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Functional grammar in the classroom

Michael Halliday has written about the three ways that all children encounter language at school: that they are always learning language, learning through language, and learning about language (Halliday 1980/2004). His focus was on mother tongue learning, highlighting the challenges that all children face in developing new ways of using language as they learn school subjects. For the second language learner, the challenges are clearly even greater, as they are simultaneously learning a new language, learning through the new language, and learning about the new language.

But the challenges do not lie only with the learners. Teachers of second language learners are *teaching language*, *teaching through language*, and *teaching about language*, and they are not always well prepared for the complexity of addressing all of these aspects of language learning. Historically, language teachers have been prepared through a variety of approaches that were mainly developed for teaching foreign languages, where the stakes are not high and the language is considered a school subject isolated from other subjects. Alternatively, teachers have been prepared to work with adult learners with specific goals in learning the language of the new country they had moved to. But today, teachers in primary and secondary schools around the world are encountering large numbers of immigrant children and children born to immigrants who grow up in contexts where the language of the home and community is different from the language used at school. Supporting the development of these children calls for new ways of thinking about language teaching.

In particular, teaching these second language learners calls for a focus on the registers of schooling, a focus on the patterns of language in the school curriculum that learners need to understand and produce to learn the subject matter of schooling. Any language is a vast resource for meaning-making, and speakers of the language experience it in social contexts in which it is meaningful and functional for them. These social contexts call for different ways of drawing on the resources of the language to accomplish different things with it; using different registers. For learners who are engaging with the second language mainly at school, the focus needs to be on the ways language is used in the different school subjects

they are learning, and their teachers need to be able to teach them the language they need to engage effectively in learning school subjects.

Newly-arrived immigrants or beginners in the second language are often served through programs that “shelter” instruction and use simplified materials. But this approach is only useful for a short time, while second language development is a long process that takes place over several years. Too many second language learners are not moving smoothly out of sheltered approaches into the challenges of the grade-level curriculum, and a key challenge in teaching second language learners is helping them learn at age-appropriate levels of their cognitive development, engaging them with the mainstream curriculum, even as they continue to develop the language through which they are learning.

In this chapter I will describe how teachers of second language learners are effectively engaging their pupils in learning through language and about language as the learners develop proficiency in a new language. Drawing on an approach to teaching second language learners that is grounded in Halliday’s functional theory of language, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), teachers are using a meta-language (a language about language) that connects linguistic form with meaning to talk with learners about the texts they are reading in their grade-level curricula to help them learn about how the new language works. This meaning-based meta-language offers teachers a set of language-focused strategies they can use in conjunction with the many other ways they support second language learning, further enhancing children’s opportunities to learn school subjects as they learn the new language.

The context for the work described here is elementary schools where 85% of the children are second language learners of English. Most of the children are from the Middle East, so their first language is Arabic, and many of the children do not interact with native speakers of English at home or in the community. Most of their families are economically disadvantaged. Over the past four years my students and I have been working with their teachers in the early grades, focusing on the challenges of academic language in the reading curriculum.

Academic language is the language children encounter in schooling from the earliest years (Schleppegrell 2004). It includes a range of registers that vary across age levels and the subject matters that learners engage with; registers in which knowledge is presented authoritatively in highly structured ways. To use these registers, learners need to explore how they work, and teachers are facilitating this by engaging learners in exploration of the language features of the texts they read. This chapter illustrates how second and third grade teachers of seven and eight year old children are

developing new ways of talking with learners about language as they read the texts of their literacy curriculum. Using the SFL meta-language, teachers are analyzing the texts they teach and developing activities that focus their pupils on language. In this way the children learn about the registers authors use, at the same time the activities support reading comprehension and offer the children language they can use in their writing.

The meta-language informed by SFL is called functional grammar. Systemic functional linguistics suggests that we can approach talk about language from three angles; focusing on interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings. We explore *interpersonal meaning* when we look at how an author interacts with a reader, or at how characters interact with each other, and when we identify language that suggests the attitudes or interpretation of an author. We explore *ideational meaning* when we look at what a text is about and at how authors represent experience in a text. And we explore *textual meaning* when we look at how an author has structured a text and linked clauses to one another as the text moves along. The interpersonal, ideational, and textual meanings are realized in the language choices an author makes, and so we can explore the language to see how these meanings are presented in any particular text.

In workshops for teachers, we introduce the functional grammar meta-language and help teachers see how a focus on different grammatical features highlights different aspects of meaning in a text. We ask questions such as: *What's going on in this text?*, *What is the perspective of the author?* and *How is the text organized?*, and develop teachers' awareness about the forms language takes in presenting content, authorial perspectives, and text organization. We highlight particular SFL constructs that can be used to answer these questions and help teachers develop activities that focus their second language learners on the meanings that can be explored, using the functional grammar. Teachers then use the SFL constructs to analyze the language of the texts in their reading instructional programs and engage their learners in talk about text to support reading comprehension and better understanding of how English works.

Working with language learners

The following sections illustrate the ways teachers are exploring these three kinds of meaning in texts. First interpersonal meaning will be in focus as we explore interaction between an author and readers. Then we will explore ideational meaning by looking at how an author uses processes of different types to show us how characters feel. The examples of interpersonal and ideational meaning come from a narrative text. Then

we will focus on ideational and textual meaning in a science explanation, looking at how an author uses conjunctions to sequence events and develop an explanation. Throughout, we will also see how the teachers are talking with their pupils about these language features, engaging them in exploration and dialogue that further supports their comprehension of the texts and their development of new language resources.

Exploring interpersonal meaning

Interpersonal meaning refers to the ways an author or speaker enacts a relationship with a reader or listener, and particular language resources are functional for this purpose. We start with interpersonal meaning, as interaction between author and reader is highly salient in *Jamaica Louise James*, by Amy Hest, the story we will focus on here. *Jamaica Louise James* is a story about an 8 year old girl who loves to paint. She lives in New York City with her Mama and Grammy. Her Grammy works underground, selling tickets in the subway station. When her mama and Grammy give Jamaica a set of new paints for her birthday, she decides to paint pictures to decorate the drab subway station where grammy works.

The language resources we focus on here are *mood* and *speech function*, as the author of this story does more than just narrate through a third person voice. The story is told in Jamaica's voice, in the first person, and Jamaica sometimes interacts directly with the reader as she narrates her tale. This interaction creates a shifting perspective for the reader, as Jamaica moves between narrating events and questioning and directing the reader.

This is how the story begins:

I was the one with the COOL idea... It happened last winter and the mayor put my name on a golden plaque. It's down in the subway station at 66th and Main. You can see it if you go there. That's me. You better believe it! Want to hear my big idea?



When we look at Jamaica's words here, we can see that the story begins with her evaluation of her idea (COOL), and that she tells the reader that she will report on something that has already happened (*It happened last winter...*). The story will be about why the mayor has put her name on a plaque, but Jamaica does more than just narrate the story. The reader has to recognize this when Jamaica says *You can see it if you go there*. Here and in the following sentences, Jamaica is interacting with the reader as if

the reader were present. This is challenging for a second language learner, who needs to recognize this shift in voice and tease apart the events in the story from the interaction with the author. Identifying the features of the language that enable the author to interact with the reader helps the learners be conscious of the shifts and recognize what they mean.

Particular selections from at least three linguistic systems enable the author to move between the narration of the story and the interaction with the reader. First is her choice of pronoun; the *you* that talks directly to the reader construes interaction. The second is the deictic *that*, a linguistic choice that constructs the reader as present in the same context as Jamaica, where the referent of *that* does not need to be specified, as the illustration in the book is taken to be the joint focus of attention of both Jamaica and the reader, and she can point to the plaque with her name on it. The third relevant linguistic selection relates to the author's choice of mood and speech function in these moments of moving between narration and interaction. The command *You better believe it!* and the offer *Want to hear my big idea?* are speech functions that construe the context as one of interaction and engagement with the reader.

Teachers can highlight the way interpersonal meaning is constructed here to help the learners focus on the ways the author presents Jamaica's voice, drawing learners' attention to the pronoun choice, deixis, and mood/speech functions that evoke the shared context and enact the relationship between writer and reader. This first person voice is challenging for second language learners, and exploring and talking explicitly about the language choices the author has made helps children recognize that Jamaica is sometimes narrating events and sometimes interacting with us as readers, and helps them see how English works in doing these things.

Teachers need a meta-language that enables this discussion, and SFL offers a meta-language that helps us see how different grammatical *moods* are used to present different *speech functions*, as well as how authors can manipulate these systems to create particular effects. English has three grammatical moods – declarative, interrogative, and imperative:

Declarative:	<i>She is painting a picture.</i>
Interrogative:	<i>Does she want to paint a picture?</i>
Imperative:	<i>Paint a picture!</i>

Children can learn to recognize and name these moods and consider how they help an author interact with the reader. But this is only part of the story. These three moods are used to perform four speech functions: statement, question, offer, and command. Declarative mood is typically used for the

speech function *statement*, interrogative for the speech function *question*, imperative for the speech function *command*, and various moods for the speech function *offer*, as in these examples:

Statements (giving information): *It happened last winter.*

Questions (asking for information): *Where does Jamaica Louise James live?*

Commands (demanding something): *Now look at me on birthday #8.*

Offers (offering something): *Want to hear my big idea?* or *Let's paint a picture!*

Sometimes authors and speakers manipulate the relationship between mood and speech function to construe the speech functions in indirect ways. For example, in this story, commands are presented in both declarative and imperative moods:

Command forms:

Declarative: *You've got to listen.*
You better believe it!

Imperative: *Now look at me on birthday #8.*

The 'declarative' commands do not begin with the imperative form of the verb, but instead engage the reader, using *you* to realize the command in the form of a statement. Teachers ask the learners to look at Jamaica's words and think about whether she is making a statement, asking a question or making an offer, or commanding the reader to do something. They have the children sort the utterances addressed to the reader into these different categories and then look at the forms that the author uses. In this way, teachers can build on the identification of mood and speech function to focus on meaning and what is happening in the story. Learners understand more about how language works and develop language resources that can give them more flexibility in their own speech acts by focusing on the variation in mood and speech function in this text.

Looking at the language and identifying the mood and speech function also helps learners recognize the informality of the everyday conversational register Jamaica uses throughout the book. She asks, for example, *Want to hear my big idea?* Of course we typically teach learners that to ask this question in English, they should say *Do you want to hear my big idea?* But in this story, Jamaica talks with the reader as if their relationship were close, using a conversational style to urge the reader to do things. The particular language choices enable this; other linguistic choices could have construed a different register. When we teach language formally, we typically teach learners the "standard" forms of imperatives and interrogatives. But authors

of literary texts do not always follow the rules; and neither do we when we talk. So helping learners recognize differences in register between everyday talk and the language of the classroom can help them see how different forms are used in different contexts. The teachers tell us that engaging learners in looking closely at language and exploring differences in register stimulates a lot of discussion about the words an author uses and why the author has said something in a particular way. Using the SFL meta-language enables learners to look closely at the wording in texts and connect it with meaning, thereby also engaging them more closely with the themes and motifs of the story.

Exploring ideational meaning

Ideational meaning refers to the choices speakers and writers make about how they represent experience in a text. Focusing on the representation of experience helps learners better understand what a text is about, so analyzing texts from this perspective can deepen readers' comprehension. A meta-language for talking about clause constituents is an important resource for exploring how ideational meaning is realized in language; how experience is construed in each clause of a text. Functional grammar offers four meaning-oriented constructs: *process*, *participant*, *circumstance*, and *connector*, that are useful for talking about the elements of a clause. Typically, processes are realized in verb groups, participants in noun groups, circumstances in adverbs and prepositional phrases, and connectors in conjunctions. Meaning-oriented labels can be attached to each structure. For example:

Yesterday	the mayor	put	my name	on a golden plaque.
Circumstance	Participant	Process	Participant	Circumstance

Teachers have found these meaning-based labels more useful than a word-based analysis of the clause that identifies *adverbs*, *articles*, *nouns*, *verbs*, *adjectives*, *prepositions*, etcetera, because the meaning-oriented labels focus on the grammatical relationships between elements in a text rather than simply labeling their word forms. In addition, this focuses attention on the larger units that are meaningful parts of a clause, helping readers recognize whole phrases (*the mayor*, *my name*, *on a golden plaque*), and read the text in larger meaning-based chunks rather than single words.

Functional grammar also offers constructs that enable *processes* to be categorized into four types: processes of *doing*, *saying*, *sensing*, and *being*, with each type having its characteristic configurations of participants and circumstances. The example above has a process of *doing* (*put*) with the

participants *actor* (*the mayor*) and *goal* (*my name*). Other process types have other kinds of participants (e.g. *sayers*, *sensors*, etcetera), so identifying the process type helps learners recognize the different ways that authors represent experience in language through their choice of different process-participant configurations.

The teachers we are working with use the notion of these four process types to talk with learners about the kind of experience each clause represents. If the clause is about *doing* (e.g., *She painted the picture*), they'll find an actor (*she*), an action process (*painted*), and sometimes a recipient/goal (*the picture*). If the clause is about *saying* (e.g. *She said she was having fun*), they will find a sayer (*she*) and a saying process (*said*), along with the message of the saying process (*she was having fun*). If the clause is about sensing (e.g. *They knew what was going on*), readers will find a senser (*they*), a mental process of thinking, feeling, or perceiving (*knew*) and the phenomenon that is sensed (*what was going on*). And if the clause is constructing *being*, (e.g. *She was so happy*) the reader will find what is described (*she*), the *being* process (*was*) and the description (*so happy*)¹. These four process types take different grammatical forms, and focusing on the meaning in the forms can help learners increase their comprehension of a text. Authors of the stories children read use the different process types for literary effect, and teachers can consider what their learners would need to understand from the language of a text in order to answer the kinds of comprehension questions that their curriculum asks about each reading selection. In considering the comprehension questions, they can look at what is offered in the text to respond to that question, and what additional language learners would need to understand and respond to questions that ask for information that is implicit rather than explicit. This enables the work with language to support a focus on grade-level expectations.

For example, in *Jamaica Louise James*, a key moment comes on Jamaica's 8th birthday. Here's the text:



Now look at me on birthday
#8. Grammy and Mama dance
around my bed. "Open your
present!" they shout. "We
can't wait another minute!"

1. This is only a subset of the ways processes of doing, saying, sensing, and being are realized. Other process types are also described in Halliday's (1994) grammar.

One of the kinds of comprehension questions that readers often have to answer is about how characters feel at different moments in a narrative. If we look for the words that tell us how Grammy and Mama feel at this moment, we can see that their feelings are construed in *doing* and *saying* processes. We are not told directly how the characters feel, but their feelings are instead portrayed in their actions and in the words they use and how they say them (they *shout*).

We can see here that the author could have represented the excitement in *Grammy and Mama danced around the bed*, a *doing* process, as a process of *being*: *Grammy and Mama were so excited!* The author presents their shouting *Open your present! We can't wait another minute!* as a *saying* process, but could alternatively have construed this as *sensing*; e.g. telling us what they were thinking, as in *They wanted her to get up right away!* In this case, the words of the author that the children will have to focus on to understand how the characters feel are *doing* and *saying* processes. Good literature often uses *doing* to represent *sensing* ("show, don't tell"), and readers can become conscious of this and think about how to translate *doing* into *sensing* or *feeling*. With the help of the teacher and with a meta-language that raises their awareness about different process types, children can learn to draw on different ways of representing experience, representing *doing* in *feeling* with words like *excited*, *happy*; or, on the other hand, using *doing* processes to write about the feelings of characters themselves. The meta-language of *process type*, like the meta-language of *mood* and *speech function*, helps teachers talk with children about language in this way, enriching the children's understanding of the story and developing their repertoires of academic language. In doing this work teachers recognize the role language itself plays in constructing the texts learners read and so address the challenges of academic language.

Early grade reading texts often use illustrations to contribute to meaning-making, and in this story the illustrations also help portray how the characters feel, as Grammy and Mama are pictured dancing about Jamaica's bed, looking very excited. Readers can recognize the feelings from the illustrations, but the wording of the text does not offer them any language to use to report on the feelings themselves, even when they recognize them. The teachers we work with find that a focus on the meaning in illustrations and their connection with the wording in a text is another very fruitful domain for discussion of the meaning in language, and we give the exploration of the multi-modal meaning a prominent place in these functional grammar activities.

Teachers tell us that these strategies for recognizing different ways of representing experience have helped their pupils better understand a story. By thinking and talking about *doing*, *sensing*, *being*, and *saying*,

learners consider what is going on in the text and learn how to represent it in different ways. For example, a focus on *saying* processes improves the *voice* in learners' writing, because when readers look closely at the saying processes that writers use, they learn the nuanced meanings in words like *exclaim*, *whisper*, *suggest*, and *shout*. Learners can use these saying processes productively to make their own writing more precise or colorful (Schleppegrell & Go 2007).

***Exploring textual meaning:
How clauses are linked in meaningful ways***

Textual meaning refers to the way speakers and authors move from clause to clause, creating a cohesive text and flow of information. Teachers can talk with learners about textual meaning by focusing on how clauses are linked. One point of focus can be the *connectors/conjunctions* that link clauses, putting a simultaneous focus on ideational meaning by using functional grammar meta-language for four major areas of meaning that are used to develop the logic of a text: *addition*, *time*, *comparison*, and *consequence*.

In exploring textual meaning, we'll look at a different text; a book in the third grade curriculum called *From Seed to Plant* by Gail Gibbons. This is an informational text about how seeds develop into plants. The language of science texts is especially challenging, as science draws on technical vocabulary to present taxonomies and relate concepts that are often not part of everyday knowledge. Learning the technical language is an important part of learning science, so science texts often offer diagrams that make the meaning of the technical terms clear. But in addition to learning the technical language, learners also need to be able to use the language in explaining concepts and processes. This makes it important to explore the language used to present information in the text.

Connectors are the conjunctions and other linking phrases that construct the logic of a text as the author moves from clause to clause. In *From Seed to Plant*, the organization and logic of the text, as it describes how a seed becomes a plant, is presented in the connectors that sequence the steps in the process of growth. Focusing on the meaning in connectors helps the reader see how the steps relate to each other. The main logical relationship in this text is passing time as a seed grows. In English, time can be presented as events happening one after the other, in sequence, or as events happening simultaneously, occurring at the same time. For example, this sentence presents two events, and the relationship between them is one of sequence in time, but the events do not occur in the order that the clauses are presented:

Before a seed can begin to grow, a grain of pollen from the stamen must land on the stigma at the top of the pistil of a flower like itself.



While this sentence may seem complex at first, when we break it into its two clauses, we see that there are two processes that are presented:

a seed can begin to grow
a grain of pollen from the stamen must land...

Teachers ask their pupils to find the two processes in this sentence (*can begin to grow*; *must land*) and then identify the connector that tells us what the relationship between the two processes is (*before*). Then the learners are asked whether the two processes are happening at the same time (simultaneous) or one after the other (sequenced). If they are sequenced, the learners are also asked what order they happen in.

This and the other language exploration tasks described in this chapter are always done in small group or pair work interaction, giving the learners the opportunity to talk with each other about the language and meaning. Through their conversation they establish that the two clauses are not sequenced in the order of events, and that what is represented in language first in this sentence is actually the event that occurs second in time. In fact our second language learners find this quite interesting, and enjoy practice in constructing sentences like this with events in reverse order.

From Seed to Plant describes a number of processes involved in seeds growing, and offers many sentences that learners can use to explore whether the events are happening simultaneously or in sequence; for example:



The seeds grow inside the flower, even as the flower begins to die. As the seeds become bigger, a fruit or pod grows around them. When the fruit or pod ripens, it breaks open.

As we can see, the first two sentences present processes that are happening simultaneously, while the third presents a sequence, in this case one in which the clauses are ordered in the same way as the processes they represent. Readers generally agree that the first two of these sentences are about events that happen simultaneously, but they often disagree about the third. This highlights the importance of having the learners talk about the texts they are exploring. Not all language falls neatly into the categories of any system of grammar, and functional grammar categories also sometimes overlap in the shades of meaning that they provide. But in talking about whether the two processes in the sentence are happening at the same time or not, learners are crucially engaged in talking about the meaning of *ripen* and what happens to fruits as they decay. This illustrates how talking about text, using meaning-based functional grammar categories, puts the focus on the meaning, and is not just an exercise in labeling parts of a sentence. The language and content are not separate, and a focus on meaning and form in this way connects language with content in powerful ways.

This example also illustrates that a teacher does not need to be an expert in functional grammar to talk with learners about language in this way. Because some ambiguity is always present in the interpretation of meaning, putting the language into the correct category is not the main point, and if a teacher is unsure about which category a particular linguistic element belongs in, the conversation can focus on how it straddles categories or has aspects of more than one category.

Teachers tell us that talking about the meaning in connectors helps them address the challenges of science texts and gives them strategies for adding to a focus on technical vocabulary in teaching science registers. They also find that the focus on connectors is useful in reading other texts as well. When readers recognize the meaning of connectors it helps them see the logic of a text and also gives them models for using transitional phrases and connectors in writing.

Summary

There is much more in language to look at and talk about, of course, and each text needs to be considered in terms of its highly salient language features whose exploration would contribute to better understanding. This chapter has described only a few of the ways teachers are taking up functional grammar constructs to talk with learners about meaning in language. For the texts explored here, *Jamaica Louise James* and *From Seed to Plant*, functional grammar constructs have helped us recognize the interpersonal meaning in mood and speech function, the ideational meaning in processes of different types, and the textual meaning in the

way clauses are connected. Exploration of these language features connects with the foregrounded meanings in these texts and has helped second language learners develop greater comprehension of what they read.

Since language is the medium through which learning in schools is accomplished, our goal is to give learners strategies for recognizing and talking about how language works. Functional grammar offers ways of talking about text that can help learners recognize the language features that give a text meaning. By treating the language of a text as an object of study in itself, functional grammar strategies help learners see patterns in other texts they read as well, supporting their reading comprehension. In addition, it supports other goals of reading instruction – to encourage appreciation of literature and help pupils learn to respond to literature, and to learn from science and other disciplinary texts. These are skills that will be needed in the later grades for constructing formal interpretations of literary texts and for continuing to learn technical discourses.

The value of the functional grammar approach

Functional grammar strategies offer a language for talking about language, strategies for linking language and meaning, and opportunities for interaction and discussion about the language and content of age-appropriate texts. Functional grammar provides tools for talking about how language makes meaning in the texts learners read and helps learners see how language choices construct the meanings in a text. It gives teachers explicit and concrete ways of talking about meaning in language that can help second language learners engage with and develop academic registers. Using functional grammar focuses attention on language in ways that support reading comprehension and writing development.

Functional grammar offers tools for identifying the language that learners need to focus on in order to develop content knowledge in different subject areas and gives teachers strategies for helping their pupils recognize how that language presents the meanings it does. By talking explicitly about language and meaning, teachers are *teaching through language* and *teaching about language* in the contexts of their grade-level instructional curricula. These functional grammar activities add to teachers' repertoires ways of *teaching language* that offer learners the support they need to learn school subjects.

Learning to approach texts in this way is a challenging new area for teacher development, but our experience suggests that the benefits teachers and learners gain make the investment in learning worthwhile. The teachers we are working with say that they now look at the text

selections they teach in very different ways, looking for opportunities to talk more richly with learners about form-meaning connections. Teachers recognize that the functional grammar constructs help them keep a focus on meaningful chunks of text rather than words in isolation, and that the talk about text also supports learners' writing development by focusing them on wording they can use in their productive skills as well.

The process of working with functional grammar strategies in this way has these steps: First, teachers identify places in a text where a close focus will be worthwhile in helping learners understand it. Then they engage in interaction with their pupils about the text, as illustrated here, identifying places in the text where the wording of the author can be explored and having learners work in small groups to answer questions about language and meaning. Teachers then interact with the class as a whole as learners share the discussion they have engaged in, using the meta-language of functional grammar. Finally, teachers have learners use the language they have been working with and talking about in a writing task that reinforces the meaning of the text.

Table 1 offers a set of questions that are linked with the metafunctions, and suggests some language features that can be explored to answer the questions. (More information about doing functional grammar analysis can be found in Fang and Schleppegrell (2008), which suggests particular ways of looking at texts in science, history, mathematics, and language arts. Holmberg & Karlsson (2006) provides the functional grammar meta-language for Swedish.)

Table 1. Questions to ask and language features to explore

Question (metafunction)	Language features
What's going on in the text? (ideational metafunction)	Processes, participants, circumstances, connectors
What is the perspective of the author? (interpersonal metafunction)	Mood, speech function, modality
How is the text organized? (textual metafunction)	Clause connections, theme/rheme structure

In exploring interpersonal meaning, for example, in some texts a focus on *modality* might be useful; if aspects of *possibility* or *necessity* are frequent in language and the text focuses on what *might* or *should* be done. The other metafunctions can also be approached through analysis

of systems of grammar other than those explored here; for example, an exploration of ideational meaning might focus on what *circumstances* are contributing to the meaning of a text; an exploration of textual meaning might focus on theme-rheme structuring (see Fang & Schleppegrell 2008, for examples).

Once teachers understand the principles to use in developing activities, they can explore each new text with their pupils in varied ways. Preparing teachers to engage this way takes some investment in learning the new meta-language and how to focus the text analysis. But the teachers we work with find that the more they use the functional grammar constructs, the easier it is to identify an appropriate focus and activity for each new text. In addition, for some teachers, engaging learners in this talk about language also requires that they adopt new participation structures in their classrooms. This is not easy work, but it is now being done in a variety of contexts (Achugar et al. 2007; Gibbons 2006). Williams (2004; 2005) and Spycher (2009) also report on functional grammar activities that have engaged young children. Reports on functional grammar work with teachers in history classrooms can be found in Schleppegrell & de Oliveira (2006) and Schleppegrell et al. (2004; 2008).

This chapter has presented a linguistic approach that provides ways of talking about meaning in language: recognizing different ways of interacting with a reader, representing experience, and developing the logic of a text. A key to the approach is interaction and opportunities for learners to talk about meaning in language. Focusing on the language that constructs a text supports deeper comprehension and helps learners engage with content. Second language learners need to hear the same meanings presented in different wording, and by focusing on wording and evaluating the value of different ways of wording – whether by exploring the author's choices of mood and speech function, by looking at how actions are expressed as feelings, or by talking about the meaning in connectors – readers learn to see meaning in language at the same time as they are focused on the content to be learned. Talk about language also helps learners develop flexibility in alternative ways of saying the same thing; an important skill in schooling, where learners have to summarize and write about what they have read. Second language learners enjoy interacting with each other as they explore meaning in the language of the texts they read, and this interaction can be done in mixed ability groups. In fact, observers in the classrooms where children are doing these activities often cannot identify the language proficiency levels of newly-arrived and struggling learners, as all are able to engage successfully in the small- and whole-group activities that teachers use to focus on language. Learners have fun

doing the activities, staying on task and enjoying the group work, and are proud of themselves for their accomplishment and learning.

Some teachers initially think that this approach will be too hard for their language learners, but when they engage their pupils in talk about the language-meaning connections, they typically find that the children are capable of and enthusiastic about exploring the texts they are reading. Teachers often develop a different view of what their pupils are capable of through these activities, as they see them using the meta-language to talk about texts, and using new language forms in their writing. Their pupils have been enthusiastic about learning how English works in the texts of different subjects. In addition, and important for our mixed classrooms, doing these activities also challenges learners who already know English, and they also enjoy the exploration of texts. Finally, the focus on functional grammar contributes to an increase linguistic awareness by teachers that helps them support second language learners in new ways.

A key challenge in our schools today is engaging second language learners in work with grade level content, even as they continue their academic language development in a second language. Children face academic language as soon as they arrive at school, so talking about the meanings in the text develops knowledge about language and content at the same time. The functional grammar strategies are especially fruitful in work with learners who have moved beyond the early stages of second language development. They turn the classroom into a robust site of academic language development where learners engage in talk about content, meaning, and the ways language works.

Second language development is a long process that requires support at each new level and in each new subject. But by taking this linguistic approach, teachers help second language learners *learn about language* as the talk about form-meaning connections helps learners see patterns they will also find in other texts they read. Through talk about text, teachers are also helping them *learn language* as they practice using the language of schooling, and *learn through language*, as talking about the language in texts helps learners focus on content as they make sense of what they read. Functional grammar strategies add to teachers' pedagogical tools and classroom activities, infusing the classroom learning environment with the increased language awareness and explicit talk about language that second language learners need.

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