

## **Engaging teachers in language analysis: A functional linguistics approach to reflective literacy**

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*ABSTRACT: Classrooms around the world are becoming more multilingual and teachers in all subject areas are faced with new challenges in enabling learners' academic language development without losing focus on content. These challenges require new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between language and content as well as new pedagogies that incorporate a dual focus on language and content in subject matter instruction. This article describes three professional development contexts in the U.S., where teachers have engaged in language analysis based on functional linguistics (for example, Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Christie, 1989) that has given them new insights into both content and learning processes. In these contexts, teachers in history classrooms with English Language Learners and teachers of languages other than English in classrooms with heritage speakers needed support to develop students' academic language development in a second language. The functional linguistics metalanguage and analysis skills they developed gave them new ways of approaching the texts read and written in their classrooms and enabled them to recognize how language constructs the content they are teaching, to critically assess how the content is presented in their teaching materials, and to engage students in richer conversation about content.*

*KEYWORDS: Academic language, functional linguistics, L2 language development, reflective literacy.*

Teachers need knowledge about language and tools to analyze language to understand the demands their subject matter poses to students, to support their students' literacy development and to critically approach the texts they use. The current linguistic landscape of the US has foregrounded the importance of language in learning all subjects and has promoted incorporation of literacy and language objectives in teacher development programmes as today's school teachers respond to the needs of their multilingual students. We report here on teacher professional development in the U.S. public school context of complex L2 academic language development informed by the functional linguistics model of Halliday (1994). Emphasizing the importance of language in learning (Halliday, 1993) and the importance of explicit attention to language in education (Christie, 1989; 1999), this work has contributed to secondary school teachers' understanding of language in their disciplinary areas and has enabled them to engage with their students in talk about language in the context of disciplinary learning.

## MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM ECOLOGIES

Educational settings in the U.S. and many other parts of the world are characterized by multilingualism. Students develop and bring varied language resources to school and this multilingual environment affects the classroom contexts in which they will further develop those resources and develop new ways of using language. The languages spoken by students have different symbolic values and are assigned different roles in educational institutions. Outside the classroom, students may use different languages for different purposes and may have learned to function in situations of great linguistic diversity. In schools, however, especially in contexts like the U.S., where monolingual, standard language ideologies dominate, classrooms promote, often implicitly, a “natural language order” (Creese & Martin, 2005). In such contexts, a particular language or register becomes naturalized as the “appropriate” choice for learning about the world and learning subject matter, even when the language is not shared, or when the level of expertise in it varies among those participating in the classroom learning experience.

A key issue in education today is enabling students to participate in learning in such contexts in ways that make new ways of meaning available to all students and that build on linguistic diversity as a resource that enriches learning for all. Therefore, pedagogies dealing with this reality need to have a dual focus: promoting academic language development and creating a space to value the linguistic resources students bring with them.

The multilingual classroom is increasingly the norm in U.S. public schools. About 5,119, 561 of the students enrolled in U.S. public schools have been designated as English Language Learners (ELL)<sup>1</sup>, and yet the classroom context typically expects standard academic English to be the “lingua franca”. In foreign language teaching<sup>2</sup>, the standard varieties of the target language are also favoured and valued over other varieties, even when classrooms have a complex cultural and linguistic make-up, often including heritage language students<sup>3</sup> who bring resources and experiences with that language to the classroom. Heritage language learners have typically developed the language in contexts associated with everyday uses and often have had no formal instruction in it in their home communities.

In the U.S., there has been a growing awareness of the need to value the heritage language learning experience as an asset<sup>4</sup>. The students’ experiences with language and their goals in studying their home languages at school push teachers of languages other than English to focus more on academic language development than on typical, foreign language instruction that emphasizes conversational and “survival” language.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Survey as of the 2004-2005 school year (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programmes).

<sup>2</sup> In the U.S. context, “foreign language” teaching refers to the teaching of languages other than English.

<sup>3</sup> By heritage learners, we refer to those students who have a cultural link with the language and have previous experience using it at home. This is usually the case for immigrant languages in the U.S.

<sup>4</sup> In 1998 the Center for Applied Linguistics launched an initiative to help the U.S. education system recognize and value heritage language resources in order to produce citizens that can function at a professional level in English and other languages. See Peyton, J., Ranard, D., & McGinnis, S. (2001). *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource*. McHenry, IL, and Washington, DC: Delta Systems and Center for Applied Linguistics.

Both ELLs and heritage language learners, then, have in common a need to develop academic language to serve new functions and allow them to engage in new situations of learning with language that responds to those situations. Teachers need to be able to help these students engage with the specialized language that constructs the content of school subjects and offer them opportunities for participation in advanced learning contexts, and professional and institutional contexts outside of school.

Multilingual and multicultural contexts of learning raise questions about the best ways to teach language and subject matter when students' competencies vary widely. Teachers and students need ways to develop the instructional content at the same time students are learning the language that construes it. In order to confront the challenges this situation poses, teachers are increasingly urged to adopt pedagogical approaches that foreground the role of language in learning, including content-based instruction (CBI) (Stoller, 2005) and critical language awareness (Carl & Garrett, 1991; Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b). These approaches have in common a focus on language as an important aspect in learning content and in helping students construct meanings that draw on "discourses of power" (Delpit, 1996; Gee, 2002). Critical approaches also focus on learners' agency and question dominant or established ways of making meaning. Work that summarizes the contributions of these approaches to language development pedagogies can be found in Snow, Met & Genesee (1989); Mohan, Leung & Davison (2001); and Norton & Toohey (2004).

The approach we describe here links with these approaches and adds to them a functional way of talking explicitly about features of the language itself, offering a principled means of focusing on language in systematic ways. The goal is to help teachers develop tools to assist their students in biliteracy development and critical language awareness by helping them recognize how language varies according to its use and to reflect on the role of language in the disciplinary contexts of subject-matter classrooms. As Halliday (1989) points out,

Language is a political institution: those who are wise in its ways, capable of using it to shape and serve important personal and social goals, will be the ones who are "empowered" (to use a fashionable word): able, that is, not merely to participate effectively in the world, but able also to act upon it, in the sense that they can strive for significant social change (p. x).

A critical pedagogy recognizes the power of language in the production and reproduction of society, and helping students be "wise in its ways" depends on having ways of engaging them in explicit conversation about how language works in different contexts of use.

A goal of enhancing teachers' critical language awareness and enabling them to adopt a critical language pedagogy leads to key questions such as: What kinds of knowledge about language most appropriately support the development of language and encourage critical responses to "content"? How can we help teachers engage with students in ways that encourage them to read from positions that are both mainstream and resistant (Martin, 1993; Kress, 1989b) and to write in ways that are powerful so that they can participate in new disciplinary contexts and contribute to shaping and re-shaping those contexts?

Hasan (1996) has suggested that “reflective” literacy enables students to treat norms of knowledge and norms of discourse as changing and changeable. Reflective literacy means both recognizing the semiotic resources that construe knowledge and reflecting on how those resources also construe ideologies that can be challenged. Knowing the resources one has available to make meanings allows one to act with them and analyze those acts. For students who have traditionally been excluded from participation in powerful discourses, a focus on language through tools for deconstructing the meanings in texts can be a powerful resource. Students who encounter new registers in schooling contexts rather than through their home and community socialization may even be advantaged in deconstructing this language, more able to respond critically than students whose socialization has positioned them to align naturally with the cultural assumptions of the texts they read, and less likely to take up the naturalized reading positions that such texts assume (Au, 1998; Belcher & Braine, 1995; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993a; 1993b). From this perspective, students’ linguistic and cultural differences can be resources in the classroom for reading and understanding texts in new ways.

But to enable this type of reflective literacy for students, teachers need to value the functionality and appropriateness of different language choices. Student writers and the authors of the texts they read always make particular language choices in constructing meanings of different kinds related to the subject matter and their purposes. As teachers focus on the language choices made by authors of the texts they read and on their students’ language choices in writing, using a functional metalanguage for talking about the meaning of those choices, they inevitably also address broader issues related to ideologies, genre conventions, and disciplinary practices. Our approach uses functional linguistics to engage teachers in learning about language and reflecting on content, providing tools for challenging that content and constructing new ways of interpreting the material if they so choose; and for assisting their students in writing in a wider range of academic contexts.

## **FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

Learning a language is a means to learn about the world, about the social relations we participate in, and about the patterns in which this information is routinely organized. According to Halliday (1999), language appears in three forms in schooling: in learning language (first language or second language development), in learning through language (content matter), and in learning about language (metalanguage). While the first two of these may proceed to some degree without conscious attention to language itself, learning about language, and becoming conscious of the power of different ways of using language, requires conscious attention by teachers, and requires that teachers develop their own knowledge about language. For teachers, a *metalanguage* for talking about how knowledge is constructed in language in their subject is a prerequisite for making the link between the “content” and the language through which it is construed.

The metalanguage of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994) offers tools for talking about the role of language in the educational process as an integral aspect of a pedagogy that makes the valued ways of making meaning in a discipline explicit to students (Schleppegrell, 2004). The incorporation of a functional metalanguage into

the professional development experience enables teachers to develop the means to reflect on language and subsequently to reflect on the meanings and values constructed with that language. In the next sections, we present some guiding principles for a functional approach to academic language development and describe how the principles have been implemented in three professional development contexts where we have engaged in curriculum planning and collaborative research with language and content teachers.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)<sup>5</sup> ACADEMIC LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

The functional approach we have developed is informed by work done in Australia in the 1980-1990s as part of the Sydney school (cf. Christie, 1989; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin & Christie, 1997). Our approach draws on this work and adapts it to the U.S. context, taking the basic views on language and content from SFL, and foregrounding academic language development in multiple languages. Below we list the basic principles that inform our work.

- *Learning is a semiotically mediated activity.* Language plays an important part in learning – mediating representation, distribution and evaluation of knowledge. Because of this all teachers can be said to be in some ways language teachers.
- *Language and content are inseparable.* To talk about language apart from content is only an abstraction that serves theoretical purposes, but not a description of how language actually functions.
- *Language users make choices based on their linguistic repertoires and these choices are related to the situations they participate in.* Language users are aware of and able to adapt their language use depending on the demands of context. In the case of second-language users, they may be aware of the need for a different type of language in a particular context, but not have the linguistic resources to respond to it.
- *Second language development is an expansion of the meaning making resources.* Second language learners already have linguistic resources they have developed to fulfill the needs of their social worlds. As their social worlds expand, they need to develop new resources to be able to participate in these new worlds.
- *Academic language features can be recognized across languages.* Every language develops as the ways it is used develop, so if a culture has academic contexts, an academic variety of the language will have developed with it<sup>6</sup>. Students who have learned in other languages already bring awareness of

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<sup>5</sup> The term L2 is problematic, because it implies that learners only have one other language or that there is an order of acquisition. We are aware that many students in these multilingual classrooms have competencies in several languages and might have learned some of them simultaneously. However, we use this term because it is prevalent in the literature and it usually refers to the non-dominant language in society and the individual.

<sup>6</sup> This process is different with minority languages that have less impact in the public/social world. In some bilingual contexts, for example, there is a division of labour between languages, with some domains restricted to the dominant language only.

ways of responding to academic contexts and even strategies from that other language that can be applied in the new context. Their main task may be to learn how to realize the academic strategies in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way in the new language. Or in the case of heritage learners, they may have developed academic language resources in the society's dominant language but now need to develop their linguistic resources for academic contexts in their L1. The language they already know is a resource for them in adding an academic variety of another language.

- *Learning about language by developing a meaning-based metalanguage allows language users to be reflective about the meaning and power of the linguistic choices that others and they themselves make.* Having a common language to understand and discuss language use allows users to be more critical about the meanings made and the interests of those who make them.
- *Focused work on analyzing texts allows users to become aware of the meaning and power of language choices.* By engaging in close analysis of texts, teachers learn about the ways language is used in their discipline and also about the value attached to these linguistic choices.
- *Learning is socially distributed and occurs in communities of practice.* The view of learning that characterizes this approach is based on socio-cultural theories that recognize the importance of the distribution of knowledge within communities of practice and the importance of participation in those communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). To learn means to expand one's meaning-making potential through engagement in social practices characteristic of the community of learning into which one is being apprenticed.

These theoretical principles grounded our collaboration with three different professional development programmes, one based in California and led by history teachers who serve colleagues within the state; another based in Pennsylvania and coordinated by professionals in the field serving teachers nationwide who later continue the work in their own sites; and one based in Washington state, run by university professors who served local school districts. These three professional development programmes are situated in different disciplinary contexts and focus on different aspects of academic language use, but all of them have included the development of critical language awareness, through a functional linguistics approach, as part of their work.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH A FUNCTIONAL FOCUS ON LANGUAGE**

The next section presents the California history project, where our work together began. This project has been in place for several years, and its impact on students' learning has been positively measured by an external evaluator. This case served as a catalyst and model for the projects in Pennsylvania and Washington described in later sections of this article.

## **The California History Project**

Several years ago we responded to a request from teacher-leaders in the California History Project, a well-established professional development programme that had been focused on enhancing teachers' content knowledge of history (<http://historyproject.ucdavis.edu/>). In response to the growing number of ELLs in mainstream classrooms in California, teachers were increasingly asking for strategies they could use to support grade-level content learning for students who were developing academic language proficiency in English. Drawing on research on the language of history from an SFL perspective (for example, Veel & Coffin, 1996; Coffin, 1997; Eggins, Wignell & Martin, 1993; Martin, 2002; Oteiza, 2003; Unsworth, 1999, 2000), we worked with the teacher-leaders of the project to develop "Literacy in History" workshops. The work was guided by the notions that students need to develop literacy in important and authentic curriculum contexts, that the notion of genre is a way of highlighting patterns in the way language is used to write history, and that focusing on grammar as a meaning-making resource and using a functional analysis of grammar is a means of discussing and critiquing texts.

Using the California History-Social Science Standards and the mandated curriculum, we helped teachers develop ways of talking about how language works to construct knowledge about history. Initially we introduced work on historical genres from a SFL perspective (Martin, 2002) and found that history teachers readily saw the value of recognizing the genre variation that is characteristic of their discipline. They noted with surprise the mismatch in expectations that the genre study revealed to them: for example, that they typically required students to write expository texts, even though few of the texts that they asked students to read had the kind of structure of exposition that they expected students to produce.

However, in subsequent observation of these teachers' classrooms following introduction of the notion of genre, we observed that they treated the knowledge about genre as a set of facts to share with their students, without making use of this knowledge in ways that would give students access to historical texts in any meaningful way. Based on this experience, we saw that knowledge about genre would be more useful if teachers also were introduced to a metalanguage and analysis tools for talking with students at the level of grammar.

In our next work with the teachers, then, we introduced a meaning-based approach to deconstructing sentences in text, based on identification of grammatical *processes*, *participants* and *circumstances*. This gave teachers and students strategies for unpacking dense text by analyzing sentence constituents and their meaning relationships. Teachers identified textbook passages or primary source documents with important information for students to learn, and then learned to deconstruct the text, moving clause by clause through the text to unpack the meaning. By looking at time-markers and connectors, the semantics of the different process types constructed in verbs, and at the overall organization of the text, teachers have been able to recognize patterns in the ways history is written. The teachers planned lessons that incorporated language analysis and found that the approach enabled more in-depth discussion and understanding of history content for the ELLs in their classrooms. (For exemplification of this approach see Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell, Achugar & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006).

Over several years, the CHP has developed and elaborated this approach, offering summer institutes that have helped history teachers develop the functional linguistic tools in the contexts of their curriculum goals. Six years into the California project, teacher-leaders are implementing the literacy-focused approach to history teaching through professional development institutes that are reaching teachers across the state each year. Recent external evaluation of the work has shown that students are learning more history in classrooms where teachers are implementing this literacy approach. Students whose teachers participated in CHP institutes made significantly greater gains on the California History-Social Science test (a standardized measure) than students whose teachers had not participated in the workshops, and ELLs were among those who show great benefits from the approach (Gargani, 2006). Students whose teachers used these strategies also wrote more effectively, developing a thesis and supporting it with evidence and analysis (Schleppegrell, Gargani, Berman, de Oliveira, & McTygue, 2006). The close reading and deconstruction of texts that the teachers engaged in enabled students to write with greater authority about historical events.

In recent focus group meetings with the teacher leaders in the project about the impact of their work, they reflected on the experiences they have had in the classroom and in interaction with other teachers in implementing the functional grammar strategies. They reported that it takes a major commitment to learn to implement the language-focused strategies, but since students learn a great deal from the approach, teachers find that the time spent is worth it, and that they are able to prepare the language analysis lessons in less time as they become more familiar with the strategies and with the way history discourse is typically constructed. These teachers also suggested that the literacy work helps teachers who are not history experts develop more content knowledge, as they are looking in more depth at the text and the information that it provides.

Teachers agreed that the focus on language, rather than taking students' attention away from "content", supports critical thinking and critical discussion in their classrooms, as students are quick to recognize the linguistic "clues" in the text and the meanings they contribute. One teacher described, for example, how in reading a text about the Vietnam war, a focus on the grammatical participants who are presented as agentive revealed that the Viet Cong were consistently presented as perpetrating acts against the American forces, but when the U.S. was the agent of destruction, the grammatical agent was often elided by using passive voice, or the agent was the *aircraft* that dropped the bombs or napalm, rather than the U.S. army or soldiers. The focus on language became very powerful in that lesson, as the students recognized that the author showed a bias in the way historical actors were presented. The teachers noted that the students would not have had a discussion about historical agency and how it is construed if she had just asked them to read the text and answer questions about it.

Another teacher described how the deconstruction of a text that suggested positive and negative effects of imperialism in India put all of the effects into focus in ways that enabled students to compare them. As she suggested, "Once you give them the power to see and understand the patterns, they get them." Teachers claimed that students enjoy deconstructing texts and begin to see new aspects of meaning that they might otherwise have overlooked. They reported that the functional grammar



strategies make the text accessible and less daunting, and give students tools for challenging the way information is presented and seeing the authors' biases. They also stressed that the approach enables all students to engage in discussion of grade-level material, as deconstructing the language slows down the reading and discussion of the history content. While the strategies were developed with ELLs in mind, teachers reported that their advanced readers also like and benefit from the approach because it forces them to slow down and see meaning in the text that they would not have seen in reading quickly for main ideas and details. Deconstructing the text pushes everyone to read carefully and see the depth in the text, and even students who would not be able to read independently are able to read and discuss it when it is slowly deconstructed by the class.

Teachers have more complex discussions with students who better understand the history content. When students discuss the language, disagreements arise that enable the class to understand the historical content in greater depth. That is exciting for students and teachers, and teachers report that they are better teachers of history with these strategies and enjoy the more engaged students. These teachers' ultimate goal is that their students understand history and are able to engage in conversation about it and write about it, and teachers reported that they are getting the history across more effectively because they are addressing students' literacy development. From their perspectives, the functional grammar strategies help them accomplish this.

As the co-authors of this paper moved on to other contexts, we took the experience of the CHP and introduced it in other environments. In the next sections, the approach is exemplified in the contexts of professional development for history teachers in Pennsylvania and for teachers of languages other than English in Washington State.

### **The Institute for Learning: Disciplinary literacy in history**

During the summer of 2005, Mariana Achugar was invited by Gaea Leinhardt and Anita Ravi to present her work with the CHP to the University of Pittsburgh's *Institute for Learning* (IFL). The IFL (<http://www.instituteforlearning.org/>) offers a disciplinary literacy learning course for administrators and teachers to include "even students with initially weak academic language competence in thoughtful, cognitively demanding engagement with complex written texts, difficult problems, and challenging inquiries" (IFL web page). One of the main assumptions informing this work is that for students to become literate in history they need to work on content and language simultaneously, requiring teachers to become aware of the ways language is used in their discipline. These guiding principles, similar to those of the California project, made a functional linguistics approach compatible with the work the disciplinary literacy team was doing.

With similar views about the role of language in constructing knowledge in history, the historians in the group selected texts and highlighted relevant historical issues, the linguists provided analysis of the texts that highlighted linguistic features that could be in focus to bring out meaning related to the content or that might pose problems for ELLs, and the historians and linguists together developed guiding questions to use in connecting content and language through analysis of the text. The approach was used in three, week-long professional development sessions that teachers and administrators from school districts across the U.S. participated in. Teachers

participated in demonstration lessons that allowed them to experience the approach as learners, seeing what it means to look at a historical text from a linguistic perspective to see how historical meanings are constructed in language. They reflected on their learning experience and the design of lessons by analyzing example units and using them in planning other lessons directed to students or for professional development workshops in their districts.

Participants interpreted and contextualized a historical document, compared it to others and extrapolated ideas to support a historical argument. This work provided them with opportunities to engage in the typical habits of thinking and doing of historians, expanding on the notion of *habits of mind*, “the ways of thinking that one acquires so well, makes so natural, and incorporates so fully into one’s repertoire, that they become mental habits – not only *can* one draw upon them easily, one is *likely* to do so” (Goldenberg, 1996, p. 14). By modeling the “historical reading” activity historians and history teachers typically engage in when trying to understand primary sources, we demonstrated that knowledge includes more than facts and provided a means of reading beyond the surface of the text.

Using functional linguistics, discourse analytic questions were integrated into the historical inquiry that guided the subject matter discussion. As in the California work, the target population was ELLs at intermediate levels of proficiency in English, who had been mainstreamed into regular history classrooms. The professional development sessions raised teachers’ awareness of the linguistic features that characterize history texts, provided them with tools to identify the potential challenges that historical texts might pose to ELLs, and helped them develop text analysis skills to draw on when planning history lessons. Guiding questions, based on functional linguistics, identified linguistic and rhetorical features that point to the textual cues that can reveal the historical meanings construed in the text, providing simultaneous perspectives on language and on history. The questions and the linguistic and rhetorical features in focus are presented in Figure 1.

- **What is the social purpose of the text?** *Identify how the text is structured:* design, structure, moves (stages in the text)
- **What is going on?** *Identify the events (processes):* verbs (action, saying, thinking, feeling, relating); *Identify key participants and their roles:* noun phrases that appear as subjects or objects of the verbs (agent, sensor, beneficiary, goal); *Identify the circumstances:* context (time, place, cause, manner, reason, and so on)
- **What is the orientation of the writer to the information?** *Identify the position:* words that express probability, obligation, frequency (for example, modal verbs such as *will, must, have to, usually*); evaluative vocabulary (attitudes: emotions, judgments, appreciation)
- **What is the relationship between reader and writer?** (How are readers positioned in terms of power, distance, familiarity?) *Identify the social roles:* Types of clauses (declarative, interrogative, imperative); use of terms of address and pronouns.
- **How is information organized?** *Identify cohesive devices:* theme (beginning of each paragraph and sentence); connectors (for example, *because, furthermore, however, first*, and so on); nominalizations (packaging of information into noun phrases, for example, “system of settlement”).

Figure 1. Questions to ask about historical texts and the linguistic and rhetorical features in focus to answer them

The rationale for the work is that teachers can help learners unpack the meanings in a text by pointing to the linguistic cues that enable the presentation of historical content. By explaining *how* a text means, they can make visible the linguistic and background information they rely on for the historical reading, demonstrating the often invisible work teachers and historians engage in when working with and around texts. Teachers can integrate into their instructional practice the knowledge and reasoning patterns typical of history by engaging directly with both the information and the language that instantiates it.

The workshops engaged teachers in the linguistic analysis of a text that had already been contextualized and discussed, so participants were familiar with the topics and the issues. They identified the purpose of the text and looked at the linguistic and formatting cues that pointed to this “reading”. Then they learned to move clause by clause through the text, identifying the process (verbs) and participants. They discussed reasons why a particular event or social actor had been represented as an active agent or a passive experiencer of an event, for example. They also looked at what was left unsaid or implied by the particular choices the author had made in representing those events. They then looked at the point of view that was being constructed in the text, focusing on modals, evaluative vocabulary, terms of address, whether the clause was a question, statement or command, and other signals that point to the author’s relationship to the audience. Then they tracked the cohesive devices that construct the flow of information. These joint activities were later followed by group work in which different groups continued exploring issues of representation, orientation or organization of information. Finally, we discussed how this close reading and linguistic analysis supported deeper historical understanding.

In reflection on these activities, the teachers reported that these linguistic tools and strategies for exploring text and meaning made them feel more capable of engaging with their ELLs. The highlighted text in these representative comments indicates the positive evaluations teachers gave to the work done in the sessions:

This was beneficial as another way to **help students go deeper**. I truly see the analysis of linguistics/word choice as a vehicle for **helping students produce better writing** connected to work w/documents and a unit of study. I also see as a teacher how it would **help me coach into small group work** where students are struggling w/language in documents, be it struggling or ELL learners.

This work makes me think that we **don’t need to dumb down the texts** we use but to unpack them systematically.

Teachers were able to recognize the potential of doing close textual analysis of historical documents with ELLs, while acknowledging the students’ ability to engage in this type of cognitively demanding task. The positive responses to the focus on language in history also reveal that participants became aware of the integral link between language and content. The linguistic choices of the writer construct particular meanings that can be conceptualized in discussion of the range of other possible ways of representing or orienting to the same information. This awareness was also valued as a pedagogical tool to enhance understanding of historical documents. It is too soon to report on the impact of this work in teachers’ classrooms, but we are encouraged by teachers’ responses to believe that their students will benefit as well.

This approach to language has the potential to inform classroom teaching, not only across disciplinary contexts but also across languages. This is illustrated in the project we describe in the next section, a professional development project that helped teachers of other languages focus on academic language development in teaching writing.

### **Enhancing students' second language writing**

Oteiza moved from her work with the CHP to Washington State, where she taught a methods class to pre-service teachers of languages other than English and coordinated a professional development programme for high-school, Spanish language teachers. Bringing a functional linguistics perspective from the California work, she recognized that the role of writing in a second language in academic registers had scarcely been explored by researchers and language teachers outside of ESL contexts (for example, Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Reichelt, 1999; Ferris, 2003; Kroll, 2003). In the U.S., high school teachers of Spanish, French, German or Japanese tend to focus mainly on development of oral skills. Writing is treated as a resource to support the oral development of beginners and intermediate students, and so writing exercises are typically done in genres that favour colloquial and familiar uses of language (narrative, descriptions, letters, likes and dislikes, journal entries) to enhance students' motivation through activities that are believed to be meaningful to them. At the same time, a primary focus is on correction of errors, because it is thought that this can help avoid the fossilization of incorrect grammatical structures or idiomatic expressions (Liu & Hansen, 2005). Thus error correction is often the only feedback learners receive on their writing development. Writing in the language classroom, then, often has the contradictory practices of foregrounding "everyday" uses of writing while insisting on "formal" conventions. This results in an approach that neither recognizes the actual writing development needs of the learners nor provides support for experimenting with new ways of using language (regardless of the errors that would inevitably result) that could lead to increased writing ability. Recognizing the need for a theoretically grounded methodology for teaching academic writing in high school language classes, Oteiza drew on the functional linguistics metalanguage and approach to develop new ways of teaching writing.

Academic language differs from everyday language, and writing academic registers challenges students to use more abstract vocabulary, new grammatical structures, and new ways of structuring discourses (for example, Coffin, 1997; Kress, 1989a; Halliday, 1993; Christie, 1998; Martin & Veel, 1998; Unsworth, 1999; Schleppegrell, 2004, among others). From the theoretical perspective of SFL, "form versus content" represents a false dichotomy; these cannot be understood as two separate aspects because they are always interrelated in their contexts of use. Grammatical structures realize meaning in context; they always serve in making particular meanings in particular texts. With more complex contexts of use, as in academic contexts, the language also requires higher levels of elaboration and abstraction.

For those students who aim to work or study in the language, it is especially crucial that they develop proficiency with academic registers. In fact, for heritage-language learners, the development of academic writing is often one of their main goals. When teachers and students are struggling to develop the language at a basic level, the notion of working on academic registers may seem to raise too high a bar, so students

typically have few opportunities to develop written academic registers in a language other than English. However, teachers want to recognize their students' ability to work at a high cognitive level in secondary school, and students want to move beyond basic levels of language proficiency to expand their knowledge about and engage with other cultures. While writing academic registers and genres is complex and challenging, working on this task also provides opportunities for developing critical language awareness, especially when students are learning to build reasoning and argumentation at the different levels of abstraction required in academic genres.

With a metalanguage that enables teachers to address the complexity, abstraction and nominalization that are needed in writing academic registers, these linguistic resources can be the focus of explicit teaching. Teachers can also benefit from using an explicit metalanguage when engaging students in revision and when evaluating students' writing. Writers who have been trained in peer response are able to notice content and rhetorical problems in their texts (for example, Berg, 1999; Hansen & Liu, 2000; Hansen, 2001), but tend to focus mainly on surface grammatical errors when teachers are principally concerned with this.

To counteract this tendency, the Washington State workshops taught teachers to analyze the organizational structure of students' texts through functional linguistics metalanguage that links the language choices of the writer with the content being presented. Teachers were introduced to the functional linguistics constructs *theme* and *rheme* and further elaboration of theme into *textual*, *interpersonal* and *experiential themes* as different options available to the writer to use as points of departure for each clause as a text evolves (Halliday, 1994). This was especially productive for helping teachers analyze the organization of meaning in students' writing and also helped them reinforce grammatical patterns they were teaching. Such analysis allowed students to work on topic development and clarification of ideas, structure their texts more clearly, and develop a metalinguistic awareness of grammar and textual resources.

The analysis was modeled for teachers with texts written by heritage and non-heritage, Spanish-language learners in university writing courses where the approach had been implemented. For example, teachers analyzed the *theme/rheme* structure of a student's expository essay about Pinochet's Chilean dictatorship, where the writer had chosen the word *Pinochet* as eight out of the twelve *topical themes* in her composition. Teachers immediately recognized that the student could be encouraged to begin some sentences with experiential elements other than *Pinochet*. Some suggested that she make her point of departure a circumstance of time (a date or other time reference), while others suggested an *interpersonal theme* (words like *unfortunately*, *surprisingly*, and so on) that would more explicitly indicate her position on the topic. Others suggested including some *textual themes* (conjunctions or connectors) to make the organization and points of argumentation explicit. In analyzing other students' essays, in contrast, teachers pointed out that the excessive use of *textual themes* can make a text "too heavy" or simplistic.

After exploring texts that presented a range of choices in *theme* position in students' writing, teachers wrote their own compositions and analyzed each other's writing, identifying and classifying *themes* and making recommendations in a combination of oral and written peer response. In the discussion that followed this activity, teachers

commented that this was the first time that they had looked at a piece of writing in this way. They discussed the impact of particular language choices on meaning; how the selection of a *theme* is not only a matter of variety and style, but also helps present and organize ideas with particular focuses and emphases. Teachers agreed that this kind of analysis would help to develop students' metalinguistic knowledge, raise awareness about lexico-grammar and textual resources, and stimulate more critical reading and responses to others' texts.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have described three contexts in which a reflective literacy approach was introduced to teachers by providing them with a metalanguage to analyze texts, think about language at new levels of abstraction, and develop new understanding of the complex meaning-making practices of their subject matter and their pedagogical approaches. We have seen that this enables teachers to analyze meaning in texts, recognize the naturalized readings and help students critically discuss and engage with the content and the interpretation. Helping teachers see how language works in their subject area and develop new approaches to talking about language in meaningful ways gives them powerful tools for working with second-language learners and helping them develop the academic registers that are not available to them outside the classroom. For English language-learners, the academic registers that construct content in different disciplines need to be learned in the context of learning those disciplines, so subject-area teachers need knowledge about how language works in their subjects to construct knowledge, and a metalanguage to make that knowledge accessible to their students.

Teachers of languages other than English need approaches that can enhance students' language development possibilities and enable them to reach advanced language capacities (Byrnes, 2006). In the U.S., where monolingual language ideologies flourish, languages other than English tend to be taught in simplistic and superficial ways, with colloquial registers privileged over other registers, and oral skills considered more relevant than written ones. The functional perspective on language we presented here opens a possibility to work in academic registers in foreign language classrooms. This is especially important for Spanish, which is expanding into a broader range of contexts throughout the U.S. and so calls for more rigorous and systematic teaching that recognizes the role of register.

As teachers become more aware of the linguistic resources used to construct knowledge in schools, they are also better able to evaluate the texts students read and write. Developing teachers' knowledge about language can help them value the discourses minority students bring to the classroom and helps them develop their bilingual reservoir (Riches & Genesee, 2006) as it helps teachers construct pedagogical interventions that build on and expand students' language choices. A functional linguistics metalanguage and approach has had a powerful impact on teachers in these professional learning contexts and offers teachers in the new multilingual learning contexts explicit ways of recognizing and valuing differences in the language through which school subjects are constructed and the language students use to respond in those contexts.

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