

A Timeless Journey: On the Past and Future of Present Knowledge

Preamble

I have been asked to write an account of my intellectual life by way of introducing the chapters in this volume. On the face of it, this should have been easy: after all, having undertaken the work deliberately, even the most modest of us would admit to knowing its history better than that of any one else's work. It should, therefore, be simple to say why I chose the directions I did; and, with some effort, it might be possible to even distance myself enough from my work to speculate dispassionately on its impact either at the present moment or possibly some time in the future. But these things simply *appear* simple; the fact is that the history of human knowledge, no matter how humble, neither has a simple beginning nor a simple route to development: the humbler the knowledge, the truer this observation. Unless one is able to work from a reasonably detailed diary—and I was never a diarist—one is somewhat liable to seeing the remembered past with the eyes of present preoccupations, adjusting events with a view to positions that are favored here and now; and so far as the present is concerned, it seems to possess a protean quality—you can make of it what you will—which means that ideas about the future of present knowledge are likely to rest on somewhat shaky grounds. Faced with these realizations, only one possible solution presents itself to me, and that is: leaving the issue of any impact of my work aside, I should turn to the context of this volume searching for a starting point for what led me to work of the kind included here and continue the story from that point. This, most probably, will not prevent the present from coloring the events recounted in this 'autobiography', but at least it will avoid having to say anything about the usefulness of 'the deeds done' either now or in the future.

From this perspective, the most important element of that context is surely the use of linguistics in attempting to solve linguistic problems. This thought takes me to September 1960 when I first arrived in Edinburgh to do a

post-graduate diploma in Applied Linguistics. At that time I had only a vague idea of linguistics as something that might help in solving problems which concern doing something where language plays a central role. As a teacher of English language and literature in Pakistan I had naturally encountered some of these—which is why I was grateful to the British Council for enabling me to do some linguistics at Edinburgh. Two problems engaged me particularly at that time: one, how to teach English to non-native speakers so as to enable them to cope successfully with what we now call ‘curriculum genres’ following Christie (1987a, 1987b); and, secondly, how to conceptualize the ‘teaching of literature’ at the university level so as to enable the students to produce their own reasoned analysis of a literary work; this was essential if they were to free themselves from simply following renowned critics, whose unquestioned reputation for taste rendered their literary taste unquestionable. As it happened, to qualify for a Diploma in Applied Linguistics, I focused on the problem of teaching literature for my independent research: to me the learning of English as a second language was simply a politically imposed requirement—whereas literature had seemed more important—socially, morally, and pedagogically.

Challenging linguistics with literature

As an academic, this was the most important decision of my life. I had, of course, no inkling of the many aspects of language which I would have to explore from a state of considerable ignorance in pursuit of this problem, so at that stage, the complexities of the problem seemed not very complex. This was perhaps a stroke of luck, for, otherwise, I might have been intimidated from rushing in quite so readily. Plunging headlong into my chosen problem—how to teach literature to enable the learner to produce an independent reasoned ‘reading’ of some existing work in literature—opened unimagined vistas unchecked by preconceived ideas; it took me into multiple new domains of the study of language in its socio-cultural context. With a post-grad degree in English literature, I was familiar with how language was said to feature in literary criticism, and how the artistic milieu of the work of art and the artist’s own biography were relevant to the qualities of its formation. Some of the lecturers who taught us literature at University College Lahore in Pakistan were brilliant teachers: from Safdar Mir I had learned about the critical importance of ideology to the creation and

evaluation of verbal art; Khwaja Manzoor's erudite lectures had opened up the world of literary criticism, discussing the many features of style across the various genres; Siraj Saheb (as he was known to all of us) held us spellbound for hours with his fascinating interpretations of instances of verbal art—particularly the intricate meaning structures in Shakespeare. I did not know then that the many important aspects of verbal art, such as ideology, artistic milieu, author's own life history, stylistic features and meaning structures—each of which was introduced individually in literary criticism—worked together in shaping the nature of verbal art; I had no idea what part they played and how in bestowing the artistic credibility of form and a sense of aesthetic power on some of these texts; nor would I have been able to say what had failed to work in cases where this did not seem to happen. The significance of this gap had not struck me then, but now engaged in research on a specific question that embraced the entire world of literature, I realized that in order to answer the question I had raised, I needed to see these multiple aspects in relation to each other. This has turned out to be a highly complex challenge. The claim is not an exaggeration that, no matter what aspect of language I was engaged in researching in the next fifty years of my life as a linguist, the challenges raised by verbal art were never far from my mind. And yet, it would be far from true to say that I have resolved the challenge completely, much less that I have expressed my solutions clearly and explicitly.

Sometime later during the research, it came as a surprise to realize that at some level of abstraction all these individual 'aspects', singled out in the volumes of literary criticism as critical to the evaluation of verbal art, pertain *only* to two phenomena, namely, its *socio-cultural environment* and *the semiotic system of language*. Today I would describe their mutual relation as synergic: in the evolution of human cultures as we know them language has played a major role while an imprint of their user's sociality becomes an inherent attribute of human languages around the world; this synergic relation allows each to play a unique role in verbal art. Take the obvious fact that all aspects of literature in the sense of verbal art as discussed in the last section of this volume (and elsewhere, e.g., Hasan 1985a) depend on the possibilities of the verbal—i.e., linguistic—system. It is by using language that the artist is able to explore some set of fundamental cultural elements that have become—or are on the way to becoming—part of our consciousness/our mental habits, and these foreground for us the deepest concerns of

humanity: how in the time that is ours for living, we humans act, react, relate to others, living for a brief moment without perhaps raising the tiniest of ripples in a timeless world, and how we must depart alone with or without pomp and glory, often leaving the world seemingly unimpressed; the artist thus explores the deep meaning of human history, and/or philosophy, and/or sociality, and or ethics and morality. To explore these universal themes of human existence bracketed between being and not being, to articulate *artistically* the sense of such a vast universe of feeling, longing, action and emotion as a coherent metaphor, verbal art relies most on these two indispensable matrices as its sources of energy—the powerful semiotic system of language and the intricately woven fabric of the semiotically shaped culture.

Towards a social-semiotic stylistics

It became clear to me that a study of these two engines of power as they operate together in bringing about the instantiation of verbal art can lead to an understanding of what is most central to the definition of this artistic activity, throwing light both on its production and its reception. The elements essential to the creation of verbal art are activated by the community's social history leading right up to the moment of its actual production: it is the socio-semiotically shaped communal history that provides an insight into the impulse which, speaking metaphorically, makes the dramatist choose this particular drama and these *dramatis personae*, linking the theme of his/her work to this cultural issue or that; the choice of what theme to focus on in verbal art is so open, so indifferent to the immediate social occasion of language use (which is what literature is in the final analysis—just a variety of language use), that we have often looked for its 'activation' in the artist's imagination. Certainly imagination comes into it, but what shapes the artist's imagination and drives it towards this choice or that? My research shows that the secret lies in sensing some appealing perspective on some critical element of the internalized experience of living; further, the artistic externalization of this theme is enabled by the artist's intimate relation, his/her sensitivity to language as a meaning potential. The 'poet's divine madness' germinates in the social-semiotic terrain.

This same social history which is important for the production of the verbal art, also shapes its reception which often varies from one instance to

another, raising some interesting questions: what makes one instance of verbal art fit to be treated as just light entertainment enjoyed today and forgotten tomorrow, while another is received as a deeply engaging and memorable aesthetic experience whose value might survive across the culturally changing centuries, and sometimes even across distinct cultures: obvious examples are Shakespeare in English, Ghalib in Urdu and Hafez in Persian. It is not the physical nature of time and space that make a difference: what matters is how they become carriers of culture, namely, the essentially human experience of ways of being, saying and meaning, that has to be internalized by the makers of verbal art as well as by its readers: it is largely this experience that presents them with specific fashions of speaking and interpreting, 'valid' standards of taste. This is what underlies both the modes of being artistic and of evaluating the artistic quality. Seen thus, the entire process of verbal art is a cultural enterprise: this resonance of cultural ambience is not negated even if the elements of the social history are deliberately repudiated by an artist or a reader; the repudiation simply positions the instance of verbal art, the artist and the reader in some specific relation to the social circumstances; the simple fact is that the attributes of *conventionality* and *originality* are mutually defining.

If the creation, evaluation and duration of literary value are clarified by appeal to its social-semiotic nature, then clearly the situation calls for a keen understanding of the 'language-culture connection' (James 1996). There are no shortcuts in this business: no aspect of language is expendable, no semiotically shaped cultural element is irrelevant, and an understanding of their mutual relation to the production, reception and evaluation of verbal art is an essential requirement for validly accepting, rejecting, or modifying the existing (frames for) reading a given instance. Put thus, the project sounds straightforward. However, it would be foolish to give the impression that such a research has actually been exhaustively and successfully accomplished: a project of this kind requires not just fifty years by one scholar but more than fifty scholars devoting their working life to it. Some of the difficulties in the path of this research arise from the nature of verbal art; others are institutional. I have already said a few words on the challenges inherent in the complexity of verbal art; turning to the institutional reasons, consider the nature of 'lit-crit' and the established modes of literature pedagogy as two institutions that 'live off each other': as one indicative example of this claim, I point simply to the fact that in the half century since the publication

of *Style in Language* in 1960, which initially foregrounded the relevance of linguistics to reading literature, any public research has been rarely conducted in the pedagogic institutions of the world for a linguist qualified in stylistics either by a department of literary studies or by that of linguistics—which naturally acts as one powerful dis-incentive, bringing in its wake a denial of recognition to the field, and of time and space that could be legitimately devoted to the pursuit of research by interested scholars: stylistics is not as popular as the often misguided psycholinguistics or sociolinguistics, both of which are represented in the departments of linguistics all over the world. So why do I go on in this fashion about the centrality of understanding the nature of literature? What does it have to do with applied linguistics? How is it relevant to anything in lit-crit. or in linguistics as a *science of language*? Who cares about it anyway?

It would be an inadequate response to say defiantly that notwithstanding these hurdles, I have continued to present analyses of instances of verbal art: for the fact is that at my official place of work, that labor had been seen as additional to my ‘proper’ teaching in linguistics; or, that many of my colleagues—though not a large number by any means—pursue the line of enquiry I initiated in my doctoral research and later elaborated: these scholars too typically find such work treated as optional extra; or, that occasionally I have had the pleasure of supervising brilliant doctoral students such as, for example, David Butt at Macquarie University: to his credit he does currently offer a course on ‘Stylistics’ but it rates as option, not core; or that one of my most sought after publications, called *Linguistics, Language and Verbal Art* (1985a), was concerned with this area: the fact is it has been out of print for over twenty years. So none of these responses offers a viable explanation for my claim that ‘of all the applications of linguistics, that to the study of literature is potentially the most challenging and most fruitful’ (Hasan 1975): if truth be told, the real reason for my claim is that in my experience research on verbal art lays a foundation of respect for what is most central to the humanities and the social sciences, i.e., for the far reaching effects of language and culture on the formation of human history. Let me elaborate this claim by saying a little about how some of my research on language has gained by my interest in the study of literature.

Verbal art as discourse

Whatever else an instance of verbal art is, one thing is certain: barring

accidents, every one of its instances is ‘a complete text’—something that has a ‘natural’ beginning, middle and end. This was true of the instances of verbal art when they had only an oral manifestation, and it is true of them now that they typically have graphic manifestation, though technological advances might make it appear otherwise. But what is a text? How does it relate to verbal art or to the artist’s *oeuvre*? Can the uniqueness of artistic style define *text-ness*? Suppose you mixed up lines from two of Wordsworth Lucy poems, would the resultant make *a text*? If not, why not? What validates the textual boundaries across Shakespeare’s *The First Part of Henry the Fourth, with the Life and Death of Henry Surnamed Hotspur*, *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth Containing his Death and the Coronation of King Henry the Fifth*, and *The Life of Henry the Fifth*? With interest in verbal art, it was no accident that very early research on the concept of text came to occupy a central place in my working life. Luckily, as a linguist researcher working on the Nuffield Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching at University College London (1965-1967), I was able to do a considerable amount of linguistic research which formed a large part of *Cohesion in English* (co-authored with M. A. K. Halliday 1976). Now a classic in text analysis—sometimes called ‘cohesion analysis’—the research identified the majority of linguistic resources for creating continuity in English texts. Further developments in research along this line followed while working (1968-1971) on the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Children’s Stories in Bernstein’s Sociological Research Unit (SRU): this later research examined important parameters for the classification of cohesive chains and their functions in the ecology of a text (Hasan 1973b, MS); I succeeded in identifying a particular type of dual relation between elements of two or more cohesive chains: on the one hand these items were cohesive by virtue of being in a cohesive chain, on the other their cohesive power was enhanced by an experiential relation based largely but not exclusively on transitivity functions. This mode of investigation in the analysis of textual continuity, which I called *cohesive harmony*, on the one hand, clarified critical difference between the concepts of ‘cohesion’ and ‘coherence’, and on the other, it offered an objective method for measuring the degree of intra-textual relevance, without an appeal to the hidden mental processes (for example, see Chapter 11 in Section 3 of this volume). Together cohesion and cohesive harmony offer a powerful picture of that kind of textual unity which Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to as ‘the texture of the text’. This form of continuity is

a necessary, though not sufficient condition, for some piece of language to be treated as an instance of text. It took a little time to establish the nature of that other kind of unity which would help identify ‘a complete text’?

I began my studies in Edinburgh with a linguistics that derived its main inspiration from Firth; so the concept of context of situation was central to it. Halliday’s modification of the Firthian framework along with the introduction of the category of register (later published in Halliday, McIntosh & Stevens 1964) presented concepts and relations that seemed useful in pinpointing the notion of text. The term ‘register’ was said to refer to a variety of language defined by its use; the nature of use could itself be analyzed in terms of three parameters of the text’s context of situation, namely, *field*, *tenor* and *mode*. Field concerned the type of language activity: this might consist of just some linguistic activity, e.g., discussion or as linguistic activity taking place by way of assisting a non-linguistic event, for example in getting a child dressed. Tenor (initially called ‘style’) concerned the ‘relations’ of participants functioning in the language activity (and the non-language event, if present); for example, it is one thing for an adult to bake a cake (non-language event) with the help of a child (with linguistic activity assisting the non-linguistic event of baking cakes), and quite another if the participants are a professional chef and his assistant: the language activity in the two cases would be noticeably different, despite the fact that the field and mode (of contact with language) would be the same, i.e., field: language ancillary assisting in baking cake; and mode: spoken and dialogic. Given these facts, it follows that a text could be treated as a case of some specific category of register; as such the identity of the two—the register variety and the text pertaining to that variety—would stand in a type-token relation. In this perspective, the identity of a text could be characterized by the fact that throughout its extent the same specific field, the same specific tenor and the same mode of discourse would be manifested. It was this view that was later reformulated as a general principle (Halliday & Hasan 1976): texts display registerial consistency.

Do texts have registerial consistency?

Though applicable to most text types, the principle turned out to display some notable exceptions as I discovered in analyzing the language sample for my doctoral research in 1962-1963. Drawn from two contemporary novels,

the sample presented a goodly number of quite distinct registers; thus in one of them—*Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* by Angus Wilson—one encountered registers ranging from casual conversation amongst the members of the family to fairly formal discussion of the significance of an archaeological find, from discourse between two persons with a history of intimate relation which had now ‘burnt out’ to discourse of a doting mother about her wayward son addressed to a husband, a famous professor of anthropological archaeology at one time, but now a withdrawn and quizzical witness to the motley events of daily life; and this random collection does not exhaust the list of registers in that one text. It seemed as if, by no stretch of imagination, could either of the texts be said to possess ‘registral consistency’. But there were three interesting facts about this finding: first, it seemed very likely that this lack of registral consistency did not apply to all of literary genres: it was only the so-called ‘fictive’ genres, e.g., novel, novella, long short stories and most drama that displayed this tendency. Secondly, even in these cases, it did not create the kind of lack of unity that would be evident if one put parts of two Lucy poems together, or married parts of two Shakespearean sonnets, or attempted to create ‘one text’ by joining a page from William Golding’s *Free Fall* to one from Angus Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*. Surprisingly, the co-occurrence of varied contexts, instead of creating chaos, displayed a text that seemed to hang together, with fleshed out events and interacting characters providing a vivid picture of the nature of their relationship; the ‘assortment’ of contexts appeared to move in congruent semantic direction. The overall effect was rather different from much of casual conversation being recorded in Edinburgh at the time: there it seemed you had a succession of different conversations not just ‘one complete text’. What exactly was going on? Thirdly, hard on this discovery, there arose another question: assuming that verbal art is really ‘just a kind of language use’—technically a (hyper) register variety, what specific context of situation characterized the identity of that variety? These, and other related questions, in the words of the philosopher, Susan Langer, proved ‘productive’. Sadly, this does not mean I can claim to have resolved these problems in a satisfactory way in my doctoral dissertation; far from it: some of the decisions I made then embarrass me even now. But to be fair to myself I was keenly aware of the dissertation’s shortcomings; I knew, despite its encouraging reception, it had raised more questions than it had answered. I would, though, take credit for one thing: that even though, after this initial

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‘apprenticeship’, I have never had the luxury of officially working on the linguistics of verbal art, I have never lost sight of these questions. And in time this problem centered approach to linguistics has paid off by contributing to my understanding of literature, particularly the working of its stratal organization as discussed in the chapters that make up the last section of this volume (also, relevant, Hasan 1985a); further, it took me into a deeper analysis of the relation of text and context than was available at that moment in the theory of linguistics that was to become SFL.

The structure of stories told by children

Working on the Sociolinguistic Study of Children’s Stories at the SRU offered an excellent opportunity for continuing reflection around the concept of context, register variety and text. The SRU had collected a large number of stories invented extempore by young school children in response to a prompt by the interviewer asking them to tell ‘a bed-time story’ to ‘this teddy bear’ about ‘this sailor, this boy and girl, and this dog.’ In terms of ‘lit-crit’, the genre had been specified, and the ‘*dramatis personae*’ were represented by appropriate toys; the adult expectation was for the child to imagine and narrate the sequence of events that would bring the given characters together around the events. The question was whether the children would actually do what was required—whether everything they said in response to the instruction could be regarded as a story; and would it matter if they did not use all the ‘named’ characters. Given that this was a sociolinguistic research with child-subjects belonging to two distinct sociologically defined sub-communities, what they did actually could be significant: it might, for example, reveal whether there was a significant correlation between children’s social background and some culturally conformist criteria for recognizing ‘a bed-time story’ with verbal ability to ‘word’ the story? In other words, I needed to find out if the children had any idea of the kind of discourse called story and how successful they were in externalizing that idea—I flatter myself that this was perhaps the first faltering perception of what turned into Bernstein’s sophisticated ‘recognition’ and ‘realization rules’ for engaging in social practice (1990). Be that as it may, the problem I faced now could not be resolved by reference to cohesion; the conclusion was unavoidable that, to be an instance of any register, a text must also possess some other kind of attribute such that not only did the

reader/listener recognize a piece of language as an instance of some particular register but also whether or not as an instance of that register it was complete. No two stories are identical, but overwhelmingly most will display a ‘generalized structural formula’ (Hasan 1978; Chapter 9 in this volume). Later this would become ‘generalized structure potential’ or GSP. This is where the idea of textual structure first had its beginning for me; the version for the structural unity of a ‘story’—or ‘nursery tale’ as I called it—as presented here in Chapter 10, took some time to develop, but looking at the sample of 80 from among the ‘stories’ produced by children, even the first version made it sufficiently clear that variations on general structural formula that I had designed on this research would allow a meaningful classification of my data. Though both Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Mitchell (1975) were known to me, from my perspective both had been off the mark; at that time the work that I read with interest and from which I learned a good deal about the nature of children’s stories was Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*.

But while working on the problem of a GSP for the nursery tale, I could no longer ignore a question that had haunted me throughout my doctoral research: if literature is a variety of register, what is its context like? Clearly it was not like Mitchell’s buying and selling in Cyrenaica: there, the situation at the material site of the linguistic activity was a motivating factor for predicting what language would be used stage by stage of the material activity; situation, in Mitchell’s words, correlated with the language used in the text. But thinking of the children’s stories under analysis, if there were any such *situationally* ‘given’ *referents*, they would presumably be the instruction to tell a ‘bedtime story’ about ‘this sailor, boy, girl, dog’ and possibly, ‘teddy bear’: clearly no story could be made just with those referents; besides not all children used them, which did not necessarily mean that therefore they did not produce a story! Ignoring a few formulaic expressions such as the famous *once upon a time*, the words and phrases that can occur in a text instantiating the story genre are so varied that it would be absurd to suppose they could be specified as the elements of any context for producing stories. So what is the relationship of the context of situation to texts pertaining to the story-genre?

Material situational setting and relevant context

It was around this time that I coined the term ‘material situational setting’

(Hasan 1973c; Chapter 2 in this volume) in an attempt to differentiate between the concept of ‘relevant context’ and ‘material situation’. Whether looking at texts as process or as product, I saw relevant context as something that is logically relevant to a text since it is *always encapsulated in the language of the text*. By the term ‘material situational setting’ (MSS) I meant the immediate material surroundings for text production, sometimes referred to as ‘raw situation’. Relevant context in my view was a semiotized entity: thus, thinking of the three dimensions of situation postulated by Halliday *et al.* (1964) as relevant to discourse, it is difficult to think of any text that has no field, no tenor and/or no mode; these texts are semiotized witnesses to both the immediately surrounding situation and the culture to which the situation relates. By contrast, material situational setting, as such, plays a variable role in the process of the text: not all of the MSS is ever fully semiotized. The relevant context of some registers displays minimal semiotization of elements from the situational setting: for example, in writing a text book, the MSS ‘supplies’ only the author, whereas in other cases, such as bathing or dressing a child a good deal of the material situational setting must be semiotized—this might include toys and towels, water and soap, the addressee’s physical presence, and so on and so forth. But in the last resort, no matter what register is being instantiated, there always exists the possibility of some element of the MSS intruding in the process of the text in the shape of interruption, aside, regulation of conduct, and such like. This was the reason I described MSS as ‘a dormant force’ (1973c), though with hindsight I would add now that in specifiable categories of register the intrusion from MSS leaves no trace in the text as a product. In the 1970’s, it seemed to me that given a viable description of the features that pertain to the communal register repertoire, it should be possible to throw better light on the part MSS may play in the process of different register varieties.

The concept of material situational setting proved useful when some time later I attempted to apply Malinowski’s insights on the narrative context to the data of children’s story at SRU. Malinowski suggests (1935) that narratives—more specifically, his example belongs to the recount genre—have not one but two contexts: the *primary* and the *secondary*. By primary context he meant the actual spatio-temporal occasion where a speaker narrates some ‘story’ either based on personal experience or previously orally transmitted to the community in general—this is obviously important for

deciding what kind of narrative would be suitable for the occasion. The secondary context of a narrative is that which is construed by the words and phrases of the narrative itself. In terms of the above discussion about stories told by the children, this would be the context encapsulated in the language used by the children by way of telling their story, and in my usage it would refer to the text's *relevant context*. The primary context of the required narrative was the interview itself; however the interviewer's instruction and the appearance of certain objects in that context, could not be seen as having any *necessary* correlation with the relevant context of the stories produced by the subject children: they might or might not have used all the 'props' the interviewer provided, but this would make no difference to the generic status of the stories told by them; the relevant context would include some elements of the primary context of interview only if the children did take up some of the suggestions made by the interviewer (or some accident such as the sudden break down of the tape recorder). In other words, both the generic status of a text and its relevant context depend solely on what the speaker does with language in some situational setting: from this perspective, an inappropriate or irrelevant discourse has a 'relevant context' which displays a non-responsive relation to the immediate situational setting. The integrity of the relevant context is disrupted only when the system based order of language massively breaks down, as for example in brain trauma of some kind. It is, in fact, this potential of language for construing relevant context that allows us to produce such experiences as are enshrined in religion, verbal art, and in much of the varied domains of knowledge presented in the social and physical sciences. Relevant context is an important concept in connection with verbal art, and building on Malinowski's thinking, I have suggested a multiple contextual framework for genres in the domain of verbal art (1971a, 2007, i.e., Chapters 12 and 13 of this volume; see also 1985a, 1996): these are (i) *the context of production* which locates the artist in his/her cultural ways of being, doing and saying; (ii) *the context of reception*, which places the work in the reader's cultural modes of being, doing and saying; and (iii) *the text's relevant context*, i.e., the contexts construed by the artist's use of language which is what ultimately gives shape to some theme—i.e., 'the deepest level of meanings' in that work—voiced by the text's semiotic organization playing a central role in cumulatively realizing the theme's artistic articulation.

In 1971, I left London with my family for USA. I was then completing

a book length report on the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Children's Stories to be published by Routledge in the series known as Primary Socialization, Language and Education. For reasons I have discussed elsewhere (Halliday & Hasan 2006) this report entitled *Language in the Imaginative Context: A Sociolinguistic Study of Stories Told by Children* was unfortunately never completed but before I finally signed off, I had already written up three substantial chapters. These contained much of the linguistic methodology for concerning the analysis of aspects of texture (1973a), the methodology and considerations for drawing a viable sample for linguistic research especially from the data of extempore spoken language (1973b), and some comments on the notion of story as well as the structure of the story. Fragments of this material were presented in invited talks in the USA and in the courses I taught at North Western University (Evanston, Illinois) during 1973-1974; later when I moved to Macquarie University in 1976, the materials became available to my students and the select group of SF colleagues within Sydney. As well, in time some ideas concerning texture and structure were published in some free-standing articles (e.g., Chapters 9, 10 and 11 of this volume).

Textual structure (GSP) and register identification

Although the problem of the identification of the genre of a story had been resolved satisfactorily, this did not mean that the question concerning the relations of language, context and register had been generally answered. When Halliday *et al.* (1964) suggested that registers are defined by their 'formal properties', I interpreted it as emphasizing that register is not a situational category: it was not known by the situation but by its linguistic patterns, which in my terms meant by their relevant context, not by their material situational setting. Up to the late 1960's, there was no systematic methodology for handling large amounts of analyzed linguistic data. All the same, reliance on 'formal properties' did not seem to me very productive, especially since it meant frequency count of word or pattern tokens. I suggested tentatively (Hasan 1973c: 273) that 'it might be advantageous to specify the characteristics of... registers by reference to some high-level semantic components'; these would be functionally related to the 'situation type' and likely to be 'text-wide', rather than 'localized'. I added (1973c: 274)

It is often difficult to know what value to assign to relative frequencies of items occurring within a text when ... allocating the text to some specific register. If the text is long there seems to be no criterion for concentrating on certain items rather than others. ... the postulate of high-level semantic component provides a justification for picking out those items of the encoding levels which are pertinent to the encoding of the said semantic components ... further, the realization of these ... is not 'localized' ... but ... dispersed over the text as a whole ... the register allocation of a text is impossible without understanding the meaning of the text ... within the meanings of the text there are constellations ... crucial to the identity of the registers; and these are the ... high-level semantic components. .

Today SF linguists readily accept that a register is known by the meanings at risk in it, but the situation was different when the above arguments were presented.

The principle underlying the relationship of context to language (as used in instantiating some register) at this time rested predominantly somewhere between 'determination' and 'correlation'. That context motivates the language in registers as suggested by Halliday *et al.* (1964) was borne out by informal observation in everyday life. On the other hand, thinking of the genres of verbal art, one noted that as McIntosh (1961) put it language is not just 'a tail wagged by the situational dog'. The extent to which 'situation' motivated the language of a register seemed highly variable, ranging from 'almost none' as for example in genres of verbal art, to 'almost all' as for example in shopping or bathing children. The analysis of the structure of children's stories had raised the idea that the identity of all register types might in fact be recognized by the structure of texts. Results from the indicative analysis of two texts (1978, 1979) —both 'manufactured' on the basis of my own everyday experience—proved encouraging. Although in both the field belonged to the quotidian sphere, more delicately the non-linguistic events and so the linguistic activity in the two contexts varied; so did the tenor and mode—in fact, much of the variation in these dimensions was predictable on the basis of field description (for some indications, see Chapter 9 here). These analyses represented the first attempts in SFL to characterize textual structure as a the *potential* available to what, following Bakhtin (1986), might be called a 'speech genre', which is what SFL referred to as 'a register' to avoid the markedly different character of 'genre'

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as used in lit-crit.

Discourse on text structure was not new, but the orientation of my work was unique. Mitchell had dealt with text structure, as in his analysis of 'The language of buying and selling in Cyrenaica' first published in 1957, becoming more widely available in 1975; Mitchell showed that the textual 'stages' correlated with stages in the non-linguistic event but the concept of textual structure did not rise above the instance; it was not Mitchell's concern to examine systematic variation in text structure in correlation with variation in 'contextual configuration' (Hasan 1975). The same is true of Labov and Waletzky (1967): in general, it would not be wrong to say that the 'schematic structures' which sprouted for a number of genres in USA with Rumelhart's work (1975) were 'wholesale' affairs: the entire schematic structure was an aspect of the genre as a whole; if there was any recognition of variation, it was random or governed by the speaker's desire, therefore, 'dynamic'. In SFL, register faces, Janus-like, in two directions: motivated by context of situation, it relates to some non-linguistic phenomena; and being a linguistic category, its formal patterns semiotize some dimensions of the social situation. I began with the recognition that texts instantiating the same register differ from each other, and yet since they instantiated the same social and linguistic category there had to be something in common to them. It followed that register/genre does not have 'a' structure; it could be characterized as offering a potential that would allow a finite number of actual realizations, hence 'generalized structure potential' *a. k. a.* 'generic/registerial structure potential' (GSP). It follows that a valid description of this potential would specify (i) what was invariant in the structure; (ii) what was systematically variable; (iii) what forms variation could take; and (iv) what manifested 'a complete text' capable of instantiating some specific register. I postulated that the potential 'enables' an array of 'semo-logically permissible' structures: a text capable of instantiating that register manifests one member of that array; this is the secret of a text's registrality consistency. In time this last statement had to be revised (Hasan 1999): it is simple texts that manifest one permissible pattern of textual structure; in complex texts there will be more than one pattern, which are integrated within the 'main text' either experientially or interpersonally.

Registers defined as meanings at risk

The GSP leads as a logical progression to the characteristic language of

the register in question: the elements of the GSP differ in terms of the kind of meanings that can be appropriately meant in the realization of each (Hasan 1984, i.e., Chapter 10 this volume; also Hasan 1985b). Thus the realization could be stated in terms of semantic properties pertaining to each element. These semantic entities would be tailored for the purpose for each register: by these steps a method became available now to indicate the explanatory validity of 'a register defined as meanings at risk' claim. Most such semantic entities realizing structural elements display a center of stability where no departure is tolerated while remaining within the same register, but much of the remaining aspects are capable of being realized formally by one out of a number of distinct lexicogrammatical units (for example 1984, Chapter 10 here; 1985b) each slightly different in its meaning. The account thus offered another vector of textual variation within the same register, some aspects of which could be seen to be idiolectal in nature, e.g., say the difference between 'henceforth' and 'from now on' though of course they do vary systematically with variation on the cline of formality in social distance.

The text is where all and any viable evidence of language use is to be found; as such it will always be a focus of study: texture and structure work together. Cohesive harmony, developed a decade ago, when applied to textual study, showed patterns in texts that (a) appeared to correlate with the textual extent—i.e., where one text stops and another begins—and (b) within that frame of the text, it foregrounded elements of its structure by showing somewhat different texture for each. Cohesive harmony presents a situation that in my view requires further work; here the developments introduced by Cloran (1994, 1995, 1999) are likely to offer interesting insights into which aspects in the environment of cohesive harmony identify topical and which identify structural unity in the text. It also became possible to formulate a predictive calculus for registerial consistency (Hasan 1981, i.e., Chapter 8 here): registerial consistency will be maintained throughout a text, if the field is specialized and/or institutional; the tenor has the feature (near-)maximal social distance; and the mode is overwhelmingly written; if spoken it is spoken monologic. In such cases, no matter how long the text, it is likely to remain simple: there is little or no possibility of textual integration (Hasan 1999). Intrusions arising from material situational setting will act as interruptions; if the channel for construing text-meanings is graphic, clearly there will be no trace of this interruption, as for example, in writing about this 'timeless journey': after all the present lengthy text was

not construed in one sitting; there were interruptions but it was desirable not to acknowledge them either explicitly or by inference. By contrast, if the channel had been phonic, as in lecturing to a class, the interruption would still not form part of the text—i.e., it will be seen by all participants as an interruption: it ‘arrests’ the process of the text, but it does not affect its texture or structure. Compare this with contexts where the field is quotidian, the language activity occurring with specific relation to some ongoing non-language event, and the tenor displaying near minimal social distance; the channel, phonic with spoken dialogic mode: these values of the contextual configuration predict that the environment is hospitable to the formation of a complex text—it *does not have to be complex but the potential exists*. A complex text is not a ‘menagerie’ of registers or a random co-occurrence of genres: it has a definite shape activated by a dominant context. To an analyst with a cursory glance, the transcription might appear as ‘different’ registers co-occurring, but, *in situ*, the interactants are seldom misled: they know that the departure from the dominant context is momentary; the ‘diversion’ is a step that either facilitates the non-linguistic event, or it is something that matters to them by way of mutual negotiation of what may/must happen next, or, recalling Bernstein’s ‘regulative discourse’, it aims to control conduct. In these ways the ‘sub-texts’—i.e., what appear like ‘other genres’—are integrated into the main text activated by the dominant context. It remains to be added that a novel, an epic or drama is not a random combination of genres: the principle for the integration of the many sub-texts in verbal art is much more complex than those mentioned here (Chapters 13 and 14 this volume, for some indication). In these ways the continued engagement with register, text and context had been greatly satisfying to me and to my colleagues pursuing similar directions. In closing this account of my work in the area of context, register and text, I must thank my colleague Jim Martin (1985, 1992), whose often justified mis/readings kept me striving to express myself better, though obviously without much improvement.

Linguistics, education and the learning mind

Appointment at Macquarie University in 1976 widened my activities: although I did not have the luxury of actually presenting any work on verbal art as such, I very soon began to supervise one of my most brilliant students in that same field. Besides, I could see a connection with verbal art in

everything I was asked to teach—that is to say, semantics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis: to me linguistics without meaning was ‘a castle built on sand’, and of course sociolinguistics—a study of discrimination between sub-sections of the community could be significant only if it brought language face to face with speakers’ ways of doing and meaning. The only apparent diversion was a service course, but I had the luxury of designing it; I called it *Language and the Child*, and taught it for maybe the early two or three years. *Language and the Child* was a ‘service course’ in the sense that it was a core course for candidates doing a preparatory course in the Department of Education as part of their training as teachers; it was open also to students from linguistics, psycholinguistics and anthropology. Let me begin this phase of my ‘intellectual journey’ with a few words on this course because I learned so much from it!

In preparing for this course, I was glad to have had the experience of having worked, on the one hand, with Halliday on language as a social semiotic system and on the other with Bernstein from whom I had my first lessons in a Marxist sociology. Halliday, a constant source of inspiration, had just published *Learning How to Mean: Explorations in the Development of Language* (1975). This book became the mainstay of my thinking on early child language development; its socio-genetic approach to learning the mother tongue was like a breath of fresh air in an age crowded with expressions such as ‘language acquisition’, ‘LAD’, and ‘universal grammar’, the template for which was curiously close to English. I was sympathetic to the functional approach of the Firthian, Hallidayan linguistics not least due to its interest in discourse, on which I had been working as described above. Also I could recognize in this linguistics the promise of superior research in the study of verbal art: it had a good deal going for it when put face to face with those linguistic approaches which characterized verbal art by its ‘grammatical deviation’, or insisted on atomistic analysis of linguistic form, or even saw it as a ‘macro speech act’. If you are interested in children learning language, you are by definition interested in how they come to be able to use it for the living of life: the answer to that is not in innateness but in participation in registers current in their immediate community. The work of scholars such as Goodenow, my colleague in the department of Psychology, Lock, Trevarthen, Bruner, Bateson and above all Vygotsky and Luria added further weight to the SFL socio-genetic approach.

Bernstein’s work introduced me to the world of sociology: it was he
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who guided my early reading in the domain. For the first time I began to see the intricate nature of human society, its actual details and social organization. I had never questioned the usually accepted meaning of many words, such as ‘intelligence’, ‘learning ability’, ‘equality’, ‘motivation’, ‘egalitarian education’ and so on; their problematic nature suddenly began to reveal itself. Although Bernstein’s code theory (for some discussion, Chapter 2 here) was not about learning language in the conventional sense, his perspective allowed—uniquely in sociology—a central position to language: he argued that the early experience of participation in communal ‘fashions of speaking’ actually ‘fashioned’ the growing child’s forms of consciousness—what is called today ‘habits of the mind’ following Lave (1997); Bernstein’s ‘coding orientation’ is one agency that is active in establishing the habits of the mind in an individual. Whether one examines learning in everyday life or in educational institutions, Bernstein’s concept of ‘coding orientation’ is central to all mental process because it brought language and the formation of human consciousness in a logical relation to each other; in my view, educators ignore the importance of this concept at their peril (Hasan 2009). In my lectures I placed the paucity of analysis in the nativist framework side by side with the explanatory power of the socio-genetic one. Focus was on understanding and analyzing language in order to see how one learns and what impediments there may exist in our complex, stratified societies.

For evaluating students’ performance on this course I had included a mini-research report as a major element in their final submission. Options for this research included recording young children’s language in different environments which could be analyzed from different perspectives; this led to two important though completely unplanned results. First, the work the students submitted with accompanying audio-recorded data added to my familiarity with young children’s naturally occurring language. It revived the memory of naturally occurring language used by primary and secondary school children that I had collected as Research Officer at the University of Leeds in 1964 (Nuffield Foreign Languages Teaching Materials Project, Directed by S. Spicer). The materials collected by the students showed that even pre-school children have better sense than to make sentences such as ‘Run Spot, Run!’. In real everyday life children reason; appreciate the point of jokes; catch nuances in their mother’s discourse; begin to manage the different registers at different levels of efficiency, and as they move into

literacy practices at school, their spoken and written language begins to vary; and so on. So the raw material itself was a source of learning; but the students were required to analyze the data. This led to the second unexpected consequence. The students needed some tool for analyzing language. It was difficult to teach sufficient functional grammar on a 13 hour course to enable linguistic analysis. Since ‘speech act theory’ was on everyone’s lips, I decided it would be useful for the students to be introduced to a more ‘linguistic’ version of it. It was here that I first began to draw system networks for ‘speech acts’. The feature in these system networks represented some semantic element: choice amongst these would help identify the speech function of messages under analysis. The options were realized by some lexicogrammatical patterns which showed the connection between linguistic form and linguistic meaning. I hoped this might prevent easy appeals to speaker intentions and intuitions, which were popular tools for the analysis of speech acts in the current speech act frameworks (Austin 1980; Searle 1974). I had no idea then that these humble networks would later develop into reasonably viable semantic system networks that will be used in the first substantial sociolinguistic variation analysis in SFL, and perhaps one of the most important in variation studies as a whole. But more on this, later.

Teaching this course made me more interested in the relations of language and education, but my perspective, at least in my own understanding, has always been Bernsteinian: for me the center of the educational enterprise is the learner; while teachers cannot teach without the knowledge of what they are teaching, it has to be realized that learners learn only because they have a brain, and much before they come to the school they have a brain that has already been ‘personalized’, i.e., they have a *mind* (Greenfield 2000). In this view, the human mind is socio-genetically formed by the experience of living with others as Vygotsky has strenuously argued (1970, 1978). It follows that in as much as our experience of living is unique, our minds are unique; but in as much as the experience of life includes experience of (some) people’s ways of being, sensing and doing and of interaction with them, to that extent there is something in common to the ‘minds in contact’—and just as an individual develops ‘habits of the mind’ so also members belonging to a ‘meaning groups’ (Halliday 1975) and a ‘speech fellowship’ (Firth 1957) share significantly similar habits of the mind: as Bernstein put it succinctly communities have ‘different orders of relevance’ (Bernstein 1971). And this, in turn, implies that ways of interpreting, and

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therefore of learning, are not identical across sub-communities: the mental world presented by the culture is wider, more colorful than the bland conception of ‘the child’ as ‘the pupil’ on the basis of which the distressing outlines of our educational systems are drawn. To cut the story short, teachers need to understand the bases of cultural variation—they must have a sense of varied ways of being, doing and saying current in their society: without such training they would find it difficult to empathize with those they are teaching. An important inference from this debate is that we must recognize the importance of the learning we all do as we grow up, and this first ‘round of learning’ to a large extent become our ‘second nature’ (Bernstein 1971, 1990; Vygotsky 1970, 1978; Hasan 2009; Cloran 1994; Williams 1995): this primary learning become part of what appears indisputably ‘real’ to us; it is a shaper of our understanding of what the world is like, as I have argued in the chapters of Section 2: it could therefore enter in all our dealings in life. In complex societies such as ours, ‘egalitarian education’ cannot rely on ‘naturally invariant’ brains, since they turn quite early into minds with certain preferred habitual frames. This however does not mean that such primary learning is permanently, ineradicably engraved: there is evidence that through effective teaching we do learn to question, to reason, to internalize new experience thus changing our previous mental landscape: this becomes evident in our actions, reactions and locutions which are the normal ways of externalizing what has been internalized. Section 2 of this volume presents some examples of my research and thinking in this area, and how it impacts on the opportunities for learning other forms of knowledge provided by our official pedagogy (for more detail, Hasan 2005; Hasan in press).

Semantic variation: meaning making mind

This takes me naturally to the last theme in this ‘intellectual biography’, which concerns a few words on my major federally funded research at Macquarie University (1983-1986) in the general field of sociolinguistics, more specifically on ‘semantic variation’. As mentioned above, the main linguistics courses I taught at Macquarie University were Semantics, Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis. I have already referred to major aspects of discourse analysis exemplified here by chapters in Section 3; but the analysis of text and context—i.e., discourse analysis—is indispensable

for understanding language whether as process or as system. Thus in Section 2 as well, there is ‘discourse analysis’—i.e., focus on language use, this time in order to understand how minds are shaped—consciousness is formed—in early life by engaging in discourse with other members of the speech fellowship. The aspect of learning that forms the focus of chapters in Section 2 is on linguistic meaning, because experience can be internalized only as significance, and its externalization can only be made by some form of meaning; this much is certain (Hasan 2011) even if further research is needed to establish what counts as significant to the connection of brain synapses.

The point I am moving towards is that the study of meaning is central to linguistics—which, of course, does not mean that other aspects, e.g., phonology or lexicogrammar are irrelevant. Halliday (1974) described the linguistics of the 1960’s as ‘syntactic’, and this was apparent from much work on Semantics, i.e., linguistic meaning: in fact the disappointment I felt with the many ‘methods’ of ‘describing’ meaning was equal to that aroused by traditional ‘lit-crit.’, with a lot of ideas, many very interesting, but without any robust principle(s) to bring them together. In this climate, reading Saussure—rather than reading *others on Saussure*—began to illuminate the concept of meaning. When ‘scale and category linguistics’—the first theoretical guise of today’s SFL—moved from its more formal stage (Halliday 1957, 1961, 1963) to a systemic functional orientation in the late 1960’s (Halliday 1966, 1967, 1968, 1970, 1973), clearer connections between Saussure and Halliday became visible: the mutual relations of context, semantics, lexicogrammar and phonology fell into place. Inspired by *Transitivity in English* (1966, 1967, 1968) I published my first paper in this field (1971b), arguing a Saussurean view of linguistic meaning as the *valeur* of a sign as realized by its lexicogrammatical relations and expressed as phonological patterns: in this view, *valeur* had primacy over signification, i.e., the reference relation between units of language and language-external phenomena. It made sense to say that registers are known by the meanings at risk in them. In a way, discourse and semantics came together. But what about sociolinguistics?

Sociolinguistics then, as also now, was predominantly inspired by Labov (1972, etc.): I was not aware of Lavandera’s questions (1978) to Labov. Overwhelmingly the view presented was that sociolinguistic variation preserved meaning: sociolinguistic varieties differed only in their ‘social

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meaning'. So if one had not had the occasion to think very deeply, Labovian studies were, on the whole, attractive: precise, methodical, with clear-cut results, they appeared fascinating, and promised to link synchronic sociolinguistic variation to diachronic (systemic) change in language. I would have said without hesitation at this stage that apart from Halliday and Bernstein, Labov was another significant intellectual influence on my thinking, though with hind-sight I do realize that even as early as that some questions had raised their head: for example, I had wondered about the 'place of' social meaning in the over-all ecology of language. Also, if sociolinguistic varieties were to be recognized by Labov-style variation only, then what were register varieties? They were clearly social in nature, so why were they not part of sociolinguistics? Why did they have to be seen as an ethnographic enterprise? Finally, what about Bernstein's codes? His work has been, and still remains, controversial; despite great respect and admiration, I would have to agree that his style did not help in 'facilitating' his concepts. All the same, why should his style be any more problematic than Bourdieu's? At least Bernstein did not contradict himself. Reading him with care always paid off (e.g., see Chapter 2 in Section 1). The major problem was ideological: in a very real sense the concept of Bernstein's codes logically depended on the acceptance of social stratification as significant to the maintenance of our societies; scholars with a mythical belief in the egalitarian nature of their own culture find this difficult to accept, thus providing the best proof of Bernstein's notion of coding orientation. Bernstein was criticized for inventing 'social class', for creating 'code based differences' in the language of different classes: the critics, amazingly, failed to observe or ask how and why disparities between segments of the society should display no serious consequence. Working with Bernstein in the late 1960's had been a challenge: as I understood his message, it seemed to me that instead of criticizing him, his critics—mostly educationists and/or linguists of some kind—ought to have been criticizing linguistics because of its inability to solve the 'problem of meaning in language'. The more you understood Bernstein's codal variety, the more you realized that the site of socially significant variation was at the level of semantics: language across classes might vary in accent and in certain kinds of ritualistic grammatical patterns, but this had nothing to do with code. Code was purely variation in perception and production of meaning.

It is not surprising that there was a head-on clash between Labov and

Bernstein. Of the two Labov misread more and was more vocal in his critique. Also while professing himself as a scholar of language in its social context, he was working with a model of language which was autonomous—i.e., unaffected by human environments. It believed in ‘language universal’ at the level of grammar, so that, logically, in the last resort every language had the same form: in short, having criticized Chomsky profusely, Labov had appropriated his model of language, and so he, naturally, had to see all variation as making no difference to speakers’ ‘life chances’—making a difference only to ‘social meaning’, which, given his linguistic model, belonged to ‘pragmatics’ not semantics—to performance not to competence. While defending the functional nature of linguistic variation, Labov refused to accept that variation in meaning was possible: according to his linguistic model, the ‘semantic space’ for the human species was the same. These features of Labov’s argumentation were sufficiently unsettling to arouse curiosity, and in 1983 I embarked on a large empirical research (reported in Hasan 2009) which conclusively demonstrated flaws in the Labovian variation framework; and statistically upheld the Bernstein hypothesis of the linguistic aspects of his view of codal variation, as well as indicating its role in the formation of consciousness. Working with me on this project was another brilliant student, Carmel Cloran, whose excellent doctoral work further supported Bernstein’s hypotheses of how primary learning varies across social classes (Cloran 1994). A little later, Williams’ (1995) carefully designed empirical research presented in his doctoral dissertation showed significant difference between joint book-reading across social classes. Both William’s findings and those of Hasan’s research demonstrated that teachers’ own discursive style in teaching children was more like the middle class mothers, irrespective of whether teaching in working class areas or in middle class ones.

For this research project, I worked hard to create a semantic system network along the lines begun in *Language and the Child*, except that these system networks represented choices at the level of semantics from the perspective of the four metafunctions recognized in SFL, namely, experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual (Hasan, Cloran, Williams & Lukin 2007). Chapter 5 in this volume presents one example of such analysis and its statistical results. The description at the level of semantics represented in that network (Hasan 1983) complements the work presented in Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), enabling SFL to demonstrate the two aspects of

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linguistic realization at the higher strata—context, semantics and lexicogrammar: from the speaker's perspective, context of situation activates semantics and lexicogrammar which is expressed as a phonologically/graphologically patterned acoustic stream, while from the listener's point of view phonology/graphology is the doorway for accessing the lexicogrammatical form which construes semantic entities, which construes the context of situation (Hasan 2010) that occasioned the discourse. It remains to write a detailed account of all the semantic networks together with their grammatical realizational criteria—a step that might be resource for the community of SFL scholars needing to analyze discourse in terms of their semantic values.

I had been asked to present my intellectual biography: in the event, as I had already feared, the biography begins in the middle and ends without covering the entire spectrum of my interests. In doing this writing, I am deeply aware of ignoring my debt of gratitude to many colleagues and students as well as scholars whose work has enabled mine. Tolstoy said: art is long, life is short. Dare I add: individual life is finite, knowledge is infinite.

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