Example from the California History Project

Thanks to Stacey Greer
8th grade history: *Alien and Sedition Acts*

Claiming that the nation needed protecting from treasonous ideas and actions, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798.

(Stuckey & Salvucci, 2000: 324)
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Who is the ‘Actor’?

Claiming that the nation needed protecting from treasonous ideas and actions, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798.

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Goals of the ‘Actor’

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Ideational Meaning
The Field of Discourse

- **Processes** of different types
  - *Doing, sensing, saying, being*

- **Participants** of different types
  - *Actors, Goals; Seners, Sayes, etc.*

- **Circumstances** of different types
  - *Place, time, cause, manner, etc.*
How is the information organized?

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(Stuckey & Salvucci, 2000: 324)
Textual Meaning
The Mode of Discourse

- Exploring the meaning in word- and clause-ordering options
- Analyzing the connections that an author makes as a text unfolds
What perspective is taken?

Claiming that the nation needed protecting from treasonous ideas and actions, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798.

(Stuckey & Salvucci, 2000: 324)
An alternative perspective

To suppress domestic opposition, Congress passed a Sedition Act, virtually outlawing public criticism of the federal government.

(Taylor, 1995: 264)
Identifying historical processes

To suppress domestic opposition, Congress passed a Sedition Act, virtually outlawing public criticism of the federal government.

(Taylor, 1995: 264)
Goals of the ‘Actor’

To suppress domestic opposition, Congress passed a Sedition Act, virtually outlawing public criticism of the federal government.

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Comparing perspectives

• **Claiming that the nation needed protecting from treasonous ideas and actions, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798.**

  (Stuckey & Salvucci, 2000: 324)

• **To suppress domestic opposition, Congress passed a Sedition Act, virtually outlawing public criticism of the federal government.**

  (Taylor, 1995: 264)
Interpersonal Meaning
The *Tenor* of Discourse

- Examining the stance the author takes
- Exploring how the reader is positioned
- Investigating the attitudes and judgments infused into the text
Register: Three angles on text

- **What is it about?**
  - Exploring *field*
- **How is it organized?**
  - Exploring *mode*
- **What perspective does it take?**
  - Exploring *tenor*
Does it work?

- External evaluation of the California History Project work through experimental designs shows that eighth grade students of project teachers significantly outperform other students on measures of reading, writing, and historical knowledge (Gargani + Co.)
Other Research Using SFL

- Geoff Williams: elementary children talking about grammar in the stories they read
- Meg Gebhard: fifth grade students using academic language in writing
- Pam Spycher: high school ELL writers adopting academic registers
Making language a focus of attention

- How does language work in different subjects? At different levels?
- What are the forms of language that ELLs most readily take up at different stages?
- What kind of support do teachers need to take up new ways of talking about language?
Developing academic language

- ELLs are eager to engage with challenging content
- Teachers are asking for tools to support students’ engagement
- A functional linguistics perspective offers tools for explicit focus on content through analysis of language
For Further Reading


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