

INTRODUCING SFL-RELATED EXPERIENCES IN URUGUAY TO SFL PRACTITIONERS

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There are three rather small communities which have taken up, to different extents, the project of developing materials, courses and even their curriculum in English language teaching from an SFL perspective¹. There were a number of academic events that supported these endeavours. I am first going to outline those events², and then I am going to describe these SFL-related projects, referring to their achievements and the challenges they are facing.

Regarding the academic events, there were many visiting professors, courses and conferences between 2010 and 2013: Estela Moyano lectured in Montevideo for a handful of students at the teacher education institute in 2010; in Mariana Achugar and Brian Carpenter taught two different courses introducing SFL, the first one, and focusing on SFL as pedagogical theory and tool, the second one. Also in 2011, Heidi Byrnes came to Uruguay for a short course on Genre Pedagogy and SFL. In 2012, the annual ASFAL conference took place in Montevideo. It was a

¹ There used to be a fourth one that has recently been de-continued. The one that was closed involved four English Language courses and two Discourse Analysis courses in two careers at a private university: English language teacher education and English – Spanish translation.

² In 2006 – 2007 we heard the words *systemic functional linguistics* for the first time at the Masters Degree in English in the School of Languages in Córdoba, Argentina (Discourse Analysis, by Anne Borsinger-Montemayor and Text Grammar, by Lucrecia Berrone, Liliana Anglada and Griselda Bombelli. In 2008-2009, thanks to a Humphrey scholarship, I briefly met Meg Gebhard, in Amherst, who introduced me to Derewianka's *Exploring how texts work* (1990) and to *Genre, Text, Grammar* by Knapp & Watkins (2005). I spent a while in Ann Arbor with Mary Schleppegrell, who introduced me to whole world of SFL and its pedagogic potential. Also in Ann Arbor in 2009, I attended a 20-hour course by Jim Martin. I always looked forward to coming back home to share all this with my colleagues at Kennedy school and my students at the Teacher education institute where I still work.

huge event for this country, and 10-hour courses previously taught by Maria Brisk, Cecilia Colombi, Beverly Derewianka, Sue Hood, Gunther Kress, Annabelle Lukin, Estela Moyano, Mick O'Donnell and Len Unsworth had an impact on a larger audience. In 2013, Brian Carpenter taught a new seminar on SFL and education in May and in September, Beverly Derewianka returned to Uruguay to teach two three-day seminars: one at a private school and another one at a vocational institution.

As for the teaching projects, the first one to be mentioned involves the English Department of a private school called Kennedy School. This project has initially been strongly inspired by Derewianka's work (Derewianka, 2011; & Derewianka & Jones, 2014), and later on reinforced by *Learning to Write. Reading to Learn* (Rose & Martin, 2012). At Kennedy School, the English courses have an ongoing project that is moving towards genre pedagogy started some 8 years ago. I say "moving towards" because it has been found that it is less difficult to organize the syllabus in genres, and even to find appropriate texts to accomplish it –which is already significant in EFL- than to sequence the lexico-grammatical realizations in coherent progression. Precisely, this is the main current challenge in that school, though not the only one. There is also a concern with developing the work on the oral genres, for example, and on the ways in which oral interactions can further scaffold and develop students' command of the English language. The school has a vast experience regarding the design of curriculum units and pedagogic materials, but the ways in which the language is studied in class is still a matter of doubts. For example, there has been a debate about what metalanguage should be offered in class, particularly regarding grammatical terms. Though the school has acquired a considerable reputation for the level of English of the students, particularly as compared to the number of

hours of English lessons they have per week as compared to bilingual schools, the school has not undergone any research that allows them to identify the reasons for such results. Finally, another major challenge this project has is the education of teachers in the basics of genre pedagogy and SFL. But this is a concern shared also with the project in the vocational schools.

The second is a pilot project currently consists of 20 groups in three vocational institutions, meant to improve the teaching and learning of the students' command of the English language. This project belongs to the state or public national system of education, a large institution with its particular structure and ways to recruit teachers, to offer in-service training in genre pedagogy, and to spread the project among teachers who do not take part in it. It may be said that the project offers three correlative courses in which students become familiar with a set of genres realized by a wide range of lexicogrammatical options. It started in 2013 and is still running, in spite of many academic and organizational challenges.

The third SFL-related course applies to the four *English language* courses in the only public English language teacher education institution. Some concepts from SFL have been adopted to the syllabi –genre, register, field, tenor, mode- though they are still isolated from the whole theory of language and not yet coherent with the design of the curricular units or the materials developed to be used in class. Again, there is a gap between these terms and the kind of work necessary to expand student teachers command of English and to furnish them with basic and relevant notions of the architecture of language for EFL teachers. What to teach, how to sequence it, what texts to choose and how to design classroom materials. The challenge here implies opportunities for teachers' in-service training that allows them to further develop the implementation of genre pedagogy. If this project is to develop, it project seems to require

accessible opportunities for teacher development in genre pedagogy and in a recontextualized version of SFL for EFL teachers.

It seems that the three projects would benefit from joining a network of similar attempts in other countries, where experiences and materials become mutually enriching opportunities.

References

8 ALSFAL, Montevideo 2012; Publicación de trabajos presentados

<https://www.slideshare.net/VIIICongresoALSFALMontevideo/publicacion-de-trabajos-viii-congreso-alsfal-montevideo-2012-20600922>

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