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## Teaching to mean, writing to mean: SFL, L2 literacy, and teacher education

Meg Gebhard\*, I-An Chen, Holly Graham, Wawan Gunawan

*University of Massachusetts, School of Education, Amherst, Massachusetts, United States*

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### Abstract

This study analyzes how ten linguistically and culturally diverse candidates in a TESOL master's degree program used systemic functional linguistics and genre-based pedagogy to design curriculum and instruction. Using case study methods, the findings indicate that participants' conceptualizations of grammar shifted from a traditional sentence-level, form-focused perspective to a more functional understanding operating in interconnected ways across lexicogrammatical and discourse semantic features of texts. However, participants' constructions of what SFL is and how they might use genre-based pedagogy in the future were highly influenced by their previous schooling experiences and the contexts in which they taught or envisioned teaching. The implications of this study relate to reconceptualizing grammar in the knowledge base of language education.

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*Keywords:* Academic language; Genre; Grammar instruction; Halliday; L2 writing; Metalanguage; Systemic functional linguistics; Teacher education

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### Introduction

Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a theory of learning to mean (Halliday, 1993). It explains how learners use the meaning-making resources available to them in the immediate and broader cultural contexts in which they participate to accomplish social, cognitive, and political work in and out of school (e.g., Christie & Martin, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008; New London Group, 1996). These semiotic resources include the use of talk, gestures, images, and print to realize meanings that construct social dynamics (e.g., social distance and power), the mode through which interactions take place (e.g., face to face, online, in print), and the nature of the ideas being constructed (e.g., everyday topics or more discipline-specific ones; Halliday, 1993; Martin, 2009; Martin & Rose, 2008).

As a number of scholars have documented, second language (L2) learners typically develop the semiotic resources required to construct everyday meanings in a second language, but many struggle to construct discipline-specific meanings despite years of schooling (e.g., Cummins, 2008). Explanations for why L2 learners have trouble learning disciplinary discourses have focused on a number of issues, ranging from the nature of sociolinguistic interactions in which they participate; the quality of institutional supports schools provide; and race-, class-, and gender-based inequities reproduced in schools (e.g., Harklau, 1994; Olsen, 1997). However, we argue that one largely unexplored

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\* Corresponding author.

*E-mail addresses:* [gebhard@educ.umass.edu](mailto:gebhard@educ.umass.edu) (M. Gebhard), [chen@educ.umass.edu](mailto:chen@educ.umass.edu) (I.-A. Chen), [hgraham@educ.umass.edu](mailto:hgraham@educ.umass.edu) (H. Graham), [wgunawan@educ.umass.edu](mailto:wgunawan@educ.umass.edu) (W. Gunawan).

reason L2 learners have trouble learning to use disciplinary discourses, especially in print, is that teachers often have not developed an explicit understanding of how language works in the texts they routinely require students to read and write in school. As a result, despite having developed other domains of professional knowledge (Freeman & Johnson, 1998), teachers often are not prepared to provide L2 learners with an apprenticeship in how language and other semiotic systems make disciplinary meanings, especially as students transition from reading and writing about everyday topics to exploring increasingly discipline-specific ones in the upper elementary grades, secondary school, college, and the workplace (Martin & Rose, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Schleppegrell, 2004).

To respond to the need for a meaning-making orientation to teaching and learning disciplinary literacies, this study calls for a reconceptualization of grammar and the role of grammar coursework in teacher education programs. This reconceptualization requires a departure from a traditional perspective of grammar, which defines grammar as a set of sentence-level, decontextualized rules for correct usage and focuses on the study of parts of speech. These parts of speech are often learned through sentence-parsing exercises that teach teachers and students a metalanguage for describing classes of words that are subsequently used in edicts such as, “Don’t end a sentence with a preposition.” While developing a metalanguage to talk about language has been demonstrated to be of value to teachers (Borg, 2006), these prescriptive rules for correctness have given grammar a bad name in composition studies because they: shift attention away from meaning; focus on sentence-level grammatical structures without attention to how sentence-level grammar meaningfully supports the organization, purpose, and audience of a text; impose arbitrary rules that experts do not necessarily follow; and discriminate against social or regional dialects (Gebhard & Martin, 2011, p. 297).

In contrast, an SFL perspective of grammar focuses on the relationship between form and function and conceives of grammar as a resource for making meaning in context. Halliday writes:

Grammar is what brings about the distinctively human construction of reality; and by the same token, grammar makes it possible for us to reflect on this construction. (Halliday, 2002, p. 370)

Drawing on this broad understanding of grammar and applying it to literacy pedagogy, the New London Group (1996) argues that learning to read and write should not be conceptualized behaviorally and taught authoritatively as the act of coding and decoding a stable print-based system that progresses neatly from the study of sounds and words to paragraphs and eventually longer texts. Rather, the act of producing, and interpreting, a text is increasingly a process in which people use multiple languages, print, and images to communicate, drawing on their resources as members of diverse and often hybrid linguistic and cultural communities. As a result, the authors call for teachers to develop a deeper understanding of how texts are constructed or “designed” so they can support students in “redesigning” texts based on “available designs” (New London Group, 1996). The authors use the word “design” to refer to how language is used to make meaning because it is “free of the negative associations” of the word grammar (p. 73) and argue that all teachers and students, not just L2 teachers and learners, need a metalanguage for critically analyzing how texts are “designed” to identify “differences between texts, and relate these to the contexts of culture and situation in which they seem to work” (p. 77).

Research regarding the benefits of using SFL as the basis for a metalanguage that can support teachers’ professional development and L2 students’ academic literacy development across content areas has been encouraging (e.g., Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteiza, 2007; Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca, & Boscardin, 2008; Brisk & Zisselsberger, 2010; Gebhard, Chen, & Britton, 2003). While a comprehensive review of these studies is beyond the scope of this paper, the findings from these studies suggest that the use of SFL metalanguage in designing curriculum and instruction supports ESL teachers in developing a deeper understanding of both disciplinary knowledge and how language constructs this knowledge. In addition, teachers who have participated in SFL-based teacher professional development initiatives report feeling more confident about their abilities to teach ELLs to read and write disciplinary texts and to design instruction that links an analysis of the kinds of texts students are asked to read with an analysis of the kinds of texts they are asked to write, thus creating more synergistic links between L2 reading and writing activities. Last, these studies suggest that ESL teachers gained confidence in providing students with targeted, meaning-based feedback on their writing rather than attending exclusively to spelling and traditional grammatical errors.

Despite these positive findings, critics argue that SFL metalanguage is jargon that is “too complex” to be “pedagogically relevant” (Bourke, 2005, pp. 93–94). This response is not unexpected given the degree to which SFL is indeed a complex theory that places new demands on teachers and teacher educators. However, drawing on nearly

thirty years of SFL scholarship, Macken-Horarik (2008) argues SFL metalanguage provides a “powerful navigational toolkit for teachers. . .that will enable us to move forward rather than backward, to engage with complex social-semiotic practices, to diagnose strengths and weaknesses in students’ texts, relating them in a principled way to the relevant meaning potentials on which they draw” (p. 46). To contribute to this debate and research that explores how teachers develop a meaning-making approach to designing academic literacy instruction, this study analyzes how teachers participating in a graduate degree program made sense of SFL and genre-based pedagogy in designing and reflecting on academic literacy instruction for L2 learners in a variety of contexts, focusing on the following questions:

- (1) How does coursework in systemic functional linguistics influence L2 teachers’ conceptions of grammar, if at all?
- (2) How does coursework in systemic functional linguistics influence L2 teachers’ approach to designing literacy instruction, if at all?

We begin by articulating the conceptual framework informing this study of language learning and teachers’ professional development. Next, we present a qualitative study of how TESOL master’s degree candidates developed the ability to use SFL metalanguage to analyze texts and design literacy instruction while enrolled in a graduate degree program in the US and how this ability influenced their conceptions of grammar. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study for L2 teacher education and literacy pedagogy.

### Conceptual framework

#### *Halliday’s SFL: Learning to mean in expanding and differentiated contexts*

A Hallidayan perspective of learning maintains that as individuals learn language in the home, then printed language in primary school, disciplinary discourses in secondary schools, and professional knowledge in post-secondary and work-related contexts, they are simultaneously learning language, “through” language, and “about” language in ways that expand their meaning-making repertoires (Halliday, 1993, p. 113). In explaining how oral language, disciplinary literacies, and professional knowledge develop, a Hallidayan perspective theorizes that the meaning potential of one’s semiotic system increases through three metafunctions that construct meanings sensitive to the contexts in which they are used. These metafunctions comprise ideational, interpersonal, and textual resources. The ideational represents experience; the interpersonal enacts self/other dynamics in social interactions; and the textual manages the flow of information to make discourse coherent. Halliday maintains that as we get older, not only do we physically and cognitively mature, but also the cultural contexts in which we interact expand and become more diverse. As a result, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions realized through language and other semiotic means expand and become more syntagmatically and paradigmatically diverse, creating more meaning potential and choice within the system.

Central to Halliday’s theory is the way texts and contexts are socially constructed by individuals through interactions within the cultural contexts in which they participate. To capture this dynamic, Halliday proposes that any instance of language must be understood both in the broader context of culture and in the immediate context of situation (Halliday, 1999, p. 4). The context of culture refers to the socially constructed semiotic potential of the system as a whole. The context of situation refers to the immediate context in which the system’s potential is realized through the choice of particular phonological, lexicogrammatical, and discourse semantic features used in a specific context. To capture linguistic variation at the level of text realization, Halliday proposes three register variables: field, tenor, and mode. The field of a text realizes ideational meanings; the tenor realizes interpersonal meanings; and the mode realizes textual meanings. Applied to literacy education, these variables enable teachers and their students to analyze how language functions: to convey who did what, to whom, and under what circumstances; to negotiate social distance and status in culturally sanctioned ways; and to present given (theme) and new (rheme) information in ways that make discourse coherent.

#### *Genre-based pedagogy: Learning to mean through disciplinary literacies*

The expanding social contexts and associated semiotic activities in which learners participate construct what Martin calls different “genres.” Martin (2009) defines a genre as “a staged goal-oriented social process” (p. 10).

Following Halliday, Martin maintains that as students participate in expanding social networks in which different genres are used, they are apprenticed to a hierarchy of knowledge and to participating in specialized activities that push on the semiotic resources available to them. Moreover, in the transition from primary to secondary school and eventually to the university, access to robust forms of academic language apprenticeship becomes more and more limited as schools offer a differentiated curriculum that breaks down along race, class, and gender lines. Drawing on the work of Basil Bernstein, [Martin and Rose \(2008\)](#) underscore that this differentiation recreates class structures and economic realities, particularly for students whose community language practices differ greatly from the language of schooling. This argument is not based on a belief that community literacy practices are in any way less complex or sophisticated. Rather, the point is that discipline-specific semiotic systems in math, science, social studies, and literature studies, like community literacies, have evolved socially over time to construct specific kinds of meanings and that schools play a role in stigmatizing non-dominant literacy practices while also legitimating inequitable access to learning disciplinary ones (e.g., [Harklau, 1994](#)).

As a way of responding to educational inequities, Martin and his colleagues began collaborating with teachers in the 1980s to develop a genre-based approach to designing curriculum and instruction ([Martin, 2009](#)). This approach, known as the “teaching/learning cycle,” was developed to apprentice students to reading and writing the genres they are likely to encounter in specific subject areas and across grade levels ([Martin, 2009](#), p. 16). In the primary grades, the approach builds on students’ oral uses of everyday genres realized through everyday grammar (e.g., recounting events and narratives). As students move from upper elementary to secondary school, the focus shifts to teaching disciplinary genres that realize meaning through an increasingly dense grammar by simultaneously building students’ content knowledge and knowledge of the social contexts in which genres are used within specific fields (e.g., explanations, arguments, and discussions in science, mathematics, history, and English). The goal of this approach is to apprentice all students to a critical understanding of disciplinary knowledge and the social semiotic practices that construct this knowledge. The phases of this cycle include: building students’ background knowledge through hands-on, dialogic experiences to prepare them for specific reading and/or writing tasks; deconstructing model texts using functional metalanguage to name genre stages and register features; jointly constructing texts with students to make semiotic know how visible and the nature of linguistic choices available to authors explicit; and gradually supporting students in reading and writing texts more independently by providing less scaffolding as they become more knowledgeable and able readers and writers of a particular genre over time.

#### *Teachers’ professional development: Learning about language*

For teachers to be able to explicitly and critically apprentice students to reading and writing disciplinary texts in ways suggested by Martin, they need to understand how language works to make meaning in their discipline ([Christie & Derewianka, 2008](#); [Martin & Rose, 2008](#); [Schleppegrell, 2004](#)). This argument echoes the New London Group’s call for teachers to develop a functional metalanguage they can use to identify and explain the differences between disciplinary texts and the contexts that give rise to them. However, research regarding teachers’ professional development has not explored how teachers arrive at this kind of specialized metalinguistic knowledge.

The scholarship regarding teachers’ professional development does, however, clearly demonstrate that teacher knowledge is socially constructed and heavily influenced by the contexts in which they first learn as students and then later work as teachers ([Freeman & Johnson, 1998](#)). With reference to grammar, scholars such as [Borg \(2006\)](#) have documented that teachers’ conceptions of and approaches to teaching grammar are shaped by their language-learning biographies and the contexts in which they teach (see also [Andrews, 2007](#); [Burns & Knox, 2005](#)). In addition, these conceptions and approaches are often not commensurate because what teachers come to believe about grammar and what they do in actual classroom practice are shaped by interacting forces, including their personal experiences as language learners, professional coursework, immediate classroom realities, and larger institutional forces influencing curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices ([Borg, 2006](#), p. 283). These collective forces make studying teachers’ conceptions of grammar a challenging, but important task for the field of L2 literacy studies. To contribute to understanding how teachers make sense of SFL and how their understanding informs their approach to designing disciplinary literacy instruction for English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) students, this study explores how teachers’ conceptions of grammar took shape over the course of their experiences in a MATESOL program informed by Halliday and Martin’s theories.

## The study

The context of this study is a MATESOL program in the US that offers a 33-credit Master's Degree in Education. The program is aligned with TESOL standards and prepares pre- and in-service teachers to teach ESL in K-12 contexts in the US or EFL in international contexts. The participants ( $n = 10$ ) were selected from among 50 students enrolled in three sections of a required course called *Language and Language Learning (LLL)*. They were selected based on their willingness to be observed and interviewed over the 14 weeks of the course. From this group, shown in Table 1, Chen, Juanita, and Jing (pseudonyms), were chosen for more in-depth analysis because of their willingness to participate in data collection over the course of their entire program.

Data collection and analysis relied on qualitative case study methods (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Each case explores how a participant made sense of how language works to make meaning in the types of texts they assigned ESL/EFL students to read and write, or were likely to assign in the future, and how they would use SFL and genre-based pedagogy to design curriculum and instruction and provide feedback on student writing samples. In producing each case, we sought to gain insights into the dynamic ways in which participants' conceptions of grammar were constructed and shifted over the course of the study.

Data were collected between September, 2009, and December, 2011, and came from three sections of *LLL* taught by Meg Gebhard. Data collection and analysis for each section occurred in three phases. Phase One focused on documenting participants' experiences in *LLL* and relied on observational fieldnotes, transcribed classroom discussions, formal and informal interviews, formal and informal email exchanges, and participants' course assignments. The first assignment required participants to conduct a genre and register analysis of a reading selection and design instruction to support L2 learners in deconstructing this text. The second assignment required participants to conduct a genre and register analysis of an L2 student writing sample and design instruction supportive of academic language development based on their analysis. All formal interviews, conducted twice over the course of each semester, were transcribed.

Phase Two consisted of reviewing and coding the data using an inductive and iterative approach (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). On average, each data set consisted of approximately 50 hours of fieldwork that resulted in approximately 400 pages of fieldnotes, transcriptions (classroom and interviews), participants' assignments, and emails. These data were coded first with "open codes" generated by a review of the data in which themes, topics, and issues were identified no matter how varied or disparate they seemed. These codes were then differentiated, collapsed, or eliminated to develop a set of "closed codes" or a "focused category system" for analyzing data related to the questions guiding the investigation (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 85).

Phase Three consisted of collecting and analyzing follow-up data on three participants and included one formal interview, informal email exchanges, and assignments turned in for other required courses in the program, including courses in curriculum design, assessments, and professional leadership.

Throughout the three phases, the researchers played different roles and drew on various identities as participant observers, which influenced how the cases were constructed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Meg, a white woman, was the course instructor and drew on her experiences as a researcher and former ESL teacher in the US. Likewise, Holly, also a white woman educated in the US, drew on her work as a secondary English teacher in her role as a teaching assistant. In contrast, Wawan and I An's interactions were shaped by their identities as international teaching assistants. Wawan, an Indonesian man, drew on his past work as a teacher educator in his home country and I An, a Taiwanese woman, drew on her experiences as a EFL teacher in Taiwan.

Our primary roles as course instructors contribute to the limitations of the study. We are aware that the texts constructed by participants were in part co-constructed by us in our institutional roles as teachers vis-à-vis their roles as students. We attempted to address this limitation during Phase Three by collecting texts produced over time in other contexts in which we were not instructors and our roles were more varied, resulting in multiple sources of data and allowing us to triangulate or challenge the strength of findings as they emerged. A second limitation is that we cannot make any claims about teachers' actual classroom practice because we did not systematically conduct classroom observations in their practicums. Last, the findings are not intended to be generalizable to other contexts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 113). However, insights into the phenomenon of how teachers make sense of SFL are intended to add to the growing empirical work regarding the knowledge base of L2 teacher education (Andrews, 2007; Borg, 2006; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000).

Table 1  
Participants' profiles.

Teacher & course section	Age	Identified as	Languages spoken and/or used academically	Education	Teaching/work experience	Career goals
<b>Chen I</b>	29	Taiwanese	Mandarin/English	BA Info. & Comp. Sci.	4-year Math & Computer teaching – secondary level in Taiwan	EFL teaching – secondary level in Taiwan
Qiang I	28	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA English Ed.	2-year EFL teaching – secondary level in China	EFL teaching – secondary level in China
Shuang I	28	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA Chinese Lang. and Lit.	No prior teaching exp.; journalist in China	Chinese teaching in US
Jiao I	25	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA English	1-year teaching – elementary level in China	ESL & EFL teaching – college level
Louise II	33	Arabic/American	English	BA Psychology	5-year teaching ESL – K-5	Pursue Doctoral of Education degree
CeCe II	32	Multi-ethnic	English/Spanish	BA Psychology	6-year teaching – variety of teaching positions	Certified ESL teacher
Amber II	25	White	English	BA Elem. Ed.	3-year teaching – elementary level	Reading teacher/specialist
<b>Juanita II</b>	30	Puerto Rican	Spanish/English	BA Social Work	6-year SEI teaching and social worker	Structured English Immersion (SEI) teacher
Elizabeth II	26	White	English	BA Psychology	Less than 1 year teaching experience	Unsure
<b>Jing III</b>	24	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA English Lit.	1-year bilingual tutor in US	Chinese teaching – college level in US/or EFL teaching – secondary level in China
Hui III	24	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA English Lit.	1-year Chinese as Foreign Language tutor in China	EFL teaching – college level in China
Zhijia III	25	Chinese	Mandarin/English	BA Teaching Chinese as L2	No previous teaching experience	EFL teaching – secondary level in China

## Findings: Shifting conceptions of grammar

The findings indicate that participants' conceptualizations of grammar shifted from a traditional sentence-level, form-focused perspective to a broader, more functional understanding operating in interconnected ways across lexicogrammatical and discourse semantic features of texts. This shift occurred as participants developed an ability to use SFL metalanguage to break texts into clauses; identify the presence or absence of expected genre stages; and conduct field, tenor, and mode analyses of published texts and L2 writing samples. Through these activities participants increasingly acquired the ability to use SFL metalanguage to identify and explain the differences between narratives and arguments in designing English language arts instruction for ESL and EFL students. They used SFL metalanguage to discover how language works to construct literary narratives, arguments related to interpreting these texts, and sample texts for students modeled after the linguistic choices employed by authors of award-winning multicultural children's literature.

How participants developed the ability to use SFL metalanguage and the degree to which they reported potentially using SFL tools in the future were heavily influenced by the institutional contexts in which they were teaching or envisioned teaching in the future. For example, both ESL and EFL teachers described institutional forces in US and Asian educational systems that would prevent them from using SFL and genre-based pedagogy. With reference to assessment practices, they characterized these forces as rewarding teachers and students for participating in drill-and-practice approaches to teaching and using short inauthentic texts to focus on sentence-level grammatical correctness, not the ability to deconstruct and construct meaning critically in extended discourse. They also described how mandated textbooks and curricular frameworks made the proposition of designing curriculum using SFL and genre theory an impracticality, especially with large classes where extended dialogic engagement with texts was impossible.

Table 2 summarizes the findings regarding how participants designed reading and writing instruction. First, the table identifies the published reading materials participants analyzed and how they used genre theory and SFL metalanguage in their analyses. Many teachers chose multicultural children's literature about the language learning experiences of immigrants. This was fortuitous for a number of reasons. These texts are well suited for L2 learners because they are lexicogrammatically less dense than grade-level texts while still retaining weighty content and a literary quality. They are also well suited for teachers who are just learning to use SFL and genre theory to analyze texts because they do not require teachers to have an advanced knowledge of SFL. Last, they provide opportunities to teach students how to appropriate discourse semantic and lexicogrammatic patterns used by published authors.

Second, Table 2 summarizes how participants analyzed L2 students' writing samples using SFL metalanguage and genre theory. In instances where participants analyzed children's literature in the first part of the course and then L2 learners' narratives in the second, using SFL metalanguage to deconstruct published texts appears to have enhanced their ability to design focused writing instruction. For example, they noted that the students' texts were simple recounts rather than developed narratives with compelling complications and resolutions (Qiang, Juanita, CeCe, Hui, and Zhijia). In addition, most described designing curriculum and instruction that would direct students' attention back to model texts written by published authors to analyze genre stages, create "word banks" of cohesive devices, and develop lists of various process types used to produce more developed and engaging stories (Juanita, CeCe, Hui, and Zhijia).

For participants who first analyzed children's literature and then expository texts, this contrast allowed them to identify the difference between these two genres and to support L2 writers in noticing the linguistic features that construct these differences (Jiao, Chen, and Amber). Accordingly, they described designing instruction to teach students how to make arguments more authoritatively (e.g., use of material processes, less use of mental processes, use of declaratives) and to develop an ability to nominalize as a way of packing more information into a clause and managing the flow of given and new information in making claims (Shuang, Jiao, and Chen).

### *Three portraits of participants learning to use SFL and genre-based pedagogy*

The following three portraits provide a discussion of these findings. They illustrate how three participants, Chen, Juanita, and Jing, made sense of SFL and genre theory over the course of their graduate studies.



Table 2  
Participants' use of SFL/genre theory to design literacy instruction in the context of a 14-week course in SFL.

Teacher	Reading material	Use of SFL/genre theory in designing reading instruction	Student writing sample	Use of SFL/genre theory in designing writing instruction
Shuang	Narrative <i>A Step from Heaven</i> by An Na	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Analyze author's use of appraisal and modality to construct characters' emotions and attitudes</li> </ul>	Response to literary text produced by 8th-grade ELL in mainstream English class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Create a verb bank useful for realizing the purpose of genre (e.g., indicate, reflect, show)</li> <li>Model use of nominalization to build an argument</li> </ul>
Jiao	Narrative <i>Tell-Tale Heart</i> by Edgar Allan Poe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Analyze author's use of circumstances to provide "details"</li> <li>Analyze authors' use of cohesive devices to support an understanding of relationship between the events (e.g., temporal, cause/effect)</li> </ul>	Response to literary text produced by 8th-grade ELL in mainstream English class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages of an argument as opposed to a narrative</li> <li>Model register features used to construct a more authoritative voice in presenting an argument (e.g., use of declaratives, present tense)</li> </ul>
Qiang	Argument A TOEFL sample essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Analyze how the author constructs an "authoritative" tone through the use of tenor resources (e.g., material verbs and absence of mental verbs)</li> <li>Analyze author's use of cohesive devices to make an argument</li> </ul>	Personal description produced by 12th-grade Taiwanese ELL in mainstream English class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Model use of adjectives in expanded noun phrases</li> </ul>
<b>Chen</b>	Narrative <i>In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson</i> by Bette Bao Lord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Support students in tracking participants and creating lexical chains to assist students in following the pathway of the main character</li> </ul>	Response to literary text produced by 8th-grade ELL in mainstream English class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model/compare genre stages associated with narrating verses making an argument</li> <li>Highlight the difference between using concrete participants in narrating a story versus abstract ones in making an argument</li> <li>Teach nominalization as a way to support the building of an argument</li> </ul>
Amber	Expository passage on baseball from textbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Support students in tracking participants and creating lexical chains to help identify the "main idea"</li> </ul>	"Five paragraph" essay in response to district writing prompt produced by 4th-grade ELL in mainstream classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model/compare the genre and register differences between narratives and explanations</li> <li>Create a word bank of cohesive devices found in explanations and in narratives</li> <li>Support students in analyzing the repetition of participants and processes to make sure they "stay on topic"</li> </ul>

<b>Juanita</b>	Narrative <i>Too Many Tamales</i> by Gary Soto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> </ul>	Narrative in response to district writing prompt, produced by 7th-grade beginning ELL in “Sheltered English Immersion” class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Teach past tense</li> <li>Teach participant tracking and use of pronouns to build the field and avoid repetition</li> <li>Create a word bank of cohesive devices used in narration</li> </ul>
CeCe	Narrative <i>Letting Swift River Go</i> by Jane Yolen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages with a focus on the “complication” to support reading comprehension and analysis of events</li> <li>Support students in tracking participants and creating lexical chains to follow the pathway of a main character through the complication</li> <li>Attend to pronoun referencing systems to support reading comprehension</li> </ul>	Narrative in response to district writing prompt produced by a 5th-grade ELL in mainstream classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Model participant tracking and lexical chaining to support students in building the field and avoiding repetition of the same pronoun</li> <li>Create word banks to expand students’ use of a greater variety of process types in narrating (e.g., material processes to convey action; mental processes to convey thoughts; verbal processes to convey emotions).</li> </ul>
Hui	Fable/Narrative <i>Fly, Eagle, Fly!</i> by Christopher Gregorowski	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>List processes to comprehend sequence of events in the plot</li> <li>Analyze author’s use of tenor resources in dialog to construct relationships between characters</li> <li>Analyze author’s use of temporal connectives to make the “story flow”</li> </ul>	Narrative produced by 3rd-grade ESL in a pull-out program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Create word banks to expand students’ use of a greater variety of processes types in narrating (e.g., material processes to convey action; mental processes to convey thoughts; verbal processes to convey emotions)</li> <li>Model adding details by using and/or expanding circumstances</li> <li>Create a word bank of cohesive devices to support the “flow” of the narrative</li> </ul>
<b>Jing</b>	Samples of model cover letters for job applications found online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the function of each genre stage</li> <li>Analyze author’s use of tenor resources to construct social distance and politeness, while also arguing the talents of the applicant without sounding “aggressive” (e.g., use of modals and appraisal)</li> <li>Notice page layout and business letter writing conventions</li> </ul>	Cover letter produced by 23-year-old ESL student attending community college	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Provide instruction in using modality and appraisal to balance politeness and self-recommendation.</li> <li>Make a “word” and “phrase” bank from help wanted ad; use these words and phrases in one’s cover letter</li> </ul>
Zhijia	Narrative <i>The Racist Warehouse</i> by a skilled 8th-grade writer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze genre stages to support comprehension</li> <li>Analyze authors’ use of cohesive devices to support an understanding of relationship between the events (e.g., temporal, cause/effect)</li> </ul>	Short story produced by 19-year-old EFL student in China as practice for taking college entrance exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Model genre stages</li> <li>Teach material processes to construct the sequence of events</li> <li>Teach temporal connectives to support the “flow” of the sequence events</li> </ul>

Names in bold indicate participants focused on in case study portraits.

## Chen

At the time of the study, Chen was a first semester student from Taiwan. Chen had a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science and had taught math, technology, and English at a private middle school. She was interested in earning a degree in TESOL in the US and returning to her home country to teach EFL at the secondary level. Like other international students with teaching experience, she entered the course with a strong conception of traditional grammar and an ability to use traditional metalanguage to teach language based on her own language learning experiences and use of EFL textbooks. By contrast, analyzing how language worked in longer stretches of discourse, particularly in literature, was new to her. Early in the semester during a class discussion, she said, "Grammar is considered the easiest way to teach [the] English language. When teaching, I usually follow a textbook." Later, once the class began to read SFL/genre theory, she commented, "It's hard to connect—I always think that grammar is verb, noun—I think it is hard to think [of] genre as part of grammar."

Chen's ability to think of "genre" as well as aspects of field, tenor, and mode "as part of grammar" developed over time as she gained an ability to use SFL metalanguage. This more functional metalanguage gave her a set of cognitive tools with which to see, name, and make connections between the lexicogrammatical and discourse semantic features of narratives and insights into how she might teach students through children's literature, something she had not previously considered. Chen analyzed Bette Bao Lord's (1984) *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, a novel about a young girl who immigrated to San Francisco from China in the 1950s. In designing curriculum, Chen noted that she would highlight the genre stages typically found in narratives and realized in this text. At the register level, she reported she would teach students how to "track participants" related to the main character. Based on this tracking, she would "make lexical chains" to support students in understanding the trajectory of the main character in the novel by teaching "pronoun referencing."

For the analysis of an L2 writing sample, she focused on an expository text written by "Adam," a seventh-grade ESL student from Malaysia who had been in the US for five years and was "mainstreamed" for English language arts. Chen observed Adam in class, collected curricular materials and samples of his writing, and interviewed him and his teacher. Her analysis focused on a unit of study that required Adam to read *A Step from Heaven* (2001) by An Na and reflect on the experiences of immigrants in America as depicted in this novel. In analyzing Adam's text, Chen conducted a quantitative analysis of the number and types of clauses and created a table that displayed the distribution of participant, process, and circumstance types. She noted that Adam followed the template for a "five paragraph" essay the teacher required the class to use; his text contained a clear thesis; and he had used quotes as stipulated by the teacher to support his claims. However, she judged that these quotes "narrate[d] facts objectively from the book" rather than "taking a position" and "showing his critical thinking" because of his use of "concrete participants" rather than "abstract ones" related to issues of immigration (e.g., *the mother, the father, the daughter, the book, I, An Na*). Moreover, she remarked that the theme/rheme patterns in his text did not "build" his argument using "nominalizations." Citing Schleppegrell (2004), she wrote:

*Adam did not build his arguments from clause to clause, increasingly re-packaging and re-presenting information as nominalized participants in the ensuing clauses. Instead, he often remains focused on the same participant, especially concrete participants as theme, in a way that is more typical of narrative than expository writing. (LLL, Fall 2009)*

To support students like Adam in developing the kind of literacy practices needed to be successful in secondary English classes, Chen articulated an instruction plan that included analyzing a model text and comparing this model to less successful texts to build students' "genre knowledge" of the differences between narrating a story and persuading a reader of a thesis. She planned to "clarify the function of each move" in different model texts, and, at the register level, to support students in noticing how nouns can be turned into abstract participants by "circling where noun phrases and nominalization form abstract subjects."

In two subsequent courses, Chen continued to explore using SFL and genre-based pedagogy to support L2 learners in reading and writing about children's literature. In a course on curriculum design, she developed a unit based on Ellen Levine's (1989) illustrated story *I Hate English*, which portrays the experiences of a young Chinese immigrant. In her unit plan, Chen outlined how she would develop students' "genre knowledge" by illustrating how narratives typically have "an orientation, sequence of events, a complication, and a resolution" (*Curriculum Design*, Fall 2010). In addition, at the register level, she would instruct students in using

... linking word [connectives], which make the story fluent; verbs, which can specifically present how the characters acted, felt, and thought; descriptive words, which can create the image of readers' mind; dialogues, which will focus on the format and the time tense; time tense and explain the reason why in some situation the time tense will change to other than past tense. (Curriculum Design, Fall 2010)

Chen had the opportunity to implement this unit informally with a group of ninth-grade EFL learners when she went home to Taiwan in between semesters. In her analysis of their writing, she remarked:

*The handout [I made] of genre moves may have positive influences on students' writing structure, since most of the students have clear and properly developed genre moves in their narratives. Orientation is the most capable move for students, where they are able to add major or minor characters and events cohesively. Complication is difficult for the students to control their language to design delicate problems in order to gain or hold readers' interest in the story (Derewianka, 1990). Overall, their complications tended to be predictable without much surprise for readers. As for resolution, most of them preferred to use personal comments instead of stating solved or unsolved situation in the end, which may be affected by their L1 writing experiences. In their L1 writing experiences, they were told to make a conclusion in the end of their writing, and personal comments are the most common and simple conclusions. (Curriculum Design, Fall 2010)*

Chen also provided an accurate quantitative analysis of the register features of students' texts, but glossed over how these patterns supported and/or limited their ability to narrate a compelling story for a particular audience. Without these insights, she could not provide specifics on how she might design instructional activities to support students in addressing weaknesses she had previously identified in their writing. In reflecting on teaching this unit in an interview, Chen reported that previously she did not enjoy anything related to literature in English, but added, "I now have started to like reading literary works in English, maybe it is good for me as an English teacher, and you know I changed . . . because honestly it [these analyses] made me change" (Interview, 11/30/09).

Although Chen stated repeatedly that a meaning-oriented approach to grammar might be beneficial to her students and that she had used concepts learned in the course to improve her own ability to write academic papers in English (e.g., use of nominalization in constructing theme/rheme patterns), she reported she would not use SFL to design curriculum and instruction because of the exams her students need to pass, exams that test knowledge of traditional grammar:

*That's [traditional grammar] what I learned, so I also teach it in the same way to the students, to the kids. In Taiwan, we always defer to entrance test so students to enter high schools they can get. . . good grades, the best grades for the school in Taiwan. So writing is not my focus in junior high. (Interview, 11/30/09)*

Chen's concerns regarding her ability to implement an SFL approach in Taiwan, especially one that incorporates the use of children's literature, appeared to be well founded. In an email exchange with one of the researchers after graduation, Chen reported that she "must finish the textbook by the end of the year" and that she did not "have time for SFL or for literature." She wrote that she used the school-selected textbook to teach "vocabulary, dialogue, focus sentence pattern (oral practice), reading, listening exercise" (Email exchange, 12/26/2011).

### Juanita

Juanita grew up in Puerto Rico, where she attended Catholic schools. She moved to Massachusetts and finished high school in the same Puerto Rican community where she now teaches. Juanita described her experiences as a "former English learner" as "painful" because she confronted "discrimination" and "low expectations." She reported feeling "anxious" and "frustrated" because teachers did not provide clear instructions, especially regarding writing. After attending community college and completing a four-year degree, Juanita became a social worker and then a middle school ESL teacher. At the time of data collection, she had been teaching ESL for three years and was in the first semester of graduate school.

Like other participants, she entered the course with knowledge of traditional grammar, which she reported learning in Catholic school. She used the words "rules," "parts of speech," "proper," and "correct" in association with the word grammar, and described teaching grammar using worksheets. As Juanita began to use SFL tools to analyze how meaning is made in literary texts, her conceptions of grammar and grammar teaching broadened beyond this approach.

In *LLL* and subsequent courses, Juanita chose to analyze the genre of narrative for several reasons. First, as part of *No Child Left Behind* legislation and state anti-bilingual education mandates, her students were frequently tested on their ability to read and write narratives in a language they were in the process of acquiring. At the time, students had no access to bilingual education to support them in making the transition to doing academic work in English. Because nearly all of the students in her school were struggling to pass these exams (and eventually graduate from high school), Juanita put her energy into understanding this high-stakes genre.

Second, like Chen, she reported that children's literature provided an entry point for teaching emergent L2 writers how to read and write about culturally relevant topics. She analyzed *Too Many Tamales* (1993) by Gary Soto, a Mexican American author. In conducting a clause break analysis of this short story, she grouped and labeled clauses according to the expected genre stages found in narratives. Next, she conducted a field, tenor, and mode analysis using a series of charts. This analysis informed her design of future instruction. She described how she would "use highlighters with students to color code" expected genre stages. She also stated that a register analysis would support her in teaching students how "similes" and "metaphors" work in this text, but did not offer specifics regarding how she would use SFL to teach these concepts. She concluded by stating that she would lead students in "jointly constructing" a narrative as a class based on Soto's model:

*The students will be [introduced] to the genre of narratives in general. We will discuss the purpose of a variety of narratives and the audience. Next, students will be introduced to the genre moves/text organization and will identify them in the story "Too Many Tamales" by color coding them. Then, we will analyze the language features through the realization of the field, tenor and mode, within clauses. Some language features might be looked at separately first due to the fact that specific aspects of English language writing are new to them, such as similes and metaphors. Following that step, the class, together with the teacher, will co-construct a piece of narrative that will serve as another writing model. Finally, the students will independently construct a narrative of their interest. (LLL, Fall 2010)*

Additional evidence that Juanita developed an ability to use SFL metalanguage to design literacy instruction comes from her analysis of a writing sample produced by "Francisco," a beginning ESL sixth grader. After analyzing his text, she noted he produced more of a recount than a fully developed narrative, because his text lacked an "orientation" and a "well-developed problem." She remarked that he could address these issues by "looking at some model texts" and adding "dialogue" to make the problem come alive. As for the register features in Francisco's text, she noted that he used a variety of process types (e.g., "action, mental, and verbal verbs") but had trouble controlling the "tense" and "pronoun referencing." In addition, she observed that he tended to overuse cohesive devices such as "and" and "then," which are features of oral rather than written discourse, and concluded that Francisco would "benefit from being exposed to a variety of narratives" and "noticing cohesive devices that appear in more complex or extended narratives" (*LLL*, Fall 2010).

A year later in a subsequent course, Juanita continued to use SFL tools to teach narratives. She reported working with students to deconstruct a chapter in Paul Fleischman's (1997) *Seedfolk*, a story about a young Vietnamese girl who starts an urban garden that ameliorates cultural tensions in a Cleveland neighborhood. Similar to previous projects, Juanita described how she would lead students in "identifying the text organization by color coding the orientation, complication and resolution" (*Literacy Development*, Fall 2011). However, in this unit, she also planned to assist students in conducting a register analysis:

*... they will conduct a register analysis: field, tenor and mode in order to notice certain patterns of language usage associated with narratives at the clause level. For instance, they will identify language features such as the use of specific participants, past tense verbs, circumstances of time and place and other cohesive devices. During this process, students will be using charts, which will then be accessible for referencing [for their writing]. (Literacy Development, Fall 2011)*

In an assessment of writing samples that resulted from this unit, Juanita observed that the students, similar to Francisco, produced recounts rather than narratives. She reiterated her earlier claim that her students would benefit from "analyzing similar texts to the ones they were required to write":

*I was able to notice that students like to see examples. When deconstructing the text, it helped to practice identifying some language features and talking about the patterns noticed as a whole class before having them work in small groups or independently. I noticed it provided them with the confidence they need in order to produce something for*

*themselves. However, it would be beneficial for the students if we spent more time looking very closely at various texts before moving on to the joint construction stage. Spending more time during the modeling stage would ease the process of the joint construction and independent construction of a text, as it will allow them to look at and explore more language options to use in their narratives. (Literacy Development, Fall 2011)*

She indicated that such an approach, however, would require more time than she could spare in an already crammed school day. She wrote:

*They were able to notice patterns of language features typical in narratives as well as the genre moves associated with it. However, I feel that my students would be able to get deeper understandings of how language works and how their linguistic choices rely on purpose and audience, only if there is more time to expose them to different types of text in order to compare the differences among them. (Literacy Development, Fall 2011)*

Reflecting on the potential of using SFL and genre theory in her work, she was enthusiastic and reported that SFL supported her in teaching both language and disciplinary knowledge specific to English language arts:

*As a former English language learner, I had the idea that learning English had to do barely of a set of strict rules that had to be explicitly taught and drilled. Sure enough, that learned idea has had a negative impact on my teaching. . . Now, my philosophy of grammar has changed tremendously. . . I was amazed to hear the students have discussions as they were trying to make meaning of what is a narrative. . . They had to determine what language to use to narrate a problematic event to different audiences for different purposes. This quick activity opened their eyes as it opened mine. . . [an] SFL approach has loaded me with knowledge that will allow me to improve my teaching practices. (Literacy Development, Fall 2011)*

While Juanita's estimation of the potential of SFL stands in contrast to Chen's, both reactions were rooted in assessment systems that shaped their work as classroom teachers. In Chen's judgment, testing practices worked against EFL teachers using SFL to teach language *and* explore how meaning is made in literary texts. In Juanita's assessment, because testing regimes required her to teach both language and disciplinary knowledge, SFL and genre-based pedagogy provided her valuable tools with which to plan, implement, and reflect on instruction. However, Juanita also had concerns about using SFL due to the lack of time she had to work with students in critically reading, deconstructing, discussing, and reconstructing texts. Ironically, the instruction time she needed to teach reading and writing competed with the amount of time she was required to test and re-test students over the school year as a result of the standards-based accountability systems used in US schools. This irony was not lost on Juanita and other teachers working in US schools who were very critical of the lack of time and support L2 learners were given to learn academic English before they were tested on it and through it.

### Jing

Jing was a pre-service teacher in her first year in graduate school. Similar to other international students, her desire to earn a degree in TESOL from a US university centered on wanting to improve her English and gain advantage in the international job market. Her shift from constructing grammar using traditional terms to using SFL metalanguage is representative of other pre-service international students. As a group, they reported being interested in changing the way English is taught in China because they felt it left them unprepared to use English outside of testing situations. Jing said she learned English by "memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures, translating sentences, and reciting textbook passages" and that these experiences had not prepared her to "communicate fluently" (LLL, Spring 2011). In an interview, she elaborated on how SFL metalanguage gave her "a broader perspective":

*以前我對Grammar的理解就是那些規則像是名詞、動詞、主詞、受詞那些。就是語法上的規則。現在我對grammar有比較廣泛的理解。比如說, theme 和rheme, 的作用是讓一篇文章有cohesion。我以前沒有想過那些也是文法。*

*Before [taking the class] I viewed grammar as something just like nouns, verbs, subjects, and objects. It's all about the rules of syntax. Now I have a broader perspective of grammar. For example, theme and rheme are also grammar. They help build cohesion. I never thought they are grammar before. (Interview, 11/10/2011)*

This conceptional shift occurred over the course of her studies as evidenced by her analysis of the genre of “cover letter.” She described her rationale for focusing on this genre:

*For a long period of time, Chinese government was taking the obligation of allocat[ing] job positions for university graduate, so young people didn't have to worry about their job hunting. The job allocation policy was stopped at 1994 and Chinese young people were forced to join into fierce competition of job hunting field. For those planning to apply [for] international job, they need to learn from students in western country to write their application documents like resume, letter of interests and cover letter. (LLL, Spring 2011)*

For her first LLL assignment, Jing analyzed a model cover letter downloaded from the Internet by identifying its genre stages: “formal greeting,” “statement of the purpose,” “introduction of self and background,” “notification of attached resume,” “request for an interview,” and “formal sign-off.” She also described how these stages were supported by the text's field, tenor, and mode. For example, Jing noted that a predominant theme was “I.” In exploring aspects of the tenor, she remarked on the importance of using modal verbs to show “politeness” and construct “a respectful, but confident tone.”

For her second assignment, Jing analyzed an email cover letter written by a community college student. She noted that he followed expected genre and register conventions, using “business letter conventions, material processes in the past tense, and participants” taken from the job announcement to build a description of his experiences and qualifications. She also noted his use of modals in combination with high appraisal in describing himself. She remarked that this combination allowed the writer to recommend himself without sounding arrogant.

In two subsequent courses, Jing continued to focus on the genre and register features of cover letters. The first course required students to design an instructional unit and the second required students to develop a leadership project. Jing coupled these requirements and created an instructional blog to support international students in finding jobs in English-speaking countries. She designed an online unit to teach “Cynthia,” a volunteer university student whose first language was Chinese, how to write more effective cover letters for “a western audience.”

For this project, Jing further analyzed the lexicogrammatical features associated with the genre, noting that the “I” in a sample cover letter was constructed from beginning to end through a long “lexical chain” in which the appraisal gradually increased:

*The lexical chain refers “I” is very long (I=an English major=a writing tutor=a strong candidate=a recent graduate with writing, editing, and administrative experience=beneficial addition=excellent editorial assistance). Many references are used to identify and describe “I”, showing one's experience, qualification and advantages. The degree of appraisal of the lexical chain is gradually increased. (Leadership Projects, Fall 2011)*

Exploring aspects of the tenor, Jing remarked on the importance of using modal verbs to “ease up the power,” show “politeness,” keep “a respectful, but confident tone,” and “maintain social distance”:

*... we can see the writer uses mainly present tense and declarative mode (state the fact rather than questions or commands). The use of modality eases up the power of the tone and keeps a social distance, showing the writer's politeness, avoiding over aggression and exaggeration. . . Some are in high appraisal. These features highlight positive aspects of the candidate and realize the function of self-recommendation. An interesting note is the writer's effort in keeping the balance. She uses high appraisal to recommend herself and showing confidence. On the other hand, she uses modality and declarative sentences to control the aggressive and self-esteem, keeping a respectful but confident tone and proper social distance. (Leadership Projects, Fall 2011)*

To design the instructional unit, Jing created four online lessons using a blog, PowerPoint slides, and Skype. The lessons guided Cynthia through the process of constructing three drafts of a cover letter. The first lesson introduced the purpose of cover letters and how they relate to other job-hunting texts such as ads, resumes, and recommendation letters; the second provided a model of a cover letter and an analysis of its genre stages using PowerPoint and different color overlays to highlight the stages visually; and the third drew attention to aspects of register. These slides highlighted the main lexical chain found in the sample letter, the predominance of the pronouns “I” and “my,” and the use of modal verbs in phrases such as, “I would like to. . .” At the conclusion of lesson three, Jing instructed Cynthia to write a cover letter for a job using a template. In lesson four, her final slide included a set of “tips” in Chinese:

## Tips:

- (1) 多使用积极意义的词。使用陈述句 (Use positive vocabulary. Use declarative sentences.)
- (2) 可以适当使用一些有感情色彩的积极意味的词来进行自我推销。注意要有依据 (Use positive and emotive adjectives for self-promotion. Make sure that your self-promotion comes from evidence.)
- (3) 在进行要求或者自我标榜时，情态动词的使用显得有礼貌，尊重读者，也可以中和具有感情色彩的词产生的不好效果 (Use modal verbs to create politeness and respect for the readers. Modal verbs help moderate your letter to avoid over self-promotion.)

Reflecting on her use of SFL pedagogy, Jing's reactions were mixed. She reported that providing students with "scaffolding" in the form of "a model text with an explanation of each of the genre moves" was more productive than trying to provide "a lot of feedbacks" after students produced a text independently. She also reported that Cynthia appreciated explicit instruction in how to use "I" in a "reasonable manner that is neither too humble nor too aggressive":

*... being humble is deeply rooted in Chinese peoples' mind. She [Cynthia] worried about how to keep a reasonable manner that is neither too humble nor too aggressive. The problem of social distance is a big challenge to her. In modeling part, the modality and words with appraisal is very helpful to her. (Leadership Project, Fall 2011)*

However, after analyzing Cynthia's texts, Jing commented that she relied too much on the model text. Jing hypothesized that this over-reliance was related to "habits" Cynthia formed during prior "structure-focused" English instruction:

*... we can see she [Cynthia] still keep the ways of learning writing in an structure-focused way. She regard sample texts as template and need substitute words to fill in the template. . . . But she is not familiar with the method of learning to write based on its genre type, its contexts and purposes. Therefore, one of the insufficiency of this curriculum is the weakness of highlighting the function of the sample. To modify it, teacher should explain to learners that we are not using the sample as template, but seeing how texts work under contexts through this sample. (Leadership Projects, Fall 2011)*

Along with having to contend with students' socialization regarding approaching writing, Jing expressed skepticism about using SFL and genre-based pedagogy in the future because of issues related to her own English proficiency:

老師自己本身必須很清楚不同genre的features才能幫助學生做選擇。這對於我們英語非母語的老師來說是很困難的。所以要用SFL和Genre-based pedagogy教學生之前必須要考慮到中國老師的英文水平。比如說，我想用nominalization。我心裡明白用nominalization會寫出更好的coverletter，可是我自己的英語水平不明白要怎麼用。如果我是老師自己都不明白，我要怎麼教學生呢？

*[In order to teach functional and genre-based grammar], teachers must know language features of different genres so that they can help students make choices. This is difficult for non-native English-speaking teachers. Chinese teachers' English proficiency level should be taken into consideration before implementing SFL and genre-based pedagogy. For example, I know that using nominalization will make my cover letter better, but my English language proficiency is not good enough for me to nominalize a particular verb. If as a teacher I don't know how to use nominalization, how do I teach students? (Interview, 11/10/2011)*

In addition, regarding assessment practices shaping the context of EFL classrooms, Jing remarked that Chinese teachers have "40 or 60 students" in a class and have to prepare students for exams that reward students and teachers for "producing errorless passages." As a result, teaching EFL in China centers on "memorizing sample texts, templates, and sentence structures" (Leadership Projects, Fall 2011). In sum, Jing's reservations regarding SFL and genre theory resonated with issues raised by Chen and Juanita – all three describe a system in which the goals of



language learning and teaching are paradoxically displaced by assessment systems that reward efficiency and formal accuracy.

### *Functional vs. structural practices: SFL in the classroom*

The reservations expressed by Chen, Juanita, and Jing regarding implementing an SFL-based approach to curricula within assessment-driven contexts were echoed by all ten participants. In response to these concerns, the use of templates was a frequent topic of discussion. In these discussions, the shift to a broader, socially constructed conception of grammar as a meaning-making resource for reading and writing disciplinary texts tended to drift back to more structural and behavioral conceptions of teaching students to reproduce text types. This shift played out in discussions when participants described testing practices and time pressures limiting their ability to analyze multiple models critically in relation to purpose and audience. Thus, while Chen, Juanita, and Jing believed analyzing the linguistic features of multiple models with students would be beneficial, they ultimately chose to provide students with templates and lists of associated register features in ways that did not always include attention to how genre and register features interact with aspects of context.

Participants made arguments for using templates in two ways. First, ESL teachers working in US public schools made clear that district and state assessment systems gave them little power to do much else regardless of what they knew about literacy development. Second, both ESL and EFL teachers argued that templates provided emergent readers and writers with “scaffolding” that was suited to their “zone of proximal development” as newcomers to reading and writing challenging grade-level disciplinary genres (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10). In class discussions, some argued forcefully that many L2 learners need templates to “get started” and “so they don’t get overwhelmed and shut down.” These teachers maintained that attending to genre and register variation and more nuanced aspects of text and context dynamics was something they would address as a function of students’ language proficiency over time, but attention to variation was not a good starting point for beginning readers and writers. Despite participants’ concerns regarding what was possible within their educational contexts, they did not report that learning SFL metalanguage and genre-based pedagogy was too challenging or too theoretical. In fact, Jing alone commented that SFL and genre theory demanded more of teachers in regard to their language proficiency. This trend in the data is interesting to note given the prevailing opinion that SFL is too technical and complex of a theory to inform teacher education (Bourke, 2005).

### **Discussion: More than templates and jargon**

The findings indicate that participants’ conceptualizations of grammar shifted from a traditional, form-focused, sentence-level perspective to a broader, more functional understanding operating in interconnected ways across register and genre features of texts. Participants were able to use SFL metalanguage to identify and explain the differences between narratives and arguments in designing instruction for ESL and EFL students. They came to use SFL metalanguage to discover how language works to construct literary narratives, present arguments, and produce texts modeled after the linguistic choices employed by authors of children’s literature. How participants developed the ability to use SFL metalanguage and the degree to which they reported potentially using SFL tools in the future were influenced by assessment practices in the contexts in which they taught or envisioned teaching. Thus, these findings support the findings of other studies, which highlight interrelated dynamics regarding the influence of context on teachers’ conceptions of grammar and approaches to grammar instruction (Andrews, 2007; Borg, 2006). These results also support the findings of other studies that have documented the benefits of teachers developing a functional metalanguage with which to design content-based academic literacy instruction for L2 learners (e.g., Achugar et al., 2007; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010).

The implications of these findings for research relate to two issues in the fields of L2 literacy instruction and teacher education. These topics center on participants’ beliefs regarding using templates to teach genres and the viability of SFL metalanguage to inform teacher education and classroom practice. First, in regard to templates, the data indicate that teachers used templates to teach genres not because they failed to understand Halliday’s and Martin’s reflexive perspective of text/context dynamics or because they lacked the ability to design more nuanced curriculum; rather, they favored templates in response to assessment systems in US and Asia that work against functional perspectives of grammar, constructivist perspectives of learning, and professional conceptions of teaching. These assessment systems, as experienced by participants, reward traditional conceptions of grammar, behavioral conceptions of learning, and

de-skilling conceptions of teachers' work. As a result, teachers' arguments for the use of templates in teaching genres at times oscillated between a functional/constructivist approach to literacy development and a more structural/behavioral one, even to the point of fusing the two. Such vacillation requires further research to explore: the extent to which teachers re-inscribe functional metalanguage with more structural conceptions of literacy; the nature of institutional forces that shape how teachers take up and implement a functional perspective in practice; and ultimately the ways in which students benefit from participation in SFL-informed practices.

Second, this study provides evidence that SFL metalanguage is much more than jargon teachers cannot understand or use in the classroom. However, because SFL metalanguage is complex and does require sustained support in learning how to use it to design curriculum, its use in L2 teacher education represents significant shifts not only in conceptions of grammar, but also in demands on teachers and teacher educators. It necessitates greater knowledge about language than the field may be ready for given the degree to which prevailing approaches to L2 teaching and process approaches to writing instruction have actively discouraged teachers and teacher educators from developing a metalanguage for literacy instruction (Kolln & Hancock, 2005; Schleppegrell, 2004).

In responding to the critique that SFL metalanguage is too technical to be a viable framework for teacher education, Macken-Horarik (2008) argues for "a good enough grammatics" (p. 43). She maintains that teachers need a level of SFL metalanguage that is "functional, stretchable and good for teachers to think with" but that does not force them to be retrained as theoretical linguists (p. 47; see also Macken-Horarik, Love, & Unsworth, 2011). The data from this study suggest that a "good enough" grammatics is achievable in the context of a 14-week course in that teachers were able to use SFL and genre-based pedagogy to design curriculum and instruction for a variety of learners in a variety of contexts.

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**Meg Gebhard** is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research centers on the use of SFL in teaching academic literacies to linguistically and culturally diverse students in the US.

**I-An Chen** is a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research centers on the professional development of language educators and the teaching of English as a world language in Taiwan.

**Holly Graham** is a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her research centers on the use of SFL in teaching English language arts to secondary students in the US.

**Wawan Gunawan** is a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His research centers on the use of SFL in the teaching of English as a world language in Indonesia.