Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspectives in TESOL: Curriculum Design and Text-based instruction

Peter Mickan

*Discipline of Linguistics,
University of Adelaide*

Abstract: *This paper outlines the general influence of Halliday's (1994, 2014) systemic functional linguistics on TESOL curriculum. Halliday's explanation of language as a social semiotic and language learning as learning to mean has been applied internationally in genre and text-based teaching. The concept of register in systemic functional linguistics describes linguistic variation of texts for the expression of different meanings. SFL studies document teachers' explicit instruction in the lexicogrammatical construction of text types linked to function and social context. The explicitness informs students' decision-making for formulation of meanings in different text types. Reference is made to SFL applied in teacher education. There is mention of the relevance of SFL to Australia's concern with literacy standards in education.*

Systemic functional linguistics and TESOL

This paper outlines the general influence of Halliday's (2014) systemic functional linguistics (SFL) on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) curriculum.[1] Systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 2014) is a theory of language and a theory of language learning which applies language theory to education in practice. The theory has influenced TESOL for at least fifty years (Christie, 2012; Oliver et al., 2017). Central to SFL are the understandings of language as a social semiotic, as a human resource for the expression of meanings, and learning language as learning to mean (Halliday, 1978, 2014; Hasan, 2012;

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[1] Due to the particular focus of SFG and the impact of Halliday, this paper does not cover other understandings of genre in any detail.

Halliday & Hasan, 1985). In the words of Halliday (1993), "language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge" (p. 94). The concept of learning a language as learning to mean has established a transparent focus for the documentation of teaching and learning practices and for the study of discourse development. This focus has informed teachers' and researchers' studies and documentation of children and adults' speech and writing in life and lessons, which has been a foundation for TESOL policy, curriculum and teaching practices. SFL has impacted on educators across the curriculum but has been particularly influential for teachers of language and literacy (Butt et al., 2000; Christie, 2012; Unsworth, 2000). Significant influences of SFL on education include the study of child language development, the analysis of language as a system, explanations of language as a social semiotic and learning language as a process of semiotic mediation (Mickan, 2019). These studies place language at the centre of human activity generally and in education specifically.

Sociocultural views of language
The interest of teachers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in language learning since the middle of the nineteenth century coincided with educators' explorations into child language development and learning (Donaldson, 1985; Halliday, 1978) and the role of language in education (Barnes, 1971; Barnes, Britton & Jones, 1969). While some studies recorded classroom language interaction to understand students' acquisition of language (Allwright, 1984, 1988), others focused on children's social contexts to reveal differences in children's languaging experiences and in the discourse resources needed to take part in formal education (Bernstein, 1975; Heath, 1983). Sociolinguistic studies of language use in society (e.g., Hymes, 1974; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Kramsch, 1998) extended attention from the formal features of morphology, syntax and lexis to discourse embedded in sociocultural contexts.

   In language education, particularly in teaching additional languages, a traditional focus has been on form and on linguistic features – morphology, lexis, phonology and syntax – which are distinguished from function. From this perspective, linguistic teaching continues to model a pedagogy of decontextualized extracts, artificial exercises and meaningless tasks (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Kuci, 2020). Such traditional approaches separate items of

language from context and teach the items unrelated to speech acts in meaningless exercises and nonsense texts.

For TESOL teachers, the traditional methods are not appropriate to meet the needs of migrant adults and children for social participation in English speech communities. Migrants require proficiency in languages for participation in community, for travel and work. However, the focus of grammar translation programs on written language and accuracy paid limited attention to speech. The need for communicative proficiency triggered experimentation with different approaches to teaching: situational, functional-notional, audio-visual and communicative. These attempts to develop students' communicative skills focused attention on daily discourse of typical workplace and life circumstances (Savignon, 1987; Wilkins, 1976). In reviewing approaches since the mid-nineteen sixties, Mickan (2013) described attempts to fix the decontextualisation of language in grammar translation teaching approaches as addititive, e.g. via inclusion of situations, functions and notions, speech acts and tasks with oral components and audio-visual elements. However, the attempts have not changed the fundamental teaching paradigm of grammar as structure taught outside of contexts and texts. Apart from SFL applied in genre and text-based teaching (Derewianka, 2015; Feez & Joyce, 1998), the above-mentioned endeavours have maintained the teaching of grammatical structures apart from function and have failed to transform the understanding of language learning as learning to mean.

The migration policy of the Australian Federal Government in the mid-twentieth century resulted in the arrival of many non-English speaking citizens for whom English was needed as a communicative skill for life in Australian communities. The prevalent grammar translation approach was a cumbersome way for migrants to achieve some level of communicative skill. Indeed, meeting the language needs of migrants required adaptation in instruction from grammatically and linguistically based courses to functional and communicative curriculum designs taking into account the prior educational and linguistic backgrounds of students. In short, they required a different pedagogy. The Federal Government's Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) (Martin, nd) developed English curricula, syllabi and resources for teaching non-English speaking immigrants. Firmly based in SFL, the programs were designed for migrants to manage the complexity of daily life in new social environments (Burns & De Silva Joyce,

2007) and they recognised the role of language in daily living based on participation in people's social practices in Australia.

Text, context and register analysis
The strength of SFL analysis of texts for teaching is in the depiction of the relationship between texts and social contexts described in the concept of register. For Halliday (1978), "registers are ways of saying different things", with different "configurations of meanings" (p. 185) according to who is speaking, how they are speaking and what they are speaking about. This links directly to Hasan's (1999) point that "to describe the nature of human language we need to place it in its social environment" (p. 224).
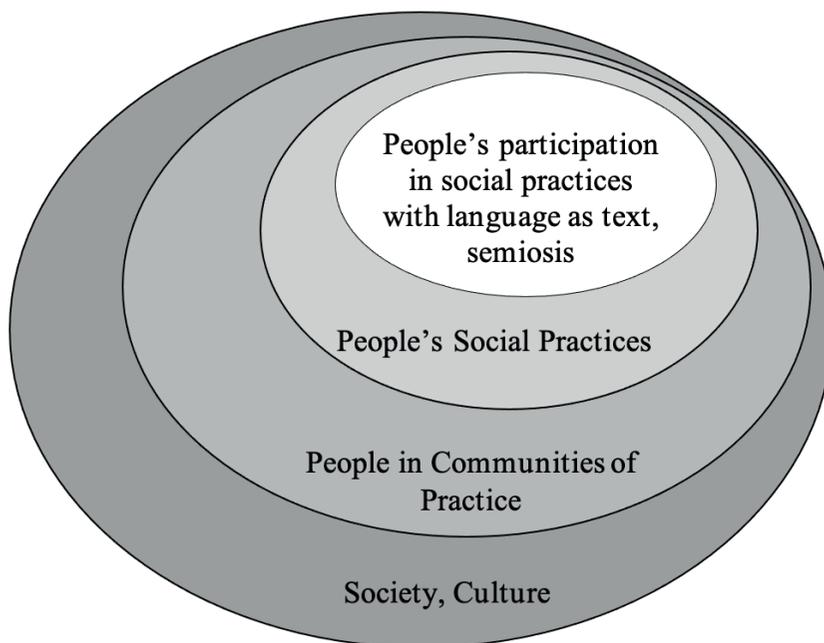

Figure 1: People's participation in society with language (adapted from Mickan, 2019)

The SFL analysis depicts the choice of text types, of discourse and of wording of texts interacting with contexts. This relationship of texts and social contexts is depicted in Figure 1, which also shows how SFL introduces a description of language as a system with different levels of analysis. When we see, read or hear texts, we make sense of them in the context of culture and the practices

of communities. In Extract 1 from a science lesson below, the texts relate to the practices of a scientific community in the educational culture of an Australian school. The discourse and language choices creating these texts relate to the socio-cultural environment of language in use. When reading texts or hearing speech (Hasan, 1999) context is deduced and essential details predicted.

The analysis of texts in SFL is characterised by a metalanguage describing the relationship of texts and the contexts that are shown in Figure 1 (Halliday, 1994, 2014). In any situation three key factors affect choices in register:

- Field [what is going on; content]
- Tenor [who is involved; relationship]
- Mode [kind of text; speech, written]

The choices in Field, Tenor and Mode explain what a text is about, how language is used in the text, and who is involved in the text. Specific linguistic choices in Field, Tenor and Mode relate to interpersonal, textual and ideational functions of the text (Butt et al., 2000; Halliday, 2014), which means that each occasion of speech and writing requires appropriate selections in register. Students' awareness of variations in text types and of the lexicogrammar of texts assists their text choices appropriate to different contexts.

Text awareness and knowledge

The identification of the social functions of texts together with analysis at the discourse and lexicogrammatical (or wording) levels supports teachers' conversations with students about the composition of texts. Teachers' instruction using SFL raises students' awareness of language variation in texts according to context. It includes analysis of the wording and structure of texts and teachers' scaffolding of students' composition of texts. In order to raise student awareness, instruction informed by register analysis looks first at language in context and asks how is the language related to what is going on? This allows the educator to teach the system as choices, which provides student access to the language resources which relate texts to social contexts. This means explicit teaching of grammar is conducted in contexts of students' engagement in communication with authentic texts in acts of meaning making.

Text-based and genre teaching

SFL has influenced approaches to TESOL instruction with genre and text-based teaching (Derewianka, 2011; de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2012; Martin, 1992; Mickan, 2013; Mickan & Lopez, 2017), including the teaching of literacy (Martin, 1999; Martin & Rose, 2008). These approaches take genres or texts as the unit of analysis for potential comprehension and expression of meanings. In SFL "a text is any use of language that makes sense for someone who knows the language" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 4). Genre and text-based teaching focus on text types and typical genres described for teaching include persuasive texts for arguing points of view, factual texts for knowledge-building, procedural texts for explaining processes and narrative texts for telling stories and entertainment.

Genre and text-based teaching apply analysis of language in use for people's daily living and participation in social practices (Feez & Joyce, 1998). Instruction is characterised by the identification of genres and text types and their function in social contexts. It is based on the idea that different texts enact different purposes and distinguishing features of texts identify participation in different community practices. Such features are multifarious as, in our regular discourse, we typically work with pluritexts, i.e. with multiple texts as part of our ongoing discourse. For example this paper includes description, references and reporting, each of which serves specific functions in the paper.

Genre teaching applies a teaching and learning cycle with four stages of instruction, which connect reading, talking and writing (Derewianka, 2015). The cycle commences with the teacher and class building the context or topic of a genre. A model of the genre is then presented in stage two as a scaffold and support for analysis of the the features of the genre. In stage three, the teacher and class work together in the construction of a genre, which prepares students for the independent composition of a genre in stage four. The teaching cycle supports students' understanding of different genres, makes explicit the grammatical and discourse features of different genres, and scaffolds students' own writing.

Text-based teaching also takes texts as the unit of analysis (Mickan & Lopez, 2017; Feez & Joyce, 1998). Figure 2 illustrates text-based teaching progression beginning with a plentiful selection of written and spoken texts for students' comprehension of the meaning of texts related to social function.
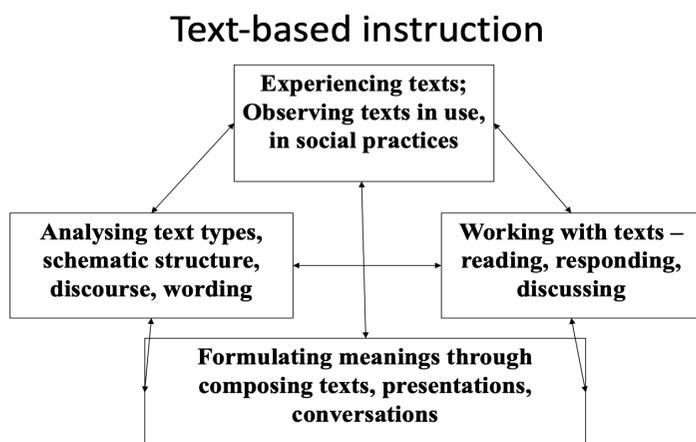
Text-based instruction

Figure 2: Teaching texts for the comprehension and expression of meanings (adapted from Mickan, 2017)

In Figure 2, the design of instruction is semiotic, whereby students study language as a resource for knowledge-building and for the formulation of their meanings. The approach follows Halliday's idea to "interpret language not as a set of rules but as a *resource*" (Halliday, 1978, p. 192). On the one hand, learning is gaining the meaning-making resources of language systems for participation in social practices. On the other hand, instruction provides students access to a rich selection of authentic texts around a topic related to function, equipping them with the language resources for living with texts and for the expression of meanings.

Teachers and students analyse the grammatical variations of text types, raising awareness of wording selections for the expression of different meanings. To achieve this, teachers take into account students' extensive knowledge of texts and text types in their other languages. They program a banquet of written and spoken texts for reading, talking and writing on real-world topics presenting different perspectives. In talk about and around texts, students build knowledge, dispute content, act on information and share ideas, viewpoints and experiences. From multiple encounters with texts in contexts students develop awareness of the meaning making resources for the expression of their own ideas and arguments (Palincsar & Schleppegrell, 2014). The discussions around topics and content combine focus on the structure and lexicogrammar of texts. This approach is exemplified in content-based language programs (Turner, 2020; Halbach,

2020) in which students participate in subject-specific practices with subject-defining texts.

Learning as a social semiotic process
The idea in a social semiotic design (Gebhard et al., 2013) is for students to work with, respond to, and interact with numerous authentic texts. The texts serve multiple purposes beyond modelling, including knowledge building so students have something to talk about, query and respond to. They present choices for expression of different ideas and viewpoints and offer options in the discourse semantic and lexicogrammatical choices for creation of ideas and arguments in different text types.

Learning to mean with language is a process of socialisation (Mickan, 2013). For Halliday (2014), "language is ... a resource for making meaning; so text is a process of making meaning in context" (p. 4). For students, familiarisation with the purpose, type, content and wording of texts is a process of socialisation in interaction with the teacher and with the teacher's scaffolding support (Gibbons, 2006; Mickan, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). The discussion around the texts introduces students to the purpose of text types and the lexicogrammar for joining in talk about and around the content of the texts. For example, as shown in Extract 1, in an English as an additional language science class (Mickan, 2007), the teacher socialises students into the use of scientific texts focusing on the terminology related to doing science. In the lesson preceding the conduct of an experiment in the laboratory, the teacher explained the aim of the experiment to the class of students. In the lesson shown in Extract 1, he introduced what was planned in the experiment.

Extract 1: Science lesson

Teacher: The aim is to extract the coloured substance from the red cabbage and use it as an acid base indicator. Do you know what extract means?

Student: To take out.

Teacher: Very good. So we're going to take out the chemical that is the red colouring and that's going to be a different colour . . . (inaudible) . . . in a beaker. You'll be using water to help draw that colour out, so we'll make a coloured solution – a coloured liquid. That will be an

indicator. The same way as we have used litmus as an indicator but it will be different colours and so we should see a different colour happening when we test it with an acid and a base and we can record that. (Sc. 21–30) (Mickan, 2007, pp.112-113)

In Extract 1, the teacher's talk is part of the socialisation of students into scientific practices through the language of science, including aims of the experiment, technical terminology, the experimental procedure and recording results. The teacher has made choices related to Field (teaching science), Tenor (teacher and student science apprentices) and Mode (semiformal spoken language), exemplifying how speakers and writers make choices from the language system according to the social context. The teacher's selection of text and wording fit the social practices of science, which highlights language as a resource for the expression and comprehension of meaning potential, whereby participants are interpreting what is said and written and formulating meanings for themselves. During instruction, the teacher and students analyse the appropriate types of texts and examine the lexicogrammar which comprises the texts. The science teacher did this as part of normal instruction. The interactions in class were an apprenticeship into social practices through the language of science (O'Hallaron et al., 2015). Over time, these lesson activities socialise students into scientific discourses and practices. Similarly, the practices of Australian EAL and TESOL teachers induct and socialise students into the discourses of school and community cultural practices (Mickan et al., 2007).

SFL and TESOL curricula
In the past decades, curriculum materials based on SFL have been designed for the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP) (Burns & De Silva Joyce, 2007) and for EAL teaching (South Australian Department of Education, 2003). A current curriculum is the South Australian Department of Education's (2020) *Learning English: Achievement and Proficiency* (LEAP/D) project. The LEAP/D curriculum is an advanced resource applying a SFL framework to a curriculum that is directly connected with teacher professional development. It documents children's development of Standard Australian English (SAE) from Reception to Year Ten and is structured with three year-level groupings corresponding to the national curriculum, ACARA. It, therefore, reflects students' language repertoires across a range of contexts and texts.

LEAP/D and its teacher mentoring program validate the applications of SFL in languages education (Custance & White, 2022). The curriculum is based on the documentation of students' development in composition of texts from less formal language to the formal language requirements of the curriculum. LEAP/D assumes that speakers and writers make wording choices on a continuum from spoken-like discourse to formal academic texts. Language analysis is specific to texts and to text types in the curriculum. For example, the curriculum includes informative texts in mathematical/scientific investigation, descriptive/comparative and classifying texts in historical and geographical studies, as well as many other persuasive and evaluative texts such as exposition, response, review, analysis, and recounting and narrative texts. LEAP/D is a distinctive resource for teachers with its description of school children's discourse requirements, and identification of features of texts for targeted instruction and intervention. In the detailed analysis of texts, the curriculum highlights how children's school studies and success are reliant on managing a wide repertoire of text types for knowledge building and for lesson and community participation (Christie, 2012). In doing so, it exemplifies the view of language as a social resource in the development of children's speaking and writing (Schleppegrell, 2017).

Curriculum design and teacher education

SFL informed pedagogy is dependent on teachers' knowledge about language applied to explicit analysis and teaching of texts and genres at the semantic level of text and the nano-level of lexicogrammatical selections. Studies on teacher training based on SFL show how language awareness and knowledge of the metalanguage of SFL impacts on teachers' decision-making and instructional practices. In a review of 103 SFL-based teacher professional development (PD) studies in the United States of America, Accurso & Gebhard (2021) conclude "SFL-based PD has been effective for supporting teachers' increased semiotic awareness, pedagogical knowledge, critical awareness, and confidence for literacy teaching" (2021, p. 16). Troyan et al. (2019) claim that SFL can be a flexible knowledge base for teachers to help students understand how the features of a particular oral or written genre work together to convey messages. The findings show the value of applications of SFL for teachers' programming, analysis and teaching of texts. Included in pre-

service teachers' education, a knowledge of SFL supports literacy pedagogy with analysis of linguistic features across a range of texts (Banegas, 2021; Sembiante et al., 2020).

Intended as a support for SFL-based education, Mickan (2020) proposes a SFL reference for language education curriculum design, planning instruction and reviewing of policies and practices (Figure 3). The reference provides criteria and standards for language educators' decision-making and for the evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy:

1.	Policy aim: Curriculum enacts the view of language as a resource for expression of meanings
2.	Theory of learning: Students learn language by engaging in acts of meaning with authentic oral and written texts
3.	Lesson tasks: Students work with text-based tasks to comprehend, respond to and formulate meanings
4.	Text analysis: Students selectively analyse grammar of text types specific to social function
5.	Language awareness: Students examine and describe variations in lexicogrammatical choices for composition of text types
6.	Program content: Students build knowledge and skills with content texts in acts of meaning.

Figure 3: SFL reference for language education curriculum design (adapted from Mickan, 2020)

The application of the SFL frame of reference (Figure 3) to policy and curriculum implements a social semiotic pedagogy. Language plays a central role in education (Halliday, 1993) and a knowledge of SFL as a system applied in practice is capable of systematic transformation of current practices in education (Mickan, 2000). The SFL point of view presents an opportunity to address dismantled discourse pedagogy in research, policy and practice. With the SFL focus on language as a resource for learning to mean, students talk, read and write with authentic texts. As Hasan (2012) writes - "acts of meaning call for someone who 'means' and someone to whom that meaning is meant: there is a 'meaner', some 'meaning' and a 'meant to'" (p. 83). The challenge for curriculum designers, teacher educators and teachers is to apply a social semiotic view of language and learning in

curriculum design and in instruction. SFL gives insights for teachers into their use of language for teaching and into strategies for explicit teaching of subject discourses. It also informs educators how language is a primary resource for teaching by raising awareness of the language choices we make for different purposes in our speech and in our writing. This is relevant knowledge for students making choices in text, discourse and lexicogrammar in acts of meaning in their own speech and compositions.

The professional programs of teacher organisations such as ACTA underscore the roles of teachers in curriculum designing, monitoring and research. For Halliday (2007) education is a field of activity "where we investigate how language functions in various educational contexts, and by doing so, seek to improve our educational practice" (p. 270). TESOL teachers' knowledge of language in education positions them to apply SFL in education in general (Alyousef, 2020; Derewianka, 2015: de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2012; Macken-Horarik, 2005), as in the South Australian inservice program *ESL in the Mainstream* (Burke & South Australia Education Department, 1991) and in the LEAP/D program referred to above.

TESOL professionals have been at the forefront of evidence-based research and teaching in languages education in Australia. They have played a pivotal role in addressing teachers' need for knowledge about language based on a coherent theory of language learning as a social semiotic process (Halliday 1978, 1993; Hasan, 2012). SFL integrated in curriculum and teaching scaffolds students' management of the discourses embedded in their daily schooling experiences and builds students' knowledge about language for engagement in society.

SFL has general significance for educational policies, teacher education and curriculum design. Viewed across the curriculum, it has implications for conversations around the decline in national literacy and numeracy standards in Australian schools since 2000 (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2022; DET, 2018; Mickan & Wallace, 2020). Educators' work with SFL has impacted on students' literacy and numeracy through teacher education, curriculum and pedagogy (Hasan & Williams, 1996). SFL based teacher education influences teachers' pedagogical knowledge relevant to literacy education (Accurso & Gebhard, 2021). The study of SFL theory applied in practice in preservice and inservice teacher education is, therefore, a practical

strategy to address the national, documented decline in literacy in schools. The evidence from SFL applied in Australia is a reminder for educational administrators, policy formulators and teachers of the central place of language in children's and adults' education as a meaning-making, social resource.

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Dr Peter Mickan is Visiting Research Fellow (Applied Linguistics) in the University of Adelaide and Director of the Adelaide Research Institute. An experienced teacher and teacher educator, he established the Postgraduate Applied Linguistics program in the University of Adelaide (2001). Theoretically his work is based on Halliday's language as a social semiotic and learning as socialisation experiences. The theory frames his studies in curriculum design, in languages pedagogy, in academic literacies,

in language and literacy, in workplace communication, in German language revival, and in language assessment. He co-edited with Wallace (2020) The Routledge handbook of language education curriculum design.

peter.mickan@adelaide.edu.au