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From Teaching Literature to Exploring Ideological Development:
The life and works of Ruqaiya Hasan

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Ruqaiya Hasan is a renowned linguist, who throughout her life has made major contributions, including the application of linguistics to the study of the verbal arts, establishing textual cohesion as an area of study, and extending Bernstein's theories to mother-child interactions, but above all, to explore "the continuity between the smallest unit of linguistic meaning through to the living of life" (Cloran et al. 1996, p1). This paper will explore some of the salient aspects of her contributions, roughly following a biographical model.

Applying Linguistics to Literature

Ruqaiya was not always a linguist. She started her professional life as a teacher of English Literature, and it was only through trying to teach literature effectively that she found her way into linguistics.

In 1958, Ruqaiya was taking a Masters of Arts in English Literature at the University of Punjab in Pakistan. To support herself, she was teaching English Literature to undergraduates, and she believed strongly in the value of what she was doing:

> *...at that time I believed that I was going to save my corner of the world by teaching people literature. Literature in those days seemed to me not only to offer an understanding of human life, but also to cultivate in the reader a sense of better things humanity could achieve. I*

felt if my students could read literature with understanding, they would probably understand how things work in this world, what is wrong with it and how it can be put right; they wouldn't have to depend on me or anyone else. (Halliday and Hasan 2006, p31)

However, she did question the way Literature was taught at that time:

...all I was doing by way of teaching literature was to tell them what I or some critic had thought about a literature text, and it was effectively these same opinions they had to reproduce in their term papers and in exams. Of course, this is how I was taught literature, but now I found it truly appalling - what kind of teaching was this where all you were being required to learn was to repeat someone else's opinions without understanding why they said what they did? (ibid. 2006, p30-1)

Additionally, she was aware that many of the students could not gain value from the study of English literature because their own poor grasp of English got in the way of their understanding the messages of the texts.

To find answers to these two problems, Ruqaiya applied for a British Council scholarship for the postgraduate Diploma in Applied Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh. She did this "in the hope of not only learning something about effective ESL teaching but also, and even primarily, to explore what one could do about teaching literature more effectively" (ibid, p31). In this course, she joined ESL teachers from the British Council, as well as promising candidates from around the world. Braj Kachru, now famous for his pioneering work on 'World Englishes', was in Ruqaiya's class. One of their main teachers was Michael Halliday, then starting to develop what is now called Systemic Functional Grammar.

For the main work in the Diploma, Ruqaiya applied the linguistic theory she was learning to literature, analysing a short story. She learnt that:

> *English grammar does not have to be meaningless - the patterns of language, systematically related to meaning, could form a firm basis for a viable analysis of meaning in literature texts.* (ibid. p31)

Ruqaiya continued her study in Edinburgh, via a Ph.D., supervised by Angus McIntosh, Halliday, and John Sinclair, later of COBUILD fame. Her work started to explore how linguistics might be used to access meanings in literature. She performed a grammatical analysis of clauses and phrases of parts of two novels. While she gained some insights from the study, she found that most importantly, it showed what was missing:

> *It was obvious that simply doing grammatical analysis and presenting an account of that analysis in the form of umpteen tables just didn't get to the heart of literature: there is no direct connection between the percentages of structure types and reader's evaluation. What one needed was to somehow show the significance of all this grammatical patterning.* (ibid, p33)

Ruqaiya's published works in relation to language and literature include: Hasan (1967), Hasan (1971), Hasan (1975), Hasan (1988), Hasan (1989a) and Hasan (1996a). Amongst these works, Hasan (1996a) is particularly important, addressing the issue of teaching literature to those of cultures different from which the literature was written (literature and cultural distance). Many of these works are difficult to find now, but will be released in a collected volume to appear in 2013 (Hasan, to appear).

Cohesion in English

The British Council would not fund her doctoral work, as their focus was on language teaching, not literature. However, she took a job teaching English to foreign students, under John Sinclair. In the diploma, she had learnt both Chomskian and Halliday's grammar as it was at that point. She found:

> *It was really easy, for example, to teach students how to transform the 'active' clause into 'passive', but when it came to teaching where and why you use the passive construction rather than the active, well, you couldn't say much using the [Chomskian] framework. About this time, the early 1960s, Michael had been working on the significance of the clause initial position, which was later called 'Theme'. Interestingly, this was useful in explaining some of the semantic work that the passive construction did.* (ibid. p32)

From this and other instances, she concluded that Chomskian grammar was not well suited to effective language teaching: "language learning is not about manipulating structures - the main issue is cultivating the ability to mean appropriately, which requires relating grammar to meaning, not ignoring it." (p32).

Halliday had been working with English teachers, trying to develop a kind of linguistics that could be of help to language teachers. In 1963, he went down to London to take up a post, and received extensive government funding to further develop his approach. The project had linguists and teachers working together:

> *The linguists were supposed to take up the linguistic description of some part of English language, which would become a resource in language teaching; it was the teachers' job to decide what to take and how to integrate it in their teaching materials.* (ibid, p34-5).

This project produced the well-known "Breakthrough to Literacy" resources, and two lesser known products called "Language in Use" and "Language and Communication".

For her dissertation, teaching, and subsequent research work, Ruqaiya was using Halliday's grammar framework. In 1965, after her doctorate, Ruqaiya joined the project in London as one of the linguists. She took on the task of describing connectivity in texts, and this developed into the area of "grammatical cohesion". The work, together with Halliday, was published as *Cohesion in English* (Halliday and Hasan 1976), adding other work on ellipsis and substitution. This was the first work to address this area seriously, and has become the prime reference work for all in the area.

After a year, the romantic link between Halliday and Ruqaiya grew, and it became inappropriate for her to work on his project. Ruqaiya went to the United States for a year, teaching in Champaign, Illinois (teaching Urdu), Berkeley (teaching stylistics) and Yale (on a research project under Sydney Lamb). During this time, Halliday also came to the States, and they married.

Ruqaiya's main works in relation to cohesion include Halliday and Hasan (1976), Hasan (1984a) and Halliday & Hasan (1989, chapter 5).

Language and Social Codes: Bernstein and Mother-Child talk
On her return to London, Ruqaiya started working with Basil Bernstein as a researcher on his project. His group had been closely affiliated with Halliday's group, often attending each other's talks. Bernstein was "interested in accounting for the relatively poor performance of working-class students in language-based subjects, when they were achieving scores as high as their middle-class counterparts on mathematical topics" (Young 2002). Bernstein came to believe that part of the reason for working class children to fail in school was because of the way they were socialised in the family: middle class children

had often been socialised into the language of education in the home, while working class children had not.

His project was exploring this difference, exploring the language used by and around children in the families of different classes. Ruqaiya was given the task of analysing a corpus of children's writings, to see whether linguistic analysis could bring out the underlying grammatical patterns, to test whether there were significant differences between the classes (Halliday in Hernandez 2000).

This project helped shape one of the major directions in Ruqaiya's career. When Halliday took up a post at Sydney University (1975), Ruqaiya followed him and took up a post at nearby Macquarie University. In the 1980s, she finally had the opportunity to return to the work she started under Bernstein:

> *It always irked me that Bernstein kept being misread even by respected scholars such as Labov. ... So I geared up to do empirical research in the linguistic aspects of coding orientation. With Macquarie University research funding I began a pilot project in 1981 on `The role of everyday talk between mothers and children in establishing ways of learning.* (Halliday and Hasan 2006, p41)

Ruqaiya's work with Bernstein had focused mostly on grammatical patterns. One of her colleagues in that earlier project, Geoffrey Turner, had worked at a more semantic level, exploring the strategies used by mothers to control their children (commands, threats appeals, etc.), and how these strategies differed between classes (see Turner 1973). In her new work, Ruqaiya was following similar lines. However, Turner's data had consisted of asking children what their mothers would say in particular circumstances, while Ruqaiya asked mothers to record themselves in everyday contexts interacting with their young children (Cloran *et al* 1996, p8).

This pilot study was carried out as follows, with Helen Fraser as research assistant:

Four case studies were conducted on the basis of naturally occurring talk between mothers and children - two mother-child dyads were from the working class and two from the middle class. The idea was to do a semantic analysis of the talk to examine whether there existed any indication of coding orientation. (Halliday and Hasan 2006, p41)

After this pilot study was over, Ruqaiya applied for national funding for a larger project, which was granted, and she worked with Carmel Cloran, David Butt and Geoffrey Williams. The results of this work have been published, for instance in Hasan (1986), Hasan (1989) and Hasan and Cloran (1990).

Cloran *et al* (1996) conclude that this research program directed by Ruqaiya gave results "invaluable in beginning to understand how everyday talk in the home contributes to the ontogenesis of ideology" (p8). It was also through this research programme that Ruqaiya developed her notion of a socio-semantics, and how it relates downwards to grammar (see Hasan 1996b for instance).

Ruqaiya summarised the results of the project as follows:

[the project] made a comparison of habitual ways of meaning in correlation with social class and gender provenance of the speakers; statistically robust evidence was found for postulating semantic variation as one kind of variation in language, which correlated with the social positioning of speakers. For the first time, the analysis of large-scale natural language data foregrounded the linguistic criteria for Bernstein's coding orientation.

Generic Structure Potential

In this chronological picture of Ruqaiya Hasan's academic life, many aspects have not been covered. One important area is her work on Generic Structure Potential (GSP). During the 1970s, she worked extensively on the use of GSP, modelling the structure of written texts and spoken interactions in terms of stages (see e.g., Hasan 1978; 1984b; Chapter 5 in Halliday and Hasan 1989). Her main focus was on relating the occurrence and ordering of particular stages to the particular contextual configuration of the text (the context of situation in Halliday's terms).

Her approach was adopted by Eija Ventola, who was her M.A. student in the 1970s. Because there was no Ph.D. programme at Macquarie University, Ventola did her Ph.D. with Jim Martin at Sydney University. He later used Generic Structure (what he called schematic structure) as an important component of Australian Genre Theory, which is gaining increasing acceptance world-wide as part of not only English teaching, but also within the teaching of content areas such as geography, science, history, etc.

Coda

This brief note has summarised some of the ways in which the work Ruqaiya Hasan has changed the way we look at text, first as a teacher of English Literature, later as a grammarian, and finally as a sociologist using language to explore human development.

Many of her publications have been hard to find, but recently her collected works (over 7 volumes) have started to appear (Equinox publishers), with two already available, and the rest will be out by 2013.

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