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## Learning to use systemic functional grammar to teach literary analysis: Views on the effectiveness of a short professional development workshop

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# Learning to use systemic functional grammar to teach literary analysis: Views on the effectiveness of a short professional development workshop

## **Abstract**

As students' academic language ability grows, they are expected to move from summarizing or retelling works of literature to studying texts critically. With this comes the demand for more developed literacy skills or, as those working from a systemic functional linguistic perspective would argue, an increase in the students' resources for making meaning in an ever-widening variety of contexts (Derewianka, 2001). English language arts (ELA) teachers in the United States today are challenged with the task of developing this literacy to meet Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Specific standards for literacy development include teaching students to understand how to uncover what is important in a text and to describe and argue the explicit evidence and inferences that support their opinions as well as to analyze the connection between an author's word choice and the meaning of the text. Throughout the schooling years, teachers are required by the Common Core to move students from enjoying literature in the younger grades to studying literature from middle school onwards, and in doing so teachers must aim to develop students' ability to argue and support ideas and opinions in literature classrooms as well as develop literacy skills across all areas of the curriculum. In other words, ELA teachers have the challenging task of helping students engage in literature while also developing literacy skills for use across the curriculum. This can be an especially ambitious task when their students are also learning the English language.

## **Disciplines**

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Language and Literacy Education

## **Comments**

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**Learning to use systemic functional grammar to teach literary analysis:  
Views on the effectiveness of a short professional development workshop**

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As students' academic language ability grows, they are expected to move from summarizing or retelling works of literature to studying texts critically. With this comes the demand for more developed literacy skills or, as those working from a systemic functional linguistic perspective would argue, an increase in the students' resources for making meaning in an ever-widening variety of contexts (Derewianka, 2001). English language arts (ELA) teachers in the United States today are challenged with the task of developing this literacy to meet Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Specific standards for literacy development include teaching students to understand how to uncover what is important in a text and to describe and argue the explicit evidence and inferences that support their opinions as well as to analyze the connection between an author's word choice and the meaning of the text. Throughout the schooling years, teachers are required by the Common Core to move students from *enjoying* literature in the younger grades to *studying* literature from middle school onwards, and in doing so teachers must aim to develop students' ability to argue and support ideas and opinions in literature classrooms as well as develop literacy skills across all areas of the curriculum. In other words, ELA teachers have the challenging task of helping students engage in literature while also developing literacy skills for use across the curriculum. This can be an especially ambitious task when their students are also learning the English language.

Several ways to teach literary analysis have been proposed and are used by ELA teachers in educational institutions, but Van (2009) argued that not all have been proven useful with English language learners (ELLs). Both New Criticism, which views meaning as being enclosed within the text and there for the student to discover, and Structuralism, which has objective analysis as its goal, have been said to be too difficult for ELLs to use successfully (Van, 2009).

Van suggested that Language Based and Reader Response approaches, on the other hand, were less intimidating for these students as these approaches incorporated more personal interactions with the text. Yet, as often taught, these more ELL-friendly ideas do not typically involve the analysis and research that can benefit students both in literature and across the curriculum.

This is where an approach based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can be helpful. Lukin (2008) noted that the language of literature is similar to any language use in that the writer makes choices from the linguistic system, and thus looking at literature through a SFL eye “offers an alternative approach... in which the literary text is treated as a linguistic object like any other text” (p. 85). By focusing on language and making use of tools such as SFL to analyze literature, teachers can help students work critically with the texts they are reading. But for teachers to focus on language, they need to be confident about their knowledge of how language can be used to analyze texts within and across disciplines (Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteíza, 2007). This chapter details a two-hour professional development workshop and its perceived influence on its participants.

### **A Description of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

An important concept underlying SFL is that “a text is a complex of patterns, and each pattern carries meaning” (Cummings & Simmons, 1983, p. 87). The goal of teaching students to do a language-based analysis, therefore, is to teach them how to find these patterns in the literature. SFL is a theory of language that focuses on how people use language to construct three kinds of meanings. In one kind of meaning, the ideational (or experiential) metafunction, speakers give insights to their realities by their choices of participants, processes, and circumstances. In another, the interpersonal metafunction, speakers use language to represent, establish, and negotiate social relationships. In the third kind, the textual metafunction, speakers

adjust language choices for effectiveness in a particular mode of communication. Language users draw from these three metafunctions to construct the *register*, language choices which help to both build and reflect the social context in which the users are communicating. A discourse analysis based on SFL thus looks at how the particular linguistic features of a text are combined to construct specific contextual meanings in the text as a whole. An SFL analysis enables us to uncover the ways an author has used language to construct a particular reality, and we can use SFL theory to describe the relationships that characters have, or that the narrator may have with the reader. This functional model “is interested in what language choices are available within any particular situation, and in which choices are more likely to result in an **effective** text which achieves its purpose” (Derewianka, 1990, p. 17, emphasis in original).

In our workshop, we looked at the first two metafunctions—ideational and interpersonal—as we believe they can provide an initial basis for teachers to highlight many of the features that students can use to support their intuitions and produce a personal response to literature that is valued in academic settings. Moreover, as this short workshop was meant to provide an introduction to SFL for most of these teachers, we did not want to overwhelm them with too much theory; instead we wanted them to feel confident that a small amount initially could provide them with tools to carry out collaborative projects with ELLs in their literature classes.

### **The ideational metafunction**

The resources of the ideational metafunction allow us “to encode, both semantically and syntactically, our mental picture of the physical world and the worlds of our imagination” (Downing & Locke, 1992, p. 110). We can perform an analysis from this perspective, called a transitivity analysis, by looking at the processes (verbs and verb phrases), the participants (nouns

and noun phrases, adjectives), and circumstances (adverbials). In different genres, these pattern out in various ways (see Derewianka, 1990, for a very usable illustration of this). For example, a scientific report will typically employ processes that relate one thing to another taxonomically, descriptively, or causally. In literature, the choice of processes can vary depending on what the author is doing in a specific part of the text: Is the section describing a thing or recounting an event? Describing will likely use *be* and *have*, whereas recounting will use action processes. The roles of participants can vary as well as in, for example, differences in those who are agents of action versus those who are not, as we will show later. Moreover, participants can be analyzed in terms of types, including technical things versus everyday or commonsense things, or concrete things versus abstract things (for a simple overview of thing types, see Christie & Martin, 1997). Finally, we can examine the patterns of circumstances in a text. For example, whereas recipes require circumstances of manner to ensure that the instructions are being followed carefully, a setting in a novel would likely employ place and time. We believe that introducing these ideas to the students will enable them to look for evidence in the text that supports their intuitions.

### **The interpersonal metafunction**

The resources in the interpersonal metafunction work to negotiate social relationships, to allow language users to interact, show power, and establish solidarity. Relationships can be established using several different interpersonal resources. One way to examine these is to look at patterns in the mood of the text. Are there many questions being asked? Are there statements being made? Commands? Are there tag questions, aimed at bringing the interlocutor into the text's reality or seeking confirmation? Another resource is modality, which can reveal notions of stance and validity. Thompson (2004, p. 67) explained modality as follows:

If the commodity being exchanged is information, the modality relates to how valid the information is being presented as in terms of **probability** (how likely it is to be true) or **usuality** (how frequently it is true)... In commands, this concerns the degree of **obligation** on the other person to carry out the command (the scale for the demanded goods-and-services includes: permissible/ advisable/ obligatory), whereas in offers it concerns the degree of willingness or inclination of the speaker to fulfill the offer (the speaker may signal: ability, willingness, determination).

Other interpersonal resources are appraisal language, which allows a language user to react, judge, and show feeling, and the use of vocatives, which are “device[s] for nominating or appealing to someone” (Collerson, 1994, p. 37). For example, what kinds of names are characters in a literary text using with other characters, and how often are they using these? Using somebody’s name establishes familiarity, but using pet names creates an intimacy. Evidence of this type of patterning can support an analysis by informing the reader about the relationships between characters in a story.

### **Teacher Preparation with SFL for Literary Analysis**

By showing how a text makes meaning, teachers can make apparent the language information they rely on for reading, demonstrating the frequently hidden work they themselves engage in when working with texts (Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteíza, 2007; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006). However, although there are several published examples of how to use SFL to analyze literature, as we included in our workshop session and will briefly describe later in this chapter, we have not found much that addresses how to prepare teachers to use this approach in their teaching. Key exceptions focus on the teaching of history using SFL, as described in Achugar et al. (2007) and Schleppegrell and de Oliveira (2001). Achugar et al. (2007), who

prepared teachers during summer institutes, reported that teachers indicated SFL took a “major commitment” to learn (p. 15).

Yet despite the length of their professional development sessions, Achugar et al. observed that “students are quick to recognize the linguistic “clues” in the text and the meanings they contribute” (p.15), and it was from this observation that we set out to offer a short workshop to see how quickly teachers could recognize these, and to follow up on this workshop to see how teachers reacted to the information we presented. We moved forward with the belief that to make SFL more approachable to teachers it is important that professional development sessions be accessible and that shorter workshops may be easier to carry out on a large scale and may consequently encourage more teachers to try SFL in the classroom. This chapter explores the effectiveness of a two-hour workshop with pre-service and experienced ESL teachers in which participants were introduced to some basics of SFL for literary analysis. The goals of the workshop were that by the end of the two-hour session, the participants would

- understand SFL theory at a basic but useable level and follow directions for SFL analysis within the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions,
- be able to identify language that reflects the source of their intuitions about the text,
- perceive the value of SFL for teaching literary analysis to ELLs and to generate ideas for and interest in using SFL with literature, and
- gain comfort and confident with SFL analysis.

### **The SFL Workshop**

The workshop, offered by Dr. Tammy Slater, who works within an SFL framework for both teaching and research, was held over two hours on a Friday afternoon in the Fall of 2014. There were 18 participants, including one senior undergraduate pre-service teacher, two

experienced EFL teachers from Japan, six MATESL students, four PhD students, and five faculty members, all involved in English language teaching. All stayed for the full two hours.

The workshop began with a brief introduction of what SFL is, using the information offered earlier in this chapter, focusing on the fact that intuition plays a role in recognizing the meaning patterns that occur in texts, and that “the aim of any introduction to literature is to develop in a student an intuitive sense for what is important in a work, and to teach him to find and describe the sources of his intuition in the text” (Cummings & Simmons, 1983, p. xv). After introducing the SFL perspective and theory briefly, Dr. Slater invited the participants to carry out a basic transitivity analysis of Helen Cooper’s *Pumpkin Soup* (Cooper, 1998), a book for young children, in order to practice their new understandings of SFL with a concrete, simple example. This story, which was read aloud to the participants, details how three friends are living together very happily until one decides he wants to change their relationship in some way. When he is told this cannot happen, he leaves. His departure causes the remaining two friends great concern until all three are reunited at the end. Once the story was read aloud, the workshop participants were asked what happened (a recount of the story was offered), and how they believed the various three friends felt. This second question elicited adjectives such as sad and anxious when the third friend left and happy when they were all back together again. Dr. Slater then asked how the participants knew this, a question that was met with various shoulder shrugs and comments that, although these workshop participants could not specifically say, the feelings must be somewhere in the language of the text. The audience was then given copies of the book and a worksheet that required them to carry out a simple analysis that followed closely the one described in French (2009), which directed them first to identify the processes that indicate what is being verbalized in the story – verbal processes such as “said,” “muttered,” and “yelped” – and

then to see how these processes patterned out over the full story. Once the analysis task was carried out in small groups, the participants were invited to discuss whether the patterns they uncovered matched their intuitions about what the book was about, intuitions they had shared earlier with their use of adjectives. Their responses showed that they were easily able to identify the same patterns in the language that French (2009) had discussed with her young students when she used this type of task with them to develop their critical thinking skills. In fact, the participants admitted that they were surprised to see such an obvious pattern once they had been directed to look at the processes, as they had not noticed these in their initial reading of the text, despite noticing what had happened on an intuitive level.

The second short analysis involved Anthony Browne's *Piggybook* (Browne, 1986), and went into somewhat more depth in the analysis process, bringing in ideas from Williams (2000). *Piggybook* is a story about a family, the Piggots, who appear to take the wife/mother for granted. When she leaves, the male Piggots are not able to take care of themselves adequately, and soon the house becomes somewhat of a pigsty. Eventually, Mrs. Piggott returns, and the family no longer takes her for granted. After reading the story aloud, Dr. Slater again asked for a recount, but then asked the participants which aspects of transitivity seemed more interesting to them – the processes, the participants, or the circumstances – making sure she introduced a small amount of SFL metalanguage in context.

Because of the previous activity, most members of the audience felt that the processes would be the most fruitful in an analysis on this book. The leader asked what questions might be asked to explore this within the text, modeling what teachers might ask to elicit appropriate research questions. The main question that came up concerned the relationships between family members, and participants said an exploration could be done to target the adjectives being used

or the processes being used by the author. The audience was then directed to read through the text of *Piggybook* and fill out a chart that identified the various processes in the story and attribute each to either the male or female characters in the book. They were also asked to identify the goals (direct objects) within the clause and include those in their charts. From these charts, they were asked to examine what patterns emerged.

Following these instructions, participants quickly found that in the orientation to the story, the female Piggot was associated with the combination of process plus goal, whereas the male Piggots were not, suggesting that Mrs. Piggot did things *to* things (for example, she ironed clothes, cooked dinners, cleaned dishes), and the male Piggots mostly just did things (for example, they lived, called). These patterns changed from the orientation through the complication to the resolution, with the end of the book showing a more equal sharing of these process + goal tasks. As with the previous short analysis, Dr. Slater debriefed this activity, reinforcing the idea that the use of SFL can be useful in recognizing patterns that offer evidence to support intuitions about the text.

Because the first two examples focused on children's books, Dr. Slater briefly reviewed work that used SFL to analyze books for older readers. The first example, an analysis from Butt (1987) that looked at ideational meaning in Steven's (1934) poem *The Idea of Order at Key West* (Stevens, 1990), was presented to show the participants that although very detailed analyses of texts could be carried out from an SFL perspective, such analyses may be too difficult for beginning analysts (native or non-native speakers of the language) to gather evidence to support their intuitions and to use this evidence to write in an essay genre that was valued in school contexts; simpler analyses may be sufficient to begin with and to develop confidence. The instructor also briefly described the focus of Kies' (1992) work on the linguistic choices Orwell

made to suppress agency in *1984* (Orwell, 1949), and Gallardo's (2006) SFL transitivity analysis exploring the gender roles of the two main characters of *Pygmalion* (Shaw, 1973): Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle. Instead of focusing on how each researcher analyzed the texts, Dr. Slater emphasized that these types of analyses not only have the potential to help teach the appropriate literary argument genre but can also draw ELLs' attention to language use by highlighting the differences in word and grammar choices or what SFL theory refers to as lexicogrammatical choices (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010).

To illustrate better how an analysis could be carried out on a longer text for older students, Dr. Slater had the workshop participants follow systematic steps to do a simple analysis of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling, 2007), using two pre-chosen questions to guide them: How does the language used by Harry and Hermione differ? How do these differences help create a female gendered identity for Hermione? Participants looked at a worksheet of quotes by each character (Harry and Hermione) that had been selected from every five or ten pages throughout the book, a random sampling technique that the workshop recommended for analyzing longer texts. With guidance, participants carried out a simple ideational analysis, focusing on the types of processes they could see, focusing on what SFL refers to as *sensing* processes that express mental processes such as *understand*, *believe*, *see*, and *wonder*. Participants also explored the types of participants they noticed, particularly with regards to the use of pronouns (*I* or *we*) and whether the participants were technical, abstract, or commonsense nouns. Once the workshop participants finished this, they looked at the interpersonal resources, such as whether the selected samples were statements or questions, or whether they included tag questions, and what the purpose of these might be. Within this interpersonal metafunction, the audience members also examined the use of vocatives (names)

and modality (specifically the use of modal verbs and adjuncts to suggest probability or obligation). To help, the workshop leader showed a slide that listed the linguistic concepts to look for and led a discussion of the participants' findings. The entire analysis and discussion of the Harry Potter data lasted between nine and ten minutes, which reinforced for the participants the idea that the analysis was not that difficult to undertake. Finally, Dr. Slater reviewed the main steps on how to carry out a simple SFL analysis and offered examples of the types of literary relationships that might easily be explored easily through this approach, such as the teacher/student relationship in *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993), good versus evil in *Eragon* (Paolini, 2003), or power relations in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008). Finally, the workshop instructor raised the connections between this type of literary analysis and other curriculum areas that utilize a research-based approach based on the scientific method, focusing on the use of SFL particularly with ELLs.

### **Goals of the Workshop**

The entire workshop took just under two hours, including some final questions to the participants to ask whether they had ever considered this type of an approach before, whether they felt they knew enough about it from this workshop to give it a try, and whether they would be willing to participate in a focus-group interview to discuss the approach. Of the 18 workshop participants, 17 offered their insights on the workshop through interviews; the other responded through email because her schedule was too tight to meet for an interview. The interview questions targeted (1) participants' background experience using SFL and what they felt they learned in the workshop, (2) what they considered benefits of this approach, (3) what they considered to be drawbacks or what reservations they had about the approach, (4) and how usable they felt the approach was based on the short amount of information the workshop

offered. Participants' responses were used to determine whether our short workshop met the goals that we had for participants.

**Goal 1: Understand SFL at a basic but useable level and follow directions for SFL analysis within the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions.** Participants reported no difficulty following the information presented about SFL theory and were able to perform with relative ease the SFL analyses in the increasingly difficult ways that were presented in the workshop. All participants agreed that their short introduction to this SFL approach provided the basic tools to have students look systematically for this evidence in the language, which they considered to be not only an important aspect of literary analyses, but can lead to critical thinking skills that can be used in other areas of the curriculum.

Although seven of the participants had been introduced to SFL previously, none had experience using it for literary analysis, and in fact, none had considered using it for this purpose. As one participant said, "I hadn't thought of using it. I thought it might be too advanced but I can see how it could be useful, especially the way the workshop leader did this." In another interview, one participant stated, "I knew a little bit about SFL but this workshop made it a lot clearer. I had never used it for literary analysis, so this was good." In other words, demonstrating how SFL can be used specifically for teaching literary analysis appeared to offer those with previous experience a concrete way to use the theory in practice. Even those participants who had never been introduced to SFL felt they learned a lot about the connections between grammar and literature that they had not thought about before. As one participant observed, "We think of grammar as being sentence structures, but the workshop showed that grammar actually has a purpose!" This observation is at the heart of SFL theory, and given that ELLs are often taught language using a grammatical perspective (Hinkel & Fotos, 2001), putting grammar at the core

of a literary analysis can be attractive to them, as it utilizes knowledge that they may already be familiar with. Several other workshop participants heralded this “new” more grammatical approach because it offered them a more systematic “tool” for analysis rather than the types of literary analysis that they had previously been introduced to:

“I wish I had had this in my undergraduate degree. I did it intuitively, but it would have been so useful.”

“Before doing this workshop, I found analyzing literature to be mysterious. But this gave me the tools to do it and to help my students.”

“It was a mind-blowing experience even for someone who was doing this from other approaches. It was so easy!”

To sum up the outcomes of this first goal, the workshop participants felt that they were able to grasp the basic tenets of SFL as it addresses the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions, including some of the basic terminology of the theory. They also felt they could carry out literary analyses of this kind, and this prompted them to want to learn more about the possibilities.

**Goal 2: Be able to explain the source of intuition about increasingly challenging literature through SFL analysis.** Although participants were not challenged to analyze texts beyond the ones presented in the workshop, they noted that they were impressed with how SFL gave them the “tools” to connect intuition with linguistic evidence in a systematic way, which was a key goal of this introductory workshop. One participant stated, “I think I’ve had the intuition, but I never thought about it as explicitly analytically. Intuition and developing it in literature is a skill and this is a good way to help develop that skill.” Participants stated that using this with ELLs would be a good way to build literary analysis skills alongside language: “I thought it could be really beneficial for ESL students because this is a good way for them to build evidence for their

intuition and for language learning.” One participant, who was in the US working towards a graduate degree before heading back to Panama, stated that this type of approach would be perfect for using with EFL students in literature classes because these students “would learn to analyze and develop their vocabulary and language.”

Overall, the short workshop helped participants see how this basic introduction to SFL could still help them identify textual evidence for their intuitions. Just as Achugar et al. (2007) and Schleppegrell and de Oliveira (2006) reported about teaching the language of history, these participants noted that by analyzing the language of the literature systematically through SFL, they—and they projected this to their ELLs now and in the future—would be able to offer a much deeper analysis of the text.

**Goal 3: Perceive value of SFL for teaching literature analysis to ELLs and generate ideas for and interest in using SFL with other literature.** Participants were quick to point out the benefits of the approach for teaching literary analysis to ELLs. The comments made in the interviews fell into four main themes: (1) The approach offers a micro-level, systematic approach for all levels; (2) It brings students’ attention to the language; (3) It develops critical thinking skills; and (4) It offers a bridge to work across the curriculum. Each of these will be discussed in turn.

As mentioned above, ELLs can be overwhelmed with approaches to literary analysis that are dependent on more holistic understandings of the text yet expect the reader to go beyond personal responses or plot summaries. Workshop participants referred to this simplified SFL approach as a “toolkit” of “clear steps to follow” to help students approach the task of analysis in a very systematic way: “A benefit is that it offers a systematic approach. We all get intuitions about literature and this gives us the tools to back up our intuitions.” Moreover, some

participants felt that students would be attracted to this form of evidence collecting once they were introduced to it: “We could all admit that Hermione was a brainy female, but it was amazing to see the evidence, and I think students would also think it was interesting.

One person summed up what others commented on, stating that this was “like a treasure hunt... an almost game-like way to engage with the texts.” This approach would thus be useful, most admitted, with students who are having trouble with the analysis task from a more holistic or traditional perspective as “it gives people who can’t see the ideas some tools to look for the evidence.” The idea that “it can help align technical, analytical thinkers with literature” was brought up on several occasions, with the agreement that “not all might need this” approach to analysis, but some would appreciate it because “the approach helps students look at a smaller more concrete task in more detail rather than being overwhelmed with the whole text.” Overall, the participants agreed that “giving [students] a way to look for specific things to help them build their understanding of the story is really useful.” Moreover, having this simplified approach in their teaching repertoires was considered a benefit, as it “offers an alternative” to other literary approaches and thus allows teachers to better tailor their instruction to the needs of the students.

The idea that this approach could enhance language learning was another theme that was frequently addressed in the interviews. There was general agreement that the SFL view brings students’ attention to the language and allows them to focus on that, thereby helping them develop their vocabulary and grammar through the reading and analysis tasks that the teacher sets, creating a natural context for aligning language and content: “It gets kids thinking about the story in linguistic forms. You can teach them grammar at the same time.” Helping students pay more attention to vocabulary was a true benefit of the language focus for ELLs, according to the participants, and some stated that they would use the approach to help students learn vocabulary

in context. Suggestions such as teaching polar opposites in vocabulary or focusing on seeing the various “shades of meaning in a text” were not only offered as beneficial for analyzing texts but also for developing students’ own writing abilities; vocabulary development is after all a critical need for those who are attempting to function in English (Schmitt, 2008).

Developing critical thinking skills that enable students to make a statement about a text and find evidence in the text to support their statement was mentioned frequently as a benefit of this simplified SFL approach, as all participants felt that by doing this type of analysis, students were able to move beyond the types of recounts and personal reflections that they appeared to be more comfortable doing. One participant articulated this idea very clearly:

“Something that is stressed in education today is the higher order thinking skills.

And I think this is something that teachers can bring into the classroom that really gets students really looking at the development of those skills. It’s very hands-on.

They’re doing their own research. This is students doing something instead of listening to what others have already done.”

The participants in general saw this approach as lending itself very well to a data-driven research project, something that could be used to teach students how to carry out research because it “helps them learn how to collect their data.” Because of this focus, as some noted, “it would be great for ESL students in US high schools” in that it could be used to model a complete research project that mirrors the type of academic discourse that is valued in other curricular areas, promoting “a deeper look into research and language and learning.” Several participants liked the idea that the teacher could lead a discussion about what each group found in their analyses, then bring the common findings together in the same way that scientists use multiple trials to establish theory, and finally target existing theories to help explain the findings; one

interviewee noted that “being able to compare the findings with existing linguistic research is so cool!” In general, participants found that the workshop had offered them a useful “toolkit” that “if we teach students this tool, they can use this toolkit to do other similar analyses,” both within the literature class and in other areas of the curriculum.

**Goal 4: Gain comfort and confidence with SFL analysis.** Participants generally felt that this short workshop provided them with enough of the basics to try using SFL for literary analysis. When participants were asked to rank their likelihood of using the approach on a scale of one to five, with five being the most likely to try it out after this workshop, the lowest score suggested was a 3.5 and the average was 4.8, suggesting that they felt that the content presented in the short workshop was highly informative and useful for teachers who would like to attempt this type of teaching. In fact, several of the participants felt they would be comfortable using what they had learned from the short workshop to work together with their students on a book they had not previously analyzed because, as one participant stated, “Trying it out with the students is true critical thinking because the teacher is not going into it knowing the answers.” One participant adopted the idea into an assignment she was doing for a course, and another incorporated it into a course she was offering on how to teach children’s literature. Her response after teaching the unit was that “on the whole, [the students] did a good job of pointing to specific language and events in the text in ways that students in past semesters haven’t always done to support their views.”

By the time participants were interviewed, most had begun thinking in some detail about texts that they could try out the analysis on. One came to the interview with a copy of E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, well decorated with Post-it notes, saying that she had started an analysis similar to what had been modeled with Harry Potter. She claimed that “it’s like a research project. I thought it was a really good way to analyze a book. I’ve always wondered

how I can teach this, so this offered a great way for me to think about it.” She also admitted that she remembered teaching *Charlotte’s Web* in a previous ESL class, “going over vocabulary and boring things. This would be so much more interesting.” Other participants had begun to consider various projects such as analyzing a short story by William Faulkner, working with Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes character, changes in character’s language over the three books in Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (*The Hunger Games* was a popular choice), changes in the characters found in children’s series books, and the change in perception of the society in Lowry’s *The Giver*. In other words, this short workshop had inspired the participants to seek out possibilities to see how this SFL approach could work to advance their own interests, supporting the participants’ claims that the introductory two-hour workshop was indeed very usable.

Some participants did, however, have some reservations about using the method right away with students. They were not sure they were willing to go from the workshop to the classroom. As one person said, “I would want more practice before jumping into it, but not necessarily more training.” In fact, comments from participants confirmed that although they thought the workshop itself was sufficient to provide them with a language-based approach that they felt confident enough to consider, most expressed a preference for more time to work with familiar texts before committing to using the method in the classroom. As one person said, “The more I used it, the more confident I’d become. I think I’d give it a go but I’d want to try it out on a few texts first. If I have small successes, I’d continue.” In other words, although this short workshop introduced the participants to SFL-based literary analysis, several looked forward to more in-depth exposure to the potential of the theory, mirroring the comment that Achugar et al. (2007) made about commitment to learning. In their own words, the participants wanted to “find materials that can be used that have already been analyzed by others in this way” because, in

their view, these ideas were “quite new,” and to do the analysis themselves, they thought, may take more time than they were initially able to spend.

### **Conclusion**

The use of literature as content for teaching language has been both supported (McKay, 2014; Songören, 2013) and cautioned against (Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010). In today’s ELA classrooms, teachers can benefit from understanding how simply SFL analysis techniques can be taught to their native and non-native English speaking students so that these students will be able to better examine and understand the texts they are being asked to read. This is especially true when teachers need to develop English literacy skills that can be used across the academic curriculum while engaging students in the enjoyment and study of literature. Just as Achugar et al. (2007) and Schleppegrell and de Oliveira (2006) noted with the use of SFL by history teachers, being able to adopt even a basic SFL approach can help ELA teachers develop students’ understandings of how writers use language to achieve specific purposes, which brings the study of how language works to a more centralized position within our educational system, which in turn helps all students develop their language and literacy skills. Projects that involve these kinds of analyses can also provide students with useful research skills and can hone their ability to argue and support their intuitions. Moreover, these projects can allow students to choose books they are interested in to develop the academic discourse skills they so critically need to be successful in school.

Teaching the idea that language is a meaning-making tool and bringing attention to how meaning is constructed can make students more sensitive to the power and subtleties of language. As we have attempted to show in this chapter, for teachers to begin learning how to do this on a basic level does not have to be particularly difficult or time-consuming, especially if

they approach the task from existing work that has been carried out using children's literature. The responses from the participants in our workshop highlighted the surprise that occurred when language patterns surfaced that matched what they had intuitively felt after reading a story. SFL theory at its most basic and simple level offers a way to describe how a writer constructs meaning. It thus offers a valuable "toolkit," as the participants consistently called the small amount of theory they were taught, to analyze a literary text using a scientific approach. Such a toolkit can help ELA teachers address the literacy requirements that the Common Core State Standards advocate both in the English literature courses and across curricular areas, and as our participants noted, it can do this simultaneously with language development for ELLs. This basic SFL perspective also blends a Language-based approach with Critical Literacy, two approaches that were described as distinct by Van (2009).

Overall, we considered this two-hour workshop to be successful in introducing SFL to teachers who had little or no previous exposure to the theory, particularly as it relates to literary analysis, and that it provided a starting point that can have an immediate impact on practice. Participants, who like the students that Achugar et al. (2007) described as quick to recognize linguistic clues, saw the two-hour workshop on this SFL approach as effective for providing them with information to try out in what they would consider to be appropriate contexts. The workshop assured them that they did not need to be advanced scholars in SFL in order for them to help students adopt a language-based, meaning-based approach to analyzing literature. Our findings suggest that a two-hour workshop on how to use SFL for teaching literary analysis can be effective, and that these participating teachers generally felt confident enough after this short session to continue trying an SFL analysis.

One question that surfaced from our workshop participants was how to move forward to the next step. Our primary aim for this workshop was to introduce to participants a new way of thinking about literary analysis, to explore their reaction to information presented in this short professional development session, and to encourage them to consider trying it themselves. A good next step may be to develop a selection of literature that makes use of SFL theory so that teachers can use this in their classrooms to model the types of analyses they want their ELLs (or other students) to carry out. These materials could help teachers not only review the content covered in the workshop when they attempt analyses autonomously, but also point them in new directions and provide further possible SFL analyses.

We also believe it would be useful to offer longer workshops so that interested ELA teachers could feel better prepared to analyze a piece of literature completely on their own and to teach this approach to literary analysis to their students so that they do not succumb to the temptation to, as one participant stated, “fall back on my old ways.” Like the workshops described in Achugar et al. (2007), longer workshops provide greater detail of how SFL can be used to analyze language across the curriculum, which in turn can “help students critically discuss and engage with the content and the interpretation” (p. 21) of the texts they are reading. This longer workshop session could allow participants to share ways that SFL aided their own understanding of the content and their sources of intuition (and therefore continue to strengthen confidence in the approach for those who are apprehensive about trying it out), while helping those teachers who struggle with the approach. Further, longer follow-up workshops could reveal ways in which an SFL analysis can support or be used together with other literary approaches to alleviate concerns about conflicts among methods in the classroom.

Finally, we advocate for further research to follow how teachers who are presented with information about SFL use it with their English learners in their ELA classrooms. Our project focused on examining the views of participants to explore their reactions to this simplified and short presentation of SFL, and to gauge their perceived confidence regarding the approach; only a few participants moved forward to using what they learned in practice. The next step is to see how this confidence plays out in practice.

We set out to do this project with the hope that we could demonstrate that a short, two-hour workshop introducing an SFL approach to literary analysis to teachers can be useful for providing, as our workshop participants suggested, a “great toolbox” for the students, one that can help “unlock a secret message in a book” while also teaching research skills and raising awareness of how language functions to tell stories, engage readers, create characters, entertain, and inform. While future research and more workshops are beckoning positively, we and our workshop participants believe that learning even a small amount about this SFL approach was time well spent on a Friday afternoon.

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