

Writing to Persuade: A Systemic Functional View¹

Joshua Schulze^{2*}

University of Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

This study explores how a genre-based approach to writing instruction influenced by both genre theory and systemic functional linguistics supported the academic writing development of English language learners (ELLs) transitioning to middle school. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a tool for pedagogy and linguistic analysis, the teacher-researcher analyzed three instantiations of texts composed by ELLs to determine changes in the register of their texts during the course of genre-based writing pedagogy. Methods were qualitative in nature, involving both analysis of the text and the surrounding context of composition. Data came from multiple sources. They included videotaped observations of classroom interactions, transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with the student, collection of lesson plans, and materials used in lesson implementation, and field notes made by the participant observer. Findings suggest that a genre-based approach to writing instruction supported ELLs in producing texts that more closely approximated the register of the target genre.

Keywords: English language learning, genre based pedagogy, academic literacy, systemic functional linguistics, persuasive writing

Resumen

Este estudio explora como el enfoque de la enseñanza de la escritura basada en el concepto de género, influido tanto por la teoría de género, como por la lingüística sistémico-funcional apoyó el desarrollo de la escritura académica de los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua en proceso de transición a la escuela secundaria. A partir de la lingüística sistémica funcional como una herramienta para la pedagogía y análisis lingüístico, el profesor-investigador analizó tres clases de textos elaborados por estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua para determinar los cambios en cuanto a redacción de sus textos realizados durante el curso de enseñanza de la escritura basada en el género. Los métodos utilizados fueron de naturaleza cualitativa, los cuales incluyeron tanto el análisis del texto y su respectivo contexto. Los datos fueron tomados de múltiples fuentes; en las que se incluyen: los videos de las observaciones

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² Email:Joshua.Schulze@umb.edu

de clase, las transcripciones de las entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas a los estudiantes, planes de clase, el material utilizado en la aplicación de las lecciones y las notas de campo realizadas por el observador participante. Los resultados sugieren que un enfoque de la enseñanza de la escritura basada en el concepto de género provee herramientas a los estudiantes ELL para la producción de textos que se acercan más al registro de la lengua de estudio.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje del inglés como segundo idioma, pedagogía basada en el género, lectoescritura académica, lingüística sistémica - funcional, redacción de textos persuasivos

Resumo

Este estudo explora como o enfoque do ensino da escritura baseada no conceito de gênero, influenciado tanto pela teoria de gênero, como pela linguística sistêmico-funcional apoiou o desenvolvimento da escritura acadêmica dos estudantes de inglês como segunda língua em processo de transição à escola secundária. A partir da linguística sistêmica funcional como uma ferramenta para a pedagogia e análise linguística, o professor-pesquisador analisou três classes de textos elaborados por estudantes de inglês como segunda língua; para determinar as mudanças em quanto à redação de seus textos realizados durante o curso de ensino da escritura baseada no gênero. Os métodos utilizados foram de natureza qualitativa, os quais incluíram tanto a análise do texto e seu respectivo contexto. Os dados foram tomados de múltiplas fontes; nas que se incluem: os vídeos das observações de classe, as transcrições das entrevistas semi-estruturadas realizadas aos estudantes, planos de classe, o material utilizado na aplicação das lições e as notas de campo realizadas pelo observador participante. Os resultados sugerem que um enfoque do ensino da escritura baseada no conceito de gênero provê ferramentas aos estudantes ELL para a produção de textos que se aproximam mais ao registro da língua de estudo.

Palavras chaves: aprendizagem do inglês como segundo idioma, pedagogia baseada no gênero, leito-escritura acadêmica, linguística sistêmica - funcional, redação de textos persuasivos

Across the content areas of upper elementary and middle school, students are expected to use academic language to persuade, argue and justify their points of view in well organized persuasive texts. Learning to use academic language to persuade can be especially challenging for ELLs who are simultaneously learning new concepts through a new language (Halliday, 1985; Gibbons, 2009). One of the primary challenges for ELLs lies in the differences between academic and social language. Academic language or what researchers have termed “the language of schooling” (Schleppegrell, 2004) or “school discourse” (Christie & Derewianka, 2008) differs significantly

from the everyday social language students typically learn naturally through meaningful interactions at home (Bruce, 2009; Cummins, 2001; Halliday, 1985; Heath, 1983; Schleppegrell, 2004). Relying less on the immediate context for interpretation, academic language employs discipline specific terminology and lexically dense sentence structures to make meaning (Halliday, 1985; Schleppegrell, 2004).

The differences between academic and social language are not typically brought to the attention of ELLs through traditional process methods of writing instruction found in US educational contexts. While process methods emphasize self-expression and creativity, they typically postpone clause level analysis of language use until the editing and revision stages (Hyland, 2004). Critics of process methods voice concern that postponing attention to language does not sufficiently support ELLs who may not yet have gained sufficient control of grammar and genre structures to compose academic texts (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993; Hasan, 1996; Hyland, 2007). In response, literacy researchers concerned with the academic literacy development of ELLs have begun to reexamine the role of genre-based pedagogy and SFL in US K-12 contexts with the ultimate goal of making the differences between academic and social language visible to ELLs (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; 2010; Gebhard, Harman, & Seeger, 2007; Gebhard, et. al. 2011; Schleppegrell & Go, 2007; Schulze and Ramirez, 2007; Schulze, 2009). While genre-based pedagogy has been at the forefront of research collaborations between K-12 teachers and functional linguists in Australia for the better part of two decades (Christie, 1991, 1999; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Feez, 1998; 2002; Macken-Horarick, 2002; Martin, 1993, 1998; 2001), it has only been more recently explored in North American educational contexts (Gebhard, Harman, & Seeger, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004; Schleppegrell & Go, 2007). Schleppegrell & Go (2007) employed SFL as a tool for facilitating the linguistic analysis of student texts as way of helping teachers in “starting where learners are grammatically” (p. 538). Gebhard, Harman & Seger (2007) further explore the intersection of genre, SFL, and critical pedagogy as they chronicle a teacher’s apprenticeship of her ELLs into the use of academic language within persuasive genres to challenge existing school policies. In spite of these context-rich descriptive studies of the teaching and learning of academic language more research is needed. Martin (2009) attests to this fact in his call for research when he notes that the “practical power of a model of this kind has been yet to be fully explored in L2 contexts” (p. 19). Therefore, with the attention of corroborating and expanding upon these recent studies exploring the role of SFL and genre in supporting the academic writing development of ELLs in K-12 US contexts, I designed a teacher action research

project exploring the teaching of persuasive genres through an SFL model of genre-based pedagogy. During the fall of 2008, as voters in the United States prepared to cast their ballots for president, I implemented a curricular unit designed to instruct my 5th grade ELLs in writing a persuasive essay to convince readers to vote for the candidate they were supporting. Ultimately, I found that after the implementation of genre-based pedagogy my students composed texts that more closely approximated the generic structure and academic register expected of arguments created in school contexts. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Questions:

1. How does genre-based pedagogy support ELLs in using academic language to write persuasive arguments?
2. What does Systemic Functional analysis of student writing reveal about their academic writing development during genre-based pedagogy?

Systemic Functional Approaches to Genre-Based Pedagogy

The concept of genre and its accompanying instructional branch of genre-based pedagogy is taken up in significantly different ways by researchers working in English for Specific Purposes (Bhatia, 1990; Swales, 1990), Rhetoric and Composition (Miller, 1984) and New Literacy Studies (New London Group, 1996)³. For those working from an SFL perspective, genre-based pedagogy draws on the theories of British linguist Michael Halliday. Informed by the studies of cultural anthropologists Malinowski (1935) and Firth (1957), Halliday (1978) theorizes that the context of language use serves as the essential influence on the construction of meaning. Language users comprehend linguistic interactions in relation to both the context of culture with regards to the history, ideology and value systems of a culture and the more immediate context of situation or “environment of the text” (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p.6). Guided by these contextual factors, language users draw on a range of possible choices to make meaning, rather than simply adhere to grammatical rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Eggins, 1994; Gebhard & Martin, 2011). Halliday further contends that language has three essential metafunctions that work together to bring meaning to text: the ideational, interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational metafunction concerns itself with textual content, namely the linguistic representation of the world and construal of the “theory

³ Several comprehensive reviews have detailed the ways genre and genre-based pedagogy have been taken up by language researchers. See Hyland, 2004; Hyon, 1996; Gebhard & Harman, 2011; and Martin, 2009 for reviews.

of human experience” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 29). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) distinguished the ideational metafunction as “what is going on in the world” and “who does what, with or to whom, and where” (pg.13). The interpersonal meta-function refers to the interactive nature of language and the conveyance of judgment and attitudes within utterances. The textual meta-function facilitates the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions by organizing messages in unified and coherent ways. Working together, these three metafunctions bring meaning to texts.

Register.

Within specific social situations and contexts, language’s three metafunctions are realized as register. Composed of field, tenor, and mode, register corresponds broadly to what is being presented, who is involved, and how it is being presented (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1989; Martin, 1992; Ghadessy, 1993). Specifically, the field of situation has to do with what happens in a text (the processes), who or what is involved in these happenings (the participants) and the linguistic markers that indicate where, how or when events take place (the circumstances)⁴. Processes form the principle foundation of a clause since the clause is primarily concerned with the action or the state in which the participants are involved. In SFL, various categories of processes represent aspects of experience. For instance, relational processes represent ways of being and having and use the verbal group “to be” and “to have” to connect the participant and the experience. Examples include, “I was really happy” or “John has a good heart” (Christie and Derewianka, 2008). Tenor is defined as the way language reflects the roles of text participants with consideration of peer dynamics and social distance. Such issues as the level of familiarity or formality among participants and their relative status and attitudes towards each other and/or the topic determine this aspect. Analysis of the tenor of a written text includes examining aspects of Mood, modality, and appraisal. In SFL terms, Mood is concerned with the symbolic exchange occurring between writer and potential reader. Examination of the Mood of a clause in written text focuses on the Mood block composed of subject and finite. Analysis includes determining whether clauses are rendered in the indicative (declarative or interrogative) or imperative form. Closely related to Mood is modality. Modality signals the degree of probability or obligation put forth in a clause. It is comprised of subcategories: modalization and modulation (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004; Martin

¹ These terms from SFL correspond broadly to the terms verb, noun and adverb found in traditional grammar.

and Rose, 2003, 2008; Thompson, 2004). Modalization refers to the scale of probability set forth in the clause as is indicated by the use of modals ranked on a degree scale from most likely to least likely as: will, shall, may, might and won't. Modulation is defined as "the scales of obligation and inclination" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, pg. 147) and is indicated by the modals ranked on a degree scale as: could, should, may, or must. Appraisal is defined as "the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways values are sourced and reader's aligned" (Martin & Rose, 2008, p.25). Three main components comprise the framework of appraisal: affect, judgment, and appreciation (Martin, 2000). Effective persuasive writers call on these resources to make their opinions known using authoritative style and an expert voice.

Mode concerns the textual conveyance of a logical, coherent and cohesive message. When analyzing the mode of written text, linguists consider such elements as Theme and Rheme, repetition and conjunction. In SFL terms, Theme refers to the "first constituent of the clause" (Thompson, 2004, p. 143) or "the point of departure of the message" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p.64). Rheme is what remains and typically presents the new information in the clause. Though frequently found in the subject position, Theme does not necessarily perform the subject function as it is not always the intended emphasis of the clause. Repetition and conjunction, another important element used to create cohesion and cohesiveness in a text maintain their traditional grammatical definitions.

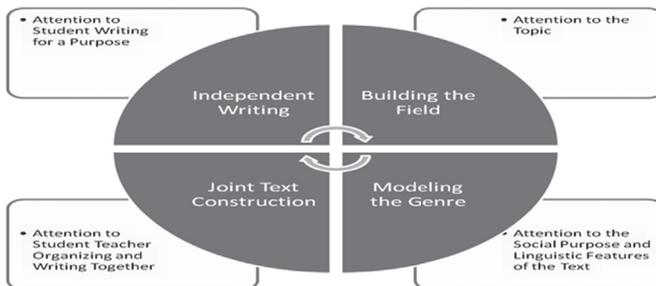
Genre.

Within cultures, varying but limited combinations of registers combine to enact socially recognizable meanings and to accomplish tasks. Such "global patterns" (Martin and Rose, 2008) of register configurations are referred to in SFL as genres⁵. Martin, Christie and Rothery (1987) describe genre as a "staged, goal-oriented social process" with "structural forms that cultures use in certain contexts to achieve various purposes" (pg. 59). Genres are considered to have stages because they typically take a number of steps to achieve their goal. Stages are signaled by the inclusion of distinct clause level elements such as processes, participants, and circumstances (Derewianka, 1990; Eggins, 2004). As a text moves through its stages or "schematic structures" (Martin and Rose, 2008), the linguistic, syntactical and textual features typical of the genre work together to realize a text's intended purpose;

⁵ See Hyon (1996) for a comprehensive review and analysis of the term's use in three different paradigms of language and literacy research.

thus, making genres “goal oriented.” Genres are considered to be a social process because participants generally interact in accomplishing the goals. This study examines the social process of persuasion which in the context of the school setting is accomplished by the genre of argument. In this case the argument is a political one in which the writer is attempting to persuade the reader to vote for a particular candidate. To accomplish this purpose, the writer takes a position and justifies it by following an organized textual structure composed of a series of stages or steps each of which are typically signaled by the inclusion of particular language features. Language researchers have described the stages and accompanying linguistic features typically encountered in academic arguments (Derewianka, 1990; Schelpeggrell, 2003; Christie and Derewianka, 2008). The first stage generally consists of the presentation of the issue in which the author orients the reader to the context of the argument and provides relevant background information. Second, the author takes a position and justifies it using detailed evidence such as quotes and statistics to support claims. The quotes and statistics are explicated using the timeless present tense. This stage is also typically distinguished by the author’s inclusion of logical connectives such as transitions and conjunctions that bring structure and cohesiveness to the author’s presentation of his position (Derewianka, 1990). Third, the author may include some form of resolution. Last, the author sums up the position and recommends action. Throughout the genre, the following language features help writers accomplish the genre’s purpose: generalized participants, timeless present tense of processes, variety of processes, connectives structuring the argument, high use of emotive words, nominalizations, and connectives associated with reasoning (Derewianka, 1990).

Overview of the Genre Based Teaching and Learning Cycle: Study Design and Procedures



Adapted from Feez (1998) and Gibbons (2009)

To support my students in learning to write effective persuasive texts, I implemented a genre teaching and learning cycle created by Feez (1998) and outlined in the work of English language educator Pauline Gibbons (2009). Gibbons' work expands the earlier designs of J.R. Martin and his colleagues who created a three-level model of genre pedagogy that followed a sequence of deconstruction, joint construction and independent construction (See Macken, et al. 1989). While sharing many similarities with Martin's three level cycle, Gibbons's version emphasizes the integration of content and language by providing a focus on building a shared understanding of the topic through discussion prior to, rather than during, reading and writing. Throughout the cycle, the teacher provides instructional *scaffolding* designed to bring emphasis to the structure and use of language within academic texts. First, the teacher designs activities to build up students' knowledge of the field or topic of discussion. The inclusion of this component of the cycle is essential for ELLs who may possess limited background knowledge of the subject about which they will be writing. Since my students were not born in the United States and had limited knowledge of the US electoral process, building this background knowledge was essential. To build their knowledge of the political and historical issues they would encounter in reading and writing activities, we read a series of articles from *Time Magazine*, *Time Magazine for Kids*, the internet site www.timeforkids.com and other supporting texts about government and citizenship. To further put the election in historical context for my students, I conducted a read-aloud of two texts about the legislative branch of US government. We followed the reading with a whole-group discussion about the electoral process. I then designed an activity in which students worked in pairs to choose an issue and research their chosen candidates' opinions on the issue as presented on the website timeforkids.com, a website designed to make complex topical issues accessible to children. Issues chosen by students included US involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and current US economic policy. After their research, we gathered as a group to discuss their findings. We also created a reference chart with lists of participants and processes that students encountered in their reading to draw on during their composition process. The cycle continued with the reading and analysis of exemplar texts that fulfill the social purpose and function of the genre. To facilitate this part of the cycle, I collected exemplar texts from various sources including letters to the editor from a variety of newspapers, persuasive essays written by students in a third-grade regular education class, and teacher-created model texts addressing the topic. My instruction at this stage included activities designed to make the linguistic features of the text

visible. For instance, as a group we read several letters to the editor. As we read, I instructed students to underline and highlight portions of the text. I then facilitated a discussion regarding what they thought the writer was trying to accomplish at that stage of the text and evaluate the extent to which they were being persuaded by the writer. Students also used highlighters to identify vocabulary, lexical terms, and persuasive phrases and recorded those terms in their notebooks. Next students were given a series of excerpts from the letters to the editor. Students were asked to determine the extent to which they fulfilled the purpose of an issue statement, argument statement and recommendation according to the guidelines and definitions of those stages we had discussed prior to this activity. Students maintained their materials and drafts in a resource folder for further reference. During the next stage of the cycle, texts are jointly constructed by the teacher and students. I did this on two occasions, employing strategies such as “think aloud” to make my thought process visible to students as I was writing. The cycle concludes, as it did with my students, with the independent creation of their own texts.

During the unit students composed three written drafts. Given that the cycle of genre-based pedagogy is by definition recursive, after composing each draft, we returned to our study of the generic structure, linguistic features and lexical items used within each stage. Students were asked to read and identify the purpose of each stage of a teacher-created exemplar text. We also focused on the language at the clause level as we reviewed ways to approximate a more academic register. For instance, we focused on the tenor by listing what we thought were “strong words” found in the letters to the editor and model texts and then discussing how these words helped connect authors with their readers and establish their authority. Next, we focused on the mode by creating a list of transitional words, defined their meaning and practiced their use by completing a cloze exercise in which they had to insert an appropriate transitional word or phrase. After this additional scaffolding, students completed a third and final draft independently.

Methodology: Setting, Participants, Study Design and Procedures, Data Collection

The setting for this study was a large urban K-8 school in the Northeastern United States. The school has a majority Latino population of which 40% are native Spanish speakers. Of these Spanish speakers, 80% were born outside of the United States in Spanish speaking countries in the Caribbean and Central America. The participants in the study were six early emergent bilingual students enrolled in the 5th grade. Based upon the results of evaluations of their oral and written

English, the English language level of the students was determined to be “early intermediate” which meant that they could hold routine social interactions in English, but needed additional support in the use of academic English. The course was designed as a “pull-out” class intended to support emergent bilingual students in learning to read, write, speak and listen to academic English so that they may fully participate in their sheltered English immersion class (SEI).

Data Collection

The following question guided my data collection: How does genre-based pedagogy support ELLs in writing persuasive arguments? To explore this question, I relied on three primary methods of data collection: participant observation, video/audio recording and semi-structured interviews. During the fall of 2008, my 5th grade ELL class met approximately three- times weekly for two hours each session. Immediately following each class, I collected all materials used in the class such as worksheets and sample persuasive texts as well as materials I had gathered for student reference such as letters to the editor or news articles. I collected graphic organizers, notebooks, and short responses. I also collected the chart paper on which I wrote the lesson’s agenda and language objectives. Frequently, I also photographed the white board to note what I had written. Unfortunately, since I was sharing the room with a colleague, I was often not fast enough in my photography to preserve the data from the board before it was erased.

Following each lesson, I took field notes of my observations. As part of my field notes, I recorded the materials used, students’ comments and questions. I evaluated what I thought was working and what I thought needed further clarification and instruction. In addition to my participant observation, I video and audio recorded each of our classes. I used a digital video camera to record whole group instruction, teacher and student interactions and student and student interaction. I also videotaped students as they worked alone revising or taking notes. Within two days of the lesson, I watched the videos to make additional notes regarding my instruction and record difficulties students were experiencing. I transcribed short portions of student and teacher interactions so that I could look closely at what I was saying and how students were responding.

I collected three instantiations of student texts during the course of the instructional unit. The three drafts served as essential informative components of my teaching. As I transcribed and divided the texts at the clause level, I closely focused on how my students were changing

the structure and register of their texts. After transcription and analysis, I designed language based lessons to scaffold students' language development. For example, after collecting students' second drafts, I noticed that students were not incorporating many transitions in their texts. To support their development of textual cohesion, I designed a lesson focusing on the use of transitions. I followed this cycle after each collection and transcription of student drafts. Data collection during the unit concluded with my videotaping students' "genre performances" as they read their persuasive texts to an audience of 4th grade ESL students conducting a mock presidential election. Upon completion of the unit, I interviewed four students to broaden my perspective on student learning. To present an in-depth analysis of how SFL analysis can demonstrate aspects of academic writing development, I present an analysis of the work of my focal student. Kira (a pseudonym) is representative of many of the students in my class as she has limited schooling in her country of birth, the Dominican Republic. She entered 4th grade unable to write academically in her L1, but demonstrated great progress during the course of the genre-based writing unit. Her three drafts are presented below.

Focal Student First Draft

Dear my family [redacted]

Family I want you all to vote for Obama because McCain is BeRepublican and he mite put every thing to expensive. a other reason is because there has not been a black guy as a president in the united state of American. the last reason is because I do not like the fite for the USA if baston's team loose everything get's so expensive and because the food is going to be expensive.

Focal Student Second Draft

I would like the second grader to vote for Barack Obama because Obama is going to put the price Down.

a reason why I want the second grader to vote for Obama because Barack Obama is going to put the house price down low.

a other reason why I want the second grader to vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama is going to help people to pay there house bills.

the last reason why I want the second grader to vote for Barack Obama is because

Focal Student Third Draft

On November 4 there is going to be a new president because it had past 4 years ago and every 4 years the US citizens choose a new president.

The first reason why I will like the us citizens to vote for Barack Obama is because Barack Obama is going to stop the war in 6 month because more than 5,000 soldiers have been died.

The next reason why I want the us citizens to vote for Obama is because hi is going to lower the prices of the food, close and every thing that has a price.

The last reason that I want the us citizens to vote Obama is because he is going to help people that don't have a lot of money pay there house bills.

These are the three reasons why I want the us citizens to vote for Barak Obama.

Data Analysis

Upon collecting three drafts of student writing, I conducted an SFL linguistic analysis of students' texts to evaluate my students' academic literacy development following genre-based pedagogy. The unit of analysis for my study was the register of student texts as represented by the register variables of field, tenor, and mode. Register analysis facilitated the evaluation of changes in student language use during the course of the unit. To facilitate the analysis of the register variables of field tenor and mode, I made a typed transcription of each student text and divided the texts into clauses (Ghadessy, 1993; Halliday and Matthiesen, 2004; Thompson, 2004). First, aspects of the field were analyzed. To analyze the field, processes, participants and circumstances were labeled as they occurred in each clause. The processes were then further divided into the subcategories of mental, material, and relational. Second, the tenor of the student texts were analyzed through the identification of the Mood and speech role of each clause. To do, clauses were labeled as indicative (declarative or interrogative) or imperative. Then, all occurring modal elements were labeled. Next, to develop a better understanding of the appraisal value of students' lexical choices, a chart was created that listed all words and phrases with the exclusion of articles and prepositions that occurred more than twice in student texts. The words and phrases were placed on a chart which intended to represent a continuum from least powerful or "strong" to most powerful or "strong." Last, the mode of student text was analyzed by indentifying and labeling cohesive elements such as repetition and conjunctions as well as identifying the Theme and Rheme of each clause.

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Changes in Register: Field

SFL analysis of the field of student texts helps to demonstrate what students can do enter the unit and their academic writing development during the course of the unit. SFL analysis of the field of Kira's first text shows multiple strengths. First, it is notable that Kira introduced campaign issues and described the opposing candidate to her readers using two particular forms of processes: relational and

material. At the beginning of her text, she uses the attributive relational process “is” in the clause “McCain is a Republican” to identify the opposing candidate. She then expands the clause by adding a material transformative process “might put everything expensive” to emphasize the effect of the opposing candidate’s election. Using the relational process to connect the participant and the phenomenon, Kira firmly associates the opposing candidate with the ruling political party which at a time of economic distress in the USA was suffering the reputation of being a poor steward of the economy. Her particular combination of these relational and transformative material processes functions to establish a link between the opposing candidate’s political affiliation and potential negative economic results of his election. As her first text continues, Kira expands the field of her argument to define the election as a breaking of racial barriers. This definition is established through her use of the identifying relational process “is” to connect the participant “another reason” with the assertion or value in SFL terms “there has never been a black guy as president.” In doing so, her use of the relational process facilitates her introduction of the topic of race and frames the electoral choice as an opportunity to break racial barriers, an argument that Kira perhaps believes will resonate with a racially diverse audience of classmates and community members. Defining candidates and establishing negative or positive associations as well as predicting the impact of their election remains an important technique of effective persuasive political writing. Potential voters want to know who the candidates are and what the impact of their election will be on their lives so they can make informed choices. Kira uses relational processes to accomplish both such functions within her first draft.

However, SFL analysis of Kira’s second text does not show significant broadening of the field of her argument. Rather, she narrows her argument to the field of economic policy. This more focused field was evident by her use of processes emphasizing the economy in the clauses “put the prices down low” and “help people pay their house bills.” Though more limited in the field, Kira’s second draft shows noticeable improvement at the clause level. Particularly, Kira’s incorporation of mental processes, such as “want”, help specify the actions she wishes her readers to perform. She attaches the mental process to the clause specifying her intentions, termed the phenomenon in SFL, “the second graders to vote for Obama.” In doing so, she creates a language pattern [participant + mental process of desideration + phenomenon specifying desideration]. The repetition of this clause constitutes a pattern as she uses the same syntactical structure in the initial clause of two more ensuing paragraphs in the same draft.

Table 1. Use of Mental Processes

A reason why/ I want/ the second graders to vote for Obama
A other reason why/ I want/ the second graders to vote for Barack Obama
The last reason/ I want/ the second graders to vote for Barack Obama
Participant+ Mental Process of Desideration+ Phenomenon

For a language learner, this linguistic pattern provides her with the scaffolding necessary to make her desires and intentions clear to readers. While overreliance on the pattern occurs, and instruction addressing sentence variety would be beneficial, it is important to note that her use of this chosen pattern helps Kira to accomplish a linguistic move she was not able to accomplish previously, that is, she presents a variety of reasons to support her candidate and clarifies the reasons her peers should do so as well.

Kira demonstrates additional academic writing development in the field of her text through her increased usage of circumstances of time. While Kira did not use any circumstances of time in her first two texts, Kira incorporates the circumstances “On November 4” and “it had past 4 years ago” and “every four years” in the first and second clauses (which make up the first sentence) of her third instantiation. The inclusion of these linguistic markers at this point in the issue stage, functions to help orient her readers to the timetable of the election cycle. Furthermore, providing these circumstances strengthens her issue statement by clarifying the timeliness and the relevancy of the topic for her readers. It also demonstrates her audience awareness given that she knows the majority of her audience will be other ELLs who may not be familiar with the US election cycle and would benefit from the additional background information being provided.

Changes in Register: Tenor (Mood, modality, appraisal)

SFL analysis of Kira’s writing reflects an increasing ability to negotiate aspects of tenor in her text, especially the elements of Mood, modality and appraisal. Analysis of the mood of a text is designed to make visible the exchanges that are taking place between text writer and text reader. To analyze the Mood, I looked at the number of declarative versus interrogative sentences to see what kind of exchanges were taking place. Throughout all three texts, the exchange between writer and reader involves Kira giving information about the candidate and providing reasons why readers should vote for him. To give information

exclusively employs declarative statements without hedges or any signs of wavering. Her exclusive use of declarative statements contributes to an authoritative tenor in her text. However, she could have more effectively made her point by including imperatives that commanded her audience to vote for her candidate followed by an explanatory clause supporting her reasoning. In further instruction, this would be an area target for further development.

Also contributing to the authoritative tenor is her use of modal elements. In SFL terms, modality signals the degree of probability or obligation put forth in a clause. It is comprised of subcategories: modalization and modulation (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2005; Martin and Rose, 2003, 2008; Thompson, 2004). Modalization refers to the scale of probability set forth in the clause as is indicated by the use of modals ranked on a degree scale from most likely to least likely as: will, shall, may, might and won't. Modulation is defined as "the scales of obligation and inclination" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, pg. 147) and is indicated by the modals ranked on a degree scale as: must, should, could. Kira's first text shows that as the unit began she was already able to negotiate some aspects of modalization. For instance, she employs a lower degree of modalization in the clause interpreting McCain's economic policy, "he might put everything expensive." This instance remains the exception. In the rest of her text she returns to presenting information using clauses with a high degree of probability resulting in a strong interpersonal tone to her argument. Kira's second text reflects a higher degree of modalization. For example, she couples the future tense marker "is going" with the infinitive form of the process "to help people" to construct a clause which predicts the effects of her candidate's election for her readers. The construction [{high modalization} + infinitive] is presented with a high level of certainty and without hedges. She offers predictions using firm statements of fact suggesting a sense of authority and certainty which are effective elements for persuasive writing. Kira's third text again exemplifies increased control and effective use of modalization. The following clause exemplifies modalization development: "The next reason why I want the US citizens to vote for Obama is because he is going to lower the prices of the food, clothes, and everything." Kira's argument is strengthened in notable ways. Through the use of a high degree of modal commitment in the above clause, Kira adds a great deal of validity to her statement. By stating her reasons positively without hesitation, Kira states the effect of her candidate's election in certain terms and adds what her candidate would do as fact, rather than speculation. In stating that "this is" what Obama will do rather than adding modals of speculation such as "might" or "may" to her

statements she makes a more convincing stance to her readers that leaves less room for disagreement.

In contrast to her use of modalization, Kira's use of modulation is much less intense in her first text. Within her recommendation statement, she employs a low obligation level, "I want you to vote for Obama because McCain is Republican." Increasing the level of modulation would clarify the intensity of her commitment to her candidate for her readers. For instance, had Kira written "Voters must vote for Obama, so America will be better!" her commitment and enthusiasm for her candidate would be more clearly conveyed. While I did not teach this aspect of modulation directly, after I modeled two texts Kira was able to incorporate additional aspects of modulation.

Kira's second text shows a marked increase in modulation. Despite the increase, the degree of obligation remains low. Nevertheless, through a combined use of modulation and modalization several of her clauses convey a strong message about the economic effects of her candidate's election. For example, in the clause "I want the second graders to vote for Obama because Barack Obama is going to put the house prices down low" she chooses to express her wishes through the use of the mildly modalized clause ["I want"] and couples it with a second modalized clause explaining why they should do so, "[Obama] is going to help people to pay their house bills." Had Kira chosen to employ modulation to a higher degree, using modals of a higher degree of intensity such as "must" or "should", the level of obligation would have increased and perhaps more effectively convinced readers to agree with her claims.

In contrast to her first two texts, Kira does not employ modulation in that she does not present any terms of obligation to the reader. In other words, she does not make a recommendation or use the modal "should" to emphasize her desire for students to support Obama. She states her reasoning and expands and clarifies the reasoning with a clause beginning with "because" that clearly states the way in which her candidate will accomplish plans for an economic recovery.

Kira's use of elements of modalization and modulation remained fairly consistent throughout her three instantiations of her texts. While she is able to express probability with high degrees of modalization, she does not effectively use modulation to convey a sense of obligation or urgency to her reader. Kira, like many other ELLs, struggled with incorporating such aspects of modality into their writing and will need continued support when persuasive writing instruction reoccurs (Holmes, 1982).

SFL analysis of Kira's texts reveals subtle but noteworthy development in her use of aspects of appraisal. Throughout her texts, Kira does not use language that directly evaluates the behavior or actions of the candidates. Rather, she uses language that expresses her values less directly. For instance, as previously noted, she defines the opposing candidate by his political affiliation using a relational process to connect the participant with an attribute in the clause, McCain is a Republican. Providing identification of a candidate's political affiliation is not unusual within the context of a political argument. However, in this case, Kira draws on the political context in which many voters were blaming the US's economic instability on the ruling Republican Party. Therefore, one could argue that she uses the opposing candidate's party affiliation as an attribute expressing affect rather than an identifier and connects the two through the relational processes "is." Such a linguistic construction allows Kira to equate membership in the Republican Party with continued economic hardship. To further express her disapproval of the opposing party's economic policies and her judgment of their ability to alter unstable economic conditions, Kira repeats the negatively connoted word "expensive" three times. Specifically, she expresses judgment by making declarative statements using processes that underscore the opposing candidates role in the economy, namely that McCain will "put everything expensive" and making the projection that if he were to be elected "food is going to be expensive." As her argument continues, Kira's "attitudinal position" (Martin & White, 2005) is further revealed. Notably, in the second paragraph of her first text, she injects an element of race into her argument. She contends that the election of a "black guy" to the presidency constitutes a reason to vote for Obama. Including this aspect in her supporting argument indicates the importance she places on the breaking of racial barriers represented by Obama's election. Her particular linguistic choices, however, highlight that she needs additional support in learning to convey appreciation using academic language when discussing issues such as race.

SFL analysis of Kira's second text reveals that she continues to use aspects of appraisal to evaluate her candidate positively. Namely she relies on language that expresses judgment of participant actions to focus her message on what she views as the positive effects of Obama's election on the economy. She conveys this message by including judgmental clauses in declarative form that specify that Obama will "put the house prices down" and "put the prices down" and "help people." Such lexical and grammatical choices, utilizing processes with positive appraisal values, convey her message regarding the positive effect of Obama's election. She contrasts this impact with the

election of McCain negating the process to express her judgment of the effects of the opposing candidate's election in the clause "John, will not help with their house bills."

Within her second text, Kira abandons all references to race found within her initial argument. Absent are the references to "the first black guy" being president, an effect she had previously evaluated positively. In place of an emphasis on the breaking of racial barriers comes a more focused economic argument concerned with "prices," "house bills" and "help." Such choices reflect Kira's academic writing development in that the informality and conversational tone more appropriate to the context of a classroom conversation has shown some development towards a more academic register. Furthermore, the shift reveals the extent to which she is attuned to the political arguments that are making up the context for her composition. As she was composing the second text and as the days of the election were drawing near, the emphasis of the political battle focused sharply on the faltering US economy. In an apparent response to the shift, Kira alters the focus of her argument. She casts her candidate's election as a call for economic stability and the election of the opposing candidate as clear continuation of the economic suffering experienced by the majority of her intended audience. Kira's use of aspects of appraisal, reflected in her lexical choices, demonstrate how in tune she is with the context of her composition and the extent to which she is able to draw on contextual resources surrounding her composition, specifically those referring to the negative economic climate to make her argument.

By her third text, Kira expands her argument beyond the economy and more effectively uses aspects of appraisal to convince her readers to vote for Obama. In this instantiation, she couples her economic argument with one addressing the war on terrorism. She assures her readers that Obama will "stop the war because 5,000 soldiers have been died (killed)." While including statistics reveals academic register development, the inclusion of this particular statistic reveals that she is aware of the human cost of war. Had she been arguing for a continuation of the war on terrorism, she may have chosen to emphasize a need for security or a proactive stance on matters of defeating terrorism. Her use of the process "stop" also makes clear that she believes her candidate will end, rather than diminish the scale of the conflict.

Kira does not abandon her economic argument entirely. She continues to use declaratively stated clauses containing processes that reflect her positive judgment of Obama's future actions regarding the economy such as "Barack Obama is going to help" and "Barack Obama is going to put the house prices down." Through her declarations,

she casts Obama as an economic hero who will “lower the price of food, clothes, and everything that has a price.” She is clear presenting his election as the key to an economic turnaround, an argument that demonstrates both her own immediate concern for the economic situation and her audience awareness of just how fundamentally important a change in the current economic climate would be for them.

Conclusion of Interpersonal Analysis

Although she indicates her belief that Obama’s election will end the war, Kira avoids appraising the moral character and/or the personalities of the candidates, a typical characteristic of appraisal (Martin & White, 2005). Kira’s argument remains issue-centered rather than personality-centered, resulting in a more authoritative tenor within her text. However, while certain aspects of perceived neutrality can lead readers to view the author as level-headed and rational, a persuasive text devoid of emotion may leave readers questioning a writer’s convictions. The model texts we deconstructed in class aimed to demonstrate a balance of enthusiasm for our candidate and factual reporting. However, the focus of further writing instruction could include analyzing more texts to demonstrate ways expert authors introduce vocabulary reflecting appraisal of topics to appeal to the emotions of readers.

Register Analysis: Changes in the Mode (Theme/Rheme, Conjunction and Repetition)

SFL analysis of changes in the mode of Kira’s text reflects academic writing development. Three aspects of mode were highlighted for analysis: Theme/Rheme, Repetition and Conjunction. Kira’s texts demonstrate development in her ability to convey a cohesive message through her choice of Theme, most notably in her third text. Within her third text she places clauses emphasizing time and sequence in the Theme position. For instance, her first clause contains the circumstance, “On November 4” in the Theme position. In contrast to her first two drafts, she does not initiate the argument immediately, but instead includes a circumstantial clause element in the Theme position to orient her readers to the time when voting will take place and emphasizes the relevancy and the timeliness of her topic. Kira follows this circumstantial clause with a series of tightly constructed clauses each of which formulates a pattern, as I noted earlier, and contains a sequence marker (first, next, last). These clauses move her argument forward sequentially, and organize her arguments by order of importance.

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Repetition

Sophisticated writers rely on repetition as a resource to hold their texts together, especially texts that deal with complex or technical

topics. Through clause repetition writers build an argument that keeps “lexical strings relatively simple, while complex lexical relations are constructed around them” (Martin and Rose, 2003, p. 81). In her second and third texts, Kira uses phrasal repetition as a linguistic marker indicating sequential and logical textual movement. Specifically, she uses the phrases: “a reason”, “another reason,” and “the last reason” to create a repetitive language pattern. Within her third text, she expands this language pattern to the following: “a reason why I would like the US citizens to vote for Obama is because.” These elements signal to readers that she is presenting her reasons and that she will follow her initial statement immediately by clarification of the exact reason she supports her candidate.

Repetition also allows Kira to build a cohesive argument. In fact, she holds all three instantiations of her text together using specific lexical repetitions, precisely, the words “reason” and “because.” The word “reason” appears a total of 8 times in the three versions of her text: twice in the first and three times in the second and third. The word “because” is used 10 times: four times in the first text, twice in the second, and four times in the last. In the final version of her text, she repeats the variations of the entire clause “The reason I want the US citizens to vote for Obama is” three separate times. While the repetitions are predictable and arguably uninteresting, they provide a valuable form of scaffolding for ELLs negotiating new linguistic terrain. As a new user of the language, she relies on the structure as a linguistic formula in which she can signal to her readers that she is both stating and explaining her reasoning. In other words, her repetitions serve as linguistic guideposts alerting readers to the location of the statement of her beliefs and the subsequent explanations of her beliefs. Clauses such as “I want you to vote for Obama because McCain is a Republican and he might put everything expensive” and “The last reason why I want the second graders to vote for Barack Obama is because if they vote for John, John will not help them with their house bills” exemplify this point. These specific examples demonstrate how she uses the repetitions as textual markers both at the clause and paragraph level to signal that she will immediately provide an explanation explaining her support. The conjunction, “because” signals the explanation and is followed by a clause that both clarifies her reasons for supporting Obama and predicts the outcome of his election or failure to be elected will be.

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Conjunction

Conjunctions establish logical connections between processes in a text (Martin and Rose, 2003). As I modeled the compositional arguments in class, I brought specific attention to the way I used

conjunctions to link my claims about my candidate with supporting details supporting the claims. Post- instructional analysis reveals that Kira increased her use of the conjunction “because” to link her ideas. While the conjunction word “because” appears only twice in both her first and second texts, it appears no fewer than eight times in her third text. Kira relies primarily on the conjunction “because” to connect the initial part of her phrase expressing her wish that readers support her candidate with explanations supporting her claim. She writes: “The last reason that I want the US citizens to vote Obama is because he is going to help people who don’t have a lot of money pay their house bills.” As in her use of specific repetitions, Kira uses conjunctions to move her argument forward, but in a way that risks boring or distracting the reader. As with her use of repetitions, activities designed to promote variety in language and sentence structure would prove potentially beneficial.

Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the body of knowledge being generated by SFL literacy researchers whose work has investigated the potential of genre-based pedagogy to facilitate the academic writing development of ELLs both in Australian (Christie, 1999; Christie and Derewianka, 2008; Gibbons, 2009) and North American K-12 contexts (Fang, 2005; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; 2010; Gebhard, Harman, and Seeger, 2007; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004; Schulze, 2009). As in most studies employing qualitative research methods, the study is hard to replicate on a larger scale, and may indeed be limited to the participants and context of this particular study. However, I believe that through the rich description of the teaching context and detailed SFL analysis of student work, much can be learned about the ways ELLs learn to write in academic ways during the course of genre-based pedagogy. SFL analysis of students texts revealed that students were better able to more closely approximate the register of academic texts following genre-based pedagogy. Close SFL analysis of the changes in the register variables of field, tenor, and mode reflect academic writing development. First, and perhaps most notably, SFL analysis of my focal student’s text demonstrates her expansion and development of the field of her text. She was able to expand her argument beyond issues such as race by including topics such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and US economic policy and its potential effects on US citizens. Genre based pedagogy and the dual focus on language and content helped build students understanding of the issues through discussion. While it may be argued that repeated writings occurring during the process approach may also have increased the

amount of text Kira would write, the space for discussion and research provided by genre-based pedagogy contributed to Kira's understanding of the political issues important to her readers. Student-led research and subsequent group discussion of issues, scaffolded her development of a deeper understanding of issues evident in presentation of the field of her argument. Her in-class research and investigations as well as our class discussions about the election supported Kira's ability to incorporate the topics of these discussions into her argument as demonstrated by the inclusion of statistics (5,000 soldiers have been killed) and additional issues in the field of her third text. Second, genre-based pedagogy strengthened the tenor of her text by focusing on how effective writers of argument create a social distance and authority when presenting arguments. By focusing on developing an academic tenor in persuasive writing through discussion of the way authors of exemplar texts such as letters to the editor present arguments, she was able to recast her social or informal language choices to reflect a more distant and authoritative tenor expected of an academic persuasive text. The final drafts of her text omitted informal references such as "black guy" and the overly friendly letter-like introduction "Dear My Family." The process approach would have conceivably supported her in creating longer and perhaps equally well-structured texts, but would not have opened up pedagogical space to discuss how and why authors of persuasive texts make certain linguistic choices to create a sense of authority. Through genre-based pedagogy we were able to explore and evaluate the choices made by "expert" writers in real texts, thereby not only providing my students exemplar models but also a meta-language to talk about why the authors of these models were making the choices they made. Finally, as we focused on developing the mode of her text, she transformed a seemingly jumbled and directionless argument, developing modal elements such as Theme and Rheme, conjunction and repetition in sophisticated ways to construct a more cohesive and coherent argument.

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Recognizably, Kira, like many ELLs at this stage of language learning needs continued support to develop her academic writing abilities. However, genre-based pedagogy brought her closer to the intended goal by providing scaffolding not only in how to structure an argument by emphasizing its form and purpose, but also by supporting her ability to use academic language at the clause level. With the support of educators knowledgeable about academic language development, Kira's development will continue as she receives support in learning how to connect her ideas textually by building on the ideas that she presents at the sentence level and developing those ideas in a cohesive and coherent manner throughout her entire text. At the clause level,

she will also build her vocabulary and develop more grammatically sound structures, such as her use of the past participle, so that her ideas can be conveyed with fewer distractions or markers of non-native English language writing. Continued mini-lessons focusing on how to incorporate grammatical metaphor in the form of nominalizations would be beneficial. However, as good writers know, there always is room for revising, developing, and improving one's argument and this study shows just a small sample of how ELLs like Kira can use language based pedagogy to move towards a mastery of an academic register.

Implications for Language Education

In US educational contexts, a growing number of ELLs have less access to bilingual education and less time before they are required to read and write in academic ways (August & Shanahan, 2006; Willet, et. al, 2008). Without access to pedagogical practices that focus on academic language, there is a danger that the achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers will grow (Gaston Report, 2009). Genre-based pedagogy, as implemented and examined in this study, showed how that danger could be potentially avoided through an approach that supports students as they simultaneously learn through and about their new language. Specifically, the study demonstrated an approach to writing instruction that emphasized both genre structure and clause level language use that ultimately supported ELLs in learning to negotiate academic language, particularly the academic language necessary for effective persuasive writing in classes such as Civics, Humanities and Social Studies. One of the advantages of genre-based pedagogy was that it provided ELLs with a tool kit they could use to analyze how language works to get things done at certain times, in certain places, with certain people. Not only was such a tool kit valuable for ELLs trying to make sense of the specialized language used in the persuasive academic writing, but it was also a highly effective way of helping students “see how content experts use language in discipline specific ways” (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 596). The linguistic tool kit demystified academic language in ways that process approaches typically fail to do and helped my ELLs make language work for them rather than making them feel they were conforming to arbitrarily set standards. Our discussions about language use centered not on what the rules were but rather what the rules of the game were, in other words, how writers effectively used language to persuade their readers to act. With knowledge of language use according to context, they recognized that register of their political texts had to be appropriate for the audience of native English speaking peers in the context of school. The idea of varying language according to context is not new to most students.

Most students have an awareness of the different registers they employ when writing to their friends and peers versus when writing to their teachers or a family doctor. However, the traditional grammar they encounter during the revision and editing stages of process approaches does not adequately name these linguistic differences so they can talk and learn more about them. Nor do process approaches provide ways to negotiate relatively new linguistic terrain as ELLs begin to formulate ideas in an academic register while performing school genres. Genre-based pedagogy, in contrast, supports ELLs in developing an awareness of the contextual and situational differences that affect their linguistic choices, so when they write they can draw on the resources the teacher has provided in model texts in class as well as their own existing understandings of how language is used in certain contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, the genre-based approach and the SFL analysis of student texts I demonstrated in this study prove potentially valuable for ELL teachers. Within process writing instructional contexts, well intentioned writing teachers provide students templates such as the ubiquitous “hamburger” or rubrics to serve as templates or check-off lists to ascertain that students are conforming to set standards of achievement. While such templates may serve as a starting point and an informative “self check” for ELLs faced with the challenge of structuring culturally unfamiliar texts, they remain insufficient for helping ELLs understand how language works at the clause level to accomplish tasks in certain contexts. Language educators can implement genre-based pedagogy that facilitates ELL’s viewing academic register as the culmination of a series of linguistic choices gathered from a reservoir of linguistic resources determined by the purpose and function of texts, rather than by arbitrary rules to be memorized.

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From the perspective of a teacher researcher, genre-based pedagogy and the subsequent SFL linguistic analysis of student texts presented in this study proves beneficial for several reasons. As Unsworth (1999) notes, “Functional descriptions of language provide a meta-language capable of describing the characteristic features of the language common to all content areas, but different areas deploy the linguistic resources of English in distinctive ways” (514). Given that even expert users of a genre may not be able to pinpoint the exact linguistic features that contribute to the appropriateness of the genres used in their field, functional analysis gives teacher researchers a tool to analyze how language is used in the content specific genres they are teaching. In other words, SFL analysis gave me insight into how academic language works to accomplish tasks in persuasive genres and also left me better able to meet my students where they were

coming from grammatically so I would have additional insight into what pedagogical support I could provide to advance their academic writing development. As a teacher supporting students in the content areas and teaching students to write academically in a variety of genres to prepare them for entrance into mainstream academic classrooms, having SFL as a tool for linguistic analysis proved particularly helpful. As Fang and Schleppegrell (2008) note, “While every teacher can use functional analysis to explore a text, it is the content area teacher who is uniquely positioned to help students interpret the meanings that are revealed through the analysis and relate them to the larger goals and the conceptual frameworks of the discipline” (110). I benefited greatly from the linguistic analysis and gained a deeper understanding of the how language works within the genres my students will have to use in content classes. Such linguistic knowledge influenced my instruction so that I could incorporate lessons designed to make language use less abstract and more accessible to my students. From this study I also see that there is much room to continue and add to the recent research regarding the use of SFL and genre-based pedagogies that was informing my teaching (Aguirre-Munoz, Park, Amabisca & Boscardin, 2008; Brisk & Zisselberger, 2011; Gebhard, et. al. 2011; Gebhard, Harman, & Seeger, 2007, Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004; Schleppegrell & Go, 2007; Schleppegrell & Oliveira, 2006). SFL analysis provided me ways of supporting my ELLs in learning to use language in academic ways within the genre structures I was teaching them. Knowing how language worked and what language choices approximated that of the expert users in the field helped me as an educator to articulate this genre specific language use in the context of genre-based pedagogy to support students in using language within those structures to accomplish their purpose of persuading readers to espouse certain viewpoints. A deeper understanding of linguistic elements gives teachers, and in turn their students, the key to unlocking and making visible the ways language is used in a variety of powerful academic genres.

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The Author

* **Joshua Schulze**, Doctoral student in Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, Language, Literacy and Culture concentration at University of Massachusetts, M.A in Teaching Languages – ESL concentration from University of Southern Mississippi. His research interests include applied linguistics, systemic functional linguistics and genre theory E-mail: Joshua.Schulze@umb.edu