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Author

Mitsikopoulou, Bessie

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Genre Instruction and Critical Literacy in Teacher Education: Features of a Critical Foreign Language Pedagogy in a University Curriculum

BESSIE MITSIKOPOULOU

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Email: mbessie@enl.uoa.gr

This paper focuses on critical pedagogy and EFL teacher education and it argues that it would be unrealistic to expect students who have been educated through traditional university curricula (aiming to deliver content through a 'banking model') to become critical foreign language teachers and educators. The education of future teachers requires new university curricula which view literacy as a critical social practice and prepare them through transformative pedagogies, encouraging them to examine critically their values and beliefs by developing a reflexive knowledge base, an appreciation for multiple perspectives and a sense of critical consciousness and agency.

Based on this premise, the article presents the case of *Genres in English*, an undergraduate language course at the Department of English Language and Literature of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, aiming to raise students' critical literacy. Using the tools of Systemic Functional Grammar and drawing on a genre-based approach to writing development, the course initially invites students to take up the role of critical text analysts deconstructing academic and media texts and at a later stage to engage in a popularization of science writing task mediating information from an academic to a media text. Through language tasks which approach genres as historical constructs, students are introduced to the ideological nature of discourses and genres and they explore the conditions of production, distribution and consumption of texts. To evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, the paper presents the findings from a small-scale research conducted with students who have attended the course.

INTRODUCTION

Critical pedagogy, in its various forms, has played an important role in literacy development of both the mother tongue and the learning of a second language in several different contexts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1988; Morgan, 1997; Rivers, 2015). Less emphasis has been placed, however, on its impact on foreign language education (see, for instance, López-Gopar, 2019) and on the preparation required for teachers to become critical educators. In this article, the focus will be on the development of critical literacy in the context of an undergraduate language course for speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who study at the Department of English Language and Literature of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. It is suggested that courses promoting critical literacy during undergraduate study are essential for the development of critical consciousness for all students, especially for those who may become professionals in the field of English Language Teaching.

Theoretically, the article draws on Paulo Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy, combining it with M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and his social semiotic approach. Both scholars adhere to a social view of language and stress its constitutive nature. Freire's critical pedagogy emphasizes the historicity of knowledge and the development of critical consciousness (*conscientization*), which enables teachers (in our case,

future teachers) and students to make connections between their lived experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. The development of critical consciousness constitutes the first step of liberatory praxis, an ongoing and reflective approach to taking action. For Freire, change in consciousness and concrete action are linked. The role of critical pedagogy is, then, to empower students leading them to intellectual emancipation and change in their lives. Although not concerned with the development of a theory of language nor with a specific teaching methodology, Freire's famous statement that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35) summarizes the essence of his critical pedagogy and literacy approach.

Similarly, Halliday (1978) also opposes the traditional separation between language and society. Adopting a functional theory of language, he introduces the notion of language as a social semiotic and argues that "language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives" (p. 4). For Halliday, the grammar of a language is a system of options (of 'meaning potential'), and a text is a semantic unit consisting of meanings not just words and sentences, a semiotic encounter through which meanings are exchanged. SFL maps the choices available in a language system in terms of three metafunctions: the ideational metafunction (referring to ideas and representations of the world), the interpersonal (referring to setting up and maintaining social relations), and the textual (enabling the construction of situationally relevant and coherent texts). His description of grammar has significantly influenced theories of pedagogy, one of which is a genre-focused pedagogical approach to writing. According to proponents of this pedagogy (e.g. Christie & Martin, 1997; Martin, 1989; Rothery, 1996), mastery of genres entails sophisticated grammatical and lexical choice (Hasan & Williams, 1996), and is considered an essential step towards democratization of education (since it is related to issues of access to these genres in the first place).

Socially based models of literacy pedagogy, including both Freirean critical pedagogy and SFL genre theories, have been criticized for their assumptions concerning the relationship between literacy and social power (see, for instance, Luke 1996, for the need of a rigorous sociological analysis). However, interested in investigating the workings of language in *Genres in English,* the emphasis has been on the other direction: to use the analytic tools of systemic functional grammar in order to develop students' *conscientization*, to make them aware of the social effects of language choices and to sensitize them to the ways grammar works in order to construe alternative realities. Adopting Freire's pedagogical framework of critical literacy and combining it with Halliday's close systematic analysis of texts using the SFL framework,[i] our aim in this undergraduate course has been to enable undergraduate students and future foreign language educators to use the lexicogrammar of the English language consciously and to be aware of its effects in order to serve different functions in various sociocultural contexts. It is this "critical reflection on practice" between theory and practice in combination with the development of "critical consciousness" about the workings of language that will empower future teachers "not *to transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge" (Freire, 2000, p. 30) when they teach their own students.

THE CHALLENGE OF PREPARING CRITICAL EDUCATORS FOR AN APOLITICAL FIELD

First, it might be useful to understand the ways English Language Teaching (ELT) developed as an applied professional field (Mitsikopoulou, 1999) with its own university programs, journals, publications, conferences, language schools and experts. Professionalism in ELT has operated, according to Phillipson (1992), on the basis of three

main mechanisms. The first mechanism refers to the transfer of practices from Centre institutions (from countries such as the U.S. and Britain) to the Periphery (countries where English is 'exported'), a transfer which ensured "the superiority of the teaching theories, methods and practices of the donor countries and the inferiority of those of the recipient countries" (Dendrinos, 1997, p. 260). Embedded in this discourse was the view of the native speaker as the ideal teacher of English, putting at a disadvantage the non-native teachers who are positioned in need of expert help (Mitsikopoulou, 1997). The second mechanism is related to training and education: coming from the Centre, the various theories of language learning and teaching, together with their respective methodologies, have had a great impact on how the English language was understood and taught in all parts of the world for many years. Finally, the third mechanism, which ensured the spread of the English language, promoted a common sense discourse of English as the language of development, technological and scientific advancement, and related it to employment skills and a particular kind of occupational ideology. These mechanisms operated as systematic patterns "within a structure in which unequal power and resource allocation is effected and legitimated" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 54) and constructed ELT as an apolitical and a narrowly technical field whose theories and methodologies are viewed as universal goals instead of cultural products. Most importantly, the discourses that legitimize ELT also have a material base, given that the teaching of the English language worldwide is a multi-billion-dollar business with invested interests.

The tradition roughly described above, together with its permeating practices, has infused a common sense and a naturalized discourse within which the teaching of English as a Foreign Language has progressed over the last forty years of so. The questions then posed can be summarized in the following: How could critical pedagogy, a highly political project, transform practices and identities (teacher, student, academic identities) when combined with the market-oriented EFL field? How can critical pedagogy enable teachers of English from the Periphery who are not native speakers (the case for the majority of our graduates) to challenge this naturalized discourse, develop their own voice and construct alternative realities? And how can systematic analysis of texts, following a social semiotic account, enhance future teachers' awareness and critical consciousness?

Definitely, there cannot be a single or simple answer to this question. Such a project will require changes at a number of different levels, among which the university curricula we use to educate our future EFL teachers. This article is based on the premise that we could not expect teachers who have been educated through traditional university curricula and mainstream applied linguistics and methodology courses to employ a critical pedagogy when they go to school to teach. As Hyland (2007) argues, teachers have not even been prepared from their education programs to show their students the ways language operates in the genres they routinely read and write, let alone to introduce a pedagogy that challenges a long-standing tradition in the ELT context.

If, therefore, we wish to expand the critical pedagogy project to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language, we need to start with providing undergraduate students and future teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge of a critical foreign language pedagogy, to challenge the reasoning of mainstream educational practices and to provide alternative ways of 'doing', 'behaving' and 'being'. First, however, we need to introduce practices that approach literacy as a critical social practice and move away from the traditional critical thinking approach that permeates several university language courses.

FROM CRITICAL THINKING TO CRITICAL LITERACY

The term 'critical' has been variously used in educational discourse, often with very different content. Critical thinking and critical literacy, for instance, are sometimes

considered synonyms, although they draw on different pedagogical and theoretical traditions (Mitsikopoulou, 2015). Clarifying the two terms is of utmost importance before I move to a critical literacy paradigm. Critical thinking has been an educational goal of many university degrees, including English Language and Literature programmes, referring to students' ability to analyse reading and writing from the perspective of formal logic, to make judgments "evaluating relevancy and adequacy of what is read" (Harris & Hodge, 1981) and to use strategies and skills to solve problems, formulate inferences and make decisions (Fung, 2005; Halpern, 2002). It has, as a result, often been connected to reason, intellectual honesty and open-mindedness (Kurland, 1995) and regarded as a cognitive ability that activates mental processes such as attention, categorization, selection and judgment (Cottrell, 2005). In fact, critical thinking is considered 'a defining concept of the Western university' (Barnett, 1997, p. 2) which holds a central position in university and professional mission statement documents (Moon, 2008). University courses on critical thinking have also been offered in various academic disciplines (e.g. Epstein & Kernberger, 2004; Gold, Holman & Thorpe, 2002; Kaasboll, 1998; Phillips & Bond, 2004; Twardy, 2004), curricula have been redesigned (e.g. Allen, 2004; Bowell & Kempt, 2002; Browne & Keeley, 2007; Fisher, 2001) and critical thinking tests have been included in large schemes of assessment (Mejia, 2009).

Freshman composition and other university language courses have embedded critical thinking activities and the methodology of identifying and evaluating arguments (Kuhn, 1999). For instance, students are asked to read a text, identify its main idea and its supporting arguments, analyze and synthesize arguments from a text, and make inferences (Yeh, 2001) or even complete drilling exercises with decontextualized statements (e.g. find logical fallacies or distinguish facts from opinion statements). Some theorists, such as Paul (1990), extended the notion of critical thinking to also refer to the disposition of the critical thinker who incorporates the developed skills into a way of life.

The idea that this, supposedly, universal set of skills will be transferred to multiple contexts in real life (Cottrell, 2005; Halpern, 2002) enabling students to become active members in their community has been criticized as a normative and 'logistic' model which claims objectivity and rationality (Martin, 1992). Giroux (2005) called this pedagogy a *pedagogy of understanding*, whose aim is to make students understand and consequently accept the reality around them without giving them the tools that will enable them to consider changing the world and making it a more meaningful and just place. Similarly, Kaplan (1994) warned about the danger of passively accepting without questioning certain political perspectives and without asking questions about the genesis of these perspectives. The problem with these conceptions of critical thinking, according to Burbules and Berk (1999), is that they place emphasis on the individual, disregarding any considerations of the social context. By focusing exclusively on the logical and evidential strengths of arguments, irrespective of any considerations for its broader context (i.e., sociocultural and historical setting), this kind of critical thinking leads to a decontextualization of thinking. Consequently, knowledge is seen as *objective* and *decontextualized* and not as an object of inquiry in which facts, issues, and events are presented problematically to students.

This *pedagogy of understanding* contrasts with critical pedagogy, which, inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, challenges the view of educational institutions, such as schools and universities, as neutral institutions designed to provide students with skills and knowledge in order to prepare them for the labor force. The purpose of critical pedagogy is the development of *a language of critique,* which raises students' awareness of dominant

ideologies and uncovers how different subjectivities and identities are positioned within historically specific social practices, and the development of a *language of possibility* which enables them to explore alternative perspectives and possibilities of change (Giroux, 1983, 1988, 1997). This is why Giroux (2005) calls it a *pedagogy of intervention;* it equips students with the resources that will enable them to act upon the world around them.

In the context of revisiting critical pedagogy and expanding its scope for EFL contexts, in this paper, emphasis will be given on critical literacy, defined as the critical capacity to use language in order to make connections between students' individual experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. In Freire's (1985) account, literacy is not a technical skill but an act of knowing, an act that views learners as subjects in the reading process. Lankshear (1997, p. 156) outlines four educational goals that derive from this concept of critical literacy, which also constitute the main elements of an inclusive pedagogy:

a. Enable students to make explicit the relationship between the 'word' and the 'world'.
b. Provide students with opportunities to explore social and discursive practices as historical rather than natural and fixed.
c. Encourage students to explore the effects of discourse and explore how the use of different language may produce different outcomes for individual and groups.
d. Provide students with opportunities to enhance their appreciation of the actual and possible ways of 'doing' and 'being'.

He further notes that critical literacy and critical pedagogy refer to the development of a critical perspective of texts and of the wider social practices that are "mediated by, made possible, and partially sustained through reading, writing, viewing, transmitting, etc., texts" (Lankshear, 1997, p. 44). The question that arises, then, is how EFL teachers of the periphery can raise their critical literacy during undergraduate studies. This article presents the case of *Genres in English*, a compulsory fourth semester language course, which engages students in text analysis using SFL tools in order to raise initially their critical literacy awareness and progressively lead them toward the development of critical consciousness. By providing a specific case of a course targeting critical literacy, this paper also aspires to respond to the critique sometimes raised for critical pedagogy, that it only remains at the level of grand theorizing oriented to critical discussions of schooling (Gore, 1993; Johnston, 1999; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

THE CONTEXT OF *GENRES IN ENGLISH*

The Department of English Language and Literature consists of two sections, the Section of Language and Linguistics and the Section of Literature and Culture, and it offers an interdisciplinary four-year undergraduate program. Currently a student body of approximately 2,000 students attend our undergraduate program, which covers important fields of the humanities and specialized fields within the wide area of English Studies such as language and culture, literature and theory, theoretical and applied linguistics, translation and a pre-service education program. The language program of the department comprises four courses taught in the first two years of the undergraduate program: *Academic Discourse* (1st semester), *Translation: Practical Applications* (2nd semester), *English Phonetics and Oral Production* (3rd semester) and *Genres in English* (4th semester). During their studies, students are encouraged to develop their intellectual faculties, an

intercultural awareness, and to carry out independent research. As stated on the department website:

> Studies in our Department do not merely aim at the development of academic competences and professional skills. They also aim at the development of our students' social, political and cultural awareness. This is particularly true as regards the role of English, which is not viewed as a neutral tool of communication or a mere means through which to access knowledge and participate in the international job market. Its ideological role and political importance is taken into account knowing that English has an important part to play in the shaping of a global culture. Finally, our studies aim at cultivating students' social sensitivity, as this is considered fundamental for their self-realization as active citizens, and at developing their social consciousness, which will allow them to critique cultural practices and ideologies.

Most students at the Department of English Language and Literature are not native speakers of English but have learned English as a Foreign Language; they are EFL learners preparing themselves to become professionals in the area of English Studies. The majority of our students are involved in EFL teaching. By the time they enter university, they have a background of several years of English language instruction and almost all of them have obtained a C2 level English language certificate (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). They also come with high formal school literacy, since the entrance to the department is highly competitive (with a minimum of 18.5 out of 20 on average in *Apolytirion*, the school leaving certificate). Still, however, the department focuses on enhancing incoming students' English language level and critical literacy, given the specific role of English in the department as the language of instruction (all courses offered by the English program are taught and assessed in English), the object of study (in literature and linguistics courses), and the subject matter of their future profession (a great number of graduates are active in diverse professional fields related to the English language, including education and translation in the public and private sector).

STUDENTS AS CRITICAL TEXT ANALYSTS

Genres in English adheres to a social semiotic view of language (Halliday, 1978) and aims to introduce students to various media genres from a critical literacy perspective as the one outlined by Lankshear (1997) earlier. The course introduces basic elements of Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), such as the systems of transitivity, theme and modality (Halliday, 1994), and adopts a genre-based approach in its analysis of different media texts. It should be noted that in the context of *Genres in English*, media genres are not simply taught to undergraduate students with instructions about how to use them for prescribed social purposes. Students are invited to analyze the 'linguistic technology' of the genre, and relate the form of the text critically to its purpose and its culture, and the human interests that it serves (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993). Taking up the position of critical text analysts, students initially analyse a variety of different media genres, particularly from newspapers and magazines (e.g. articles, news reports, features, editorials, readers' letters, letters to the editor, readers' stories advertisements and hybrid genres, such as advertorial). They analyse the situational and broader cultural context, discuss the changing roles of writers and readers of media texts and find the language features which construct the text's viewpoint. Then, they engage in a read-to-write task of popularization of science in which they use in practice what whey have learned in the course. Overall, students are involved in activities of deconstruction and reproduction following the three stages presented in detail below.

In the first stage, students focus on identifying some of the key characteristics of academic and media texts that they read and comparing the different language and contextual features of specific texts from different discourses and genres (e.g. research article, broadsheet newspaper, popular newspaper, magazine articles, etc). In the academic texts, they look for relationships of classification, taxonomy and logical connections among abstract terms and process (Lemke, 1990), high levels of nominalization, technical language (Parkinson & Adendorff, 2004), lexical density and impersonal expressions, definitions, special expressions, syntactic ambiguity and semantic discontinuity (Halliday, 1993). In the media texts, they look for narrative language, expressing relationships of time, place, manner and action among specific, real persons and events, emotional or poetic language, specific and concrete relations, and metaphors and analogies to introduce complex scientific concepts (Halkia & Mantzouridis, 2005). By comparing academic and media texts that report the same scientific findings, students explore the workings of language at a micro-level by analyzing lexico-grammatical features and features of style. They also consider contextual differences among texts, including: the writer and readers of these texts, the publishers and publication channels, issues of access such as who has access to them and where (e.g. places where one can find/buy them), and formality of language. At this stage, students look at how language works differently in different texts (e.g. levels of analysis) and by analyzing the situational and broader context, they start exploring the processes of media text production, distribution and consumption, and initiate a discussion about the *effects of discourse.*

The second stage of analysis aims at making explicit the relationship between the 'word' and the 'world'. After they have analyzed a number of academic and media texts, students then use the SFG tools in order to explore the attitudes embedded in texts. They are given two to four media texts on the same topic that hold different (often opposing) views and are asked, using the tools of SFG to identify each text's attitude (e.g., positive, partly positive, neutral, partly negative, negative) on the issue being discussed. Then, they write a brief report justifying their answer, bringing examples of the linguistic devices used to construct the text's attitude, including for instance: naming devices, adjectival and relative-clause descriptions assigning specific attributes or qualities, transitivity and agency, theme, modality, cohesion (lexical, grammatical), presuppositions and implicatures.

Being involved in these kinds of tasks, students start to realize that it is the use of certain grammatical features instead of others that construct a text's position on a topic. Little by little, they start becoming more conscious of their own as well others' choices of lexis and grammar. Treating students as critical text analysts – especially non-native speakers who are educated to become teachers of English – gradually leads them to a new kind of realization about language use. Most importantly, through this kind of analysis students begin to realize that the systematic use of some language features creates a particular view of the world. They also explore how particular ideologies are constructed in discourse and how the language used is not neutral, but always ideologically loaded. Moreover, the analysis of texts offers students a critical distance from texts, one that allows seeing things which might go unnoticed otherwise. Class discussion at this level stresses the broader ways of reading and talking about texts and is not restricted on the reading and analysis of the specific texts.

During the third stage, after they have explored how the use of different language produces different outcomes, students are involved in a "popularization of science" writing task aimed at enhancing their appreciation of the possible ways of 'doing' and 'behaving' (Lankshear, 1997). They read an academic text (e.g., an abstract, an extract from an academic article, a scientific report, etc.) that reports research findings on a topic of social concern, and, adopting the role of a science journalist, they are asked to relay information from this text in order to write a magazine or newspaper article for a generalized public.

Taking into account the context of the particular magazine or newspaper (e.g., its thematic focus, the kind of readership it addresses) as well as the specific topic, students are involved in what is known in literature as read-to-write (Ascención, 2008; Plakans, 2008; Plakans & Gebril, 2013; Weigle & Parker, 2012) and intralinguistic mediation task (Dendrinos, 2006; Stathopoulou, 2019). This task requires that writers read a given text (in our case an academic text) in order to relay information from it and produce another kind of text (e.g. a media text to appear in the science section of a newspaper) for the general public, acting as mediator.

Before embarking on their writing task, students research Greek and English science sections in newspapers and magazines, and read articles while focusing on genre structure, style, language and contextual features and keeping notes that respond to some of the following questions: What is the job of science journalists? Where do science journalists find the latest research? Do they rely only on only one source? How can they verify scientific information? How are the various voices embedded within a media text? How are scientific findings reported in a media text? What other information can be found there? How is the writer of an academic article represented in the text? In what ways are the texts written by a science journalist different from those of an academic? In what ways does the audience of an academic text differ from the audience of a magazine or newspaper? Who reads an academic article? Where do academics publish their articles and where can you buy an academic journal? In what ways is access to media texts different from that of academic texts? A discussion follows with oral reports of what they found during the research phase and then students proceed to write their article. Student texts are collected and they are redistributed for peer discussion.

The genre-based pedagogy employed above with its scaffolding process introduces students to media genres in a creative way, making connections to their knowledge of academic discourse (from the first semester of their studies). Teachers who are non-native speakers of English are often considered to be at a disadvantageous position in relation to native speakers. *Genres in English* equips non-native teachers of English with a theoretical background, that of Systemic Functional Linguistics, from which to approach language as a social semiotic system and as a system of options, enabling them to explore the different effects the language features have on representing reality, on enacting social relationships and on establishing identities. Its ultimate goal is to contribute to strengthening students' *voices* – understood here in the context of Freirean critical pedagogy as the opening of a space for marginalized groups to develop the possibility for articulating alternative realities – as future educators with substantial knowledge about how texts work.

The following research question is then posed concerning the above framework: To what extent are students of the department able by the end of the course to (a) use language critically in order to construe different kinds of meanings (at ideational, interpersonal and textual levels) for different communicative contexts, and to (b) respond to a genre restructuring task in which ideational meanings from an original academic text are recontextualized (Bernstein, 1996) in a media text? In an attempt to address this question, in the remainder of the article I will look at the ways a group of students responded to such a genre restructuring task. In this small-scale research I will use the SFL tools in order to analyze students' texts from the third stage of the approach described above with the aim to investigate the extent to which they have managed to respond to a popularization of science writing task while actively using what they have explored and learned during the course.

FROM ACADEMIC TO MEDIA TEXT: A WRITING TASK ON POPULARIZATION OF SCIENCE

For the particular writing task, students were given to read an abstract of a review paper on "the aging musculoskeletal system and obesity-related considerations with exercise" (by Vincent H. K., Raiser S. N. & Vincent, K. R., 2002, from *Ageing Research Reviews*) and then, use information from it in order to write a magazine article (180-200 words) for the popular magazine *Ageing Healthy*. In order to complete the task successfully, students are invited to select what they consider as worth-while information for a general-purpose readership consisting of middle-aged and elderly people. They are asked to (i) inform their audience about recent research findings concerning the problem being discussed in the academic article, and (ii) suggest ways of dealing with this problem.

Drawing on popularization of science research (Beacco, Claudel, Doury, Petit, & Reboul-Touré, 2002; Caliendo & Bongo, 2012; Calsamiglia, 2003; Calsamiglia & Van Dijk, 2004; De Oliveira & Pagano, 2006; Parkinson & Adendorff, 2004), I examined, in this small-scale study, 30 student-produced magazine articles during one academic semester. The texts, comprising a corpus of 6,490 words, were rated and then analyzed in order to investigate the extent to which they managed to respond to task requirements, to adhere to genre conventions, and to popularize the research findings through this genre reconstruction task. Table 1 presents an overview of the corpus and the source text in terms of reading difficulty. Students' texts scored between 30 to 70 (out of 100) according to the Flesch Reading Ease Score (FRES) while the source text, consisting of only one paragraph and longer sentences, was categorized as 'very difficult' to read (6.08 out of 100, where a lower score indicates increased reading difficulty). Specifically, the readability formula was used in 20 texts out of the 30 texts in the corpus[ii] and 12 were found 'difficult', while only four 'fairly difficult' and another four 'standard'. Taking into account that a higher score indicates an easier reading level and that TIME magazine articles rate around 50 in FRES,[iii] we find that some students texts were more difficult to read than those of a popular magazine.

Table 1
The Corpus Vis-à-Vis the Source Text

Student texts (total no of words: 6490)	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Error of Mean	Standard Deviation	Source text
Number of Paragraphs	3	17	6,8	0,6	3,3	1
Number of Sentences	8	28	14,4	0,8	4,4	9
Number of Words	148	323	216,3	7,2	39,5	213
Average Sentences per Paragraph	1,0	4,3	2,4	0,2	0,8	9
Average Words per Sentence	10,3	22,9	15,6	0,6	3,0	23,67
Average Syllables per Word	1,43	2,00	1,69	0,02	0,12	2,09
Flesch Reading Ease Score* (20 texts: above 200 words)	30,0	70,0	50,5	2,7	12,1	6,08

Mean Difference (FRES)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	Lower	Upper
44,4	38,7	50,1

Students' texts were also analyzed using Halliday's three metafunctions – the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. Each of these metafunctions is organized by its own system network[iv] and all are simultaneously expressed in the clause. Analyzing each of the

three metafunctions separately highlights the strands of the construed meanings and the semantic contributions of each one of them to the text. The findings section is brief and summative in nature, serving this article's aim to illustrate the extent to which students have moved successfully from a deconstructive to a reconstructive activity.

CONSTRUCTING IDEATIONAL, INTERPERSONAL AND TEXTUAL MEANINGS

Ideational meanings refer to the representation of experience by the content component of language, the subject matter of the texts and the ways meanings are construed. In the analysis of students' texts, emphasis was placed on the following issues: (1) who the participants in students' texts were, (2) what kind of information from the academic text was recontextualized in the media texts and how, (3) how much additional information was added in students' text (not traced in the original academic abstract), and (4) how source information and the writer's ideas were integrated in the text. In fact, very few articles actually reproduced almost all information from the academic text. In most cases, the media texts drew selectively on the information given in the academic text. Interestingly, as texts moved further away from the source text their reading ease (FRES) increased (Figure 1).
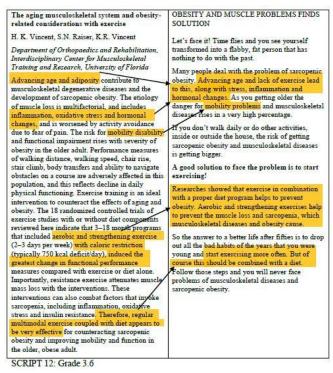

Figure 1. The academic text vis-à-vis a student's text

Still, however, despite the general aim of the media texts to make the academic content available to the general public, several technical words that one would not probably expect to find in a magazine article were used on several occasions, increasing the text difficulty and creating a mixed style in which formality co-existed with informality in the same text. Table 2 below presents the most frequent content words used in the corpus, and separates them into technical and non-technical categories. Technical words such as 'musculoskeletal diseases and sarcopenia' (see Ex.1 below) and 'obesity' (see Ex.4 below) are mixed with an informal style adopted in the text.

Table 2

Use of Technical and Non-Technical Words in the Corpus

Technical words				Non-technical words*			
	FREQ.	ALL.LST%	FREQ.2		FREQ.	ALL.LST%	FREQ.2
OBESITY	77	1,15	5	MORE	38	0,57	2206
MUSCULOSKELETAL	51	0,76	0	PEOPLE	32	0,48	840
SARCOPENIA	27	0,4	0	AGE	27	0,4	240
INFLAMMATION	15	0,22	1	TRAINING	24	0,36	157
OBESE	15	0,22	0	PHYSICAL	17	0,25	139
SARCOPENIC	15	0,22	0	CHANGES	16	0,24	130
HORMONAL	13	0,19	0	RESULTS	16	0,24	148
OXIDATIVE	12	0,18	0	PROBLEM	16	0,24	314
MULTIMODAL	9	0,13	0	BODY	15	0,22	281
INFLAMMATIONS	3	0,04	0	WAYS	9	0,13	128
				STRENGTH	9	0,13	135

Note. *Common words (excluding 'and' and verbs)

Another interesting feature of students' texts is the way information was presented. On several occasions, the texts started by establishing a narrative line through the use of a story or an example, creating images in readers' minds (Ex.1). Additional information was also included, especially of two different types: exemplifications with 'real' life examples voicing lay people (Ex.2) and reference to experts (not mentioned in the source text) (Ex.3), both characteristics of magazine articles.

> *Example 1: As years go by in one's life, health problems pile up like sand in a desert. When having led a poor and damaging eating lifestyle combined with the blow of 50th birthday candles, musculoskeletal diseases and sarcopenia are likely to be added to your health worries list. (Scr05)*

> *Example 2: A great number of the participants felt better. Mark Rogers, 58, characteristically says, 'In the beginning I didn't expect to see any difference but after the first three months of following this program, I really feel that my health has taken a turn for the better.' (Scr10)*

> *Example 3: A healthy diet is the other side of the coin. "Considering that we are what we eat, junk food replaced by a high protein diet low in calories will save you from obesity and consequently from muscle loss" says Mary Dunkan, M.D., a nutritionist from the University of Chicago. (Scr06)*

Definitions, one of the semantic means that allows language users to relate new knowledge to old knowledge (Calsamiglia & van Dijk, 2004), were also included in several magazine articles, making the scientific content easier to understand (Ex.4). These were informal definitions explaining scientific concepts in simple terms.

> *Example 4: But, what is sarcopenia exactly? Sarcopenia is a painful disease related to the reducing muscle mass of the elderly, affected by aging and obesity. People with sarcopenia suffer from swelling, stress and most essentially gradual loss of mobility. (Scr17)*

Overall, it seems that in terms of ideational meanings students have only partially managed to respond to task requirement and relay information for the general public. Students' texts though were more successful in the conveyance of interpersonal and textual meanings.

Interpersonal meanings focus on the interaction between the writers/students/ journalists and their readers as well as subjective judgments and opinions. The genre of magazine article generally foregrounds interpersonal meanings, 'subjectivizes' conveyed meanings, intensifies events and stories, and includes value judgments and attitudinal features. In students' texts, this is realized through lexicogrammatical structures that combine informational meaning with some kind of interpersonal involvement and through

comparisons (even exaggerations) which assert the size, force, signification etc. of the action under consideration (see Ex.5 below). The two most common words in the corpus were 'you' (113 times) and 'your' (65 times), eliminating the distance between the writer and the reader and creating a common ground through the use of a conversational style addressing the reader directly (*you feel, you'd better, you relieve yourselves*), rhetorical questions (*sounds good, right?*) and everyday expressions (*here comes "god, no"*) (Ex.5). Features of this style included also the question-answer format (Ex.6) and imperative forms (Ex.7) for advice giving.

> *Example 5:* **You** *feel unable to perform everyday activities like walking distance, chair rise etc. Yet,* **here comes "god, no"** *towards exercise. However,* **you'd** *better change that attitude because exercise will only help* **you** *relieve* **yourselves** *of the effects of aging or developing obesity.* **Sounds good, right?**

> *Example 6: The result? Better health. Better life.* (Scr20)

> *Example 7: Well,* **don't waste** *your time anymore!* **Take action***!* (Scr15)

Finally, textual meanings refer to topic, relevance and context, as well as ways language is organized. The focus is the role that language plays, text organization, text cohesion and coherence. Students' texts started with some engaging headlines (e.g., Workout Works out; Run down by aging? Ways to fight back; Exercising and an apple a day, keep the doctor away) often followed by subtitles (**Moving your Muscles** That is what Makes you Keep Going) and engaging conclusions (Ex.8). Several texts were structured around a problem-solution format with the problem stated at the beginning and the solution presented in bullet points or numbered lists as tips (Ex.9). To make the text easier to read, texts are often divided into sections with relevant headings. Pictures were also used to attract magazine readers (Miller, 1998).

> *Example 8:* A little exercise and control over what you eat will do the trick. Such a small price to pay *when you think of all the advantages!* (Scr09)

> *Example 9: So, if you want to leave your slacker-self behind and start doing something good for yourself, you surely have to* **follow these top 3 tips that will get you in shape in no time:**
> * *30-minute daily walk.*
> * *Have 1-hour aerobics for 2-3 times per week.*
> * *Start healthy eating! Junk food will turn your body into a piece of junk before you notice!* (Scr18)

Overall, the aim of the small-scale study was to explore the extent to which students were in a position to select from the system of language appropriate lexicogrammatical and textual features in order to respond to the requirements of the writing task. The findings from the analysis revealed that students had some difficulty with ideational meanings and they sometimes brought technical words in their texts, a characteristic of a more formal register than the one typically found in a popular magazine. Otherwise, they did not show any other particular difficulties in the ways they handled meaning at the interpersonal and textual levels. They generally used interpersonal features, which diminished the distance between the writer and the readers and they used a variety of cohesive links. Based on the findings of the study, it might be useful at the instructional level to distinguish between ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings and to specifically deal with them separately

in order to enable students to handle the complexities of the popularization of science writing task.

PREPARING TEACHERS FOR A CRITICAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

By combining Freire's concept of critical literacy with Halliday's functional linguistic approach, we designed a course curriculum that relies on explicit scaffolding through which undergraduate students start to understand language as a repertoire of resources for representing our experience of the world, establishing and maintaining relationships in interaction, and forming different kinds of texts. Students explore the relationship between texts and their contexts, and they examine how the choices we make from the language system act upon, and, simultaneously, are constrained by the social context. They also learn how to construe different kinds of meanings, something that constitutes a challenge for some students as shown in the previous section.

Within the broader framework of critical pedagogy, this article has argued that the preparation of critical educators should start from their undergraduate studies. Such a project would entail moving beyond the traditional conceptualization of a critical thinking approach and endorsing a critical literacy perspective. As understood in this context, critical literacy relates to broader ways of reading and talking about texts and is a key to empowerment for the periphery EFL teachers leading to the articulation of their own voices as English educators.

The idea of using students as critical text analysts is not new. It has been discussed in the past as part of a broader project which incorporates discourse analysis in the language classroom (Cots, 1996; Durand Sepúlveda, 2017) and as part of teacher education (Gebhard, 2008; McCarthy, 2001). In all contexts, it was suggested that it enhances understanding of language use, context variation, metalinguistic awareness and negotiation of meaning. This actually aligns with one of the department's goals for the undergraduate program: to "develop their [students'] ability to analyse critically and evaluate texts through the acquisition and use of the proper theoretical tools and methodology with an aim of promoting research."

Due to the role of the English language in our world today, it is perhaps more important than ever to equip undergraduate students with critical literacy, especially those who may pursue a career as EFL teachers in the future. Courses like the one presented in this paper could have an impact on the ways today's students and tomorrow's teachers understand the workings of language and texts and hopefully on their own teaching practices. At the very least, and to paraphrase Hyland (2007), teachers who understand how texts are typically structured, understood, and used are in a better position to intervene successfully in the writing of their students, to make decisions about the teaching methods and materials to use, and to approach current instructional paradigms with a more critical eye. The development of such 'critical consciousness' is at the heart of Freire's educational 'praxis'. Teachers, through their strategies, bring students to the point where they can 'name their world' according to their experiences of it and not according to the ideologies, institutions and discourses that declare it to be otherwise (Freire, 1970, 1987).

NOTES

i Similar studies combining Freirean pedagogy with SFL for the development of critical literacy can be found at Simmons (2018) for high school students and Ramirez (2018) for college students.
ii These were the texts above 200 words, the minimum required for the formula to run.
iii The ease of readability in FRES is assessed as follows: very confusing (0-29), difficult (30-49), fairly difficult (50-59), standard (60-69), fairly easy (70-79), easy (80-89) and very easy (90-100).

iv The ideational through the system of transitivity, the interpersonal through the system of mood and modality and the textual through the system of theme.

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