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Academic Language, English Language Learners, and Systemic Functional Linguistics: Connecting Theory and Practice in Teacher Education

Teacher educators need linguistic tools to help preservice teachers develop a deeper understanding of the academic language demands of the literacy practices required by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) serves as a tool for developing teachers' knowledge of content-area language. Teachers' increased knowledge of language facilitates the construction of language-focused instruction to support the academic literacy development of English language learners. I introduce SFL theory and illustrate how I put the theory into practice to support the literacy development of beginning-level English language learners in a middle school classroom. I include recommendations for teachers and teacher educators regarding how to embed the theory in classroom practice and teacher preparation.

Ensuring that new teachers possess a comprehensive understanding of the academic language demands of the content area they teach remains an important facet of teacher preparation in California and Nevada. Research indicates that if teachers have a strong knowledge of academic language, including the grammar, vocabulary, and distinctive discourse structure of the texts that typically appear in their content areas, they are better equipped to design language-focused, instructional scaffolding that will potentially accelerate the academic literacy development of English language learners (ELLs) (Fenwick, Humphrey, Quinn, & Endicott, 2014; Gebhard, Willett, Jimenez, & Piedra, 2010; Schleppegrell, 2012). However, recent research indicates that teachers do not have the sufficient knowledge of language (KOL) necessary to integrate academic language instruc-

tion effectively into their routine teaching practice (Gebhard, Chen, Graham, & Gunawam, 2013; Macken-Horarik, Love, & Unsworth, 2011; Rose & Martin, 2012). Therefore, teacher educators need to foster KOL within teacher-preparation programs to ensure that future teachers can identify the language patterns and rhetorical structures prevalent in the content areas they teach, so that future teachers may design instruction to make those linguistic features visible to ELLs. Consequently, for teacher educators to apprentice future teachers in designing effective academic language instruction, they must have a deep understanding of academic language themselves.

Systemic functional linguistic (SFL) theory may hold the key for teacher educators who want to support preservice teachers in developing deeper KOL. For two decades, educational linguists in Australia have turned to SFL to better understand how language works in the content areas and to develop a metalanguage for talking about academic language with students, teachers, and teacher educators (Gibbons, 2012; Macken-Horarik et al., 2011). Research throughout Australia, and more recently in North America, indicates that integrating SFL into teacher professional development and preparation can have a significant impact on developing teachers' knowledge of language and positively affect the teachers' ability to design instruction that supports the academic literacy development of ELLs (Brisk, 2014; Fenwick et al., 2014; Gebhard et al., 2013; Rose & Martin, 2012).

Although these initial findings suggest a potential positive impact of integrating SFL into teacher preparation and professional development, a barrier to reproducing similar results in the US is that not all teacher educators have sufficient knowledge of SFL to integrate the theory effectively into existing teacher-preparation or professional-development programs. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to bridge this theoretical knowledge gap in teacher education by providing an introduction to SFL, defining some of its key terms and concepts, and illustrating how the theory can be put into practice both in linguistically diverse classrooms and in teacher-education courses in ways that ultimately support the academic literacy development of ELLs.

A review of the literature reveals that SFL has proven to be a significant tool for analyzing and teaching academic language, specifically the rhetorical tools and language patterns typically used to make meaning in various content areas. For instance, SFL analysis of texts designed for instruction in K-12 science classrooms has found that the lexical complexity of science texts can be attributed to the frequent use of nominalizations, technical vocabulary, and passive-voice sentence construction (Fang, 2005, 2012; Fang, Schleppegrell, & Moore,

2013). In the content area of mathematics, Schleppegrell (2007, 2010) and de Oliveira and Cheng (2011) noted that texts frequently contain dense noun phrases with head nouns followed by lengthy modifiers, which pose challenges to meaning making for ELLs. SFL analysis of the academic language found in the content area of history identified similar linguistic challenges (Christie, 2012; Christie & Derewianka, 2008; de Oliveira, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Schall-Leckrone & McQuillan, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2011). For example, Christie and Derewianka (2008) recognized the prominent occurrence of appraisal resources, language that shows a writer's evaluation of people and judgment of actions. Additionally, they noted that nominalizations in history texts served to both connect ideas throughout a text as well as remove agency, which subsequently de-emphasizes the role of certain participants in historic events. Recognizably, a number of these linguistic features may be unfamiliar to those new to SFL. This article will provide space to define and illustrate these terms.

SFL is not limited solely to linguistic analysis. In fact, a number of research collaborations between teachers and educational linguists have demonstrated how infusing SFL into literacy instruction can potentially bridge the gap between students' home and academic literacy practices (Daniello, 2014; Harman, 2013; Harman & Simmons, 2014; O'Halloran, 2014; Paugh & Moran, 2013; Ramirez, 2014; Schulze, 2011). Specifically, SFL has played a crucial role in apprenticing linguistically diverse learners into the academic literacy practices expected in school contexts. Research conducted by members of the ACCELA (Access to Critical Content and English Language Acquisition) Alliance, based at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has examined how teachers have used SFL both as a teaching and analytical tool to identify rhetorical and linguistic patterns prominent in the genres found in K-12 instructional contexts (Accurso & Gebhard, in press; Gebhard et al., 2013; Gebhard, Chen, Britton, & Graham, 2014; Gebhard & Shin, 2011; Ramirez, 2014; Schulze, 2009, 2011; Schulze & Ramirez, 2007; Shin, Gebhard, & Seger, 2010; Willett & Correa, 2014). Through ethnographic and qualitative methods, ACCELA researchers have explored the ways teachers use SFL-based pedagogy to support ELLs in learning to participate in a variety of academic literacy practices, such as the construction of blogs in elementary classrooms (Gebhard et al., 2010; Shin et al., 2010) and the composition of persuasive texts (Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Schulze, 2011). In addition to ACCELA, Maria Brisk and teachers of the Boston Public Schools have forged a collaborative partnership that examines the potential of SFL to support ELLs' academic writing (Brisk, 2012, 2014; Brisk & DeRosa, 2014; Brisk, Hodgson-Drysdale, & O'Connor, 2011; Brisk & Zissel-

berger, 2011). Brisk et al. (2011) and Brisk and Zisselberger (2011) provide comprehensive studies of an SFL pedagogical approach to the teaching of report writing in primary grades. Their work found that infusing SFL into professional development helped teachers gain an increased awareness of text organization and the language features of academic genres. This increased metalinguistic awareness translated into a more language-focused teaching practice and subsequently resulted in students' producing texts that demonstrated an increased control of organization, audience awareness, and textual cohesion.

These research collaborations indicate that SFL is taking an increasingly important role in teacher education and underscore the need for teacher educators to know more about how SFL differs from traditional grammar. SFL distinguishes itself in a number of ways from the traditional grammar that teacher educators and future teachers have likely encountered in their own schooling. Traditional grammar focuses on rules and structures that, even to the most ardent fan of sentence diagramming, can seem arbitrary and ineffective for developing an understanding of how language works in the content areas. Conversely, SFL removes the focus from forms and rules and brings attention to the linguistic choices language users make to construct meaning in particular contexts.

Context in SFL

The concept of *context* remains central to the theory of SFL because it is context that brings meaning to language (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). SFL linguists have a specific way of looking at context. Halliday, the British linguist based in Australia who developed the theory of SFL, contended that language users comprehend linguistic interactions according to both the *context of culture* and the *context of situation* in which meanings are enacted. To be clear, context of culture and context of situation are not two different things, but as Halliday (2009) explains, "the same thing viewed from different time depths" (p. 57). *Context of culture* represents all the potential ways we can use language to exchange meaning in socially recognizable ways. In other words, context of culture serves as a virtual catalog of genres that we can choose from to accomplish tasks with language in a particular culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Hasan, 2009). Discourse communities are created when large number of language users construct, interpret, and use oral and written language in agreed-upon and socially recognizable ways (Bhatia, 2004; Gottleib & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). *The context of situation,* on the other hand, is the more immediate "environment of the text" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 6) that represents the particular instance or situation in which we are using language to make meaning. Guided by these

contextual factors, both cultural and situational, language users draw on a range of possible choices to construct and negotiate meaning rather than simply adhere to grammatical rules (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The particular language choices an individual makes simultaneously create and respond to a context. To illustrate this point, consider closely the language choices I have made when writing this article and the function these linguistic choices ultimately accomplish. My linguistic choices made within the context of this article are designed to share my knowledge of SFL, convince my readers to believe what I am saying, and organize my ideas in a way that makes sense. Therefore, I construct a context with language. The context of the article also correspondingly shapes discourse by influencing and potentially constraining my language choices. For instance, if I were to take a linguistic detour and recount the details of a recent vacation or, even more preposterously, launch into a series of offensive expletives, I would not only be forfeiting publication opportunities, but I would also be completely disregarding the linguistic constraints set forth by the context of the expectations of an academic article.

To help analyze the linguistic elements that help create the context of situation, Halliday expanded upon the existing linguistic theory of *register* (Halliday, 1989; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In the following sections, I discuss how SFL theorists conceive of the concept of register and highlight some of the ways SFL register can be incorporated into instruction to support the academic literacy development of ELLs in K-12 contexts.

Context of Situation: Register

Halliday identified three elements that combine to construct a particular register: *field, tenor,* and *mode* (see Appendix A). To illustrate how SFL linguists define these terms, I use the context of a parent-teacher conference, a context with which most experienced educators are very familiar. The potential range of topics of the conference might include student performance, grade-level expectations, and classroom procedures. This range of topics, or what the text is about, serves as what SFL theorists term the *field.* The field is composed of three elements: *processes, participants,* and *circumstances.* These terms broadly correspond to the more familiar terms found in traditional grammar (*verbs, nouns,* and *adverbs* respectively). *Processes* typically form the central element of the clause. *Participants* are defined as whoever or whatever is involved in this process. *Circumstances* provide details about the process and typically describe the action, time, the place, and/or the manner in which something is being done. Table 1 identi-

fies how each element of the field of discourse would be labeled in a hypothetical clause from a parent-teacher conference.

Table 1
Elements of Field

Clause	*Students*	*are expected to complete homework*	*on a daily basis.*
Field elements	Participants	Processes	Circumstances
Function	Who is involved?	What is the central action?	What words or phrases describe the central action?

Tenor, the second element of register, has to do with the role of language in constructing relationships between interlocutors. In other words, language users make different language choices to make connections with others, show affinity toward something, and negotiate power relationships. The clause above demonstrates the role particular language choices play in constructing tenor. The clause above is intended to clarify homework expectations to parents. The language user has a choice of clause types, what SFL theorists term *mood,* at her disposal to convey the same message. For instance, the author of the clause analyzed in Table 1 could have reworded the declarative as an interrogative, "Shouldn't students submit homework before class?" or as an imperative, "Turn in the homework daily before class." Either of these alternative clause types would have conveyed a similar message but with slightly diverse shades of meaning and varying levels of effectiveness given the context of the parent-teacher conference in which they were uttered. Had the teacher chosen to use the imperative instead of the declarative, he or she may have risked sounding dictatorial rather than merely authoritative, which would represent a shift in tenor. Language users also enact tenor through *modality.* Modality is the linguistic means through which language users express

Table 2
Modality

High modality	All students *must* complete their homework daily.
Medium modality	Students *ought to* complete their homework daily.
Low degree of modality	Students *could* complete their homework.

levels of intensity of probability and obligation. The three clauses in Table 2 illustrate how the use of modal verbs signals varying degrees of obligation.

Table 3
Elements of Tenor

Clause	*Excellent students must study to attain high grades.*
Function	High level of modality used to express judgment
Linguistic features contributing to tenor	Declarative sentence structure Use of lexical items with positive appraisal value (*excellent, high grades*)

Another significant function of tenor is to indicate *stance, attitude* and *evaluation.* To realize these elements linguistically, language users draw on elements of appraisal to communicate their evaluation of objects and/or judgment of actions. Skillful language users manage these linguistic resources proficiently to convey opinions, evaluations, and judgments. For instance, if the teacher were to conclude the conference with "Homework is an essential part of the class," his language choices would clearly convey his positive stance toward homework. Table 3 synthesizes the elements of mode and their contribution to the construction of register.

The third element of register, *mode,* has to do with the method language users choose to share information and how they organize text to make meaning. Depending upon what they wish to accomplish with language, language users construct a mode that falls somewhere on a continuum between *spoken* and *written discourse* (see Appendix B). Admittedly, there is a recognizable overlap on the continuum of spoken to written discourse, as some texts are written but intended to be spoken (e.g., a political speech, eulogy, or sermon) and, conversely, some written texts rely heavily on spoken discourse (e.g., text messages, notes to a friend). Nevertheless, certain linguistic elements influence where a text falls on the spoken/written continuum. For example, SFL analysis of an additional hypothetical clause that could potentially appear in the context of a parent-teacher conference, "Kids must pass it in first thing in the morning," illustrates a number of these modal elements at play. Given the context of a parent-teacher conference, readers can most likely predict that the "it" appearing in the clause refers to homework and the "kids" are students. More informal lexical choices such as "kids" coupled with the use of the pronoun "it" construct a register more typical of spoken discourse because they reflect language choices that are more likely made in the context of face-

to-face interaction. Alternatively, the clause above could be reworded as, "The expectation for student homework submission remains that material submission must occur prior to the commencement of class." If a teacher were to utter this clause in the context of a spoken interaction with a parent, he would undoubtedly receive puzzled looks from the parent in response because, although the field of discourse and the message conveyed by the clause would essentially remain the same, the linguistic choices construct a context more typical of written discourse.

Most examples contrasting the impact of varying linguistic choices on the construction of register are not this extreme. In most contexts, language tends to fall on a continuum somewhere between the overtly spoken discourse of informal conversation and the highly technical language choices typical of academic written discourse. However, it is important to specify some of the linguistic features typical of written discourse so that teacher educators can help teachers design instruction that brings students' attention to the differences between written and spoken discourse. In addition to *technical vocabulary* and *pronouns,* elements of written discourse also include frequent use of the *passive voice* and *nominalizations.* The latter, a linguistic feature characteristic of science and history discourse, occurs when language users choose to convert a verbal process to a noun form. For instance, in the written discourse above, "it is expected" could become "the expectation" and "students should submit" could become "student submissions." Nominalization expands the meaning potential of certain words by allowing language users room to modify, quantify, and even remove agency from the action (Gebhard & Martin, 2011; Gibbons, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004). Table 4 illustrates the varying functions nominalizations perform (Gibbons, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Table 4
Functions of Nominalization

Function	***Example***
Modified noun	Student submissions
Quantified noun	A number of submissions
Removal of agency	Submissions were collected

Nominal forms also increase *cohesion* and *coherence* in written discourse as they help to connect and advance ideas through a text. Teachers of academic writing often refer to this aspect of written discourse using the rather nebulous term *flow,* a term that often frus-

trates student writers seeking concrete linguistic resources to increase textual cohesiveness and coherence. Writers may achieve greater cohesion and coherence by employing nominalizations that function to pack larger amounts of information into denser word forms that can be carried throughout a text. Therefore, instead of long stretches of text typical of spoken discourse, lexically dense forms can be used by skillful writers to carry compact ideas within clauses and between paragraphs.

The ability to deploy nominalizations skillfully remains beneficial in particular content-area discourses such as history and science. Nominalized forms can be used to remove agency from a clause, a linguistic move that affects participants in historical political discourse and those tasked with analyzing it. To illustrate the use of nominalization to de-emphasize agency, I offer a clause one might find within a modern US history textbook:

> The ultimate responsibility for the Watergate scandal was attributed to the re-election committee of the president.

As this clause demonstrates, skillful manipulation of nominalized forms permits writers to negotiate meaning in a way that de-emphasizes agency, allowing participants to distance themselves from a particular action, in this case an illegal one. Such deft language use can pose a barrier to ELLs faced with negotiating meaning from ideologically infused discourse often found in historical texts. Therefore, learning to unpack linguistically dense clauses such as this supports learners in becoming effective, critical discourse analysts capable of taking a critical and informed stance toward content and in turn more skillfully employing these elements in their own writing (Gibbons, 2009; Schulze, 2009).

Theory Into Practice: Implications for Classroom Learning

Now that I have outlined the key concepts and terminology of SFL, it is useful to consider the theory in terms of how it can inform future teachers' instructional practice related to the academic literacy demands set forth by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In the section of the grades 6-12 standards of the Common Core focusing on the content area of history, social studies, science, and technology, four key areas of literacy receive focus:

1. Key ideas and details;
2. Craft and structure;
3. Integration of knowledge and ideas;
4. Range of reading and text complexity.

To prepare ELLs to make meaning by identifying the key ideas and details in a linguistically complex text, teachers can use SFL in some concrete ways. For instance, teachers can conduct a preinstructional linguistic analysis of the texts their students will use during a lesson. Conducting an SFL analysis of the texts during lesson preparation supports teachers in identifying potential linguistic challenges their students may face when making meaning from grade-level texts. For example, teachers may examine elements of the field of discourse by examining the processes and participants. Once they have identified these text elements, teachers may pinpoint areas in which explicit instruction may be necessary to provide additional background knowledge related to people, places, concepts, and routines that may be unfamiliar to ELLs who are learning aspects of a new culture as well as a new language. After their analysis of the field of discourse of the texts, teachers may analyze the linguistic features contributing to the tenor of class readings. For instance, teachers may identify particular words and phrases that possess connotations unfamiliar to ELLs, but that are essential to integration of knowledge and ideas within the discipline. Supplied with this knowledge, teachers can then design instruction that makes visible the appraisal value of particular word choices found in the text and instruct students on how this language contributes to the integration of knowledge and ideas. Last, teachers may use SFL to analyze the craft and structure of a text by examining elements of mode contributing to text organization and subsequently determine the linguistic resources for connecting and advancing ideas, such as temporal connectors, transitions, and nominalizations that need to be made visible to learners.

With a greater awareness of the academic language demands afforded by the SFL preinstructional analysis of course readings, teachers can subsequently design language-focused instructional scaffolding to support students' making of meaning from grade-level texts. One way to increase language-focused instruction is through the practice of close reading. Close reading involves the purposeful reading and rereading of texts to analyze various aspects of language and its particular effect on a text's construction (Fisher & Frey, 2012). During the subsequent rereadings of grade-level texts, students analyze texts for varying literacy devices, word usage, and plot elements.

The practice of close reading advocated by SFL educational linguists differs slightly from the practice taking hold in US instructional contexts (Gibbons, 2009; Rose & Martin, 2012). Although an SFL close reading also provides instructional focus highlighting the contribution of language to the construction of meaning within the text, the practice of SFL close reading provides increased instructional

scaffolding designed to build ELLs' background knowledge before reading the text, a practice that is typically de-emphasized within the US version of close reading (Fisher & Frey, 2012; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014).

SFL can play an integral part in supporting ELLs with the practice of close reading because it provides ample metalanguage that facilitates analysis of linguistically complex texts. For instance, through careful instructional scaffolding of a close reading, teachers can support students in identifying and reconstructing the key ideas, events, and details of a text as well as evaluating the contribution of language to a text's craft and structure. This language-focused method of instruction is valuable for supporting ELLs with meaning making because teachers not only provide scaffolding and clear demonstration of text analysis, but they also create space for explicit language instruction and vocabulary development.

To illustrate what an SFL-based close reading looks like in practice, I offer an example from my own teaching context. As a middle-school ESL teacher tasked with supporting the academic literacy development of beginning- and emerging-level ELLs, I implemented the strategy of close reading with my students as we began an instructional unit on persuasive writing. Specifically, my students were tasked with composing a written persuasive argument that convinced their peers to download the latest musical work of their favorite reggaeton artist.[1] As the instructional unit began, I looked for ways to support students in building their field of discourse, not only about the topic of reggaeton, of which they already possessed sufficient background knowledge, but also about the organizational structure and linguistic features expected within an effective persuasive argument. One of the instructional strategies I used to build the field of discourse related to the topic of reggaeton and the genre of music reviews was the close reading of an authentic text about the history of reggaeton. Once I identified an exemplar text, I conducted an SFL analysis of the text to gain a better understanding of its register and discourse structure (see Appendix C).

Before tackling the reading, I led a whole-group discussion, in English and Spanish, in which I gave a paragraph-by-paragraph overview of the content and structure of the reading. By providing background knowledge and explicit instruction regarding what to expect as the text unfolded in meaning, I decreased the cognitive load required to make meaning from a linguistically complex, authentic English-language text. Next, as I prepared students for the impending read-aloud, I provided the students with three highlighters of different colors. I then introduced students to the metalanguage of SFL by

introducing the concept of "processes" and identified the processes in two examples. I wrote an additional clause on the board and asked students to identify the process in the clause independently. My instructional intent was to promote my students' use of the metalanguage within the context of the close read. As I began the read-aloud, I asked students to highlight the processes in green. After I read the first two paragraphs aloud, we identified the key processes and attempted to construct an initial understanding of the key events and details of the text. To do so, students participated in a focused discussion in which they questioned each other before sharing their potential predictions and using what they had learned about processes to begin to co-construct the text. After a discussion of the processes they found in the reading, I introduced the concept of "participants" and returned to the example clause I had used to illustrate processes. Students were directed to identify who and what was actually involved in the process. I subsequently read the text aloud a second time. This time, students were prompted to highlight the participants in red. After the second reading, we identified who the participants were, their potential role in the text, and their connection to the actions. We also discussed whether the participants were humans or inanimate objects. Through each iteration of the reading, my instruction supported students in comprehending the key details and events of the text. Last, I introduced the concept of circumstances and followed the same instructional pattern. After defining the term, I conducted a third consecutive read-aloud of the text, this time requesting students to highlight circumstances in blue. After the final read-aloud, we discussed the function of the circumstances, focusing on whether the circumstances were telling us something about the way the action was happening or something about when or where the event was happening.

Throughout the process of the SFL-based close reading, we recorded the findings of our joint SFL analysis on a chart divided into three categories in which students added the processes, participants, and circumstances in each respective column (see Appendix D). After the third reading of the text, the chart was nearly complete, so I instructed students to put their copies of the reading aside. We then reconstructed the key points of the text using the participants, processes, and circumstances we had charted (Rose & Martin, 2012). This activity was only one of many that exemplified how I integrated the metalanguage of SFL into instruction to support students in acquiring a deeper understanding of how language worked.

The practice of SFL-based close reading proved beneficial for several reasons. First, the instruction helped to expand students' existing control of the lexicon related to the field of discourse. After reading

the text, students were better equipped to recognize and use the language typically found in texts about reggaeton. They readily incorporated such terms as *rhythm, tone, beat,* and *artist* into both their oral discourse when discussing the artist they chose to write about and in their subsequent written drafts of their persuasive music reviews. Second, it allowed students to use the metalanguage they had been introduced to with authentic, grade-level texts.

Close reading also allowed for analysis of the tenor and mode. I provided language-focused instructional scaffolding to support their meaning making and analysis of this text through two instructional moves: identifying and elaborating (Rose & Martin, 2012). To illustrate how I implemented these instructional moves, consider the first clause appearing in the exemplar text we analyzed in class:

> Reggaeton is the most catching and successful music style to have emerged in recent years.

As we began our close reading, I previewed the first sentence by telling my students that it would tell the readers "something good about reggaeton." I specified that there would be two words they should listen for that described the music in positive terms. I then read the clause aloud. I asked them to identify the words that indicated a positive evaluation of the music. Several students identified "catching" and "successful" and I instructed students to underline those words. At that point, I explained that those words indicated "appraisal" value and explained that those were words that showed whether the author liked or did not like something. It is important to note that the use of the metalanguage emerged gradually through opportunities provided by text analysis. Building my students' metalinguistic awareness and corresponding use of metalanguage did not happen immediately but rather emerged gradually through recursive and purposeful linguistic analysis of multiple authentic texts. Through the repeated use of the metalanguage in analysis of authentic texts, students began to attach meaning to the metalanguage required to conduct a close reading and text analysis.

Similar instructional moves were used to introduce elements of mode. My language-focused questioning built on my students' linguistic schema. For example, I would ask, "Does this sentence sound like someone is talking to you or writing something for you?" The question would provide an instructional space to discuss varying elements contributing to the mode of the text. For instance, did the text contain words or phrases that helped to advance or "move" the text forward? By my providing multiple opportunities to use the metalan-

guage in purposeful ways, the students were slowly encouraged and able to use the terms to understand how language was working in the texts we were closely reading.

Introducing the metalanguage of SFL through the use of authentic, grade-level texts was particularly important. Historically, ELLs have too often received a diet of simplified texts because they were encouraged to engage with texts that were considered "just right" for them at their reading level. However, as research has pointed out, ELLs struggle to make sufficient gains in academic literacy development if they are reading only texts that are well below grade level (Gibbons, 2009; Rose & Martin, 2012). The practice of SFL-based close reading using linguistically complex texts exemplifies what Gibbons (2009) terms a "high-challenge, high-support" (p. 16) approach to academic language instruction and demonstrates the potential to accelerate the reading achievement of ELLs. Last, and arguably most important, the SFL-based close reading allowed students to analyze, discuss, and make meaning from grade-level texts without discounting the rich cultural experiences and linguistic resources they brought to the learning context.

Recommendations for Classroom Practice

For teachers who would like to begin supporting teachers with the integration of SFL into their instruction, I offer the following recommendations for ways to put SFL into practice in the linguistically diverse classroom:

1. **Choose linguistically complex texts.** With the right amount of language-focused instructional scaffolding, ELLs of all English language-development levels can learn to make meaning from texts that are authentic, linguistically complex, and most important, interesting to them.
2. **Increase instructional scaffolding rather than simplify texts for ELLs.** The key factor in helping ELLs make meaning from grade-level texts lies in increasing instructional support, not decreasing students' opportunities to engage with linguistically complex texts. Using texts that match their independent reading level does not allow students adequate engagement with linguistically complex texts. ELLs, especially those in the fourth grade and higher, do not have the luxury of time to progress through the typical 7- to 10-year process of language acquisition in school contexts (Collier, 1989) and therefore need routine engagement with linguistically complex texts and complementary instructional scaffolding that will accelerate their academic literacy development.

3. **Introduce metalanguage in the context of meaningful instruction from day 1.** Because SFL terminology is more comprehensive than that of traditional grammar, it needs to be introduced early and reinforced frequently. Students may not acquire the metalanguage immediately but need repeated opportunities to use the metalanguage in meaningful and purposeful analysis of authentic and linguistically complex texts that are of high interest to them.
4. **Give students ample time to analyze short texts of linguistic complexity with teachers.** Linguistic analysis does not start with lengthy texts. Instead, working with short texts such as short stories or excerpts from longer texts helps students gain a deeper understanding of the role of language within these texts. It also builds ELLs' stamina for linguistic analysis and promotes the deep thinking necessary to foster subsequent critical analysis of longer texts.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators

For the teacher educator looking to apprentice preservice teachers into linguistic analysis and the practice of SFL-informed close reading, I offer the following recommendations:

1. **Start small with shared texts.** Just as the process of close reading requires deep and comprehensive analysis of small pieces of text with students, the process of text analysis should start small, too. Having preservice teachers identify a short passage from a text that they will potentially use in their own future classrooms is a good place to start. For the first analysis, agree on one text to work with as a whole group. That way, students will share the experience of text analysis step by step. I typically have preservice teachers analyze the text using three iterations of "language detectives," a tool developed for systematic text analysis by Pat Paugh of the University of Massachusetts, Boston. In this activity, preservice teachers work with partners to analyze a text using three guiding questions: What is the text about? What is the relationship between the reader and the writer? How is the text organized? After their first analysis, we share our findings. Typically the preservice teachers' responses do not focus on specific elements of language. After they complete an initial text analysis is an opportune time to introduce SFL metalanguage. We then work together to analyze the field, looking for processes, participants, and circumstances. The activity is repeated over the course of three or more classes with each iteration of "language detectives" focusing more sharply on the linguistic elements of register and discourse struc-

ture. This activity provides a model for instruction that preservice teachers can adapt to use with their future students.

2. **Introduce SFL theory with texts they will use in their classrooms.** As I mentioned, to promote preservice teachers' investment in conducting text analysis, I always encourage them to use a text that they would actually find in the grade level and content area they plan to teach. That way, they see the preparation for close reading as something that can have real practical value and can be aligned with instruction to support the CCSS that will form the basis of their future instruction.
3. **Connect theory to practice.** The final step is having students work together to use what they have learned from their text analysis to inform their practice. I have each teacher create a language-focused "mini-lesson" in which they design instruction to teach one of the academic language demands that they identified during their SFL analysis to their future students. This way, they see that the linguistic analysis is not a decontextualized event of analysis for analysis's sake, but a valuable instructional practice that can improve their lesson planning and bring a language focus to their instructional practice.

Author

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Note

[1]The musical genre of reggaeton is a genre of Spanish-language music popular in the Caribbean.

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Appendix A
Elements of Register

Field	*Tenor*	*Mode*
Processes	Appraisal value	Theme and rheme
Participants	Modality	Repetition
Circumstances	Mood	Conjunctions
		Pronouns

Appendix B
Examples of Spoken and Written Discourse Continuum Used in Teacher-Education Classes

	Academic/written discourse	*Spoken discourse*
Sample text used in class to illustrate differences between academic written discourse and spoken discourse	An ever-increasing demographic shift in the US has been the impetus for an increased focus on developing and designing lessons to support the academic literacy development of English language learners.	So many newcomers coming to the US without being able to speak English yet means teachers have to learn new ways to help kids learning English learn.
Linguistic features	Ideas packed into densely worded participants with several pre-and postmodifiers surrounding the head nouns of *shift* and *focus*	Informal terminology used to refer to English language learners

Appendix C
Exemplar Text Used in Class With SFL Analysis of Register

Reggaeton *is* the most catching and successful **musical style** to have emerged <u>in recent years</u>./ Like any lively and flexible **musical direction**,/ it *developed* <u>year after year</u>, merging with other **underground styles** in the **discos of the Caribbean** to finally make a vigorous breakthrough <u>in Puerto Rico and Cuba</u>./ **Reggaeton** has **sounds** of many other "in the street" developed musical directions, like **Hip Hop, rap, Jamaican reggae** and, of course, **plena, salsa and bomba**./

There are two existing **versions of the origins of Reggaeton**:/ some say it *originated* <u>in Panama</u>, others argue that this **music direction** comes <u>from Puerto Rico</u>./ This is actually where a majority of the singers come from/ **Reggaeton** actually *developed* from **Jamaican Reggae**,/ but was certainly influenced by various other musical directions, like for example **North American Hip Hop and Puerto Rican rhythms**./ But let's first take a look at the **Spanish speaking rap and reggae** that have made an **essential contribution** to the **development** of **reggaeton**.

Note. Bold=participants; italic=processes; underline= circumstances.

Appendix D
Chart of Field Elements Co-constructed by Student and Teacher