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A grammatics 'good enough' for school English in the 21st century: Four challenges in realising the potential

Mary Macken-Horarik,[1] Kristina Love[2] & Len Unsworth[1]

[1] University of New England, [2]Australian Catholic University

Abstract

In a complex communicational environment and at the dawn of an Australian curriculum, teachers need new kinds of knowledge about language (KAL). Our paper investigates the character of a 'good enough' KAL through 'grammatics' – a metalanguage based on careful study of grammar – a way of thinking with grammar in mind. It identifies four challenges facing any grammatics that is going to be adequate to the discipline: (1) Building a coherent account of KAL for contemporary English; (2) Fashioning a rhetorical grammatics for improving students' compositions; (3) Improving continuity and cumulative learning through the years of schooling; and (4) Developing a grammatics adequate to multimodal communication. Our paper draws on the resources of systemic functional grammatics to explore these challenges and considers the implications for teachers and students.

Introduction

In Australia, as in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and North America, teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the relationship between their own knowledge about language and their students' ability to appreciate and create the texts they encounter in school English. At the same time, robust and explicit systems of language description are now available for the work of the contemporary English curriculum, which, in these exciting multimodal times, includes the examination of meaning generated not only through speech and writing, but through combinations of words, images, animations, hyperlinks and sound.

The recent release of the draft Australian curriculum for English (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) provides a timely opportunity to explore key issues around the uptake of such systems. This curriculum is structured around three interconnected strands: knowledge about the English language; literate usage (in terms of comprehending, evaluating and creating written and multimodal texts); and an informed appreciation of Literature.

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The Language strand provides a systematic and developmental sequence that charts patterns of English usage and grammar at the level of the word, the sentence, the image and the extended text, and outlines the connections amongst these levels. Its view of grammar is a deeply contextual one where language functions to enable us to interact with others, to express and develop ideas, and to comprehend and create coherent texts.

With this new curriculum for English, Australian teachers will have access to a metalanguage – a language for talking about language – that has emerged from the best of recent research in the field of educational linguistics. There are some competing pressures here, acknowledged in the reference to the English language as both 'common' to all Australians and as 'dynamic and evolving' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 5). What kinds of grammatical knowledge will enable teachers and students to describe how language does its work in its spoken, written and multimodal forms and in a context of both continuity and change? What kinds of knowledge will be 'good enough' for teachers and students in this 21st century context? This paper investigates the kind of stretch which any grammatical metalanguage will need to undergo if it is to relate knowledge about language productively to literacy development and to enhance informed appreciation of literature.

Teachers are central to this process. As the architects of the Australian curriculum acknowledge, it is teachers who will have to 'develop students' understanding about how the English language works', progress this in a 'coherent and cumulative' way and promote 'learning that is portable and applicable to new settings across the school years and beyond' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 6). Moving into a multiliteracies curriculum, it is also English teachers who will assist students to interpret and compose 'an increasingly broad repertoire of spoken, written and multimodal texts' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 5). In short, teachers are the ones who will need to revise, or indeed establish, a grammar that relates purposefully to the texts of contemporary school English and builds knowledge about language progressively and cumulatively. This is the subject of the rest of our paper – exploration of the challenges facing any grammar that is going to be adequate to realising the potential of English.

Before we can do so, we need to consider what is meant by 'grammar'. Though used interchangeably with the term 'Knowledge about Language' in the new Australian Curriculum, the word 'grammar' is problematic, not least because of the difficult history people have experienced with learning and teaching it. For many, grammar brings back memories of red pen all over a composition, a pedantic focus on rules of construction, parsing and analysis without meaningful connection to the large and supple resource of the mother tongue (see Macken-Horarik, 2009 for a longer discussion of this issue).

Beyond negative associations with the word itself, there is a primary problem of definition. In everyday and professional contexts, grammar typi-

cally refers both to the language used by speakers and writers (often negatively, as in 'bad grammar') and to various codified descriptions of language. The slippage between references to language and metalanguage has not been avoided in the document guiding writers of the curriculum in Australia. The *Shape Paper* refers to grammar as both 'the language we use *and* the description of language as a system' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 5). The problem is not confined to Australia and it is not new, as Michael Halliday has pointed out:

> All systematic knowledge takes the form of 'language about' some phenomenon; but whereas the natural sciences are language about nature, and the social sciences are language about society, linguistics is language about language – 'language turned back on itself' in Firth's oft-quoted formulation … 'How does one keep apart the object language from the metalanguage – the phenomenon itself from the theoretical study of that phenomenon?' (Halliday, 2002, p. 384)

One way to resolve the slippage between the two meanings of grammar is to adopt Halliday's term, 'grammatics', to refer specifically to a language for talking about language. As we explore the challenges facing teachers in the context of the Australian Curriculum for English, we will use the term 'grammatics' to refer to any grammatically informed metalanguage used to work with and on language 'with grammar in mind' (Halliday, 2002). Such a definition allows us to investigate the necessary stretch or expansion which any grammatical framework will need to accommodate if it is to engage seriously with language and how it works in texts. This is an issue for anyone engaged with educational linguistics (see Locke, 2010 for a current international perspective).

Our paper attempts a futures-oriented exploration of four challenges facing grammatics in school English. The first challenge relates to the development of coherent knowledge about language as a resource for meaning – a professional knowledge base about language that is systematic and makes sense to teachers. The second concerns the contribution of a rhetorical grammatics to improve student compositions – how to turn 'knowledge about' language into 'know-how'. The third is one facing any curriculum that aims to provide continuity of learning about language from kindergarten through to Year 12. Students will need to develop cumulative understandings about language and teachers will need a shared metalanguage that is relevant to early and later years of English. And the final challenge emerges from the palpable presence of multimodal texts in the English curriculum and the need for a toolkit for exploring the contribution to meaning of non-linguistic resources. New meanings call for new tools of analysis.

Challenge 1: Generating a coherent account of knowledge about language for contemporary English

Any coherent account of knowledge about language must address the difficulties not only of texts but also of systems of meaning underlying them. Coherence is an attribute produced by people. A coherent account of language will therefore need to be developed in and by teachers themselves; it cannot be announced by fiat, as it were. While most English teachers understand the prototypical stages of different text types (a term often used in preference to genres), many do not have a conscious knowledge of the systems on which these text types draw. One recent study in the UK, for example, has revealed that beginning teachers have only a fragmented knowledge about language and this 'lacks depth' (Harper & Rennie, 2009). Similar studies in Australia highlight serious 'gaps' in beginning teachers' knowledge about language (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005; Louden, et al., 2005). But the problem of an incoherent knowledge base is shared even with experienced teachers. For example, a survey of 128 experienced primary school teachers in the state of NSW in Australia found that the vast majority (86%) claimed that knowledge about grammar was crucial to good literacy teaching but only six teachers from this group (four percent) felt confident to undertake this (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001). Many teachers don't (yet) have a coherent map of language as a whole and how to deploy it in English teaching.

The problem is not confined to Australia but has been a phenomenon observed in several OECD countries. In the United Kingdom, for example, a large survey concluded that there are still 'far too few teachers of English with an adequate grounding in the linguistics of English' (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005, p. 613). The situation is similar in Canada, as a recent survey of 400 pre-service teachers showed. The study uncovered major variations in teachers' depth of understanding of language that limited their ability to understand 'in sufficient practical depth' how children learn through and about language (Williams, 2009). A similar profile of variable and fragmentary knowledge about language has been revealed amongst New Zealand English teachers (Meyer, 2008).

But the problem goes beyond teachers' confidence in their own knowledge about language as a resource. Many teachers are unsure about the role of grammar in English teaching itself. Some argue that while grammar has always been part of 'core business' in English, it should be taught at the point of need rather than systematically (Doecke, Howie & Sawyer, 2006: 7). Others counter this, claiming that the absence of a systematic approach to teaching about language has contributed to continued disadvantage for already linguistically marginalised groups of students (see for example, Valdez et al., 2005). The issue here is not whether teachers need to know about language as a system in order to fully appreciate how texts work; they clearly do. Understanding systems like tense, voice and number is important to any

grammatics. The issue is how such systems become instantiated in texts.

As Halliday argues, both perspectives (text *and* system) are important if we are to develop 'a rounded picture of language' (Halliday 2009, p. 63). The sense we make of any text depends on shared conventions of linguistic communication, involving as this does, knowledge of the system and how it works in a particular genre or a particular mode. But the pleasure of meaning-making (or semiosis) depends, at least in part, on a departure from systemic norms, involving playful adaptation of the code for new purposes. Thus, both convention (system) *and* innovation (text) need to be built into the picture. Any metalanguage that is going to be useful to our students in English must be able to move between the specifics of particular texts, where innovation occurs first, and the more general patterns of language as a system, which makes communication possible for all speakers of English.

Herein lies the challenge. Teachers need 'ways in' to working with the relationship between systems that describe language in all its potential, and specific choices from these systems that co-pattern in particular ways with particular texts. They need opportunities to answer questions like: *Which* systems are relevant to *which* communicative tasks? Here again, Halliday's theory of metafunctions (2002) helps out, with its view that the language we use in different genres or text types serves three key functions simultaneously: the experiential metafunction, where we make certain sets of language choices to represent our experiences of the world; the interpersonal metafunction, where we use other sets of language choices to interact with others; and the textual metafunction, where we use other sets of language choices to create well-organised and cohesive texts.

We already know something about how patterns of language choices from various linguistic systems produce meaning in three of the key genres of English: interpretation (Macken-Horarik, 2009), narrative and argument (Love & Macken-Horarik, 2009). In analysing student narratives, for example, we know that successful writers generate possible worlds that build the exterior and interior experience of a character through certain choices of strong verbs, including saying and thinking verbs (experiential metafunction); they engage a reader's empathy and align readers with the viewpoint of particular characters through various forms of modality and attitudinally inflected vocabulary (interpersonal metafunction); and they make their texts coherent or 'hang together' often through a return to an earlier point of the narrative with a twist of some kind (textual metafunction). The notion of metafunctions is a portable tool that enables us to manage linguistic complexity – to see how language choices work together in a genre to produce meanings of distinctive kinds.

Some studies relevant to this challenge have already been undertaken within systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) (e.g. Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007; Love, Baker & Quinn, 2008; Love, in press; Unsworth, 2002

& 2008). These studies have drawn attention to key linguistic resources for producing school genres such as exposition, narrative and interpretation (for a recent example of such work see, Humphrey, Love & Droga, in press, 2011). The point with our first challenge is to make coherent connections between language as system and language as text. Shunting between available choices for meaning in the system and choices actually made by creators of texts will enable teachers to 'build conversations about how meanings are constructed by particular grammar and word choices' (Harper & Rennie, 2009, p. 32).

Challenge 2: Analysing the contribution of a rhetorical grammatics to improved compositions

Conversations about the relationship between grammar and meaning necessarily lead to consideration of the interplay between 'knowledge about language', 'literature' and students' 'repertoires of usage' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Teachers claim that understanding the global structure of genres like narrative or argument gives students 'something to shoot for' when learning to write (Macken-Horarik, 2002). However, knowledge of genre, though necessary, is not enough. It needs to be supplemented by attention to sentence and word-level choices (e.g. Myhill, 2008). But just how does our knowledge about language influence our literate repertoires? More precisely, what types of grammatics play developmental roles in particular types of composition?

A recent survey of the matter offers an inconclusive picture of the relationship between grammatical knowledge and improved writing (Andrews, et al., 2006). Countering assumptions in the media that grammar teaching per se is 'a good thing', Andrews et al. investigated the influence of both traditional and structuralist grammars on students' writing. Their conclusions strengthen earlier research findings demonstrating *no* beneficial effects of these narrower forms of grammar teaching on children's written work (Wyse, 2001; Perera, 1984; Wilkinson, 1971). By contrast, the impact of awareness of sentence combining on student writing has been more positive (Andrews, et al., 2006). It appears that a focus on sentence combining has the 'practical' value of teaching students how to 'splice together simple sentences to make compound or complex ones' (Andrews et al., 2006, p. 42).

The key here appears to lie in the value of a metalanguage that helps writers 'shape composition at the point of utterance' (Andrews, 2005, p. 75). Combining clauses and sentences is something we *have* to do if we are to expand a message in writing. When it comes to composition, students move beyond an abstract knowledge about types of sentences and parts of speech into 'knowing *how* to make effective and appropriate grammatical choices' (Myhill, 2005, p. 88, emphasis added). The key is to put their knowledge about grammar to practical use – to design written messages with an eye to their effect on readers. When it comes to this second challenge, teachers and

students need a *rhetorical grammatics*, a metalanguage for composing texts effective for their purpose.

With a rhetorical grammatics, teachers can address sentence and word-level composition in new ways. With its focus on *how* language works to make meaning, SFL offers teachers a way to address the concerns raised by Andrews and his colleagues. SFL is a grammatics focused on meaningful choice. This principle shapes all levels of composition – from word, to sentence, to text. At the level of sentence, for example, effective writers of expositions may use direct and indirect speech or thought (what is called *projection* in SFL) to quote and integrate authoritative sources, as they buttress a claim through evidence. These views are likely to have been previewed in the thesis of the exposition (in the opening paragraph). The rhetorical principle varies depending on the genre students are composing. In narratives, at the word level, writers use different forms of projection to quote or report the speech and thought of characters. At lower levels of choice, they may use attitudinal vocabulary (or make choices from what is referred to in SFL as the Appraisal system) to build up emotion, atmosphere or viewpoints in an evaluation stage, where the point or significance of events is highlighted. While in one genre, projection is a key resource for quoting experts and buttressing a claim made by the writer, in another it becomes a resource for building dialogue between characters or for evaluating a sequence of events. A new genre and a new rhetorical design put a resource like projection or appraisal to different kinds of work. This takes students beyond becoming 'better manipulators of syntax' (Andrews et al. 2006, p. 49) into making rhetorically effective choices in their compositions.

Effective writers draw on a range of systems to achieve the purposes of the genre they are working within. Furthermore, choices at all levels – text, sentence and word – are shaped by the rhetorical purpose or function of the genre. Higher level choices for evaluation in Narrative will shape lower level choices such as character voicing using direct speech and evaluative vocabulary (or appraisal) that emphasises affect. The rhetorical function of Exposition, on the other hand, will make other choices more likely. The argument stage of this genre, for example, will require attention to the enhancement of a claim, forms of expansion that give examples, provide evidence and cite authoritative sources. Where evaluative vocabulary is used, it will tend to be abstract or technical rather than affectual. Table 1 below illustrates how certain systems might be focused on in selected stages (bolded in column two) of two of the genres of English: Narrative and Exposition.

A rhetorically oriented grammatics mapped along these lines can make writing more meaningful for students and enable them to produce coherent, well-structured and generically apposite texts.

Table 1: Some system choices at different levels in two key genres

Genre	TEXT	SENTENCE	WORD
Narrative	Narrative stages – Orientation – Complication – Resolution – **Evaluation**	Evaluation via character voicing. **System focus**: clause combining & projection.	Vocabulary building up emotions, atmosphere, viewpoints. **System focus:** Appraisal.
Exposition	Exposition stages – Thesis – **Arguments** – Reinforcement	Buttressing a claim through evidence and sources. **System focus:** clause combining & enhancement**.**	Vocabulary that develops authority – from evidence to abstraction. **System focus**: Technical lexis

Challenge 3: Improving continuity and cumulative learning about language through the years of schooling

Cumulative learning for all students requires that teachers develop a 'clear, consistent and shared language for talking about language' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 7). However, if current teachers have variable and fragmentary understandings of language, their capacity to generate a shared metalanguage for supporting such development will be limited indeed. Without a grammatics that is both systematic and rhetorically oriented, it will be difficult for teachers to know how to build on and finesse children's earlier understandings or how to prepare them for the next stage of their learning.

SFL-inspired work on language development from childhood to adolescence offers some productive pathways here (e.g. Christie & Derewianka 2008, Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007, Halliday 1993; Painter, 2009). This research has tracked trajectories of language learning from the more congruent and spoken-like forms of expression in the early years of schooling, through to the more compressed, abstract and metaphorical forms of expression valued in the senior years of schooling. What the findings reveal is that cumulative learning about language will need to incorporate both continuity (common threads of development) *and* distinctive patterns of choice (differentiation) in language.

As children progress through schooling, they move away from texts that are congruent with everyday experience, spoken discourse and commonsense knowledge. The texts they are increasingly asked to read and write become more specialised, written-like and non-congruent. Higher levels of abstraction thus become a defining feature of school subjects like English, History and the Visual Arts even if it is expressed differently in each discipline. Other abstract categories like voicing and focalisation are managed differently depending on the discipline and its tasks. Developing continuity depends on shared

understandings about what is relevant to each genre and about how choices within and across genres get differentiated up the years of schooling. The point here is that we need a grammatics that enables teachers to capture both continuities and change in English. An example from narrative may help to flesh this out. Learning to 'get inside' a character's head via verbs of perception (e.g. 'She saw …' 'She wondered …' 'She felt …') occurs relatively early in students' writing. But representing a character's perspective more subtly calls on a wider range of linguistic resources. In later years, English students begin to produce narratives that sustain characters' viewpoints and provide for contrasting points of view. The relevant term in narrative theory is 'focalisation'. For example, a student writer might produce a narrative opposing a mother's view of her daughter's behaviour and the daughter's viewpoint. He or she will be learning to deploy a repertoire of resources for representing characters' viewpoints. In this way, s/he will be building on earlier (and simpler) understandings of how authors manipulate language to help readers to 'see and feel with' a character.

Some students manage to produce narratives with sophisticated psychological viewpoints without a metalanguage for reflecting on this. But a good enough grammatics should provide opportunities for reflection to all students via careful study of the grammar of point of view. Continuity of learning for students in years four, six, eight and 10, however, can only be provided if teachers have access to a shared metalanguage for developing such understandings. There should be recognisable links between early and later learning about literate strategies like focalisation and plotting, to name only a few. In this way, the grammatics will be in dialogue with a literary metalanguage and thus create connections between the Language and Literature strand of any curriculum in English.

Language resources don't just become more complex and abstract as students progress through the years; they pattern and co-pattern at all levels of choice in distinctive ways. To continue our earlier example, focalisation influences choice at the text level primarily via the Evaluation stages of a Narrative (see Table 1), where the point or significance of what happens is made salient or foregrounded. In an Evaluation, a character or narrator reflects on events so that we see with him or her and understand not only what is going on but also why it matters. This semantic interest in evaluation influences choices at lower levels – use of direct and indirect speech or thought by characters as they reflect on experience. Their evaluations are lexicalised through appraisal choices. In this way, word-level choices are framed by choices at sentence level and choices at these levels are influenced by choices at higher levels of composition. Thus, a semantically unifying metalanguage like focalisation yields different but meaningfully related 'realisations' at text, sentence and word levels. It is the fractal principle really – a pattern of patterns – that helps us to know that what we are reading is narrative or argument or interpretation. A

sense of how the patterns contribute to the overarching purpose(s) of a text seems key here. It may seem complex, but, it is what the curriculum writers are referring to when they mandate that students will 'learn about the structures and functions of word-and sentence-level grammar and text patterns and the *connections* between them (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 7).

Challenge 4: Developing a grammatics for multimodal communication

In the context of contemporary schooling, the range of texts that students are expected to interpret and compose has expanded well beyond the reach of conventional grammars. Yet students still need analytical tools for working with texts such as films, CD Roms, websites and picture books. Because English is increasingly multimodal, and because SFL has led the way in research here, it is in a strong position to explore the contribution of a functionally oriented grammatics to multimodal communication. Here again, current research into multimodality in educational contexts provides a platform for educators to build on (e.g. Love, 2005; Macken-Horarik, 2008; Unsworth, 2008; Unsworth, & Cleirigh, 2009). The task will be to expand accounts of language as a system to build accounts of communication more generally. In this way, we are moving beyond a grammatics for language into a broader focus on semiotics (the study of all meaning-making systems in a culture). The resulting grammatics of multimodal texts will be a powerful tool for thinking with and about semiosis itself, moving out from verbal language to consideration of a range of semiotic resources. The grammatics will thus be expanded to allow for analysis of visual as well as verbal focalisation, of visual and verbal engagement in sourcing of evidence, and so on. This is not to say that the categories of analysis can be transposed from the verbal to the visual without adjustment. They cannot. In fact, new kinds of work make our older tools of analysis strange, often unworkable. Nevertheless, a grammatics that is focused on meaning is a good place to start. And the affordances of a meaningful account of verbal texts can be explored as a 'for instance' in accounts of visual and multimodal texts. The work of Kress and van Leeuwen, for example, has been widely taken up by educators keen to move between linguistic and visual meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

How might this work? Perhaps students will take the evaluation stage of a narrative and render it as part of a graphic novel or film sequence. Perhaps they will explore the use of visual as well as verbal evidence in online arguments. Perhaps they will respond to texts in performative ways – as in ABC television programs like *First Tuesday Book Club* or the *Movie Show,* as well as through interpretive essays. The possibilities are almost endless. A multimodal grammatics could enhance conversations about language, as well as visual and multimodal communication – thus moving from knowledge about language to knowledge about semiosis more generally. There will be pay-offs for writing too, as students move back from a study of visual focalisation

in film (use of the point of view shot) to consider how this compares with internal and external focalisation in written narratives. There are analogies here that repay effort. Most film narratives exploit the evaluative possibilities of the point of view shot – where the camera moves from the face of a character to the world he or she looks at and back again. This is akin to the movement between internal focalisation and the use of verbs of perception and external focalisation and the use of action verbs for the unfolding events of the narrative. A grammatics focused on meaning allows us to shunt productively from one mode to another. The movement is productive for all genres. Studies of on-line or panel discussions, for example, can be used to inform students' written essays, especially those open to a variety of viewpoints. It could be useful to compare patterns of evidence marshalled in informal debates with those of more formal essays. Verbal engagement provides evidence in different ways from visual engagement. It can be productive to explore how these differ – how visual evidence works in print and on-line news for example. In this way, students' linguistic work can support and benefit from their multimodal work. If meaning is central, the choices in different modes can be connected to their larger semiotic function.

The point is to develop a grammatics good enough not just for the expanding discipline of school English but for teachers and students them-

Table 2: Some system choices for linguistic and multimodal texts in two key genres

Genre	TEXT	SENTENCE	WORD	MULTIMODAL
Narrative	Narrative stages – simple to complex Focus stage: **Evaluation**	Evaluation via character/ narrator focalisation. System focus: **clause combining & projection.**	Vocabulary building up emotions, atmosphere, viewpoints. System focus: **Appraisal.**	Multimodal evaluation in picture books & films. System focus: **visual focalisation**.
Exposition	Exposition stages – from claim to evidence Focus stage: **Argument**	Buttressing a claim through evidence and sources. System focus: **clause combining & enhancement.**	Vocabulary that develops authority –from evidence to abstraction. System focus: **Verbal engagement.**	Backing an argument via data – images, tables, & statistics. System focus: **Visual engagement**
Common language & literacy skills	Coherence & text structure	Logical connections & sentence structure	Vocabulary development & specialist lexis	Verbal – visual connections within/across texts

selves in their diverse classroom settings. Only in this way can they develop a 'dynamic and evolving' body of knowledge about language (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 5). This calls for a grammatics of potential – a way of using grammatics to explore how texts work, how they differ and how they can be made more effective for their purpose. This kind of grammatics takes us beyond a deficit view of meaning making where we correct errors of grammar in students' work and focus on what is wrong. It takes us into a futures-oriented English.

Table 2 is elaborated to include possible areas for multimodal work in the two genres we have discussed in this paper. The systems and explanations are by no means exhaustive and we do not attempt to define the terms in full here. But the table offers a snapshot of the relationship between linguistic and multimodal tools and the complementary ways in which we can use tools such as projection and clause combining to do different kinds of work within written genres and explore their affordances for multimodal texts like picture books and films.

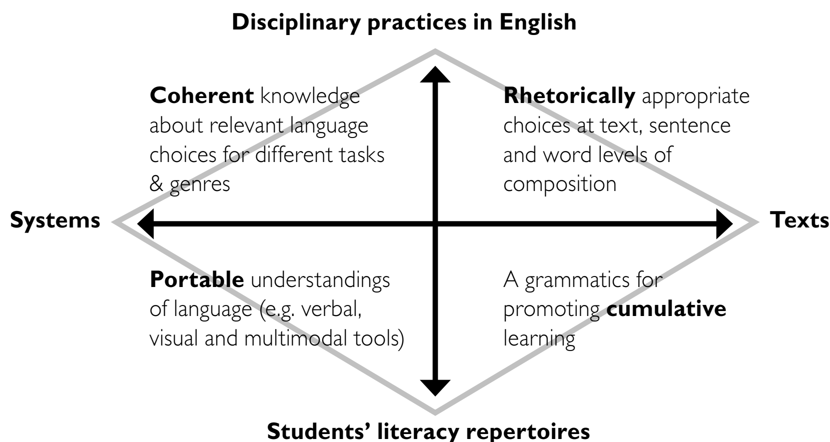
Conclusion

Whatever grammatics teachers use – traditional, structural or functional – they will be challenged and exercised, hopefully creatively, as they attempt to bring coherence, continuity, portability and rhetorical power to classroom work on language. Our interest, emerging from promising research within systemic functional grammatics, is in moving the profession away from a grammatics of deficit towards a grammatics of potential. Each challenge we have identified carries with it a particular kind of potential. Towards that end, we have put the above four challenges on the professional agenda, in the spirit of articulating what any grammatics must engage with if teachers are to promote students' language development in powerful ways. We have deliberately avoided discussing the limitations of traditional or structural grammatics and the strengths of 'ours'. Even systemic functional grammatics needs adaptation if it is to become an effective toolkit for 21st century English. Moving into a world of multimodal texts – still, moving, digital – highlights the limits of all available tools. A futures-oriented grammatics has yet to be developed, but we are on the cusp of some exciting possibilities.

The kind of 'stretch' needed for any grammatics adequate to an increasingly complex discipline and to the practical needs of busy classroom teachers is summarised in Figure 1 below. Here, we have placed the four challenges discussed above at each vertex of the parallelogram. On the horizontal axis, we have illustrated the reciprocal relationship between language systems and the texts that choices from these systems realise. On the vertical axis, we have illustrated the equally reciprocal relationship between English as a site of disciplinary practices and enhanced literacy repertoires.

Any grammatics that has coherence must make sense to teachers and

Figure 1: Kinds of 'stretch' needed for a 'good enough' grammatics for school English



students. Cumulative development of children's knowledge about language must occur through their coordinated work at progressive stages of schooling. And students' literate know-how can only be enhanced by teachers who can draw in an informed way on relevant aspects of the language and multimodal systems. It is their knowledge base that will inform pedagogic decisions and kinds of talk about language and multimodal texts that they can deploy. There will be pay-offs for literacy and literature study if teachers have access to a powerful grammatics. Knowledge about language should serve literate 'know how' and deep engagement with literature should be enriched through careful study of authorial choices and the effect on a wide readership. It is only in this interplay that deep learning of English can occur and teachers can contribute more visibly to its development.

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