

**DEFENDING AND CHALLENGING INTERPRETATIONS  
OF THE PAST: THE ROLE OF ARGUMENT  
IN SCHOOL HISTORY**

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*ABSTRACT*

The interpretation of experience accompanied by an explicit defense of, or challenge to, the particular position/s taken up is a social activity that occurs across a range of contexts. Within the context of schooling a range of generic forms and language resources have evolved to realise such activity. This article focuses on the types of text and the range of language resources that are available within school history and which serve to construct and defend—or counter—interpretations of the past. Using the tools of systemic functional linguistics, the article examines three “genres” or types of text—the argument, discussion and challenge.

1. INTRODUCTION

At the level of secondary and tertiary education, argumentation is privileged as a way of building knowledge and is typically associated with “higher level” cognitive skills such as “logical and rational thinking.” In this article the process of argumentation will be examined from a linguistic rather than a cognitive perspective. An important premise is that the ability to put forward and support a knowledge claim—in other words to argue—depends strongly on the repertoire of linguistic resources that the participant has to hand. Such a repertoire, it is argued, is typically acquired through successful apprenticeship into the discourses of secondary school subjects, namely those discourses in which argument plays a central role such as English, (e.g. Mitchell 1994a, Rothery 1994), and History (e.g. Coffin 1996a, 1997, Mitchell and Andrews 1994).

The particular focus for the article will be the subject area of history. Drawing on a large scale Australian literacy research project (the Write It Right project), I show how the discourse of history is a key instrument in students' socialisation into processes of reasoning, arguing and, as part of this process, persuading and positioning. By analysing the subject of school history from a linguistic perspective I foreground the discursive dimension of building historical meaning and specifically the role that argument texts play in students' apprenticeship into history. My main aim is to argue that linguistic analysis can make explicit key text types and discursive strategies in a particular subject area and that in the case of history such research has implications for the teaching and learning of argument. As part of this thesis I raise the issue of whether argumentative practices are changing within the discipline of history. I suggest that an awareness of change, as well as insight into the ideological pressures underlying it, is an important understanding for both teachers and students to have.

The article is organised into six sections. The first section provides an overview of research into argument (from a range of disciplinary perspectives) and thus provides a context for the investigations carried out by the Write It Right project. This project is the main focus for sections 3 and 4. Section 3 introduces the project, and outlines its theoretical framework which draws on current developments in systemic functional linguistic theory. Section 4 focuses on three types of text or genres whose main purpose is to make claims about the validity—or lack of validity—of particular interpretations of the past. These three “arguing” genres are described in terms of their generic structure (the stages they move through in order to realise their overall purpose) as well as their deployment of discursive resources which serve to persuade and position the reader. Next, the article raises the issue of the role argument plays within history and whether or not this role, or indeed the form it takes, is changing. Finally some of the implications for the teaching and learning of argument within school history are outlined.

## 2. ARGUMENTATION —SOME DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

The phenomena of argumentation, as noted by van Eemeren et al. (1996) has been examined from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, with the purpose of the research clearly influencing the theoretical and methodological framework that is drawn on:

Some (scholars) approach argumentation philosophically, generally adopting a normative perspective; some approach argumentation rhetorically, usually with the purpose of analysing argumentative practices; still others approach argumentation linguistically, aiming for a description of functional uses of discourse. (van Eemeren et al., 1996, 340)

In the research reported on here a predominantly linguistic approach is taken since the Write It Right project was designed to build on—and make contributions to—research within educational linguistics. In the Australian context such research has a strong tradition—systemic functional linguistic theory has been applied in primary, secondary and tertiary settings and is responsible for bringing about major

changes in language and literacy education. Despite the strong linguistic perspective, however, it is important to highlight insights that other disciplinary “lenses” have provided and which are part of the background against which the research is set. These are outlined below.

## 2.1 RHETORICAL STUDIES

Understanding the interrelationship between argumentation (in the form of a text) and its purpose, subject matter, the writer-reader relations and historical context is an area of critical concern in rhetorical studies. Andrews (1992, 9), among others, argues that the tools provided by the New Rhetoric, as well as by classical rhetoric, provide the means to chart the changing functions of argument in relation to their social and historical context.

The emphasis given to historical context by rhetorical studies is valuable in that it reminds us that argument is best viewed as a dynamically evolving process which may take new forms to serve new purposes. Such a perspective is particularly helpful when examining historical discourse in that, as the discipline of history changes and redefines its parameters (I will discuss this further in section five), the traditional uses to which argument is put change and, as a consequence, so do its forms. A discussion on the relationship between changing contexts and forms of argumentation by Crosswhite (1996, 202) is particularly illuminating in this regard. He makes the case that the traditional argumentative essay privileges agreement and consensus:

Arguments reach at least provisional conclusions... this means that argumentation privileges sameness over difference, consensus over dissensus. (Crosswhite 1996, 200)

In contrast he proposes that new forms of argument may

include “twofold” or “threefold” arguments without deciding among them. There are many, many ways to uncover differences without treating them as conflicts in need of resolution. (Crosswhite 1996, 202)

Similarly, Berrill (1992, 100) makes the point that argument could be reframed from

a war metaphor, which is monological and seeks to destroy opposing viewpoints, to a different metaphor, which encourages a dialectical exploration of the truths offered by alternative points of view.

In Section 5 I will comment on the emergence of this latter type of purpose and form of argumentation within the context of school history.

Through its emphasis on context, a rhetorical approach makes another important contribution to the study of argument —the notion of argument as situated practice:

It turns out that discourse is very different in different communities and different situations, and it is different precisely along the lines of what will be taken to be convincing communication, and thus, from a rhetorical point of view,

successful reasoning. ...Not only what is arguable and inarguable, but also what counts as evidence is different in different contexts (Crosswhite 1996, 37).

Such an approach contrasts with the view that argument can best be understood as following universal metaphysical or logical norms. It also reinforces systemic functional theory's emphasis on the cultural and social context of language use.

Finally, rhetorical studies encourage reflexivity by questioning the "taken for granted." Andrews (1992, 11), for example, states "A rhetorician would ask: why does fiction nearly always take narrative form?" As part of the study reported on in this article I ask the question "why does history so often take argumentative form?" I also ask the question "is the argumentative form changing—and how?"

## 2.2. PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY/HISTORIOGRAPHY

Contributions to our understanding of the forms and functions of writing practised by historians (including argumentation) have also been made in the sub disciplines of philosophy of history and historiography. Within these disciplines discussion has largely centred on the two broad categories of "narrative" and "argument" (e.g. Burke 1991, Mink 1978, Ricoeur 1981) and there has been much debate as to which of these two forms is best suited for constructing historical knowledge. This debate has in turn raised the issue of "objectivity" and "subjectivity," "truth" and "fiction." For instance, some theorists assert that narrative form captures or imitates the natural order and structure of experience (narrative as mimesis) and that as a mode of thinking and representation it is as legitimate as that of abstract logic (see White 1989, 31 for a discussion of this view). Philosophers such as Mink, on the other hand, associate narrative with fictional practices, in that narrative imposes on the events of the past a form that in themselves they do not have:

This form is a "product of individual imagination" which arises from the historian's act of telling and has no part in the events narrated. (Mink reported in Carr 1991, 10)

Postmodernists have also explored the issue of whether a particular generic form (for example a narrative) is more "objective" and "truthful" than another. One conclusion is that:

"subjectivity" and "objectivity" are better understood as particular textual practices: practices significant both in the production ("writing") and the interpretation ("reading") of texts. According to this perspective there can be no claims for a greater "purity" of some discourse forms over others. (Gilbert 1992, 73)

However, enquiry within the sub disciplines of Philosophy of History and Historiography, as well as debate within the discipline of History as a whole, draws our attention to the way in which different types of discourse do indeed claim to have greater "purity," "truth" and power. In other words, there is a "disciplinary politics of truth." This needs to be taken into account when investigating the role of argumentation practices in school history (as the discussion in section 6 will confirm). It is an

understanding that enables us to ask and answer “which genres are privileged in school history?” and “what are the underlying ideological reasons”?

Truth isn't outside power ... it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint ... Each society has its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements. (Foucault 1980, 131)

### 2.3 LINGUISTICS

From the discussion above it is clear that the disciplinary perspectives of rhetorical studies, Philosophy of History and Historiography provide us with useful insights into the phenomena of argumentation. It is insights such as these that can serve to both guide and encourage reflexive thinking in the course of an investigation, even if they do not provide the major theoretical underpinning of the study. This is the case in the research study reported here where, although the research design and thinking were enriched by the disciplinary perspectives discussed above, the most influential perspective was that of linguistics. The rationale for privileging a linguistic framework was as follows.

Andrews (1992, 5) points out, “the major difference between rhetoric and linguistics is that rhetoric is concerned with the arts of discourse and with context.” Linguistics, on the other hand, offers us a set of tools for fine grained analysis of the texts themselves, how they are shaped and grammatically patterned. In addition, a linguistic framework such as systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is able to show how linguistic realisations are systematically related to both contexts of situation and contexts of culture. These linguistic tools allow us to ground a discussion of the “arts of discourse” by analysing their textual realisation. As well, a critical linguistic perspective (e.g. Fairclough 1992, Martin 1992, 2) explores not only how language works but investigates “why” and “where” particular forms of argumentation are used and “what meanings” are constrained as well as enabled. Thus a linguistic framework makes it possible to build a description of argumentation practices at the level of text and grammar as well as provide a means for exploring these practices in relation to their social and cultural context. Such an embedded and rich description is of high pedagogical value (as I show in section 6).

## 3. THE WRITE IT RIGHT PROJECT

The thesis presented in this article originates from a major literacy research project—the Write It Right (WIR) project—one of several projects conducted by the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) in the Metropolitan East Region of Sydney, Australia. The DSP is a program designed to address the educational disadvantages experienced by students from low socio-economic background and was active throughout the 1980s and 1990s in exploring the educational applications of linguistic theory, specifically SFL. The specific aims of the WIR project were to research the written discourse of significant secondary school subjects (English, history, science, math-

ematics, geography) and to consider their relationship to the written genres of selected work situations (the media, science industry and administration). In this article I focus on the research undertaken in the subject area of school history and in sections 3-5 I focus on the first two research questions listed below. In section 6, I consider questions 3 and 4.

1. What kinds of texts and language resources do students need control over in order to be successful in school history ?
2. What is the relationship between these texts and language resources and the wider social and cultural context?
3. What kinds of pedagogical practices can integrate the teaching and learning of historical knowledge with the teaching and learning of textual knowledge?
4. What kind of pedagogical practices can help students to develop a critical orientation towards text and knowledge?

As can be seen from questions 1 and 2 the starting point for investigating the literacy practices of apprentice historians was an open one. That is, although there was an awareness of the categories typically used for classifying history texts —i.e. argumentation and narrative texts— as linguists, the research team predicted that the analytical tools of systemic functional grammar would make it possible to draw finer distinctions, that within each category there would be different types of narrative and different types of argument. It was also predicted that there might be other important categories or “genres” of historical writing. In the following subsections I describe both the method of data collection and the method of text analysis that were employed to answer the first two research questions. This is followed by a brief summary of the main findings of the project.

### 3.1 DATA COLLECTION

More than a thousand texts encountered by students in their reading and writing practices were gathered from a total of eighteen schools (comprising both private and state institutions and including disadvantaged schools). Also collected were National outcome statements, the New South Wales (a state of Australia) history syllabus, school programs, units of work and assessment tasks. In addition semi structured interviews were conducted with academics in education and history departments, history teachers, members of the history syllabus committee and the National Association of History Teachers.

### 3.2 METHOD OF TEXT ANALYSIS

Texts were analysed using the analysis techniques available from within SFL, in order to bring together, in a coherent and systematic manner, the linguistic and the social and cultural dimensions of language use. The SFL model is illustrated in Figure 1. It shows how social purpose is related to genre or “text type” and how social context, in terms of subject matter (the field), social relations between writer and reader (the tenor) and medium or channel (the mode), is related to language choices at the level of vocabulary and grammar referred to, in SFL, as “lexicogrammar.”

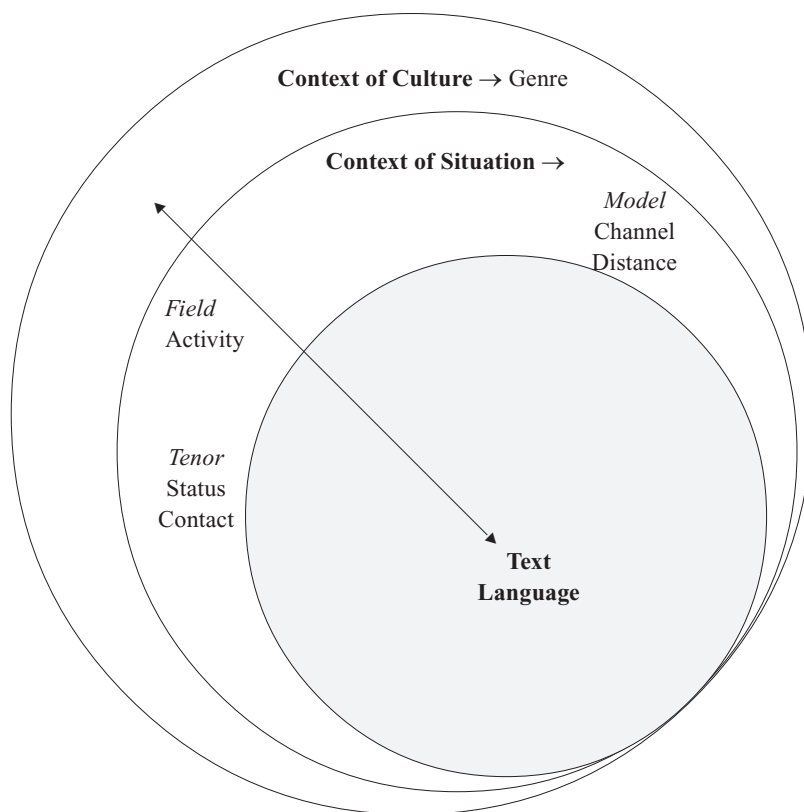


Figure 1. Functional Model of Language

Texts were therefore analysed from the point of view of their overall organisation or structure (generic structure), their particular combination of field, tenor and mode variables (Register) and their overall grammatical patterning (lexicogrammar). A brief explanation of each of these analytical tools situated within the overall SFL framework is provided below.

#### *Context of Culture: Genres and Generic structure*

A useful starting point for examining the relationship of language and its cultural context is to look at how written and spoken texts achieve their purposes. In each culture different kinds of texts are used to get different things done in various social settings (e.g. recording personal experiences, explaining why a particular historical event occurred, organising a protest rally). Each of these *social purposes* results in a distinct type of spoken or written text referred to, within SFL, as a *genre*. Genres can be defined as staged, goal oriented social processes. They are “referred to as *social processes* because members of a culture interact with each other to achieve them; as *goal oriented* because they have evolved to get things done; and as *staged* because it usually takes more than one step for participants to achieve their goals” (Martin,

Christie and Rothery 1994). An example of a genre in school history is the “historical recount” where the goal or “social purpose” is to “retell events in the past” and the main steps or stages it moves through to achieve its purpose can be described as “Background” and “Record of Events,” with “Deduction” as an optional final stage. Genres do of course evolve over time as the original purpose they were established to achieve develops and changes within a culture.

*Context of Situation, Register and Choices in the Lexicogrammar*

While different purposes for speaking and writing determine the genre and overall shape or structure of the text, the particular situation in which the text is spoken or written influences its lexical and grammatical patterns. Halliday (1994) proposes that there are three aspects in any social situation that have linguistic consequences. They are

The topic of the text —*field*

The relationship (e.g. the social distance) between the interactants —*tenor*

The channel of communication (i.e. whether the text is written or spoken) —*mode*

Collectively, field, tenor and mode are referred to as *register* variables.

In section 3.3 I show how register analysis enabled the research team to make explicit the way in which the grammar and lexis of a text (the *lexicogrammar*) are affected by the register variables of field, tenor and mode. I will also show how genre analysis made it possible to make explicit the key text types that students need to control as they move through secondary schooling.

### 3.3 KEY FINDINGS

Drawing on the tools of analysis outlined above, the following section summarises the key findings of the project.

*Genre and Generic Staging*

Within the project, analysis of the generic staging of key history texts revealed that apprentice historians can be seen as having four main social purposes —“chronicling,” “reporting,” “explaining” and “arguing” and that within each of the four main genre “families” there can be further subdivisions as displayed in Figure 2. According to the linguistic analysis carried out, there are eleven types of historical texts (organised within four genre “families”). Each genre has a particular purpose and specific way of building historical knowledge.

*Register and Lexicogrammar*

Analysis of the register of texts revealed that students are apprenticed into increasingly generalised (field related), impersonal (tenor related) and abstract (mode related) construals of the past. It was found that as texts increase in the degree to which they interpret rather than chronicle the past, grammatical patterns change —for example nominalisation (turning verbs into nouns) and dense nominal groups become a more common feature. Resources for persuading and posi-



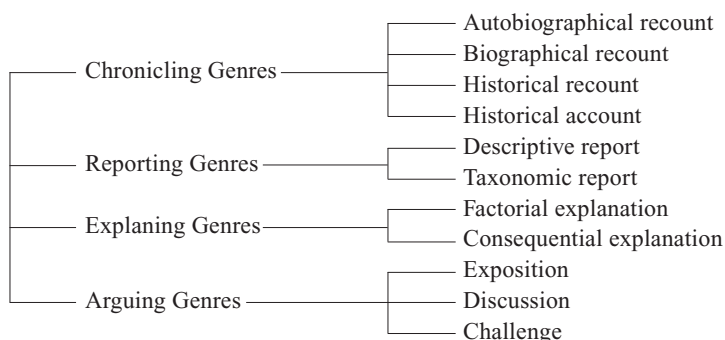


Figure 2. Key Genres in Secondary School History

tioning also become more significant as students make the transition from junior to senior high school. As well, it was found that a range of grammatical resources for construing temporality and causality were central to the construction of historical knowledge, as were resources for giving value to the past and construing this process of valuation as “objective.”

#### *The Relationship of Genre and Register to the School Context*

On the basis of a detailed linguistic analysis the question can be posed —what does this mean for teachers and students? How does the linguistic analysis relate to syllabus aims and objectives? What does it tell us about the kinds of history genres and grammatical resources that students need to have control of at different stages of schooling? What does it tell us about the role of argumentation within the institution of schooling?

Data derived from interviews revealed that the chronicling and reporting genres mapped onto syllabus outcome statements (statements outlining teaching and learning objectives) for students in years 7 and 8 (approximately ages twelve to thirteen) whereas the explaining and arguing genres mapped onto outcome statements for students in years 9 and 10 (approximately ages fourteen to fifteen), with arguing genres the key texts in years 11 and 12 (the final two years of secondary schooling). Overall it was found that texts which constructed the past in more generalised, impersonal and abstract ways and in the form of argument genres mapped onto higher level syllabus and outcome statements and were more highly valued by teachers and examiners (see Coffin 1996a for further detail).

#### 4. THE ARGUING GENRES

From the findings of the project, as summarised above, it is clear that the more highly valued texts in school history are the Argument genres, genres that in school history tend to be realised in abstract, impersonal and generalised language. The following section looks at the language of Argument genres in more detail in order to

show what people do “linguistically” when they argue (information that can be put to effective use in the classroom). First I comment on the overall textual shape of the genres and then I examine key linguistic resources that are typically drawn on in order to persuade and position the reader.

#### 4.1 EXPOSITION, DISCUSSION AND CHALLENGE —SOCIAL PURPOSE AND GENERIC STAGING

The three arguing genres (see Figure 2) —the exposition, discussion and challenge— are similar in that they have evolved to argue the case “for” or “against” a particular interpretation or perspective/s on the past. They do this by supporting or opposing a thesis through the marshalling of evidence. Unlike the chronicling, reporting and explaining genres (which generally present their interpretation of the past as categorical fact) the arguing genres draw attention to the formation of history as a set of interpretations and “doing history” as a process of negotiating with these different interpretations. Reconstructions of the past are therefore construed as hypothesis rather than fact, as possibilities or probabilities that have to be argued for. Whilst similar in these respects, there are also differences across each of the genres. Figure 3., for example, shows how each of the genres is distinct in terms of its structure or generic staging.

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Social Purpose</b>	<b>Stages</b>
Exposition	to put forward a point of view or argument	(Background) Thesis Arguments Reinforcement of Thesis
Discussion	to argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue	(Background) Issue Arguments/ Perspectives Position
Challenge	to argue against a view	(Background) Position Challenged Arguments Anti-thesis

Figure 3. The Arguing Genres: Social purposes and Stages

Across all three Arguing genres, resources that function to persuade and position are strategically deployed. A major resource lies in the genres’ staging and the weighting of Arguments in favour of the Thesis, Position or Antithesis. Discursive Resources which serve to weight arguments and evidence are discussed below in section 4.2. They will be exemplified through extracts from a sample discussion genre in which students were asked to answer the question “To what extent was the 1920s a decade of Hope?” This text can be found in the Appendix where its generic stages have also been labelled.

#### 4.2 DISCURSIVE RESOURCES FOR PERSUADING AND POSITIONING : THE ROLE OF DEDUCTIONS IN WEAKENING AND STRENGTHENING EVIDENCE

As support for, and elaboration of, arguments put forward in an exposition or discussion genre, a writer may embed “condensed” or “mini” historical recounts, accounts, reports and explanations. For example, paragraph 3 of the sample discussion and which is reproduced in Figure 4 below, exemplifies the use of a condensed or “mini” historical recount in which events are sequentially recorded (the Record of Events stage) and then given historical significance in a Deduction stage:

<i>Record of Events</i>	Partly as an outcome of anti war feelings many treaties were signed so that the same mistake would not be made again. In 1925 the “Locarno Pact” was signed at Locarno. It was a pact between Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain and Italy. In it, Germany agreed to accept her western frontier with France and Belgium as final and settled. In 1926 Germany joined the League of Nations. This was <i>very significant</i> because, firstly it <i>showed</i> that the other nations accepted Germany as a country and secondly it <i>indicated</i> that Germany was prepared to forget about the past and co-operate with the other nations.
<i>Deduction</i>	

Figure 4. “Mini” historical recount within a discussion genre

In arguing genres the Deduction phase as part of an “embedded” or condensed historical recount plays an important role in weighing up evidence. In discussion genres that alternate different points of view on an issue, “mini” Deductions serve to prepare the reader for the final Position. They achieve this by synthesising and weighing up the different sides of an issue at different points in the text. This places less pressure on the final Position stage to gather together and weigh up evidence from the whole text. These Deductions are typically in “hyper-New” position, hyper-New being the closing generalisation which consolidates the paragraph’s point (Martin 1992: 453-6). In the context of the arguing genres, then, the closing generalisations of a paragraph are often Deductions drawing out the significance of the previous evidence.

In discussion genres, Deductions realised as hyper-New typically serve to strengthen or weaken an argument. That is, mini Deductions linked to arguments that counteract the final Position need to be weakened and those which support it need to be strengthened. Some important language resources that are used to make the Deduction more —or less— persuasive are choices drawn from the subsystems of the APPRAISAL system —SOCIAL VALUATION, APPEARANCE and GRADUATION. In brief, APPRAISAL (a relatively recent theoretical development within SFL) is the set of systems for giving language users choice in terms of how they appraise, grade and give value to social experience). SOCIAL VALUATION refers to choices that ascribe significance to phenomena whereas the APPEARANCE resources are concerned with evidentiality and what Halliday calls “reality phase” (Halliday 1994, 279-83). GRADUATION comprises a set of resources for grading and scaling evaluations. Instantiations of these resources

in paragraph 3 above are highlighted in bold. “Very” is an example of GRADUATION and “significant” an instantiation of SOCIAL VALUATION. Both “showed” and “indicated” are examples of APPEARANCE. (see Martin 1997 and White 1998 for further explanation of APPRAISAL resources).

In the example Deduction in paragraph 3 the writer deduces that Germany’s behaviour (with regard to her signing of pacts and joining the League of Nations) is “very significant.” In this example, the choice to draw on the GRADUATION system and to choose “very” rather than, for example, “quite” strengthens the SOCIAL VALUATION “significant” and therefore the Deduction.

The choice of APPEARANCE in a Deduction may also contribute to the strength or weakness of its claim. For instance, in the example of paragraph 3 above, while the choice of APPEARANCE in the verb “showed” is fairly neutral, there is an element of tentativeness in the verb “indicated.” These choices clearly reflect the tension in interpreting Germany’s behaviour both as a sign of hope and a warning. This ambivalence on the part of the writer clearly foreshadows the final Position in which the writer concludes that “An analysis of the evidence above shows that the 1920s were only to some extent a decade of hope.”

In Figure 5 below we can see how the choice of APPEARANCE, as realised through verbs typically drawn on in the construction of Deductions, may be placed along a continuum from weaker to stronger.

<i>Weaker</i>			<i>Stronger</i>
indicate	Signal	Demonstrate	prove
Suggest		Show	

Figure 5. Continuum of Appearance resources

APPEARANCE resources can, of course, be realised in nominal form, for example “signal,” “indication,” “proof.” In nominal form they can be described and expanded to become part of a rich nominal group. Choices of epithets are often drawn from the SOCIAL VALUATION sub system of APPRAISAL. For example, “significant proof,” “an important sign.” These choices also serve to strengthen or weaken the Deduction.

## 5. THE ROLE OF THE ARGUING GENRES IN SCHOOL HISTORY —IS IT CHANGING?

Beyond the research into the literacy practices of history conducted by the DSP in Australia, research into the British history curriculum also serves to confirm the privileged status of argument within school history:

At sixteen the transition to academic status brings with it an increased expectation of the student’s ability to argue ... for history there is a move away from the teaching and learning of historical narrative and facts ... History becomes in

the final two years the subject of historical analysis and, because analyses differ, of historical debate. (Mitchell and Andrews 1994, 86)

In both curriculums, therefore, the end point of students' apprenticeship into history is the ability to reconstrue the past as perspective/s which require defending or challenging. Evaluation practices at the level of high school matriculation are further evidence of the dominant role of argumentation. These practices indicate that, as a type of discourse, argumentation is perceived to have greater "truth and power" than narrative forms of writing.

If it is the case that the disciplinary "politics of truth" operating within school history privileges the argument mode, a further question to ask is whether it is similarly privileged by the wider community of professional historians within the discipline of history as a whole. According to Burke (1991, 18), "the discipline of history is now more fragmented than ever before." He suggests that the traditional division between narrative and argument no longer holds:

The traditional opposition between events and structures is being replaced by a concern for their interrelationship, and a few historians are experimenting with narrative forms of analysis or analytical forms of narrative (Burke 1991, 19).

Professional historians' dissatisfaction with traditional modes of construing the past suggests that contemporary views about the nature of historical knowledge and ways of "doing history" are changing. Postmodern theorists, for instance, would argue that in the current cultural and social context historical meaning can no longer be perceived as relatively stable and accurate but instead must be seen as "unstable, contextual, relational and provisional" (Hutcheon 1989, 57). In this framework a traditional argument essay which asserts a particular thesis regarding the past, or a traditional discussion essay which favours one perspective over others must surely be treated with suspicion "the post-modern suspicion of closure, of both its arbitrariness and its foreclosing interpretive power" (Hutcheon 1989, 57).

However, the view of history as simply a set of different perspectives that derive different "facts" from the same event is not accepted by all historians. Far from being a unified discipline history can be seen as a contested site where narrative historians challenge empiricists and are both in turn challenged by the New Histories.

In this context Toulmin's (1958) concept of disciplines operating from different "argument fields" which point to distinct paradigms and ways of thinking about subject matter becomes problematic. As purposes and social situations shift, genres, and the paradigms they serve to construe, are likely to become "more flexible, plastic and free" (Bakhtin in Freedman and Medway 1994, 7).

The question that emerges from these observations of the wider context is "what are the implications for the recontextualisation of historical knowledge at the level of secondary schooling"? "Are school history genres "stabilised for now"? or "are they too evolving in response to the wider environment"?"

Research by Mitchell within the British context certainly suggests that multisided discussions in which different perspectives may be seen as relative "truths" is becoming favoured by some syllabi (for example, the Cambridge History Project syllabus).

In this context the traditional “for” and “against” essay is being replaced by texts that are organised around multiple “interpretations of the “strands” (the substantive issues in a historical investigation) whereby “bringing different views of the same phenomena into contact with one another ... generates argument” (Mitchell 1994a, 153) but does not necessarily lead to any definitive “truth” as the following conclusion to a student essay illustrates:

So it has been shown that using the right evidence, strands and perspectives the First World War with regard to women’s role in British society can be seen as a turning point, trend and (or) false dawn. (Mitchell 1992, 42)

While the multisided “postmodern” argument genre may be emerging in the British context the research carried out in the Australian context, as part of the DSP project, shows that in history matriculation exams the exposition or two sided discussion is the arguing genre most often chosen by students. The selection of these genres rather than the “post modern” multi-perspectival discussion suggests that within the Australian secondary school context a liberal humanist ideology still prevails. This ideology, according to Jenkins, originates from J.S. Mills’ idea of reciprocal freedom, involving a pragmatic “weighing up and a balancing of viewpoints, a consideration of the pros and cons ... as rational choices for action” (Jenkins 1991, 44). The selection of an oppositional paradigm, in which one perspective is shown to have greater explanatory power and therefore more “truth” than other perspectives, also reveals a persisting ideology of school history as “a question of argument” rather than a question of perspective in which class, gender, and culture create different “truths” about the past.

I would argue that one reason for the continuing privileging of this kind of argumentation in school history is the role that history plays as preparation ground for society’s future bureaucrats, lawyers and politicians. The kind of argumentative strategies and forms required by these social subjects, as they argue issues of power and debate, are of the “for” and “against” type, rather than those which encourage “a dialectical exploration of the truths offered by alternative points of view” (Berrill 1992, 100), the “twofold” or “threefold” arguments which uncover differences without treating them as conflicts in need of resolution” (Crosswhite 1996, 202).

## 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

In Miller’s article “Genre as Social Action” it is suggested that “for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (Miller 1994, 38-39). Put in the context of a community of historians, genres can be seen as tools for learning what the goals of the historian are, as well as an index to the ideological stance/s which prevail within the discipline and perhaps, as discussed above, an index to the ideological stance/s which wield power in the wider society.

I would like to add that the patterns of grammar and lexis which construct and differentiate a set of genres are equally valuable tools for learning and thus “under-

standing how to participate in the actions of a community.” As the linguistic analysis undertaken in the DSP project revealed, success in history depends strongly on having control of both a range of genres and a range of grammatical resources. In particular, control of the arguing genres was seen to be critical to success. These genres were focused on in some detail—I looked at their typical organisational structures and I introduced some grammatical resources which are typically drawn on to persuade and position a reader to accept a particular interpretation of the past.

The important question to ask, then, is “how do students make best use of these tools”? “What are the pedagogical issues surrounding the notion of genre and grammar”? “How is genre best learned and taught”?

As part of the Write It Right project research questions 3 and 4 reproduced below were explored through professional development programs for history teachers as well as through classroom interventions and the trialling of materials :

3. What kinds of pedagogical practices can integrate the teaching and learning of historical knowledge with the teaching and learning of textual knowledge?
4. What kind of pedagogical practices can help students to develop a critical orientation towards text and knowledge?

As a result of the investigation it was decided that apprenticeship into a community of practice (see Rogoff 1990 for further discussion of the notion of apprenticeship), in this case, the discourse of history, is best served by both teacher and student developing ways of talking about text.

To this end a teaching and learning model was developed in which the teacher as “Master Practitioner” (Rogoff 1990) guides and scaffolds a learner into acquiring critical control of specific genres. This entails moving through three basic phases, the *Deconstruction* phase, the *Joint Construction* phase and the *Independent Construction* phase. These are briefly elaborated as follows.

In the *Deconstruction* phase students are introduced to model texts of a chosen genre. Through a range of activities and teacher input there is analysis and critical reflection on the texts as well as the genre they are instances of. For example questions are posed in relation to the typical users of such a genre, the kind of historical meaning it can build as well as the historical meanings it constrains. In addition, key lexicogrammatical resources may be examined in order to see how historical interpretation can position a reader to accept the text as an uncontroversial representation of the past. As well, the texts serve to build historical knowledge relevant to the historical topic that the unit of work is addressing. In this way the focus on language and literacy is not seen as an “add on” (and therefore distraction) to historical content (see Coffin et al., 1996 for an example of the teaching learning model applied to a history context).

In the *Joint Construction* phase students first build up additional historical knowledge through various reading or research activities and then shape this information according to the typical staging and grammatical patterns of the target genre. This shaping, organising and constructing of text is jointly negotiated and publicly written up (ideally using an overhead projector) and by this point, due to the work done in the

Deconstruction phase, both teacher and students have a shared language for talking about historical discourse. In this phase the teacher takes at times a lead role—he/she both guides and scaffolds the students so that they are apprenticed into the written mode. This may entail rewording some of the students' contributions in order to model the process of moving from the spoken to the written medium.

The *Independent Construction* phase involves students first collecting historical data. This is then reworked into the target genre with students either constructing a text individually or else as part of a small group.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would argue that systemic functional linguistic research such as that conducted by the Write It Right project and described in this article, can make important contributions both in terms of advancing linguistic theory and register description and in terms of having valuable pedagogical applications. This article, for example, has shown how detailed linguistic analysis can provide for both teachers and students an explicit understanding of the “arts of discourse” of history—both at the level of grammar and at the level of text organisation or genre. Equally important, linguistic analysis conducted within the SFL framework provides insight into the relationship of genres and language patterns with their social, cultural and historical contexts. Such explicit understanding can only facilitate the ability to consciously and reflexively construct and deconstruct historical text. The teaching and learning model outlined in the section above is designed to provide such an understanding.

In this article, we have seen, in particular, how the Argument genres play a crucial role both in relation to students' apprenticeship into the discipline of history and in relation to their socialisation into strategies of persuasion and positioning that have wider social power. I would argue that by providing an apprenticeship which is not simply based on a transmission model, students are given the technical tools (a meta-language) for reflecting on text as a constructed “artefact” and on disciplinary knowledge as discursively based. This provides an opportunity for students to become both “history literate” and “critically literate.”

## APPENDIX

Sample Discussion Genre: To what extent was the 1920s a decade of Hope?

### Issue

The 1920s has been called a decade of hope—by the end of the decade the feeling of anti war was very high in most countries, many treaties had been signed to ensure that there would not be another war and there was great economic growth. However, it can also be argued that the twenties had a pessimistic dimension in that they prepared the world for further conflict and depression. Evidence which supports both views therefore needs to be examined in order to state the degree to which the 1920s can be viewed as a period of hope. This evidence will include an exami-



nation of antiwar feeling, the signing of various treaties and pacts and the economic climate.

**Argument for**

One of the main forms of evidence that indicates that the 1920s was a period of hope was the strength of anti war feeling. Soon after World War I people around the world realised just how much a disaster the war had really been. They had witnessed the millions of men who had died innocently and they were affected by the millions of dollars that had been spent on the war. As a result, anti war feeling increased in most countries around the world.

**Argument for**

Partly as an outcome of anti war feelings many treaties were signed so that the same mistake would not be made again. In 1925 the “Locarno Pact” was signed at Locarno. It was a pact between Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain and Italy. In it, Germany agreed to accept her western frontier with France and Belgium as final and settled. In 1926 Germany joined the League of Nations. This was very significant because, firstly it showed that the other nations accepted Germany as a country and secondly it indicated that Germany was prepared to forget about the past and co-operate with the other nations.

**Argument against**

However, even though the signing of the Locarno pact and Germany’s joining of the League of Nations can be interpreted as strong evidence for hope in a peaceful future, these events can also be seen as evidence of future conflict. For example, in relation to the Locarno Pact, although its aim was to maintain peace within Europe, many people were aware that the pact would not have the power to prevent Germany from invading another country.

**Argument against**

With regard to the establishment of the League of Nations it can also be argued that its goals of collective security and international co-operation were unlikely to be fulfilled. One reason for this was that, among many German people, feelings of resentment and hostility were far stronger than a desire for co-operation and peace. This was due to the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles which had brought huge reparations together with loss of land, population and valuable industries. As a result, German commitment to the League and its goals was questioned by the other countries. Another reason for people’s lack of hope in the League was America’s decision not to join. This decision meant the league did not have the direct support of America, a country which after it had displayed its power to stop World War I, was one of the most feared in the world. Thus, even though Germany’s behaviour in terms of signing the Treaty of Locarno and joining the League of Nations appeared to be a signal for the world to have hope for a peaceful future, it can be argued that it did not sufficiently quell many people’s fear that German resentment and hostility would manifest itself in future conflict.

**Argument for**

The third main argument for interpreting the 1920s as a period of hope was the general economic growth across Europe. In particular, the “Dawes” and “Young Plans” were instrumental in assisting growth within Germany. Between 1924 and 1929 Germany made the payments required

by the Dawes Plan and expanded her economy. In 1929 an international committee headed by an American banker, Owen Young, reduced Germany's reparations from 6.6 billion pounds to 2 billion pounds to be paid off by 1988. Within the Allied countries, American loans led to a significant increase in production, trade and personal incomes. This was strong evidence for the 1920s being viewed as a period of optimism.

**Argument against** On the other hand, this payback system can also be seen as evidence of future economic disaster. This was because, in order for the Allies to make repayments to the USA, they had to make Germany pay their heavy reparations. To do this, Germany also relied on huge loans from the USA. The overall outcome was a payback system that depended on the USA. Thus it was obvious to many people that if the USA suddenly lost all its funds the whole "payback" system would break down and the world would experience economic problems. This did of course occur in October 1929 when the American stock market collapsed. The results of this collapse included the closure of many firms and businesses, a decrease in production and a sharp increase in the number of unemployed. Thus, whilst at first the economic boom may have led to hope among some people, on closer analysis it is clear that the inherent risk of the payback system resulted in a cynical response from many others.

**Position** An analysis of the evidence above shows that the 1920s were only to some extent a decade of hope. Although anti war feeling, a belief that the potential causes of war were being removed and initial economic recovery were all indications of hope, it is also clear from the evidence that, for many people across Europe, this hope was, at best, tenuous. This was due to the lack of confidence in both the treaty of Locarno and the League of Nations. In addition it was obvious to many, that economic depression was the inevitable result of the increasing financial dependence of the European countries on the United States.

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