Embedding instruction in academic language

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Overview

- The learners and their needs
- How a functional grammar approach helps meet those needs
- The value of talking about meaning in language
Second language learners encountering language at school

- Learning language
- Learning through language
- Learning about language

(M.A.K. Halliday)
Learning language

- We learn language through meaningful interaction
- Language comes in different *registers*
- Informal, “everyday” language is learned through interaction in the community
- “The language of schooling” has to be learned through interaction in the classroom
Learning through language

- The language of schooling is challenging in its patterns of meaning-making
- School subjects are taught and assessed through language (the “hidden curriculum”)
- Learners have to develop content knowledge at the same time they develop second language proficiency
Learning about language

- Talking about language makes content accessible
- Attention to form-meaning connections supports learners’ second language development
- To talk about language, teachers need a functional, meaning-based meta-language
Systemic functional linguistics

- A meaning-based theory of language
- Relates language resources to contexts of language use, making form-meaning connections
- Provides tools for focusing on meaning in language to support content learning
SFL: Three angles on language

• Recognizing the interaction and interpretation enacted in a text: *interpersonal meaning*

• Recognizing the kinds of experience presented in a text: *ideational meaning*

• Recognizing the organization and flow of information in a text: *textual meaning*
Talking about text

- Recognizing how an author interacts with the reader: differences in mood and speech function
- Recognizing different ways of representing experience: processes of doing, saying, sensing, being
- Recognizing how clauses are linked in relationships of addition, time, comparison, consequence
Authors interact with readers by using different resources of *mood*:

- **Declarative**: She is painting a picture.
- **Interrogative**: Does she want to paint a picture?
- **Imperative**: Paint a picture!
Interacting with readers: *speech acts*

- **Statements**
  - It happened last winter...
  - You can see it if you go there.

- **Questions**
  - Want to hear my big idea?

- **Commands**
  - You better believe it!
  - You’ve got to listen.
  - Now look at me on birthday #8.
Register differences: question forms

Questions

• *Informal*: Want to hear my big idea?

• *Standard*: Do you want to hear my big idea?
Register differences: speech acts

Command forms

- *Declarative:* You’ve got to listen.
  You better believe it!

- *Imperative:* Now look at me on birthday #8.
Talking about text

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Representing experience in different ways

- Authors represent experience in language in different ways through processes of *doing, saying, sensing*, and *being*

- The grammar takes different forms in these processes; learners can focus on form by talking about meaning
Grammy and Mama dance around my bed. “Open your present!” they shout. “We can’t wait another minute!”

How did Grammy and Mama feel when they gave Jamaica her birthday present?
Four ways of representing experience

- **Doing**: Grammy and Mama danced around the bed.
- **Saying**: “Open your present! We can’t wait another minute!” they shout.
- **Sensing (Thinking/feeling)**: They wanted her to get up right away!
- **Being (defining, describing)**: Grammy and Mama were so excited!
Goals in talking about text

- Focusing on the language that constructs the text to support deeper comprehension
- Helping learners develop flexibility in alternative ways of ‘saying the same thing’
- Helping learners recognize how the new language works; how it means what it does
Talking about text

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• Recognizing different ways of representing experience: processes of doing, saying, sensing, being

• Recognizing how clauses are linked in relationships of addition, time, comparison, consequence
Focus on connectors

- Connectors construct the logic of a text as the author moves from clause to clause.

- Connectors structure texts in terms of addition, time, comparison, consequence.

- Time is of two types: simultaneous and sequential.
Sequence or simultaneous?

*What happens first?*

Before a seed can begin to grow, a grain of pollen from the stamen must land on the stigma at the top of the pistil of a flower like itself.
Sequence or simultaneous?

- The seeds grow inside the flower, *even as* the flower begins to die.

- *As* the seeds become bigger, a fruit or pod grows around them.

- *When* the fruit or pod ripens, it breaks open.
Focus on connectors

• Helps learners recognize the logic of a text

• Helps teachers go beyond vocabulary in addressing the challenges of technical texts

• Helps learners draw on new language resources in their speaking and writing
Talking about text

- Recognizing how an author interacts with the reader: differences in mood and speech function
- Recognizing different ways of representing experience: processes of doing, saying, sensing, being
- Recognizing how clauses are linked in relationships of addition, time, comparison, consequence
The functional grammar approach

- Provides tools for talking about how language makes meaning in the texts learners read
- Helps learners see how language choices construct the meanings in a text
- Focuses on language in ways that support reading comprehension and writing development
What functional grammar offers

- A language for talking about language
- Strategies for linking language and meaning
- Opportunities for interaction and discussion about the language and content of age-appropriate texts
Key features of the approach

- Identifying places in a text where close focus can reveal meaning
- Interaction using oral language to support reading comprehension
- Using a functional, meaning-based meta-language to link language with content
- Extending language use through writing
Supporting second language learning

- **Learning language:** Talking about text offers practice with the language of schooling
- **Learning through language:** Talking about the language in texts helps learners make sense of what they read
- **Learning about language:** Talking about form-meaning connections helps learners see patterns they will also find in other texts
For further reading

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