

HOW SFL CAN INFORM WRITING INSTRUCTION: THE GRAMMAR OF EXPOSITORY ESSAYS

Mary Schleppegrell

University of California, Davis

ABSTRACT

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) offers useful tools for analyzing texts and identifying grammatical and lexical elements that are functional for achieving a particular text's purposes. This article analyzes an English language learner's expository essay, demonstrating how the tools of SFL can illuminate areas of difficulty and needed growth. Through textual, interpersonal, and ideational analyses, it identifies elements of the academic register that are functional for the essay writing task and examines how this particular student makes grammatical and lexical choices that approximate that register. The article provides a set of questions that teachers can ask students to use to analyze their own writing from a SFL perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) enables us to link grammatical and lexical choices with social contexts. This provides us with a framework for analyzing the writing tasks we assign our students and identifying topics for grammar instruction that will enable them to develop skills in using academic register features. This paper demonstrates how some of the tools that SFL provides can help teachers work with student writers to enable them to identify how textual, interpersonal, and ideational meanings are realized in their texts and understand how grammatical and lexical choices enable them to express their intended meanings.

One academic writing task that is especially important for higher education is the expository essay. The expository essay is symbolic of students' success with lan-

guage at school, as it often serves as an evaluation metric for acceptance at college or university and placement in a writing program. But students' success in writing expository essays depends in great measure on mastery of linguistic features that enable them to realize an academic register. Mastering these features is especially difficult for second language learners, who may need focused attention on the grammatical features that are functional for writing expository texts.

The expository essay is expected to include a thesis supported by arguments why the thesis has been proposed, with premises further elaborated through facts and warrants, and a conclusion (van Dijk). This means that the essay needs to make judgments and justify them, presenting arguments that are structured in such a way that the thesis is supported with concrete evidence and examples. Students need to be able to effectively introduce a topic, state a position or thesis related to the topic, incorporate or acknowledge the writing of others, and achieve coherence through linked ideas and text transitions (Gadda). They have to make textual shifts from abstract to concrete statements throughout the text, introducing cases and generalizations (Shaughnessy; Jones, et al.). Crowhurst (218) points out that many students do not know how to do this. As she describes it, "compositions start and end abruptly; reasons are often not elaborated; some students respond with unexpected kinds of writing —narratives, dialogues, descriptions." Second language students, in particular, have difficulty producing balanced arguments that are well developed.

In many cases, it is not the students' ideas, but the way they are presented that makes their texts fail to conform to academic expectations. They need to use appropriate ways of showing how their sentences, paragraphs, and larger units of composition are related. Doing this calls for particular grammatical and lexical strategies and conventions for clause structuring that effectively realize the kind of discourse organization and development that is expected and indicate the logical structure through appropriate markers that enable them to elaborate and link the topics they introduce. Martin suggests that important resources for exposition include nominal expressions that name the arguments to be used and conjunction strategies that rely on embedding and implicit connectives rather than explicit conjunctions. In addition, the student has to adopt an impersonal stance and present him/herself as a detached and knowledgeable expert. Inexperienced students have difficulty with all of these aspects of exposition, and their difficulty is reflected in the lexical and grammatical features they draw on in writing their essays.

Lexical and grammatical choices by a writer comprise a *register*. *Register* is a semantic concept, a configuration of meanings that are typically associated with a particular situation and are realized through particular lexical and grammatical choices (Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*). The register features that are expected in expository prose include complex nominal groups, impersonal thematic choices, and strategies of condensation in conjunction and clause combining that create a highly structured text. Table One outlines the grammatical resources that are most functional for expository writing, drawing on Jones, et al. and Moore. As Table One shows, the grammatical features that comprise the register which is functional for expository writing can be categorized according to the metafunctions they represent (Halliday).

The Textual metafunction is a resource for structuring texts. Textual resources for expository essays include thematic selection, clause combining strategies, and cohe-

Table One: Grammatical features functional for expository writing

Textual resources:

- Thematic choices.
- Clause-combining strategies.
- Lexical cohesion.

Interpersonal resources:

- Modal adjuncts and interpersonal metaphors of modality and modulation.
- Impersonal presentation of mental processes of affection, perception, and cognition, and verbal processes of saying.
- Reporting verbs and their nominalized equivalents.

Ideational resources:

- Technical and academic vocabulary.
- Condensing information in the nominal group.
- Relational processes.
- Resources for writing definitions.

Adapted from Jones et al. and Moore.

sive resources. Choice of Theme is crucial to the organization of a paragraph or text, and indicates the method of development chosen by the writer (Fries). Clause-combining strategies that enable the condensation of information, rather than stringing out clauses one after another, are also textual resources (Schleppegrell and Colombi). Finally, cohesion is a textual resource (Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*) that enables the writer to make links within and between clauses, paragraphs, and the essay as a whole. While all kinds of cohesion are important for expository writing, it is lexical cohesion that poses the most difficulties for ESL students, as their vocabularies tend to be limited. Students often rely on repetition of the same lexical items, rather than employing synonyms, and they often have imprecise understanding of the relationships that are possible among their lexical choices, making errors in transitivity structure.

The Interpersonal metafunction is a resource for presenting the role relationships of reader and writer. Interpersonal resources include use of modality, as modal adjuncts and interpersonal metaphors of modality and modulation are means of removing the author from subject/theme position, making a text more impersonal. Impersonal means of presenting mental and verbal processes are also functional for exposition, as students need to learn to use appropriate resources for reporting on what others have said or written. Appropriate interpersonal choices enable them to refer to textual, mental, or research processes (“the author of this essay *outlines, believes, or analyzes*”), and present their nominalized equivalents (*her outline, his belief, their analysis*).

The Ideational metafunction is a resource for representing the world. Ideational resources include knowledge of the grammatical constraints on vocabulary choices, especially the transitivity structures associated with particular process and participant types, as well as collocational information about words. In addition, expository

writing often requires the ability to expand the nominal group, creating nominal participants that are presented in relational processes (for example, turning *He believes it is important* into *His belief in its importance is a pervasive theme in this essay*). Ideational resources also include the ability to define relevant terms. Resources for defining include appositives, relational clauses (with *be, mean, define, represent, constitute*, etc.), and identifying relative clauses.

All of these features work together and interact with each other in realizing an expository essay of the type that is conventionally expected in typical writing courses. Making appropriate Thematic choices, for example, depends on the writer's ability to condense information in the nominal group and take an impersonal stance. Using appropriate clause-combining strategies requires the ability to use interpersonal metaphors of modality and modulation, and relational processes with technical and academic vocabulary. It is not the presence of any particular individual feature, but the constellation of features that results in an academic register appropriate for expository writing.

The following sections demonstrate how a teacher can help student writers to focus on these features to improve their expository essays. An example essay is analyzed to demonstrate how the tools of SFL can be a resource in the writing classroom. The example essay by a Vietnamese-American second-language student (see Appendix) is taken from a database of 140 expository essays written by entering university students to determine their placement in the university's writing program. The example illustrates some of the grammatical challenges that second language learners face, and provides a guide to identifying areas in which the student requires practice and development.

The students writing this exam were asked to read and respond to a passage by essayist Wendell Berry in which he argues that satisfaction comes from hard work (Berry). In his three paragraph essay, this student writer attempts to summarize Berry's points, provides an example from his own experience of cleaning up his backyard, and brings out a further point from the Berry essay about Berry's interaction with his daughter.

This paper will focus on the lexical and grammatical issues that this student writer could address to improve his writing. Of course the student also needs to work on macro-level issues such as developing an effective conclusion and bringing in more relevant examples. These organizational and content-related considerations are important for improving student writing, but these are topics that are typically addressed in composition courses. Here we will focus on how work at the grammatical and lexical levels could help to focus this writer on the linguistic resources which will help convey the meanings he intends in a register which is appropriate and expected in the academic context.

TEXTUAL RESOURCES

To produce a cohesive text, the writer needs to identify the point of the essay, establish and maintain a topical progression, and mark the structure of the argument as it develops. Teachers can guide student writers in analyzing the clause Themes in their draft essays so that they get a clearer picture of how they are accomplishing

these goals. *Theme* is a term with a particular meaning in systemic functional grammar. In English, the Theme is the grammatical element that occurs first in the clause, and indicates the “point of departure” (Halliday, 37) for the clause. The Theme can consist of a noun, adverb, prepositional phrase, or other grammatical element. By identifying clause Themes and analyzing the thematic structure of a text, students can identify the method of development they are using (Fries; Mauranen; see also the papers in Ghadessy). We expect to see a progression of Themes from one clause in a paragraph to the next, as well as links from one paragraph to another. Often, the Theme of one sentence will depend on information from the Rheme (the remainder of the clause; “the part in which the Theme is developed” (Halliday, 37) of a previous sentence. In this essay, as shown in Table Two, the thematic choices are very revealing of weaknesses in the development of the text.

Table Two: Themes

Paragraph One:

Wendell Berry, a novelist, poet, essayist, and a farmer,
 Realizing from personal experiences, Berry
 Beside communicating and working with his helpers, Berry

Paragraph Two:

Berry’s point of view toward “satisfaction”
 For instance, I recently
 My goal
 The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard
 Even though I
 From my prospective of the backyard, I
 I
 Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time,

Paragraph Three:

Beside the satisfaction of working alone, Berry and I
 For example, Berry and his daughter
 Berry’s daughter, who goes away for college,
 Berry’s daughter, who arrived home from college,
 Berry and his daughter
 The relationship between Berry and his daughter
 I, too,

The thematic choices in the first paragraph focus on Berry, the author of the essay the student is responding to. These Themes indicate that the first paragraph does not present a Thesis that will be developed in the essay. Instead, analysis of these Themes indicates that the first paragraph just summarizes what the Berry essay says. The Thematic choices, all of which point to the Berry essay, demonstrate that the

writer does not indicate a particular position *vis a vis* the Berry essay that will be the focus of his own writing.

In the second paragraph, the Themes of the first and last sentences also refer to Berry, while the other sentences in the paragraph are focused on developing the example of cleaning up the backyard. The second sentence provides an explicit cohesive link, *For instance*, in introducing the example, making an effective transition. But there is no thematic transition expression in the last sentence, where we might expect to see the point of the paragraph highlighted. Instead, the last sentence of paragraph Two has a Theme that again points to the Berry essay. This Theme, *Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time*, does not provide a link with the rest of the paragraph, indicating that the sentence may not be playing a clear role in developing the point of the paragraph. In fact, that is the case, as the student author does not explicitly tie the example of the backyard to the point Berry makes about satisfaction. So the clause Themes in this paragraph indicate that the paragraph does not clearly present a point that provides support for the argument that the student's point of view on satisfaction is similar to Berry's.

Analysis of the Themes in the third paragraph is also instructive. The Themes indicate that the paragraph is focused on Berry and his daughter. The writer could be asked to consider the point of this paragraph and how it contributes to the overall focus of the essay. Why is the example of Berry's daughter presented here, and how does it contribute to the goal of the essay? In addition, the writer could consider whether the paragraph provides a focused conclusion. Reflection on these questions would probably reveal to the writer that he is not concluding the essay with any generalizations, summary of points, or expression of a clear perspective on the issues under discussion. Instead, the Themes indicate that the third paragraph is a further discussion of the Berry essay, with no clear link to the argument the student writer is presenting. Analyzing Thematic choices, then, provides a means of considering the major points that are presented in the essay and how the essay is developed to make those points.

Clause-combining strategies are also a textual resource for realizing a desired register. Schleppegrell and Colombi demonstrates how different clause-combining strategies result in different discourse-organizational approaches to the essay writing task. A clause-condensation strategy of embedding and nominalization enables the presentation of a highly structured text, typical of the academic register. Halliday (224) suggests that written language tends to have clausal patterns that are simple, with ideational content densely packed in nominal constructions in a way that he characterizes as "crystalline." Spoken language, on the other hand, tends to have clausal patterns in which one thought is added to another as they come to mind, resulting in clause complexes which realize a grammatical intricacy that Halliday calls "choreographic." Second language writers, especially those who have learned English through spoken interaction rather than through formal study, often draw on conjunction strategies that are appropriate in speaking but inappropriate for academic writing, giving their essays a discursive oral quality (Schleppegrell, "Conjunction").

Schleppegrell ("Conjunction") analyzes conjunction strategies in essays from ESL and non-ESL writers. Using the conjunction *because* as a focal example, it illustrates how ESL writers use *because* clauses to indicate the knowledge base for their assertions, to introduce independent segments, and to display links between sections of dis-

course. These are common uses for *because* clauses in spoken English, but these functions are typically realized in different ways in academic writing. Schleppegrell (“Strategies”) extends this study to examine the frequency with which ESL and non-ESL writers use *because* clauses for different discourse-pragmatic functions, and finds that ESL writers use significantly more *because* clauses than non-ESL writers, typically using them to create cohesive ties with prior or subsequent discourse. Language learners employ *because* clauses where more proficient writers use other constructions.

We see such conjunctive strategies used by the writer of this essay. In paragraph two, we find four sentences that use *because* for clause linkage. (1) illustrates these:

- (1)
 - (a) My goal wasn’t considered to be extremely difficult *because* it was to clean up my backyard which included mowing and raking the lawn.
 - (b) The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard paid off *because* I was satisfied with the work I completed.
 - (c) I was satisfied, *because* I used my own abilities and skills to make my backyard look the best from all the rest of the backyard I have seen.
 - (d) Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time, was satisfied with his performance *because* he knew that he used his own knowledge and ability to complete his work.

In (a), we find the kind of reasoning that is knowledge-based, with *because* used to make an internally conjunctive link (Halliday, 338), reflecting the author’s reasoning process rather than events in the world. He does not intend to say that the reason that the goal wasn’t difficult is because the goal was to clean up the backyard; instead, cleaning up the backyard is an illustration of the goal and evidence for its difficulty. This is a typical way of *speaking*, but it does not work well in a written register, where it seems to present some kind of illogical reasoning.

The other three uses of *because* in this paragraph (b-d) are examples of *because* clauses that provide reasons for the satisfaction the writer expresses in the main clause of each of these sentences. While these do not appear illogical, the writer could nevertheless benefit from learning alternatives to expressing these reason relationships that do not involve clause-chaining with conjunctions.

The second paragraph is an example to support a point that the author never makes explicitly in a thesis statement, but that is implicit throughout—that working hard toward a goal leads to greater satisfaction. But his reliance on clause-combining strategies more appropriate to a spoken register detracts from the overall effect. Teachers can work with students to help them draw on resources for presenting logical relationships that do not draw so heavily on explicit conjunction. (2), for example, is an alternative way of presenting the same ideas, using clause-combining strategies more typical of an academic register:

- (2)

My own experience supports the point of view of “satisfaction” that Berry argues for. For instance, I recently found satisfaction by accomplishing the goal of cleaning up my backyard. This goal may not sound difficult, but mow-

ing and raking the lawn was hard work. It paid off, however, in the satisfaction I felt with the work I completed. Even though it gave me a backache, the work was worthwhile and made me proud of myself. My abilities and skills resulted in an outstanding job and great satisfaction that my backyard looked the best of any backyard I had ever seen. Just as Berry describes, using one's own knowledge and ability provides satisfaction with the work completed.

The several *because* clauses have been replaced with alternative ways of showing the causal relationships that the author intends. Table Three shows how the two versions compare and comments on the revisions which affect the causal relationships (revisions in Thematic choices are discussed below).

Table Three: Comparison of causal relations in the two versions of paragraph two

Original paragraph two

Berry's point of view toward "satisfaction" does incorporated with what I thought of satisfaction. For instance, I recently accomplished my goal which definitely gave me "satisfaction".

My goal wasn't considered to be extremely difficult because it was to clean up my backyard which included mowing and raking the lawn.

The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard paid off because I was satisfied with the work I completed.

Even though I acquired a back ache from the work, I thought it was worthwhile and was proud of myself in completing my goal. From my prospective of the backyard, I thought that I did an outstanding job in cleaning up my

Rewritten paragraph two

My own experience supports the point of view of "satisfaction" that Berry argues for. For instance, I recently found satisfaction by accomplishing the goal of cleaning up my backyard.

This goal may not sound difficult, but mowing and raking the lawn was hard work.

Revision: The structure *may not... but* replaces the internally conjunctive *because*, using modality (*may*) and a paratactic conjunction (*but*) instead of inappropriate internal conjunction to make the point that hard work was involved in accomplishing this task.

It paid off, however, in the satisfaction I felt with the work I completed.

Revision: *It paid off, however, in the satisfaction I felt* replaces *paid off because I was satisfied*. The nominalization of *satisfy* enables the use of one clause rather than two.

Even though it gave me a backache, the work was worthwhile and made me proud of myself. My abilities and skills resulted in an outstanding job and great satisfaction that my backyard looked the best of any backyard I had ever seen.

backyard. I was satisfied, because I used my own abilities and skills to make my backyard look the best from all the rest of the backyard I have seen.

Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time, was satisfied with his performance because he knew that he used his own knowledge and ability to complete his work.

Revision: *My abilities and skills resulted* replaces *I was satisfied because I used my own abilities and skills*. The *because* clause has been replaced by the causal verb *resulted*.

Just as Berry describes, using one's own knowledge and ability provides satisfaction with the work completed.

Revision: *Berry ...was satisfied with his performance because he knew that he used his own knowledge and ability to complete his work* is replaced by using *one's own knowledge and ability provides satisfaction with the work completed*. Nominalization enables the writer to compact information into one finite clause instead of three.

Table Four compares the clause Themes in the two paragraphs, demonstrating how the Themes of the revised paragraph now indicate that the paragraph's point is to use an example to support Berry's thesis, which the author agrees with.

Table Four: Comparison of Themes in two versions of paragraph two

<i>Paragraph Two:</i>	<i>Rewritten paragraph:</i>
Berry's point of view toward "satisfaction"	My own experience Revision: Beginning with <i>My own experience</i> makes the point of the <i>For instance</i> in the next sentence clear. The reference to Berry now appears in the Rheme.
For instance, I recently	For instance, I recently
My goal	This goal Revision: The goal was introduced in the Rheme of the previous clause, making it possible to refer to it here with an anaphoric cohesive link, making it at the same time more impersonal.
The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard	It Revision: The notion of <i>hard work</i> that appears in the Theme in the original

	<p>paragraph has been incorporated into the Rheme of the previous clause, allowing the Theme of this sentence to be <i>It</i>, a cohesive link that helps maintain the focus on the example.</p>
<p>Even though I</p>	<p>Even though it Revision: Again, this thematic choice enables the writer to be more impersonal.</p>
<p>From my prospective of the backyard, I</p>	<p>My abilities and skills Revision: By combining the content of two sentences in the original paragraph, the infelicitous <i>From my prospective of the backyard</i> and the author-focused <i>I</i> have been replaced by <i>My abilities and skills</i>.</p>
<p>I</p> <p>Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time,</p>	<p>Just as Berry describes, using one's own knowledge and ability Revision: The final sentence has taken the notion of the original final sentence and introduced the idea with an explicit link between the main point of the Berry essay and the point this author supports, instead of with an example from the Berry essay, thereby providing a more cohesive link.</p>

A comparison of the clause-combining resources of the original paragraph two and the rewritten paragraph two also shows that the rewritten version realizes a more academic register. Table Five shows the clause-combining strategies in these two paragraphs:

Table Five: Clause combining

<i>Original second paragraph</i>	<i>Clause type</i>
<p>Berry's point of view toward "satisfaction" does incorporated with what I thought of satisfaction.</p>	<p>Independent clause with embedding.</p>

For instance, I recently accomplished my goal which definitely gave me “satisfaction”.

Independent clause with hypotactic elaboration.

My goal wasn’t considered to be extremely difficult because it was to clean up my backyard which included mowing and raking the lawn.

Independent clause with hypotactic enhancing clause and hypotactic elaboration.

The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard paid off because I was satisfied with the work I completed.

Independent clause with embedding and hypotactic enhancement with embedding.

Even though I acquired a back ache from the work, I thought it was worthwhile and was proud of myself in completing my goal.

Hypotactic enhancement, independent clause, paratactic extension.

From my prospective of the backyard, I thought that I did an outstanding job in cleaning up my backyard.

Independent clause with hypotactic projection.

I was satisfied, because I used my own abilities and skills to make my backyard look the best from all the rest of the backyard I have seen.

Independent clause with hypotactic enhancement and embedding.

Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time, was satisfied with his performance because he knew that he used his own knowledge and ability to complete his work.

Independent clause with hypotactic elaboration and hypotactic enhancement with hypotactic projection.

Rewritten second paragraph:

My own experience supports the point of view of “satisfaction” that Berry argues for.

Clause type:

Independent clause with embedding.

For instance, I recently found satisfaction by accomplishing the goal of cleaning up my backyard.

Independent clause.

This goal may not sound difficult, but mowing and raking the lawn was hard work.

Independent clause with paratactic extension.

It paid off, however, in the satisfaction I felt with the work I completed.	Independent clause with embedding.
Even though it gave me a backache, the work was worthwhile and made me proud of myself.	Hypotactic enhancement, independent clause and paratactic elaboration.
My abilities and skills resulted in an outstanding job and great satisfaction that my backyard looked the best of any backyard I had ever seen.	Independent clause with embedding.
Just as Berry describes, using one's own knowledge and ability provides satisfaction with the work completed.	Hypotactic enhancement, independent clause.

Hypotactic and paratactic clauses are typical of the “choreographic” clause-chaining style discussed earlier, realizing a spoken register. Analyzing the finite clauses, we see from Table Five that the original paragraph consists of eight independent clauses plus eleven hypotactic or paratactic clauses. The rewritten paragraph, in contrast, consists of seven independent clauses with only four paratactic or hypotactic clauses. With the use of nominalization and other strategies, the revised version realizes a more formal academic register. Teachers can help students analyze the clause-combining strategies they are using and work with them to make revisions along the lines that have been presented here.

As we have seen, cohesive resources are an important part of textual structure. This essay exemplifies how lexical cohesion is a particular challenge for the second language writer. Repetition is an aspect of lexical cohesion which can be very effective if used appropriately. This writer, however, has limited lexical resources to draw on for synonymy and other cohesive relationships, and so relies too often on simple repetition. The repetition of *backyard* in the second paragraph and *Berry's daughter* in the last paragraph are examples here. Synonyms or rephrasing would strengthen this essay and give it a more academic tone. Students can learn to review their lexical choices, identify the repetitions, and seek alternatives. We will examine other aspects of the lexical choices of this writer in the following sections.

SUMMARY

As we have seen, the textual resources of the grammar are crucial for presenting a well-organized and developed expository essay. We have focused here particularly on how choice of Theme and clause-combining strategies are valuable resources for this purpose. Teachers can work with student writers to help them examine the choices they have made and make the kinds of revisions that result in a more condensed and focused style that realizes an academic register.

INTERPERSONAL RESOURCES

Students writing in academic environments are expected to maintain a relationship of formality and impersonality between reader and writer. Making the register choices that result in this impersonal stance poses challenges for students who lack knowledge of or experience using the grammatical resources that express impersonality. For example, essay writing assignments like this one require that the student writer respond to a thesis that has been proposed by another author. This requires skills in presenting that writer's point of view, summarizing the arguments that have been made and agreeing or disagreeing with those arguments in an impersonal, distanced way.

To convey impersonality, writers can employ strategies such as removing the person (*I, Berry*) from subject/theme position. This means employing alternative strategies such as passivization or nominalization, or use of modal adjuncts such as *possibly* or *certainly*. Mental processes of affection, perception, and cognition, and verbal processes of saying can also be made impersonal. To effectively present their own and others' points of view, student writers need to learn a range of verbal and nominal structures that are useful for this purpose. This student writer uses some such strategies in phrases like *Berry's point of view*.

As noted above, vocabulary is an important resource for second-language writers. Effective lexical choices can enable the student to condense and structure information in ways that present an impersonal, well organized essay. Relational verbs such as *indicate, reflect, show, influence, cause, lead to*, nouns like *reason, problem, argument, point of view, question*, and adjectives such as *significant, effective, essential* help students evaluate opinions and arguments in clause structures that do not rely on conjunctions or references to one's own beliefs.

In an expository essay, we expect to find evaluative devices and attitudinal processes, as these indicate that interpretation and argumentation are present in a text (Christie). This essay lacks evaluative devices, for the most part, because the author is not presenting any argument or point of view. He reports what Berry thinks, gives an example from his own experience of how hard work is satisfying, gives another example from the Berry essay, and then ends the essay with the suggestion that he hopes his own children will work with him as Berry's daughter did. There is no thesis to support with modal expressions or other interpersonal resources. Teachers can help students analyze their essays to identify modal adjuncts or interpersonal metaphors of modality and modulation. Lack of these resources demonstrates that there may not be a clear thesis or argument put forward in the essay.

The clause-structuring features discussed above also contribute to the resources for interpersonal meanings, enabling language users to adopt the more impersonal stance of the academic register. As we saw above, clause-condensation is accomplished through nominalization and other means that enable writers to make impersonal thematic choices.

IDEATIONAL RESOURCES

We have seen how the textual and interpersonal choices of a student writer make a text a more or less appropriate example of the academic register expected in expository

tory essays. The third metafunction is the Ideational, the metafunction through which the world is reflected through language. Analysis of the Ideational metafunction puts the focus on vocabulary choices. We have seen above that vocabulary choices contribute to textual structure (lexical cohesion) and to interpersonal structure (verbal and nominal structures that realize impersonality). Vocabulary is also a crucial Ideational resource for writing an expository essay.

The aspect of vocabulary choice that is in focus in analyzing the ideational structure of an essay is the appropriateness of the clausal structures that accompany particular lexical choices. Choice of a particular noun or verb brings with it expectations for the rest of the clause that fall out from the particular vocabulary chosen. Developing second-language writers typically make numerous errors in this regard.

Analysis of lexical choices which enable the presentation of processes and participants reveals the errors in transitivity structure which often occur in second-language writing. (3) provides examples of some of the problems with the ideational choices that this student has made:

- (3)
- (a) Realizing from personal experiences (Paragraph one, sentence two)
 - (b) Berry's point of view toward "satisfaction" does incorporated with what I thought of satisfaction. (Paragraph two, sentence one)
 - (c) From my prospective of the backyard, I thought that I did an outstanding job in cleaning up my backyard. (Paragraph two, sentence five)

In (a), the student uses *realize* without the necessary complement. In English, we have to realize *something*. In (b), *incorporated with* is ungrammatical. The student needs to learn that *incorporate* does not take a prepositional complement. In (c), the student has confused *prospective* and *perspective*. These are just some of the problems that this student could productively focus on in revising the essay. Identifying these issues as larger than just "vocabulary problems" could help the student to see that both semantic and structural considerations are integral to any word choice. The meanings may be appropriate, but the structures also have to be grammatical. Students may need assistance in identifying these errors, since they will not have a means of knowing where they have made mistakes without feedback on what they have written.

Writers often need to define the terms they use, and resources for defining are also ideational resources which are functional for expository writing. This essay, for example, would benefit from a clear definition of what *satisfaction* means to Berry and to the student writer. Such a definition would also help in the development of a good thesis statement. Teachers can help students learn how to write effective definitions that will contribute to the realization of an academic register.

SUMMARY

We have seen how textual, interpersonal, and ideational analysis can identify ways that students' expository writing can be improved. A functional analysis of grammatical resources provides a framework for students to analyze their own essays and identify the areas in which they need further grammatical development. Table Six

provides a list of questions that students can ask themselves about their expository essays.

Table Six. Questions to guide student writers

- Am I using the Theme position effectively to develop the flow of the text?
- Have I selected appropriate ways of combining and embedding clauses? Are the logical connectors I have chosen the ones that best convey the logical meanings that I intend?
- How often do I repeat the same lexical item? Could I use synonyms or other ways of expressing the same concepts?
- Am I projecting my intended attitude and stance through use or avoidance of modals and interpersonal adjuncts?
- Have I adopted an impersonal stance in presenting my own views and interacting with my reader?
- Have I chosen the correct grammatical forms for the types of transitivity represented by the verbal processes I have selected?
- Have I effectively defined terms that are important for presentation and support of my thesis?

Students can identify their clause Themes and analyze how their choices create a particular kind of organization and focus in their text. They can examine the clause-combining strategies they have used, and think about whether the logical connectors they have chosen best represent the meanings they intend. They can find the repetitions in their essays and consider how they might provide a greater variety of expression. They can analyze the ways they present and react to the views of the authors they are responding to, and how they present their own thoughts, and consider whether they have used resources that convey an impersonal stance. They can examine their use of modality and modulation to determine whether their intended attitude is conveyed through their choices. They can examine their vocabulary choices and whether they have chosen modifiers and complements that are appropriate for these lexical items. They can identify terms that need to be defined and present definitions in an academic register.

Teachers who assign expository essays can ask students to focus on the kinds of meanings their grammatical choices represent. Such focus on form shows students how their grammatical choices contribute to the effectiveness of their texts, and help them gain control of their writing and more confidence in their choices.

CONCLUSION

When teachers give writing assignments, they need to understand which linguistic resources students will need to draw on in order to be successful. With an understanding of the register features and generic structure of academic tasks, teachers can focus on grammar as a resource for the construction of texts and help students use the

grammatical resources available to them to expand and develop their language skills. Understanding that each assignment represents a genre with its own register requirements allows teachers to view writing assignments as processes through which students can develop skills in expressing their knowledge and opinions at the same time that they improve their language proficiency.

Teachers can help students learn the grammatical forms that are most useful for particular school assignments (for another example of this, see Schleppegrell, “Resources”). Just as many teachers now often focus on new vocabulary in presenting school assignments, information about grammar can be incorporated into writing instruction so that as students follow a process of drafting, revising, and editing, they can be made aware of the grammatical features which are especially important for conveying meanings in that writing task. Different choices are appropriate for different contexts, and students may not be aware of the different meanings that their choices convey. Helping students to understand how different forms convey different meanings gives them more choice about how they represent themselves as writers. It is sometimes assumed that students will develop intuitions about the grammar of academic language through exposure to such language. But we need to draw students’ attention to the grammar that is functional for particular tasks. By incorporating a focus on the grammar that is useful and appropriate for particular kinds of writing, teachers can help second language learners who lack familiarity with the expectations for academic language.

The variety of syntactic structures available in English allows the writer to present and elaborate positions, arguments, and explanations in different ways. Developing writers need to understand the functions of particular structures and how they can be used to introduce or emphasize information in their writing as they construct academic texts. Students need grammatical and discourse-organizational skills for developing expertise in a range of academic genres.

Acquiring academic registers is a long-term and difficult task, and second-language writers will continue to need assistance in identifying some types of errors and understanding how to correct them. They grapple with person, number, and tense marking even as they become more proficient with academic language, as this essay shows. Such errors are part of a normal developmental process for second-language writers. But this means that in providing feedback to students, teachers are typically confronted with a wide range of error types and infelicitous or inappropriate uses of language. SFL provides tools that allow teachers to focus students on those grammatical elements which are most functional for the assigned task, rather than waiting to see what students produce and then responding to errors. A SFL approach can help teachers target their assistance and feedback to aspects of writing that students themselves can monitor. Such an approach can lead to more satisfying and productive interaction between teachers and students, and more rapid progress for students in academic writing.

EXAMPLE ESSAY¹

Wendell Berry, a novelist, poet, essayist, and a farmer, thought that working for a purpose and with people who cared should give them “satisfaction.” Realizing from personal experiences, Berry believed that the hard work and the time it took to com-

plete the work doesn't really matter as long as Berry and his helpers (neighbors, son, and daughter) gave some effort in completing his spring job. Beside communicating and working with his helpers, Berry was satisfied with the completion of his work, too.

Berry's point of view toward "satisfaction" does incorporated with what I thought of satisfaction. For instance, I recently accomplished my goal which definitely gave me "satisfaction." My goal wasn't considered to be extremely difficult because it was to clean up my backyard which included mowing and raking the lawn. The hard work that I putted into cleaning up my backyard paid off because I was satisfied with the work I completed. Even though I acquired a back ache from the work, I thought it was worthwhile and was proud of myself in completing my goal. From my prospective of the backyard, I thought that I did an outstanding job in cleaning up my backyard. I was satisfied, because I used my own abilities and skills to make my backyard look the best from all the rest of the backyard I have seen. Berry, who was working some two-year-old horses in the spreader for the first time, was satisfied with his performance because he knew that he used his own knowledge and ability to complete his work.

Beside the satisfaction of working alone, Berry and I believed that working with others could satisfied oneself, too. For example, Berry and his daughter revealed the "satisfaction" within the family. Berry's daughter, who goes away for college, is unable to see his father because they are far apart from each other. Berry's daughter, who arrived home from college, seeks every opportunities to spend time with her father. Berry and his daughter were satisfied in completing Berry's spring job. The relationship between Berry and his daughter made the job extra worthwhile. I, too, hoped that my children would do the same.

Note

¹ The essay is reproduced with all of the errors and infelicities in the original.

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