Editorial

Systemic Functional Linguistics in Teaching English Beyond School

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Applications of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to the teaching/learning of languages have been wide reaching. Michael Halliday, SFL's initial architect, explained that, during his own early language teaching experiences (teaching Chinese to English speakers and English to Chinese speakers), he was

> conscious of the need to provide explanations of problems faced by the learners, to try to develop some kind of coherent notion of a language, how it works, how it was learned, and so forth, in order simply to improve the quality of the language teaching (Halliday & Hasan, 2006, p. 16).

Thus, language teaching/learning was present from the early stages of his theorizing about language, a theorizing which included context as an integral part of language (see Mouvet and Taverniers, this issue). Halliday saw as beneficial to L2 teaching "the systematic description of the relation between linguistic and situational features" (Halliday 2007 [1960], p. 160). In 1964, Halliday and colleagues, Angus McIntosh and Peter Strevens, published *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*, which set out "to describe how language – specifically, English – 'works'" (Halliday et al. 1964: x). Acknowledging throughout their book the primary importance of good teaching practice, the authors also argued for descriptions of language that could help solve problems in L2 teaching. Heeding Halliday's earlier call in 1960 for relating linguistic and situational features, the authors brought in the notion of register, or "variety of a language distinguished according to use" (Halliday et al. 1964: 87). They also argued that learning will take place more readily "if the language is encountered in active use than if it is seen or heard only as a set of disembodied utterances or exercises" (Halliday et al. 1964: 181). The authors, therefore, acknowledged the importance of real language in use for learners of an additional language. This 1964 volume was described "as a kind of applied linguistics manifesto" at the time of its publication (Widdowson, 2009: 194), and Halliday is cited as a major figure of inspiration for the communicative approach to L2 teaching (Brumfit and Johnson, 1979; Melrose, 1995: 3; McCabe et al., 2015; McCabe, 2017).

Its focus on register has also meant that SFL has adapted readily to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (and, obviously, the more general Language for Specific Purposes – LSP) teaching. In fact, Swales (2000, p. 59) called Halliday, et al. (1964) a "a landmark volume", which provided "a clarion call" for descriptions of language in use, citing as a key passage:

> Only the merest fraction of investigation has yet been carried out into just what parts of a conventional course in English are needed by, let us say, power station engineers in India, or police inspectors in Nigeria; even less is known about precisely what extra specialized material is required.

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> This is one of the tasks for which linguistics must be called in. Every one of these specialized needs requires, before it can be met by appropriate teaching materials, detailed studies of restricted languages and special registers carried out on the basis of large samples of the language used by the particular persons concerned (Halliday, et al., 1964, p. 189-190, qtd. in Swales, 2000, p. 59).

Thus, the seeds of SFL as a theory of language have gone hand in hand with applications to teaching from its inception, and SFL-based educationalists have promoted a pedagogy which is strongly rooted in descriptions of language as it is used in specific contexts and situations. Also, in the mid-1960s, Halliday's applied work turned away from L2 teaching and towards his mother tongue English, thus towards the broader field of language education and literacy development in schools. In the 1980s, this focus was taken up in Australia to advance literacy needs in schools and the workplace, through work by scholars and educators such as Jim Martin, Francis Christie, Joan Rothery, and others, who drew on SFL descriptions of language as it is used in specific school subjects in order to create a genre-based pedagogy (GBP) (Martin, 1999; 2000). GBP and other SFL-based pedagogies, such as Reading to Learn (R2L) (Rose, 2006; Rose & Martin, 2012) and language-based pedagogy (LBP) (Clark, 2019), have experienced tremendous growth in application to primary and secondary schools around the world (McCabe, 2021), as evidenced, for example, by the inclusion of SFL as the main theory underpinning the WIDA Standards Framework and its theoretical foundations. WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) is a consortium of 41 U.S. state departments of education as well as around 500 international schools throughout the world, "dedicated to the research, design and implementation of a high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate system to support English language learners in K-12 contexts" (WIDA, n.d.) Included in its framework are tenets of SFL, with specific mention of the social semiotic systemic nature of language, which both constructs and derives meaning from context – including notions of register and of specific shapes of the languages of academic content areas (Westerlund & Besser, 2021).

However, it is a call for applications of SFL beyond these contexts of schooling that the articles in this special issue address. Given the focus in SFL on increasing repertoires of language resources, or the gains people make in having available to them a range of choices in linguistic elements to construct ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, the linguistic theory with its lexicogrammatical descriptions and its accompanying pedagogies can obviously be applied to any language development situation across the lifespan. The genres of schooling are sites of recontextualized knowledge-making and reproduction (Christie & Martin, 2007), whose curricular role may provide a stability which leads more readily to genre description and characterization, which can then be made explicit to students in order to enhance their chances of success in school (Schleppegrell, 2004). Moving beyond the genres of schooling into other contexts of language use thus brings other challenges for educators, as the genres encountered may be less homogenous and wide-spread, meaning that learners' understandings of language need to flexible enough to be applied to an ever-increasing range of situations.

This special issue opens with a contribution by Kimberly Mouvet and Miriam Taverniers, "What is language anyway? A view on teaching English proficiency in higher education". They provide a general introduction to SFL theory, connecting it to concepts which will be familiar to language teachers. They delve into the notion of proficiency, which, as they point out, is fuzzily defined across the literature. They link their discussion to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020), as many students in tertiary education are expected to reach a minimum C1 level of proficiency as they develop through their academic careers. Given the amount of time and dedication necessary to reach such a level, Mouvet and Taverniers argue that explicit knowledge about language can allow learners to generalize to other contexts and situations, thus maximizing the learning potential across the lifespan. They draw on Gregory's (2002) framework of knowledge of context and knowledge of language, which they further connect to Cummins' (1980) concepts of BICS and CALP, the latter "a deeper, more

advanced level of proficiency, [that] encompasses both context knowledge and language knowledge, understanding what relationships are at stake in a generic situation and what the linguistic reflex of these may be" (Mouvet & Taverniers, this issue). The second part of their article unpacks how they apply the theoretical framework in practice at Ghent University, implemented through a set of overarching habits of mind that are encouraged through pedagogical practices, as well as through the teaching of 'grammatics', a term coined by Michael Halliday, to refer to "a grammatically informed metalanguage for reflecting on grammar" (Macken-Horarik et al., 2015, p. 146, qtd. in Mouvet and Taverniers, this issue).

The next three articles in this issue are, as in the case of Mouvet and Taverniers, located in the university, also in contexts where the surrounding language is other than English. These studies delve deeply into the nature of language and other modes of semiosis, in order to describe them more fully for a range of higher educational purposes, continuing with the goal in SFL-based pedagogy of explicit understandings of meaning-making, in order to provide students with tools that they can apply in new contexts and situations. Anne Hellwig's "Case Study: Multimodal, Digital Artefacts as Learning Tools in a University Subject-Specific English Language Course", as the title makes clear, goes beyond language and includes multimodal meaning-making as part of her study. Hellwig recognizes the great communicative potential of multimodality for multilingual learners, drawing on recent changes in the CEFR, which now includes the competence of mediation. This competence, Hellwig explains, can be thought of as "'resemiotization', where meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next" (Hellwig, this issue). Using a case study approach within a German university context, Hellwig demonstrates how a student's video composition uses different modes of representation to communicate technical concepts as well as to construct the genre of explanation, with fine-grained nuances of meaning emerging from the combination of meaning-making resources, leading students to develop linguistically and multimodally as social agents.

Grisel Salmaso describes story genres in "Modelling of the genre short story for teaching purposes: an approach from a Systemic Functional Perspective" by applying Hasan's (1996) Generic Structure Potential (GSP) to conceive the story genres (recount, anecdotes, exemplum, narrative, and observation) as Categories of Narrative Instances (CaNIs). She bases her theorizing of NIs on Rosch's (1978) prototype theory, with some renderings being more canonical, while others, which vary from the canonical order, potentially making more of a rhetorical contribution. As literary short stories tend to be characterized by complexity, her framework allows for modelling the short story as a macro-genre, a generic macro-structure potential, which allows for inserting one or more NIs into constituents. After demonstrating the analysis of a short story, Salmaso provides a system network of the options which are available in the generic macro-structure potential of the short story genre, and demonstrates how the network is used for teaching students on teacher training, translation and research courses at a university in Argentina, through the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC), the mainstay for SFL-based pedagogy, specifically the Deconstruction and Independent Construction phases; i.e., students learned how short stories are put together to then write their own.

Ana Elina Martinez Insua's article, "Theme in English native and learner writing", focuses on Theme in university student writing, also in a foreign language context. Students in this kind of context are often asked to write in ways that are expected in academic writing, but do not always have the background that provides them with the knowledge of how to do so most effectively. Taking as a starting point the SFL-based concept of Theme from the textual metafunction, Martinez Insua adapts Margaret Berry's (2013) distinction between contentful and contentlight Subject Themes, creating a classification of Themes according to assumed familiarity of the concept encoded, based on Prince's (1981) scale. Drawing on L1 and L2 data from corpora, Martinez Insua's study reveals differences in contentful Themes produced by L1 writers of English and L2 learners writing in English; interestingly, her study also shows the over-reliance of less proficient L2 writers on perhaps too easily taught connectors in L2 classrooms. Thus, her study reminds us that learning English in a foreign language context brings on different challenges –

where the way language is used by proficient speakers/writers may be more nuanced and complex than the way language is often recontextualized in L2 classrooms, such as through a focus on connectors. The advantage of SFL descriptions, in this case rooted within the textual metafunction, is that they "provide an array of categories for the analysis of how language constructs ideas or experiences, reflects, and enacts relationships between interlocutors, and manages the flow of information within a text and a communicative context" (Martínez Insua, this issue). Martinez Insua's fine-grained analysis of how coherence is constructed through the choice of Themes provides a way of teaching students resources within the textual metafunction of language that focuses their attention on effectively connecting meaning across clauses.

In addition to these articles that take us beyond school into higher education, two articles in this special issue are located in youth programs established outside of a school context; these programs have the same goals as SFL-based in-school programs as well as those of all of the authors in this special issue, which is, again, to make explicit to participants the ways in which semiotic resources can be effectively brought together to communicate interactants' goals, in order for those involved to increase their agency over their own learning (whether in a foreign or second language learning context) and, indeed, over their own lives. Ruth Harman and Dan Jin's article, "Multimodal Curriculum Design: Culturally Sustaining SFL Praxis with Multilingual Youth in Out-of-School Contexts", is a study of an afterschool program in the U.S., which involves youth participants and pre-service teachers in meaning-making activities that incorporate a range of modes, from the more familiar (in much of the school-based SFL literature) written genres to perhaps less familiar map-making, drawing, film making, performance, rapping and poetry writing, among other semiotic construals across the mode continuum. The youth participants are involved in creating arguments and solutions for problems in their own communities, using a range of semiotic, somatic and embodied ways of making meaning. Harman and Jin apply the TLC to meaning-making activities such as maps, in which youth participants work together with adults on deconstruction and joint construction of semiotic artifacts, after which they are prepared to create their own. Ultimately, their goal is twofold, to "support immersion and meta awareness of the affordances and complexities of community genres, resources and languages that can be configured to achieve particular social and political purposes" (Harman & Jin, this issue) as well as to "ensure that youth's dynamic repertoires are validated, integrated, and extended in the co construction of new civic knowledge" (Harman & Jin, this issue). Thus, SFL is used to dynamically underpin participants' awareness of how they (can) meaningfully interact in a range of contexts.

Carrie Symons and Yue Bian, in "Using SFL in Linguistically Responsive Instruction with Multilingual Youth: A Self-Study", like Harman and Jin, write about an experience with multilingual youth, in their case in a community-based summer enrichment program, also in the U.S.. They outline the contributions of an SFL-based pedagogical approach to a program aimed at "developing life, language, and entrepreneurial skills, learning about available community resources, and building friendships and collaborations with peers across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds". Symons and Bian frame the work with youth that they report on in their article within Lucas et al.'s (2008) "linguistically responsive" teaching principles. While Symons and Bian specifically cite the sixth principle, calling for specific attention to form and function, their work clearly encompasses the others, including meaningful interaction in a welcoming classroom environment. Their approach, while drawing explicitly on SFL understandings of process, participants and circumstances in the clause, avoids using SFL metalanguage with the youth in the program, while at the same time helping them gain insights into how language 'works', in verbal and multimodal text.

The foreign language contexts of the articles by Mouvet and Taverniers, Hellwig, Salmaso, and Martínez Insua in this volume showcase the fine-grained understandings of language necessary for learners in higher educational contexts, whose needs for proficiency involve them more frequently in encounters with texts from their sites of production (e.g., literary texts, research articles). They also are

called on to create texts of their own, demonstrating proficiency in choosing the available linguistic and multimodal resources in doing so. Hellwig, Salmaso, and Martínez Insua each provide the kind of SFL-based descriptions of language and other modal resources that demonstrate the meaning potential of different kinds of choices for texts in their contexts, which provide deep and relevant understandings for language learners. Mouvet and Taverniers demonstrate the possibilities for abstracting away from specific contexts to helping students recontextualize that knowledge to new contexts and situations:

> This means that our job as educators is to [… offer] students practical answers to practical questions (what am I supposed to do in this situation?) as well as theoretical understanding of theoretical issues (what does this situation mean and how does my language work within this, and indeed, in any situation?). This allows students to become expert users and expert knowers of English by developing the ability to move back and forth between instantial situations and generic situations, between instance and potential, between what is and what may be. (Mouvet & Taverniers, this issue).

Thus, the understandings provided by the in-depth studies into how language works in the more specific instances add up to broader understandings of how language works.

The second language contexts of Harman & Jin and Symons & Bian's studies clearly showcase the potential for SFL-based programs to engage youth from refugee and other marginalized backgrounds in meaningful learning experiences that draw on their backgrounds, interests, and ideas while simultaneously connecting them with the community and with meaning-making beyond school, thus increasing their involvement, engagement and agency. Thus, SFL is a linguistic theory that, in both of their studies, works to support linguistically and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Troyan, et al., 2021; Ramirez, 2020; Cardozo-Gaibisso, & Harman, 2019); these articles involving multilingual youth also further demonstrate how pre- and in-service teachers can learn the basic tenets of SFL (with varying degrees of technical metalanguage) to then unpack with learners how semiotic resources work across registers, languages, and semiotic modes, helping them to "thrive and reach their full potential" (de Oliviera & Westerlund, 2021).

Thus, the articles in this issue will provide readers with a range of tools from Systemic Functional Linguistic, tools which can be used to deepen awareness of how language, sometimes in conjunction with other semiotic resources, works. They also provide readers with ways of adapting the knowledge gleaned from SFL-based descriptions of semiosis into a pedagogy designed to lead learners to proficiency in agency of the choices they make as they interact in new contexts and situations which call on them to create meaning in novel and often challenging ways.

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