configurations such as the Deictic + Numerative + Epithet + Classifier + Thing of the nominal group in English. Treating the group simply as a 'word complex' does not account for all these various aspects of its meaning. It is for this reason that we recognize the group as a distinct rank in the grammar.

IFG provides multivariate structures for the nominal group and the verbal group, but not for the adverbial group: this (given what Halliday says in the second paragraph of (26)) led me to ask why we then need an adverbial group in addition to an adverbial word complex — and to query IFG's failure to recognise a category of adjectival group, given that 'adjective-headed expressions display a richer structure than adverb-headed ones' (i.e. given that the case for recognising a multivariate structure for adjective-headed expressions is somewhat greater than it is for adverb-headed ones).

Martin & Matthiessen's second quotation, abbreviated in a way which does not affect the point at issue, is from p. 115:

- (27) The Attribute is realized as a nominal group, typically (though not obligatorily) one that is indefinite; it has as Head a noun [as in *John is a poet*] or an adjective [as in *Sarah is wise*], but not a pronoun.

Notice, however, that Halliday here distinguishes the two realizations of the Attribute by reference to the Head — which is an element in a univariate structure. In the light of what he says in (26) it is more important to consider how they would be distinguished in terms of a multivariate structure. From this point of view a more relevant passage than (27), but again one which Martin & Matthiessen fail to quote, is the following, from p. 219:

- (28) It should be remembered that the category of nominal group includes those having adjective (Epithet) as Head, e.g. *so big that we couldn't carry it*

Epithet is a multivariate function, and thus (28) enables us to infer the difference in the multivariate structures of the nominal groups with Attribute function in (27): *a poet* is Deictic ^ Thing, *wise* is Epithet. Consider now the following examples:

- (28) i        *They are wise people*  
 ii        *They are very wise people*  
 iii        *They are very wise*  
 iv        *They spoke very wisely*

*Wise people* in (i) will have the structure Epithet ^ Thing. And so will *very wise people* in (ii), for *very* does not have any multivariate function, but is simply univariate submodifier to *wise*;

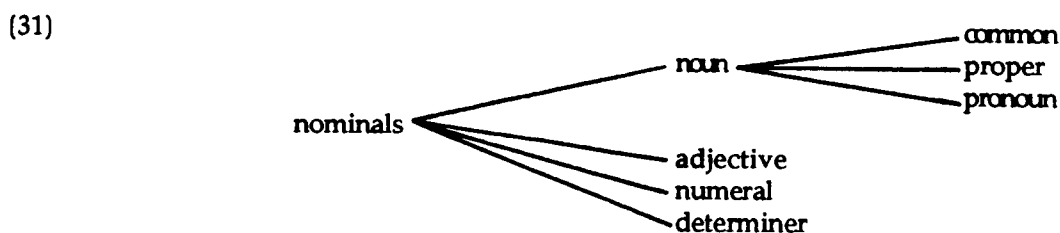
*very wise* is thus an adjectival word complex filling the multivariate Epithet function: it is not an adjectival group. In (iii) the multivariate structure of the nominal group *very wise* must — given what Halliday says in (28) — be just Epithet, and *very wise* will again be an adjectival word complex filling this Epithet function. *Very* does not enter directly ('immediately') into the structure of the nominal group: the group itself has a single element of structure, and *very* enters into the structure of the complex realising this element. In (iv), however, *very wisely* is an adverbial group, having a structure of two elements, one filled by *very*, the other by *wisely*. It was this asymmetry between the treatment of (iii) and (iv) that I was questioning in my review; it is no answer, simple or otherwise, to say that at secondary delicacy the nominal group *very wise* is an adjectival group, for this has no bearing on the asymmetry. As explained in Huddleston (1991:94), delicacy has nothing to do with the issue; I do not understand why Martin & Matthiessen return to this issue in their note on my reply without considering what I said about it in that reply.

The extent of the asymmetry is not entirely clear because of *IFG*'s inexplicitness about the structure of groups like (30i), from (28):

- (30) i        *so big that we couldn't carry it*  
       ii       *so quickly that we couldn't catch it*

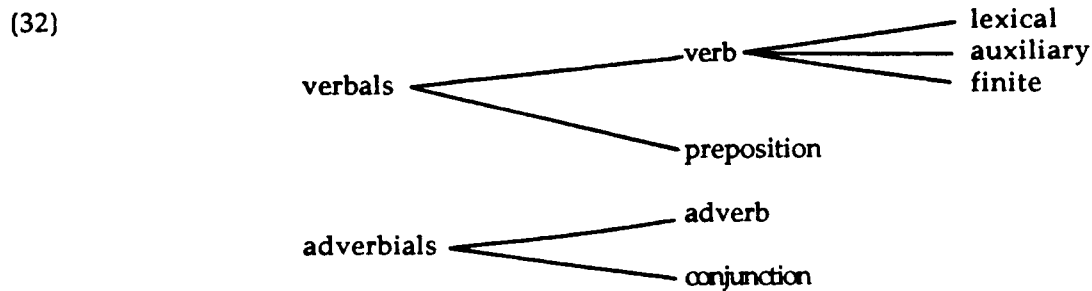
It is a curious fact that although *IFG* has 16 pages on the nominal group they deal exclusively with those that can occur as subject or object (in the traditional sense of this term): there is no mention in this section of nominal groups that are (virtually) restricted to Attribute function, like (30i) or *very wise* in (29iii). Indeed, on p. 173 Halliday says that Epithets 'do not normally function as Head', which clearly doesn't hold for nominal groups in Attribute function.<sup>6</sup> (28) appears in the section on embedding (rank shift), but a puzzling feature of the discussion at this point is that the functions that can be filled by embedded elements are identified as Head and Postmodifier. These are univariate functions, whereas embedding is crucially a multivariate phenomenon: one would have expected them to be identified as Thing and Qualifier.<sup>7</sup> What then is the structure of (30i)? We know from (28) that it contains an Epithet. *Big* obviously belongs in the Epithet, but so too must *so*: there is no multivariate function in nominal group structure that it could be filling. What then of the Postmodifier *that we couldn't carry it*? I think the only viable interpretation of p. 219 of *IFG* is that is Qualifier. The first example given of an embedded Postmodifier in nominal group structure is the relative clause in *the man who came to dinner* and this is a prototypical Qualifier (cf. p. 167): (28) implies that the embedding in (30i) is of the same kind. By this reasoning, the structure of (30i) will be Epithet ^ Qualifier, with the Epithet filled by an adjectival word complex and the Qualifier by an embedded clause. The bracketing of elements in (30ii), however, is different: while (i) has a binary structure at the first layer, (ii) has a ternary one, Modifier ^ Head ^ Postmodifier.<sup>8</sup> Evidence and argument are needed to support this difference in the constituent bracketing of adjectival and adverbial expressions: again, Martin & Matthiessen's 'simple and obvious answer' does not address the problem.

The third and final 'relevant section' Martin & Matthiessen quote is an excerpt from the word class taxonomy given on p. 191 of *IFG*:



The reader is meant to infer on the basis of 'this grouping of adjectives and "substantives" as different classes at the head of the nominal group' that the subclasses of nominal groups with adjectives and substantives as Head are respectively adjectival and substantival groups. This

seems to me an unreasonable expectation. Note in the first instance that 'substantive' is Martin & Matthiessen's term: Halliday speaks of 'nouns'. Since there is no established adjective derived from *noun* other than *nominal*, the terminology in (31) is not designed to encourage the reader to construct a set of secondary delicacy categories like adjectival group. Secondly, and more importantly, if one considers (31) in the context of the whole figure from which it is extracted, it becomes clear that it doesn't support an interpretation where categories in the second column are different classes functioning at head in a group of the class shown in the first column. The remainder of IFG's Figure 6-26 is as follows:



Prepositions don't function as Head in verbal groups, nor conjunctions in adverbials groups. The fact that nouns, adjectives, determiners and numerals can function as Head in nominal group structure is thus incidental: it is not inferable from IFG's Figure 6-26. The figure comes right at the close of the chapter on group and phrase structure. The bulk of the chapter deals with nominal groups and verbal groups, but there is also a section on adverbial, preposition and conjunction groups; these last two are quite minor categories, and the reader would naturally assume that if explicit attention was devoted to them the set of group categories had been exhaustively covered.

The fact is that nowhere in IFG does Halliday mention a category of adjectival group or suggest that we should set up secondary delicacy groups to cater for differences in the class of the Head. Martin & Matthiessen's claim that — owing to 'the intrusion of competing agendas' — I have misrepresented Halliday in this matter is quite baseless.<sup>9</sup> It is not me who has misrepresented Halliday, it is Martin & Matthiessen. By presenting (25) as Halliday's definition of group and suppressing (26) they obliterate Halliday's distinction between group and word complex — how does this differ from what Martin calls 'co-optive reduction'? Their account of Halliday's distinction between nominal groups with nouns and adjectives as Head is based solely on (27), omitting the crucial structural difference brought out in (28) — and they co-optively replace Halliday's 'noun' with 'substantive'. They take (31) out of context and give it an interpretation which it doesn't have in the text from which it is taken. And, finally, they write:

(33) It seemed to us when writing our reply that anyone reading Halliday 1985 with a view to finding out his position on adjectival groups could deduce from passages such as these [i.e. (25), (27), and (31)] that groups of adjectives (adjectival groups) were a sub-type of groups of nouns (nominal groups)

This continues the terminological co-option: they use 'noun' not in Halliday's sense, but for what he calls 'nominal'. But they also equate adjectival groups with groups of adjectives, and nominal groups with groups of nouns. Nominal groups like *very wise* in (29iii) or *so big that we couldn't carry it*, however, are not groups of nominals (to use Halliday's terminology), but groups with a nominal as Head — and even if Halliday does in fact analyse them at secondary delicacy as adjectival groups this could only be interpreted as saying that they are groups with adjectives as Head, not that they are groups of adjectives. It is difficult to imagine a more serious and thorough misrepresentation of Halliday's concept of group than Martin & Matthiessen have given us here.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Martin also mentions the textual analysis given in the section 'Thematic interpretation of a text' at the end of the chapter on Theme and related matters (*IFG*:64-67); this section, however, is concerned with tracing the successive Themes in the text to reveal the 'method of development', rather than with the explication of what it means for something to be Theme. The concept of 'concern' does nevertheless appear here too in the concluding sentence: 'we can gain an insight into [the text's] texture and understand how the writer made clear to us the nature of his underlying concerns'.

<sup>2</sup> In particular it could not be excused on the grounds of time limitations: the final version of 'Price of reply' was not submitted until February 1992, well after the appearance of Huddleston 1991. Time was found to work on the Martin & Matthiessen paper, dealing with such relatively minor matters as the issue of whether they had been justified in using the term 'simple'.

<sup>3</sup> A second reason why Halliday rejects the Topic-Comment terminology is that Topic 'tends to be used as a cover term for two concepts that are functionally distinct, one being that of Theme and the other being that of Given': this relates to the issue discussed above and does not bear on that of 'metafunctional restriction'. Note, moreover, that that the confusion between or conflation of two concepts is not confined to those who use the 'topic-comment' terminology: Martin himself notes that 'Firbas's 1964:268 translation of Mathesius's proposed definition of Theme clearly treats Theme as a combination of what Halliday separates as independent variables, Theme and Given: "[the theme] is that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation and from which the speaker proceeds"'.

<sup>4</sup> Halliday would deny that first position constitutes a definition of Theme (cf., for example, 1985:39), but that point is not made in the paper Bazell was reviewing; here Halliday writes (1970:161): 'The theme of a clause is the element which, in English, is put in first position', and it is natural in the context to interpret this as a definition.

<sup>5</sup> Another case where essential material is improperly suppressed from a quotation occurs in Martin 1992:§2.3:

- i Fries' paper, entitled 'On the status of Theme in English: arguments from discourse' is item 13 in Halliday's *Bibliography*, which Huddleston 1988:139 evaluates as making 'no reference, or virtually none, to the literature, either functional or formal'

What I said (in the context of remarking that I did not think *IFG* would do as much as one could have hoped to increase the dialogue between functional and formal linguistics) was:

- ii Moreover, there is no reference, or virtually none, to the literature, either functional or formal — only a selective bibliography of 'works relating directly to the interpretation of English in a systemic-functional framework'

I was here making the standard distinction between referring to works in the text (with a list of references at the end giving bibliographical details) and giving a bibliography. What I said in (ii) is true: there is thus no reference in the text of *IFG* to the work of Fries or any other named scholar on Theme. Suppression of the second half of (ii) leads to an inexcusable distortion of the meaning.

<sup>6</sup> This limitation on the nominal group section illustrates what I referred to in my review of *IFG* (1988:137) as its 'quite selective and uneven' coverage; this was intended as a neutral description (rather than a criticism: the book is an introduction, not a comprehensive grammar), but Matthiessen & Martin found it 'unproductively negative' and untrue.

<sup>7</sup> As observed in Huddleston (1991:94), Halliday does not provide a multivariate structure for the adverbial group, but the fact that it can contain embedded clauses could be regarded as evidence that it does have a multivariate structure.

<sup>8</sup> For (i) to have a ternary structure, it would be necessary to treat the embedded clause as part of the Epithet, i.e. to say that the nominal group had a single element of structure Epithet, realised by a  $\beta^{\wedge}\alpha^{\wedge}\beta$  structure. This would require, however, that we allow an embedded clause to function in the structure of a word complex, which is excluded by what is said on p. 219 and also (as argued in Huddleston 1991:88) by the theory of rank and complex structure.

<sup>9</sup> Again, I was not the only reviewer to comment on the lack of an adjectival group in *IFG* - cf. Morley (1986:188); Would Martin & Matthiessen want to say that Morley too was suffering from an inability to see the obvious brought on by the intrusion of competing agendas?

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A REPLY TO MARTIN AND TO MARTIN & MATTHIESSEN

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