Book Review

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Language in action: SFL theory across contexts takes very seriously the role of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in describing how language shapes and is shaped by its social contexts and the consequent use of SFL in informing sociocultural research and practice. The volume is a collection of research first presented at the 45th International Systemic Functional Congress, and thus showcases a range of developments and applications of SFL by communities of scholars working across global and multilingual contexts. The insights in the first two sections of the book are particularly relevant to teachers and teacher educators at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, with applied linguists working in translation studies targeted in the final section. Many of the 180+ scholars who gathered to present their research at the congress work collaboratively with researchers from disciplines including sociology, science, history, physical education, and mathematics to build integrated models that reach out to solve real world problems. Such transdisciplinary approaches are well represented in the selected papers in the *Language in action: SFL theory across contexts* volume. However, contributing authors have carefully delineated the aspects of SFL's rich and growing framework that are being put to work. Visible links to the theory and, in some cases, links to foundational practices within the SFL community highlight the deep understanding of contributors and ensure that methodological choices are well motivated.

The division of chapters into three parts provides an immediate navigational pathway in terms of research contexts, with the introduction by editors giving a complementary overview of linguistic and pedagogic themes with cross referencing to relevant chapters. The overview, which is presented in a table (Table 0.1), includes linguistic concepts of register, the grammatical system of transitivity, resources of Appraisal, texturing resources, and resources for pedagogy (p. 7). Pedagogic resources include Genre Pedagogy and the Teaching and Learning Cycle, which are informed directly by social semiotic and sociocultural research in language learning. Another pedagogic resource represented is Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (e.g. Maton 2014) – a sociological theory that builds on Basil Bernstein's work

in Educational Sociology and extensive dialogue with SFL 'Sydney School' perspectives. The breadth of these concepts reflects the dynamic nature of SFL research and the emergence of models developed in response to new research issues. While the table identifies a range of relevant language systems and contextual variables, international SFL users may benefit from a figure and a gloss to map the relationships amongst these. For example, positioning discourse systems of Appraisal and cohesion – glossed in the table as 'texturing' – at a 'higher' or more abstract stratum than the grammatical system of transitivity in a figure may better reveal the work of these systems in making meaning across discourse. Mapping such relations cannot, of course, be definitive for an international audience, given the variation in modelling of context-text relations within different SFL 'schools'. However, it would be useful to alert readers to the various ways that SFL models situate cohesive resources and Appraisal, for example, within metafunctions at the more abstract stratum of discourse semantics, glossed as 'beyond the clause' (Martin and Rose 2007). Such stratification has allowed researchers to make more direct relationships to both grammatical realisations and also to contextual variables of field, tenor and mode. Further positioning of genre in the introductory mapping reflects understandings of the concept as a resource for pedagogy; however, acknowledgement of genre in terms of the writing practices in a culture that influence and are influenced by language within SFL's linguistic models would also reflect understandings of the research of several contributors to the volume.

The first four chapters (Chapters 1–4) that constitute "Part I: Studies in Elementary and Secondary Education" of *Language in action: SFL theory across contexts* report on studies in elementary and secondary education, including studies with multilingual learners and those focusing on curriculum learning through language. In Chapter 1, María Estela Brisk reports on a collaborative study with elementary teachers in one multilingual school conducted over ten years. In terms of practice, Brisk makes explicit links with genre-based pedagogies that were initially developed through work in socio-economically disadvantaged communities and shown to be highly effective with a range of diverse learner groups. Brisk's study addresses a key limitation of SFL applications – scalability and sustainable impact. Findings from the research indicate measurable and sustainable impact across the diverse groups represented in the school and 'consistent improvement in English proficiency' for bilingual students. These findings are attributed to four factors leading to change: the leadership of the principal; long term, collaborative and responsive professional development; school initiation of the focus and "collaborative and responsive classroom instruction that embraced the background of multicultural students" (p. 17). The methodologies employed in this study highlight the flexibility of researchers in response to teaching and learning contexts and provide excellent modelling for to guide whole school and/or faculty based collaboration.

In Chapter 2, Mary J. Schleppegrell and Carrie Symons focus on learning English and learning about English as an additional language in the context of reading challenging texts in the grade four classroom. A major contribution of this chapter is the demonstration of SFL metalanguage as a resource explaining how a particular language feature is used in a context. Drawing on metalanguage of transitivity systems and complementary qualitative methods of think-alouds, teachers in the project identified challenges in the English language. The authors demonstrate the use of functional metalanguage to address such challenges, explaining how, for example, nouns and verbs with the same spellings may be differentiated to mediate reading comprehension.

Chapter 3 by Ruth Mulvad reports on a transdisciplinary research collaboration focusing on learning through language in the intermediate years. This study draws timely attention to what are recognized in the study's Danish context as 'practical' subjects of schooling, particularly physical education (PE) and to the interplay between language and the subject content. The sensitivity of SFL research to its context is demonstrated by the work of researchers working outwards from investigating the role of language in PE, rather than imposing a generic metalanguage that may not be relevant to the core business of learning in that subject area. The author draws particular attention to challenges in mismatches between the language used in the classroom and the expected output of written texts in mandated PE assessment situations. Mulvad walks us through a 'snail' model of the sequence of activities, showing how language is not an add-on but a tool for building knowledge of the subject. The author's focus on mode as an explanatory tool is particularly pertinent, given that most disciplinary literacy programs foreground field – and in particular 'technical language'. It can be argued that field is the area where disciplinary teachers feel most 'at home' and are often unaware that students may need explicit support in developing and demonstrating knowledge in the valued written mode of high stakes assessment.

A further illustration of disciplinary literacy application of SFL is provided in Chapter 4, by a mathematics expert, Gloriana González, who shows how literacy can serve and be integrated with mathematical and visual arts curriculum content. Addressing the multisemiotic challenges of doing mathematics, the author draws on SFL to explore the practices of an experienced mathematics teacher in geometry problem solving. One of the several innovative aspects of the study is the attention to developing disciplinary knowledge that is core to learning in both visual arts and geometry, i.e. perspective drawing. In secondary learning contexts, responsibility for supporting students to read and create perspective diagrams has typically fallen to visual art teachers, despite the value of such skills across the curriculum. A further innovation is the use of SFL resources at the discourse semantic level to 'translate' research questions to linguistic patterns, thus making visible the work of the teacher.

While further elaboration of these resources, and in particular Martin's (1992) concept of 'expectancy relations', may be required to fully understand the selection of these resources, the ensuing analysis clearly demonstrates the complexity of launching a disciplinary problem from the starting point of students' everyday knowledge and in supporting students to create reasoned conjectures from the strategies they use in reading diagrams.

The following four chapters (Chapters 5–8) that comprise "Part II: Studies in Student and Faculty Development with Respect to Academic Writing at the University Level" turn attention to post-secondary studies and respond to calls for more SFL work in languages other than English. Additionally, two of these respond to calls for cross-pollinations of SFL with other theories that might help us understand new levels of delicacy.

In Chapter 5, Julio César Valerdi Zárate analyzes 20 Mexican Spanish thesis introductions using Appraisal from SFL and Toulmin's rhetorical model of argument structure to explore how Spanish Engagement resources are used in making academic arguments. Whereas Valerdi sees previous studies as addressing "global" argument structure (p. 120), this study explores the ways graduate-level writers present their claims and the degree to which they engage other perspectives in crafting arguments around these claims. Through a three-part analysis (Engagement analysis, use of Toulmin components, and cross-analysis), Valerdi reveals that obligatory rhetorical functions in the theses (i.e. claims and data) are constructed as monoglossic propositions. When writers engage in dialogic negotiation, it is mainly in optional argument components (i.e. backings, rebuttals, modal qualifiers), and this negotiation is largely contractive. These findings confirm and extend previous Appraisal analyses of academic Spanish and may form a basis for future corpus analysis as well as contrastive studies of heteroglossic expectations in argument writing across cultures.

Chapter 6 also adds to understandings of tertiary Mexican Spanish texts while demonstrating how SFL's Transitivity and Appraisal frameworks are not language-specific, but can be applied to analyses across languages. Natalia Ignatieva, Daniel Rodríguez-Vergara, and Victoria Zamudio Jasso draw on both frameworks to trace connections between ideational and interpersonal meanings in different disciplines. Based on an analysis of 15 academic essays (five each from literature, history, and geography), they demonstrate that material and relational processes are predominant across disciplines, but that authors of literature essays used the fewest evaluative clauses. Geography essays were most explicitly evaluative and used negative polarity while history essays most often used appreciation resources. Further, they trace important connections between relational clauses and Attitude (mainly Appreciation) in history and geography essays, and between mental clauses and Attitude (mainly Affect) in history essays, pointing toward different kinds of values

held by students in different disciplines. Instructors can, in turn, make these kinds of disciplinary values more explicit in their teaching and support students in developing linguistic resources for aligning with or intentionally challenging such values.

Chapter 7 by Anna-Vera Meidell Sigsgaard and Susanne Karen Jacobsen attends to a different understudied area: the language needed to connect theory and practice in Danish teacher preparation. Most university-level SFL text analyses have focused on the language of disciplines such as history, literature, sociology, engineering, and other sciences, etc. This kind of disciplinary focus means that SFL scholarship has had relatively little to say about the kinds of analytical writing required in a professional program for pre-service teachers and how teacher educators might scaffold pre-service teachers' writing. To address this need, Meidell Sigsgaard and Jacobsen analyzed high- and low-achieving written exams using LCT semantic gravity analysis and SFL discourse analysis focused on lexicogrammar and Appraisal. Their findings indicate that a top scaffolding priority is teaching pre-service teachers to construct a range of semantic waves using 'dialogically expansive' linguistic resources. Specific resources include the use of theoretical terminology and theorists for analyses of empirical observations; long nominal groups that use nominalization to summarize empirical observations in Theme position; instances of mental processes with modal meanings; and the use of technical, formal Appreciation resources.

Chapter 8 shifts attention from students to instructors. Silvia Pessoa, Thomas D. Mitchell, and Aaron Jacobson describe a three-year collaboration between two applied linguists and one history professor at an English-medium university in the Middle East. Like the book editors' own work in K-12 schooling contexts, this chapter tackles the important question of what it looks like to make SFL useful and usable to content-area educators who are not linguists but have been charged with designing and delivering language-supportive versions of their curriculum. In doing so, this chapter highlights that disciplinary experts often experience anxiety and lack of confidence to teach the language of their discipline, but with time and sustained collaboration, can develop increased understanding of the linguistic features of common text-types and adopt more active roles in language-focused teaching and collaboration. In addition, the chapter provides clear and relevant examples of high-leverage language resources for teaching L2 historical argument writing.

The third part of the book, "Part III: Studies in Translation" (Chapters 9–10), though containing fewer chapters, reflects the growing number of research contexts to which SFL has been applied. Brought together through a shared concern with translation, the two papers also showcase diverse linguistic, geographical, and institutional factors that have a great bearing on language in action.

In Chapter 9, Hailing Yu and Canzhong Wu build on a strong lineage of Chinese scholars' work on projection. Projection studies in SFL tend to be descriptive, yet these authors expand such methods by introducing an element of comparative

description: across languages in translated texts (literary Chinese and English) and across instances of translation (four different English translations of one literary Chinese text). As well, they undertake a contextual analysis to identify which factors related to situation and culture impacted projection choices in each translation (i.e. re-instantiation) besides the meaning potentials that were available in the languages that translators were working between. The chapter reminds us that even when there are a wide range of systemic choices available in a language and in a translator's individual repertoire, the reasons for choosing among them is layered depending on situation (in this case, cross-cultural religious teaching) and culture (West vs. East). Yu and Wu's findings support the compelling argument that translation is a meaning-making act done according to purpose and audience, not some one-to-one correspondence of word and meaning. For us, reviewers who admittedly do not work in translation studies, this chapter provides valuable evidence that translation is a form of text/context analysis and, as such, is a very interpretive act. However, the authors' findings and interpretation lead us to wonder if the three-dimensional model of interlingual re-instantiation presented in Figure 9.1 would be an even more useful heuristic for analysis if it more clearly included sociocultural context of (re)instantiation, or at the very least more clearly represented culture and situation on the individuation arm.

In Chapter 10, Marina Manfredi draws on both SFL scholarship and translation studies to fill an important gap in translation studies, as well, and more general studies of intercultural communication in museums. The study is motivated by the critical need to provide "accessible and inclusive spaces to all members of global society" (p. 258). The contribution of the metafunctional perspective of SFL ensures that messages go beyond 'content' to consider how texts may be best structured for audiences. Both the interlingual focus and attention to the context of European museums are timely, given the major role played by translation in communicating cultural history of Europe to international visitors and the increasingly diverse populations within Europe. Such concerns motivate what could be seen as a limitation of the study, i.e. its focus on verbal text and texts in museums rather than museum as text (Ravelli 2006). Drawing on interviews with museum staff and observation of the texts and textual practices in a museum, the author brings to light core values and issues related to translation for museum professionals. Manfredi then applies SFL's metafunctional tools to propose how key concerns of translation studies with both accessibility and inclusion may be addressed through awareness of how three simultaneous meanings are created. Examples are carefully selected to illustrate the potential of knowledge of such features as transitivity structures (the clause as representation). While further application of the tools in relevant museum contexts will no doubt lead to further refinements for specific professional toolkits,

the theoretical perspective offers a crucial depth and breadth of resources from which to select.

Overall, the volume *Language in action: SFL theory across contexts* not only shows off the wide use and usefulness of SFL theory and practices in addressing problems relevant to contemporary communication and learning but illustrates the extent to which a functional linguistic lens can elaborate other theoretical and methodological lenses to enhance the visibility of experience in relation to different audiences and different modes.

References

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