

EXPANDING SFL RESOURCES AND MAKING CONNECTIONS: REVISITING AND REIMAGINING MOHAN'S SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY

BY TAMMY SLATER

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

As Michael Halliday has argued, language is the primary medium through which education is carried out and assessed in all content areas (Halliday, 1999, 2007; Wells, 1999). This is one of the key reasons why educational researchers, in particular those looking to improve education for students who struggle with language, have adopted SFL. SFL has migrated from its origins in Australia to North America with an aim to help teachers understand how language works to construct meanings in register- and genre-specific ways so that they can help their students succeed. SFL work in North America has been carried out in various curricular areas such as science (e.g., de Oliveira, 2017; Schleppegrell, 2002), history (e.g., Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008), and mathematics (e.g., Accurso, Gebhard, & Purington, 2017; Barwell, 2005). It has also been introduced in more general ways for elementary school teachers (e.g., Brisk, 2015) and older school students (e.g., Schleppegrell, 2004; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002).

Working from the SFL foundation, Mohan (1986) proposed that teachers and learners regularly engage in various social practices associated with their subject areas.

Mohan's work, frequently referred to as the Knowledge Framework (KF), is an SFL-based linguistic model of a social practice. The KF involves six knowledge structures (KSs), which are semantic patterns of the discourse, knowledge, actions, artifacts, and environment of the social practice. Mohan (1986) proposed that three theory/action pairs of KSs that make up the KF—classification/description, principles/sequence, and evaluation/choice—relate language, thinking skills, content, and key visuals. Each of these KSs connects to relevant questions that can be asked about the content for teaching purposes, as Margaret Early (1990; 1991) detailed; this concept is an important step in the KF's use in lesson and curriculum planning.

Mohan's KF was met with enthusiasm in the 1980s (see Slater & Gleason, 2011, for a general description and review) and has continued to interest a number of educators and researchers working in North America within various content areas such as science (e.g., Huang & Morgan, 2003; Mohan & Slater, 2005; 2006; Slater & Mohan, 2010), physical education (e.g., Slater & Butler, 2015), mathematics (e.g., Huang & Normandia, 2007; 2008), foreign language instruction (e.g., Mohan & Huang, 2002), and writing instruction (e.g., Ma & Slater, 2015; 2016). The KF has also been examined in the context of task-based language teaching, or TBLT (e.g., Mohan, Slater, Beckett, and Tong, 2015) and in the assessment of project-based language teaching (e.g., Slater, Beckett, and Aufderhaar, 2006). Although much of this

literature concerns the use of the KF in pre-K to 12 classrooms, there is new and ongoing work on its use in higher education, with an edited volume planned for publication in 2019. An edited publication on PBL is also in the works for 2019, with three chapters discussing the use of the KF within this Deweyan experiential approach to education. The KF is shown to be a good match with PBL because both focus on the development of language, skills, and content in an integrated, meaningful, and student-centered manner (see Beckett & Slater, 2018).

In a nutshell, the KF is an SFL-based tool, a heuristic that can help teachers identify tasks that make explicit the integration of language, thinking skills, content, key visuals, and even technology in the planning and linguistic analysis of lessons, projects, and whole curricular units. As such, it expands resources and makes strong and useful connections between SFL and lesson planning, allowing teachers to reimagine ways to help their students become more aware of how language constructs meaning across registers.

References cited:

- Accurso, K., Gebhard, M., & Purington, S.B. (2017). Analyzing diverse learners' writing in mathematics Systemic functional linguistics in secondary pre-service teacher education. *International Journal for Mathematics Teaching and Learning*, 18(1), 84-108.
- Barwell, R. (2005). Integrating language and content: Issues from the mathematics classroom. *Linguistics and Education*, 16(2), 205-218.
- Beckett, G.H., & Slater, T. (2018). Research on technology-infused project-based learning. In C. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Brisk, M. (2015). *Engaging students in academic literacies. Genre-based pedagogy for K-5 classrooms*. New York and London: Routledge.
- de Oliveira, L. (2017). A language-based approach to content instruction (LACI) for English language learners: Examples from two elementary teachers. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 10(3), 217—231.
- Early, M. (1990). Enabling first and second language learners in the classroom. *Language Arts*, 67, 567-574.
- Early, M. (1991). Using wordless picture books to promote second language learning. *ELT Journal*, 45 (3), 245-251.
- Fang, Z., & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2008). *Reading in secondary content areas: A language-based pedagogy*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1999). The notion of context in language education. In M. Ghadessy (Ed.), *Text and context in functional linguistics* (pp. 1-24). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Halliday, M.A.K. (2007). *Language and education: Volume 9 in the collected works of M.A.K. Halliday*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Huang, J., & Morgan, G. (2003). A functional approach to evaluating content knowledge and language development in ESL students' science classification texts. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(2), 234-262.

Huang, J., & Normandia, B. (2007). Learning the language of mathematics: A study of student writing. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17(3), 294-318.

Huang, J., & Normandia, B. (2008). Comprehending and solving word problems in mathematics: Beyond key words. In Z. Fang, & M.J. Schleppegrell (Eds.). *Reading in secondary content areas: A language-based pedagogy* (pp. 64-83). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Ma, H., & Slater, T. (2015). Using the developmental path of cause to bridge the gap between AWE scores and writing teachers' evaluations. Special issue of *Writing and Pedagogy* 7(2/3), 395-422.

Ma, H., & Slater, T. (2016). Connecting *Criterion* scores and classroom grading contexts: A systemic functional linguistic model for teaching and assessing causal language. *CALICO*, 33(1), 1-18.

Mohan, B.A. (1986). *Language and content*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Mohan, B., & Huang, J. (2002). Assessing the integration of language and content in a Mandarin as a foreign language classroom. *Linguistics and Education*, 13(2), 405-433.

Mohan, B., & Slater, T. (2005). A functional perspective on the critical 'theory/practice' relation in teaching language and science. *Linguistics and Education*, 16(2), 151-172.

Mohan B., & Slater, T. (2006). Examining the theory/practice relation in a high school science register: A functional linguistic perspective. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(2006), 302-316.

Mohan, B., Slater, T., & Beckett, G., & Tong, E. (2015). Tasks as meaning-making activities: A functional approach. In M. Bygate (Ed.), *Domains and directions in the development of task-*

based language teaching: A decade of plenaries from the international conference (pp. 157-192). The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Schleppegrell, M.J. (2002). Challenges of the science register for ESL students: Errors and meaning-making. In M.J. Schleppegrell & M.C. Columbi (Eds.), *Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power* (pp. 119-142). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Schleppegrell, M. (2004). *The language of schooling*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Schleppegrell, M. & Colombi M. (Eds.) (2002) *Developing Advanced Literacy in First and Second Languages*. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Slater, T., Beckett, G.H., & Aufderhaar, Ca. (2006). Assessing projects as second language and content learning. In G.H. Beckett & P. Chamness Miller (Eds.), *Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future* (pp. 241-260). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Slater, T., & Butler, J.I. (2015). Examining connections between the physical and the mental in education: A systemic functional linguistic analysis of a PE teaching and learning register. *Linguistics and Education, 30*, 12-25.

Slater, T., & Gleason, J. (2011). Integrating language and content: The knowledge framework. The Conference Proceedings of MidTESOL.
