LEARNING TO SITUATE SFL-INSPIRED PEDAGOGIES IN NEW CONTEXTS

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OVERVIEW

- Investigating the ways SFL theory can inform instruction
- Design-Based Research
- Example from the *Language and Meaning* project
- Learning to situate SFL-inspired pedagogies in new contexts: Putting linguistic theory in service of developing instructional theory
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “INVESTIGATE THE IMPACT OF SFL”?

- What is SFL?
  - Functional grammar?
  - Genre-based pedagogy?
  - The Teaching-Learning cycle?

- Is SFL a ‘thing’ to be adopted in classroom teaching?
SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS THEORY

- SFL is a theory of language that has inspired a range of pedagogical interventions, programs, and materials
- Each new intervention brings the theory into a particular context of students, teachers, pedagogical goals
- Applying SFL in new contexts requires transdisciplinary collaboration with others in literacy education
DESIGN-BASED RESEARCH (DBR)

- Bridges between educational theory and practice
  - Uses ‘grand theory’ to develop ‘domain specific instructional theory’ (diSessa & Cobb, 2004)
  - Creates ‘useable’ theory to address instructional problems
- Methodology for developing and studying practical applications of grand theory
  - Multiple cycles of development
  - Formative and summative evaluations
  - Iterative development of instructional practice and theory
THE LANGUAGE AND MEANING PROJECT
WITH ANNEMARIE PALINCSAR, JASON MOORE, CATHERINE O’HALLARON, CARRIE SYMONS

- How can SFL-informed pedagogy help teachers talk about text in reading and writing with primary school learners of English as an additional language to support both language development and disciplinary learning?

Can instruction for English learners be enhanced through application of SFL in our context?
- Urban fringe district
- Schools with 90% speakers of Arabic as a first language
DEVELOPING A DBR PROJECT:
(1) ANALYZING WHAT SFL CAN CONTRIBUTE

What does the research say about L2 learning and how can SFL contribute to that goal?

- L2 development requires *interaction* about *meaning*
- L2 learning is supported by *explicit attention to language*
- Teachers need *knowledge about language-meaning connections*

(e.g., August & Shanahan, 2008; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Gibbons, 2003, 2006; Lucas et al., 2008; Turkan et al., 2014)
DEVELOPING A DBR PROJECT: (2) DEVELOPING A THEORY OF CHANGE

Our argument:
Preparing teachers to engage in activities informed by a theory of language that links language and meaning will

- Stimulate interaction in the classroom
- Enable teachers to raise ELs’ consciousness about language
- Improve ELs’ language and literacy development
DEVELOPING A DBR PROJECT: (3) ARTICULATING DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Instantiating our grand theory (SFL)
- Guiding our design of learning environments
- Acting as evaluation principles for analyzing enactment

Principles are refined through iterative analysis of multiple data sources as we develop instructional theory to guide teaching and learning.
OUR INITIAL PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGN AND EVALUATION

- Provide teachers with explicit knowledge about language.
- Support explicit, meaningful attention to language.
- Support meaningful interaction between students and teachers.

These principles guided our design and were the focus of our ongoing evaluation.
SUMMARY: OUR DBR RESEARCH PROCESS

- Analyzed the current research on ELLs
- Developed a theory of change
- Developed principles for evaluation
- Engaged in iterative cycles of design, implementation, evaluation, and redesign

Today’s illustrative example: Using SFL tools to analyze and interpret literature
EVOLVING OVER THREE YEARS: CYCLES OF EXPLORING, DESIGNING, REFLECTING

Year One: close work with teachers at one school; identifying how SFL metalanguage can be used in support of instructional goals

Year Two: draft materials developed, implemented, and studied in 23 classrooms at 5 schools

Year Three: revised versions of the materials implemented and studied; expanded to better address the challenges of informational text
YEAR 1 EXAMPLE: INTRODUCING ‘PROCESSES’ IN WAYS THAT ALIGN WITH PRINCIPLES

- Introduced the notion of processes of four types (doing, saying, sensing, being) to identify characters’ processes in stories from the school curriculum

- Developed activities to introduce identification of process types as a means of exploring how characters evolve across a narrative
**ANALYZING A TEXT**

*La Bamba*, by Gary Soto

Identifying Manuel’s ‘sensing’ processes

| Page | Walking to school the day before the talent show | thinking of tomorrow’s talent show  
He was still amazed that he had volunteered.  
Why did I raise my hand? he asked himself  
in his heart he knew the answer  
he yearned for the limelight  
he wanted applause as loud as a thunderstorm  
to hear his friends say, “Man, that was bad!”  
he wanted to impress the girls  
Manuel knew he should be reasonable | Author’s language |
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

• 5th grade teacher has introduced students to the four types of processes
• Students work in groups to find Manuel's sensing processes at different points in the story and write these sentences on strips
• Students share their work; class discusses what counts as sensing
UNIT ANALYSIS: ARE WE ACHIEVING OUR GOALS?

Design principle 1: Support explicit, meaningful attention to language

- Analysis of multiple data sources indicated that
  - the activities supported explicit and meaningful attention to language at the word level
  - use of grammatical metalanguage did not support talk about meaning in the context of the story being read

- Analysis of records from multiple classrooms confirmed that talk about the meaning of processes did not help develop understanding about the story and characters
IDENTIFYING SENSING: STUDENT DIALOGUE

Reading: He yearned for the limelight.
S1: yearned?
S2: yearned? Where?
S1: Should I write yearned? Ali, should I write yearned in here?
S3: I don’t think yearned is one.
S1: Was he, he was worried that ..
S2: [worried… a feeling?]
S1: Yeah, worried!
S3: Where? Where is it?
S: How do you get a yearned? Yeah, yeah, yearned, is a sensing.
S3: He felt surprised.
S2: Yeah, he was surprised about something.

Researcher joins the group
R: That’s a good sensing word, isn’t it?
S2: Oh, yeah. What is that? What is yearned?
R: ………..Oh, are you talking about the word yearned?
S2: Yeah.
R: That’s a good sensing word too. Do you know, what does it…what’s another word for yearned?
S1: [Amazed.
S2: [Flabbergasted.
R: Ah, no. Not quite. To yearn for something is to want something very badly.
S3: Wanted. He wanted to be in the spotlight.
R: He yearned. He really, really hoped. He desired. He wanted.
Children share the sensing processes they identified

T: Is there anything else?
S: yearned

T: what does *yearned* mean? He yearned for the limelight, yes, I’m proud of you, yes, that’s a sensing
S: he wanted it
T: he wanted it real bad, good job.
OTHER DATA POINTS SUPPORTING THIS CONCLUSION

- **Review of PD session**: focus on sensing didn’t strongly support discussion about the character.

- **Research group memos**: Lesson was rich in vocabulary learning but connection between use of metalanguage and the big point of the many emotional changes the character goes through was not developed… the sentence strip activity did not culminate in the children getting that point.

- **Observation logs**: Students read *He fell asleep confident* – but since the process isn’t a sensing, this example of character feeling was not included.

**Question for us**: *Is the goal to label process types and explore word meaning or to identify how the character’s feelings are presented?*
YEAR-END EVALUATION: REVISITING DATA TO REVISE OUR APPROACH

How and why was SFL initially applied in the context of reading and responding to narrative texts, and what concerns emerged?

- Related to our principles:
  - Provide teachers with explicit knowledge about language.
  - Support explicit, meaningful attention to language.
  - Support meaningful interaction between students and teachers.

*In some cases we were supporting explicitness but not meaningful interaction*

*In other cases we were not being explicit in ways that were needed to support learning*
YEAR ONE OUTCOME: A NEW PRINCIPLE TO SUPPORT LITERACY LEARNING

- Developing linguistic knowledge for its own sake should not be the driving element in the design of the curriculum
- We needed to better connect with the pedagogical goals of the teachers

New Principle:

SFL metalanguage needs to be used in the service of achieving specific disciplinary goals
RESPONDING TO THE YEAR ONE EVALUATION:
A NEW APPROACH

- Made curricular goals the focus, rather than the SFL concepts
- Developed new codes for observation logs to capture attention to disciplinary learning goals
- Piloted and developed lesson plans to guide teachers’ learning through implementation
- Focused on supporting children in interpreting literature and providing analysis of evidence in writing arguments
INDICATIONS OF YEAR TWO SUCCESS

Design principle: *SFL metalanguage should serve specific disciplinary goals*

- Video logs and observer comments indicated that students were better supported in analyzing characters.
- Genre-specific stage descriptions offered support for argument writing (character analysis).
- Students’ writing showed they were incorporating analysis after repeated opportunities to practice.
- Teachers reported engaging in these activities with other texts from their curriculum without our support.
AS PROJECT CONCLUDES: DEVELOPING INSTRUCTIONAL THEORY

Design Principles:

- Provide teachers with explicit knowledge about language.
- Support explicit, meaningful attention to language.
- Support meaningful interaction between students and teachers.
- Draw on SFL metalanguage in the service of specific disciplinary goals

Analytic Questions:

- What are some specific practices that resulted in instruction that IS aligned with our design principles?
- What are some specific practices that resulted in instruction that is NOT aligned with our design principles?
AS PROJECT CONCLUDES: DEVELOPING INSTRUCTIONAL THEORY

Analytic Questions

- What are specific practices that resulted in instruction that is aligned with our design principles?
- What are specific practices that resulted in instruction that is NOT aligned with our design principles?

Design Principles

- Provide teachers with explicit knowledge about language.
- Support explicit, meaningful attention to language.
- Support meaningful interaction between students and teachers.
- Draw on SFL metalanguage in the service of specific disciplinary goals.
RETURNING TO OUR DATA: OBSERVER LOGS HELPED IDENTIFY KEY EPISODES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Unit/lesson</th>
<th>General Impression</th>
<th>Time Stamp</th>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10/4/12  | Unit 1      | Strong             | 4:00 – 7:00| 1 ?       | The class talks about the three things to consider when thinking about a character’s personality. There might be some confusion about A. when to use personality and when to use trait. B. The two parts of personality: inside and outside. Jaber says outside is what they look like. Should it include how they act?  
| vid id:  | Lesson 3    |                    | 18:20 – 22:00| 31, 41    | Jaber asks the classes to act out the actions from the story. She asks the class which one showed the most action, and why they knew. |
|          |             |                    |            |           |          |
| 10/5/12  | Unit 1      | N/A                | Entire clip| NA        | This clip is only one minute long, so there’s very little set up or context. |
| vid id:  | Lesson 4    |                    |            |           |          |
| Jaber10_05_12A |         |                    |            |           |          |
|          |             | Strong             | 1:00 – 7:10| 1 +       | Jaber introduces dialogue and explains that meanings talking and reveals feelings. The class refers to the text for an example. She uses the |
FURTHER ANALYSIS OF VIDEO SEGMENTS

Asking: *What practices align with our principles? What can we learn from this episode?*

- Teacher and students are discussing the sentence:
  
  “On the first day of the new school year, Sara and Meg walked to school together, laughing and talking the whole way there.”

  *(From *Best Friends* by Carrie Symons)*
### KEY ARTIFACTS:
**ATTITUDE LINE, SUPPORT FOR ANALYSIS**

![Attitude Line Diagram](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character name: Girl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Words from story:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character actions, dialogue, attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The girl hid under the bed. (ACTION)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does it show feeling or opinion?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What emotion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes: scared; really scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What does it show about what kind of person they are?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared person? Timid? A young girl?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“THEY WALKED TO SCHOOL TOGETHER, LAUGHING AND TALKING THE WHOLE WAY”

- Video example
SFL metalanguage from transitivity and the appraisal framework is well-aligned with and can support interpretation and evaluation of characters when used in instruction that connects with students’ experiences and disciplinary goals.
INFORMING THEORY

Theoretical contributions of our DBR process

- SFL metalanguage can support L2 learners’ academic language development (Schleppegrell, 2013)
- SFL can serve as a mediating tool for supporting elaboration and enactment of meaning and exploration of author’s purpose in interaction with literary metalanguage to support ELA goals (Moore & Schleppegrell, 2014)
- Genre descriptions can be made context-specific to serve ELA instructional goals (Schleppegrell et al., 2014)
- Instruction informed by SFL can be connected to other theoretical perspectives that inform teaching in our context (e.g., Kintsch, 1998)
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “INVESTIGATE THE IMPACT OF SFL”?  

- Depends on your project’s history, context, and goals  
  - Have you already implemented an intervention you now want to study?  
  - Are you developing an intervention and want to make it the best it can be?  
  - What kind of data will you be able to collect?  
  - What resources do you have for data analysis?
AND TO CONSIDER: OTHER WAYS OF MAKING SFL IMPACTFUL....

- **Connect with other literacy research** to show that SFL approaches are compatible with and enhance other ways of supporting literacy

- **Connect with other theories** teachers are familiar with, where complementarities are relevant (e.g., Vygostky)

- **Learn from teachers, students, and other resources** in your local context and adapt your approach to their needs
SITUATING SFL IN NEW CONTEXTS

- Drawing on SFL is about supporting *meaning-making*
- For us, having teachers learn about SFL was not the goal; we wanted to enable teachers to engage in stronger practice in supporting ELLs literacy
- Studying the development and implementation of an SFL-informed intervention helped us learn how to make the linguistic focus meaningful
REFERENCES (DBR)


REFERENCES (OUR PROJECT)

OTHER RESEARCH CITED


