

Hamline University DigitalCommons@Hamline

School of Education Student Capstone Theses and
Dissertations

School of Education

Summer 8-10-2015

A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach to the Academic Language in Seventh Grade Social Studies

Laura Beth Ripley
Hamline University, lhennings01@hamline.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ripley, Laura Beth, "A Systemic Functional Linguistics Approach to the Academic Language in Seventh Grade Social Studies" (2015).
School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations. 195.
https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/195

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hamline.edu, lterveer01@hamline.edu.

A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS APPROACH TO THE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE
IN SEVENTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

by

Laura Ripley

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree in Master of Arts in ESL

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2015

Primary Advisor: Bonnie Swierzbina
Secondary Advisor: Kathryn Heinze
Peer Reviewer: Brett Ripley

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Academic Language, Genre, and Systemic Functional Linguistics.....	3
The Need for Understanding Language.....	6
Role of Researcher.....	7
Research Questions.....	9
Summary.....	9
Chapter Overviews.....	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Academic Language as the Language of School.....	10
A Genre Based Approach.....	12
Systemic Functional Linguistics.....	13
Key Terms and Components of SFL.....	16
Social Studies Genre and Sub-genres.....	17
Identifying the Three Meanings.....	18
Theme Progression.....	21
Systemic Functional Linguistics in the Classroom.....	23
The Gap.....	25
Research Questions.....	25

Summary.....	26
Chapter Three Preview.....	26
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	27
Study Purposes.....	27
Methodology of Systemic Functional Linguistics Analysis.....	28
Text Selection.....	28
Data Collection Design.....	29
Theme Identification Specifications.....	31
Reliability.....	32
Chapter Four Preview.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	33
Chapter Overview.....	33
Text Corpus and Analysis.....	33
Results: Genres.....	34
Results: Theme Progressions.....	36
Results: Linguistic Resources of Themes.....	43
Results: Non-Finite Terms.....	47
Reliability Results.....	48
Conclusion.....	48
Chapter Five Preview.....	49
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	50

Chapter Overview.....	50
Discussion: Themes.....	50
Discussion: Discourse Connectors as Themes.....	53
Discussion: Temporal Clauses and Phrases as Themes.....	54
Discussion: Theme Progressions.....	56
Discussion: Genre.....	59
Limitations.....	61
Future Studies.....	61
Implications.....	62
Dissemination of Results.....	64
Personal Reflection.....	65
Conclusion.....	66
REFERENCES.....	68
APPENDIX A: PILOT STUDY.....	71
APPENDIX B: PILOT STUDY TEXT.....	74
APPENDIX C: TEXT EXCERPT SAMPLE.....	76

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Genres in Social Studies.....	19
Table 2: Theme Progressions for all Text Selections.....	36
Table 3: Theme Progressions in the Historical Recount Genre.....	40
Table 4: Theme Progressions in the Factorial Explanation Genre.....	41
Table 5: Theme Progressions in the Discussion Genre.....	41
Table 6: Categorization of Themes as Process, Participant, or Circumstance.....	43
Table 7: Linguistic Resources of Themes.....	46

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Genre Percentages of Total Text Selection.....34

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Early in my career as a teacher of English learners I had the privilege of supporting ELs through co-teaching a seventh grade social studies class, as well as teaching two separate sections of an advanced ESL social studies class. Equipped with my own passion for history and my zeal for students to develop their language skills, I opened the heavy U.S. History text and began exploring what I would teach my students. Once the class was in progress, it did not take me long to realize that the textbook was difficult for the students to read and comprehend. As an ELL teacher, I expected this, and did my best to scaffold and break down the text with students. The basic reading strategies I taught my students helped to a certain extent, but students still struggled with identifying the relevant or central ideas or making connections between events or outcomes. I tried various strategies, and some days abandoned the text all together, in favor of developing language skills in other ways that I could better control.

I knew from much exposure in my teacher preparation that the language used in school contexts, academic language, (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Zwiers, 2008) is different from language used in informal community and social contexts. Furthermore, different purposes and contexts, or genres, of text employ different kinds of linguistic features (Coffin, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2012). Using this

background knowledge, I was able to approach the textbook with some insight. I relied on this basic knowledge and used it often in my classroom. But I was still at a loss as to how to systematically teach the language forms and patterns used in this social studies textbook, and furthermore, how to focus on developing both language skills and critical reflection on the content. With each section of reading, I wanted my students to be able to understand the main ideas, acquire new vocabulary, employ basic reading strategies, and to think critically about the ideas presented. How was this to be possible? If I was struggling to wrap my head around it, how could my students do this?

From my education and experience, I believe that understanding the particular language features of certain genres is imperative in teaching language skills. However, I needed to not only review these principles, but also take a step into greater depth. I started researching the linguistic features of texts in the social studies genre, and as I looked back to the textbook I had used, I made some observations. It was packed with fast moving sections that covered complex ideas using not only advanced academic language, including multitudes of new content-specific vocabulary, but also was organized through complex linguistic structures. While some concepts are introduced with familiar, explicit connectors such as *because of this*, or *so that*, ideas may be presented through clause organization requiring students to understand implicit connections, explanations, or implications. This text was altogether unlike everyday language. This real life struggle in my teaching, combined with an acute awareness of my students' struggles with this type of literature, led me to this project.

Academic Language, Genre, and Systemic Functional Linguistics

There has been an abundance of research discussing the idea of academic language, the language used in school, that highlights its differences from informal or spoken language, namely its density, technicality, and abstract nature (Fang, 2008; Halliday, 1985; Zwiers, 2008). While students are often taught to read using texts that are more related to everyday, familiar language, the complexities and demands of literacy for students increase markedly at the secondary levels (Fang, 2008). Thus, at a school level when texts are increasingly important for instruction and learning, the language is more complex and difficult to comprehend. One way a text can become more complex is through the use of sentences that do not begin with a subject. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate this.

(1) First claimed by France, Louisiana was given to Spain after the French and Indian war.

(2) Having acquired Louisiana through diplomacy, President Jefferson turned next to Florida.

Because the subject is in the middle of the sentence, it can be more complex for the reader to orient themselves to the information.

While many students can be at risk of falling behind, ELs in particular are at risk because it is less likely that they will have exposure to English academic language outside of school.

Current research highlights the important role of academic language and calls teachers to incorporate it in their instruction in order to help students develop the language they need to be successful in school (Schleppegrell, 2012). One of the frameworks that has arisen is the concept of genre-based approaches to language. A

genre-approach views text through the lens of patterns of language and the role of context in understanding meaning (Hyon, 1996; Miller, 1994). Coffin (2006) explains that the two primary features that distinguish one genre from another are the organizational structure of the text and its uses of language forms and vocabulary. Within the category of genre-based approaches to language, one system that positions itself as a tool for classroom use is the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. Proponents of SFL see language as a meaning-making tool (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Halliday, 1985). This approach is also considered to be a genre-based approach, meaning that different purposes and contexts, or genres, which draw upon different language forms and grammar systems to accomplish their goals, are analyzed (Coffin, 2006; Christie, 2011). Applied in the classroom, this means that different subject areas use different types of language to communicate their ideas. Specialized, subject-specific language forms become more important at the secondary level as ideas become more advanced, complex, and abstract (Schleppegrell, 2012). Educators, then, can draw upon the patterns of language found in different subject genres to help students comprehend the language of their discipline. Furthermore, SFL equips students to engage in critical literacy, that is, going beyond comprehension to tasks such as identifying and questioning perspective, constructing arguments, and forming hypotheses (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002).

Two of the foundational components of SFL analysis are Theme and Theme progression. Theme, as defined by Coffin, is, “everything in a clause up to and

including the first participant, process, or circumstance” (2009). Examples (3) and (4) highlight the role of Theme.

(3) President Thomas Jefferson understood the concerns of American farmers.

(4) Late in 1803, the Senate voted to ratify the Louisiana Purchase treaty.

In (3), the Theme is a person, and the rest of the sentence is centered around this.

The fact that the president understood the concerns of the farmers is given prominence through its position as Theme. In (4), the Theme is oriented around time. In this case, the timing of the treaty is given prominence.

The second foundational concept of SFL is Theme progression. Theme progression refers to the language patterns used to move the reader from clause to clause and indicates how a text is organized (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Common examples of theme progression in social studies genres include time, contrast, and cause and effect (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

Example (5) illustrates a time progression.

(5) So, in 1803, he sent James Monroe to France with an offer to buy New Orleans for \$7.5 million. By the time Monroe reached France, Napoleon had changed his plans. A few years earlier, a slave named Toussaint L’Ouverture had led a slave revolt in the French Caribbean colony known today as Haiti.

In this excerpt, each clause Theme is a time indicator, organizing the whole passage around the timing of events, and showing that time was an important factor in what happened.

The SFL approach offers a guide for the questions I was asking as I struggled to help my students access the language of social studies. Teachers should not have to choose between teaching content or teaching language. By being able to discuss

both the meaning and structure of texts with students, there will be higher engagement and more successful learning (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

The Need for Understanding Language

As discussed above, students need to develop advanced literacy skills to be able to engage successfully in the academic language used in school. More specifically, they need to be able to understand how language is used in different subject area genres, and to apply that knowledge as they construct and respond to new ideas (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Furthermore, students increasingly need to be able to go beyond basic comprehension, to levels of critical literacy, requiring command of advanced literacy skills. Because of these needs, teachers must develop expertise on how language is used to present ideas, create a stance, and organize a text in the genres of their discipline (Schleppegrell, 2012).

The growth of multimedia further requires students to be flexible with advanced literacy skills, applying them in new and varying contexts as they grow into experts in their subject areas (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). Thus, understanding how language is used to communicate ideas is an imperative object of study for teachers, allowing them to in turn, help students develop this skill.

The ideas above are not just interesting theoretical claims; they are extremely practical and resonate with me as an instructor of real students. I see the struggle of students to deeply grasp the social studies texts they are presented with. I watch them try to make meaning from complex language about often abstract ideas. In order to address this need, I must know what language skills my students

need to master, so that I can equip them with these skills to become experts in history and language.

In my specific context, this means I will be conducting an in-depth text analysis of the seventh grade U.S. history book, *History Alive!* (Hart, 2002), according to the SFL framework and methodology.

By completing this analysis using the textbook that guides my seventh-grade instruction, I am first educating myself on the language forms that I am putting in front of my students. As explained earlier, I had a front row seat to my students' struggles with the social studies text, but didn't have a precise and systematic method for helping them access and learn the language. I had general ideas of the skills they needed, but I did not know exactly what they needed to know. First, this study is designed to answer the question, "What exactly do my students need to know to be successful with language in social studies?" Second, after compiling the data, I hope to be able to apply my findings in a way that strategically shapes my instruction so that ELs can access and develop the academic language of social studies.

Role of Researcher

My role as researcher in this endeavor has a few facets. The first is that of an investigator of language. Much research has shown that it is imperative to understand the nature of the language of school, or academic language (Zwiers, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2012), so that we understand what students must know in order to be successful, particularly at the secondary level (Fang 2008). Language is the main transmitter of ideas, and at least one of the primary ways in which

students will be asked to either construct or produce knowledge. (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2012). Therefore, teachers have a responsibility to thoughtfully research the language of their own content area. This, of course, is done informally in many ways, but what I am setting out to do in my investigative role is a deeper and more comprehensive look at the linguistic resources used in the social studies genre. My investigation will be guided by the principles of SFL, and modeled after some of the approaches of its followers. As an investigator I will observe, record, organize, and classify the linguistic resources that are present in the text.

My second role is that of an assessor. From my perspective as an instructor of language, I will seek to assess what implications this investigative information has for the classroom. Part of this assessment will involve determining what linguistic resources students need to be taught, have exposure to, comprehend, and produce in order to successfully engage in critical literacy in social studies.

My third and final role is that of an informer. After investigating and assessing language data, I will be able to make this information available for application in my own classroom context. It may also serve as a resource for other ELL and mainstream social studies teachers who work with similar texts, or simply within the social studies genre. I hope my work will be able to give voice to some of the primary needs of students, and allow me to better understand and strategically meet those needs. Furthermore, I hope that my work will open conversations among mainstream, that is, non-ELL educators into strategies that help teachers deepen their understanding of the unique language of their content area.

Research questions

The questions guiding this research are as follows:

- What genres and Theme progressions are common in the *History Alive!* text that students need to understand in order to engage in critical academic literacy?
- What linguistic resources are used as Themes in the *History Alive!* text?

Summary

This chapter introduced the critical need for students need to learn academic language to be successful in school at the secondary level. This is part of developing advanced literacy which is required in order to access, comprehend, and respond to the increasingly complex, abstract, and specialized language of the texts used for instruction at these levels. The SFL approach provides a framework for helping teachers understand the language of their subject area, as well as for helping them teach students to comprehend and apply the linguistic resources used in different genres. This approach will guide and inform my own research as I seek to identify the linguistic systems used in social studies genres at the middle school level.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter Two will begin by introducing the concept of academic language and its presence in the language of school. It will then explore the SFL approach, concluding with its application to the social studies text genre. Chapter Three will outline the methodological approach of this study. Chapter Four will present the data of the analysis as guided by the research questions. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss important findings and any implications the data has for the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary purpose of this research is to study the relationship between language forms and the genre of social studies. This will be accomplished by taking a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to analyze a seventh grade history textbook. Two research questions guide this study:

- What genres and Theme progressions are common in the *History Alive!* text that students need to understand in order to engage in critical academic literacy?
- What linguistic resources are used as Themes in the *History Alive!* text?

This chapter provides an overview of academic language and its place in education and literacy, then introduces the SFL approach. Within this introduction to SFL, relevant terms are explained, its methodology outlined, and finally considerations for the approach as it relates to social studies text is presented.

Academic Language as the Language of School

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2011 that over 70% of students in the United States in grades 4-12 have not reached a level of proficiency for literacy skills in academic subject areas (as cited in Fang, 2012). It is

no surprise then, that there is much attention and concern over literacy development at the secondary level (Fang, 2012).

Within this context, the notion of academic language receives much attention among the education community. Academic language can be broadly defined as the type of language used to acquire and demonstrate knowledge in school (Schleppegrell, 2012). Academic language can be characterized by sentence complexity, discipline-specific vocabulary, grammar and organization strategies used to communicate advanced or complex ideas (Zwiers, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2012).

Research shows that many students' first exposure to academic language is at school; therefore, not all students arrive at school ready to participate in the demands of this type of language (Schleppegrell, 2004, 2012; Zwiers, 2008). Students who do not have access to the vocabulary and discourse that is used in school will already be behind their peers who have had these experiences. Part of this readiness discrepancy stems from the reality that the expectations and functions of social language, used in the home and community, are very different from the expectations and functions of the language of school (Fang, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2012). For example, texts read at school present information in a more formal manner, in contrast to the way knowledge is collaboratively constructed informally in social settings (Schleppegrell, 2004). Furthermore, the written language in texts does not sound like the way we talk (Unsworth, 1999; Fang 2008, Halliday in Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2008). Fang goes on to identify that

this is not the “type of language” students would employ in normal social life, particularly because it is technical, abstract, dense, and authoritative (2008).

Not only are many students coming to school with little or no exposure to academic language; while literacy instruction in the primary grades has traditionally focused on storybooks, it is after this instruction, in the intermediate grades, that students are faced with the demands and complexities of academic language, especially in expository texts (Fang, 2008; Coffin, 2006, Zwiers 2008). Much research has pointed out that many students struggle with this transition (Fang, 2008). ELs are particularly at risk of not developing academic language proficiency because school may be the only place where they come in contact with these language forms (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). Furthermore, their still developing English proficiency may prevent them from comprehending them when they do.

Clearly, teachers must be prepared to help bridge the gap that exists between the language students are familiar with in everyday life, and the academic language they will be required to understand and use as they construct knowledge in specific disciplines.

With the unique demands of language in school, many students, particularly those who are ELs, and presumably have not had exposure to academic English at home, would benefit from explicit language instruction that teaches how to break down the language forms used in their core content areas.

A Genre-Based Approach

The notion of genre has been a point of focus in research over the past couple decades (Hyon, 1996). Genre provides a framework for analyzing written and

spoken discourse according to their patterns of language, and considering how context contributes to meaning (Hyon, 1996; Miller 1994). Coffin (2006) explains that the two primary features that distinguish one genre from another are organizational structure of the text and its uses of language forms and vocabulary.

Considering text genres has raised implications for instruction. Various approaches to language instruction exist under the umbrella of genre-based pedagogy; however, a relevant commonality is that all take into account on some level, how genres are used in the classroom (Hyon, 1996). A genre-based approach in the context of the classroom, therefore, sees that different genres in the subject areas utilize different language forms and organizational structures of text to accomplish their purposes.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Utilizing the framework of genres, one approach, SFL, has emerged with great relevance to specific content areas. This approach distinguishes itself from other genre-based pedagogies in that it focuses on primary and secondary school genres, rather than on professional or university genres (Hyon, 1996). Thus, it has particular relevance to text analysis at the middle school level. SFL emerged under the research of Michael Halliday at the University of Sydney in Australia. It has since become an important approach within genre-based pedagogy, involving a host of linguists who have continued to build on and apply Halliday's principles.

This theory centers on the notion that language choices contribute to meaning making (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). As part of this understanding, a cornerstone of the SFL theory is the concept of *register*. Halliday himself referred to

the term register as, “a variety of language adjusted to use” (Zwiers, 2008, p. 8). This definition suggests that in different settings or contexts people utilize different variations of language in order to best suit that setting. For example, a personal email to one’s friend would use less formal and less dense noun phrases and clause construction than a literature analysis paper written for a university course. This idea that language can be strategically adjusted to a particular purpose corresponds with the idea of genre. Indeed, in Halliday’s work, the concepts of register and genre can be used interchangeably (Christie, 2011); however, the distinction can be made that genre refers to the social context or purpose, and register refers to the language choices being made in that context (Schleppegrell, 2012). Taking the view that register and genre have related purposes, we see that the SFL approach operates within the framework of genre and describes the systems of language within each genre (Christie, 2011; Coffin, 2006). SFL then, sees meaning making as taking place in different ways within different genres, so that, in the classroom setting, patterns of language that correspond to different subject areas can be seen (Fang & Schleppegrell 2008). This means that communicating in science, for example, requires different forms and organization of language than does communicating in social studies.

Another important concept in this theory is its understanding of grammar. Grammar has traditionally been understood as a set of rules for correct and incorrect language usage (Schleppegrell, 2007; Unsworth, 1999). The SFL approach, however, understands grammar, or functional grammar, not as a set of rules, but as a description of the many systems of language used to present information in a

meaningful ways and according to specific purposes (Derewianka, 1990; Halliday, 1985; Schleppegrell, 2007; Unsworth, 1999). Again, through the lens of the classroom context, this would mean that different disciplines utilize different linguistic resources to accomplish their unique communicative goals. Fang and Schleppegrell (2008) have referred to this as “subject-specific” ways of making meaning using language forms.

SFL theorizers have expressed that advanced language is necessary to communicate the abstract and complicated ideas that make up core subject areas (Schleppegrell, 2012). In fact, Halliday, (as cited in Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002) argues that, science, for example, demands unique linguistic resources because of the way meaning making is constructed in science, and it is therefore impossible to use ordinary language to communicate these ideas. Schleppegrell (2004) adds that advanced, subject-specific language is necessary to communicate in secondary content areas because the complexity of their purposes exceeds the functions of day-to-day language. Schleppegrell’s perspective reinforces the understanding of students’ need to develop academic language proficiency to successfully engage in secondary level content areas, and suggests the importance of developing this proficiency within the context of subject genres.

The SFL framework also supports what is referred to as critical literacy (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). Critical literacy goes beyond comprehension, to a deeper level of response, inquiry and hypothesis. Identifying the interpersonal meaning embedded in clauses helps lead to this kind of critical thinking, prompting readers to ask why a text conveys a particular meaning, what perspective it reveals,

and what implications it has. Colombi and Schleppegrell (2002) see critical literacy as part of the ability to “do” a subject area. They explain that students must develop advanced literacy skills so that they can become experts in different subjects.

“Doing” social studies means more than simply comprehending the material; it is characterized by the ability to construct arguments, pose hypotheses, and critically read and respond like a historian (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002).

Practitioners of SFL see that in order to be able to comprehend and think critically about a text, one must understand the linguistic features of that genre that are being used to make meaning. This model provides a practical approach to analyzing texts to understand the academic language forms being used in a particular genre.

Key Terms and Components of SFL

As noted above, SFL portrays language as a way of making meaning. In this theory, three categories of meanings exist whenever there is spoken or written language (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). These meanings can be specifically parsed out at the clause level, which is seen as the basic unit of a text, finding that in fact each clause carries these three categories of meaning (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

These three meanings at the clause level are experiential meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning (Halliday, 1985; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Unsworth, 1999; Christie, 2011). Experiential meaning refers to what the text is about, often communicated through telling who or what is involved and under what circumstances. The meaning is realized primarily through processes (verb groups), participants (noun groups), and circumstances (prepositional phrases and

adverbs). Interpersonal meaning refers to the relationship between writer and reader, and realizing the various attitudes, interpretations, and judgments communicated therein. This meaning is primarily realized through what are called the mood system and the modality system. The mood system refers to a writer's ability to make statements, ask questions, and issue commands, and the modality system refers to a writer's ability to insert judgment, often in forms of expressing possibility, usuality, obligation, and inclination (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Textual meaning refers to how the text is organized, particularly through the positioning of old and new information (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Unsworth, 1999). This meaning is primarily realized through the use of Theme and rheme structuring. Theme is typically the first unit of a clause, including the first participant, process, or circumstance, and serving as the departure point, and holding prominence as it carries the message of the clause (Coffin, 2009; Halliday, 1984). Rheme, then, is the new information that follows the known information in the Theme (Unsworth, 1999).

Social Studies Genre and Sub-genres

An important tool for SFL analysis is the framework for identifying genres, developed by Caroline Coffin. This framework also creates a system for identifying sub-genres within the genre of social studies text. In her work, Coffin (2006) explains that a text can have a variety of purposes, such as explaining events, telling a story, or giving instructions. Each of these purposes constitutes a genre, and is communicated through using particular language forms and grammatical structures.

For example, explaining events in the past would be considered an explanation genre.

Coffin's genre framework includes three broad families into which other sub-genres fall. These three families are recording genres, explaining genres, and arguing genres (Coffin, 2006). The genre families get increasingly complex as they move from recording history to explaining history and finally to arguing history. A major shift is seen between the recording and explaining genres, as the text structure moves away from using people and sequences of events tell the story of history, to explaining history using more complex and often abstract language forms such as nominalizations and generalized participants (Coffin, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2004; Unsworth, 1999). Therefore, as students move into the secondary grade levels where the explaining and arguing genres are used, the linguistic demands increase (Schleppegrell, 2004; Coffin, 2006).

These three genre families can be further broken down into sub-genres with different purposes. Table 1 shows Coffin's chart presenting her analysis of the sub-genres of text within social studies.

Understanding the purpose and structure of each social studies genre gives context for analyzing the linguistic and grammatical choices that are used to accomplish the genre's purpose.

Identifying the Three Meanings

The SFL analysis framework identifies three types of meaning, which are communicated at the text and clause level: experiential meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning.

Table 1

Genres in Social Studies

Genre Family	Genre	Overall Purpose	Structure
Recording	Autobiographical Recount	To retell the events of your own life	Orientation Record of Events (Reorientation)
	Biographical Recount	To retell the events of a person's life	Orientation Record of events (Evaluation of person)
	Historical Recount	To retell events in the past	Background Record of Events (Deduction)
	Historical Account	To account for why events happened in a particular sequence	Background Account of events (Deduction)
Explaining	Factorial Explanation	To explain the reasons or factors that contribute to a particular outcome	Outcome Factors Reinforcement of factors
	Consequential Explanation	To explain the effects or consequences of a situation	Input Consequences Reinforcement of consequences (Background)
	Exposition	To put forward a point of view or argument	Thesis Arguments Reinforcement of Thesis (Background)
Arguing	Discussion	To argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue	Issue Arguments/Perspectives Position

Note. Taken from "Learning the language of school history: The role of linguistics in mapping the writing demands of the secondary school curriculum," by C. Coffin, 2006, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38(4), p. 413-429.

Textual meaning is identified by first asking the question, “How did the author organize this section?” By identifying the Theme of each clause, the answer to this question emerges. A text may, for example, be organized by time, participants, or cause and effect.

An example of Theme identification is seen below, using a text excerpt from the *History Alive!* textbook. The Theme of each clause is underlined for reference.

(6) Many white Americans in the Southeast wanted the United States to take over Florida. Slave owners in Georgia were angry because slaves sometimes ran away to Florida. (Some of the runaways were accepted and welcomed by the Seminole Indians.) In addition, white landowners in Georgia were upset by Seminole raids on their lands

In (6), the Themes are all participants. In this case, the author is presenting the opinions of three primary groups of people: *white Americans in the Southeast*, *slave owners in Georgia*, and *white landowners in Georgia*. Thus, the reader can see that the information is being organized by way of the people involved and each of their unique perspectives.

Experiential meaning is identified by asking the question, “What is going on in the text?” Experiential meaning looks at who or what is involved, and under what circumstances. This answer comes through analyzing the process types, participants, and circumstances of each clause. Process types are realized primarily through verb forms. There are several categories of processes that may be present in a text, such as doing, sensing, saying, and being (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Participants are realized through noun groups, and circumstances are often realized through prepositional phrases or adverbs.

Using another excerpt from *History Alive!* in (7), we see a sample analysis of participants, process types, and circumstances.

(7) On a June day in 1776, Thomas Jefferson set to work in a rented room in Philadelphia.

Participant (noun group)	Thomas Jefferson
Process (verb)	set to work
Circumstance	On a June day in 1776; in a rented room in Philadelphia

The Interpersonal meaning is identified by asking the question, “What is the perspective of the author?” This meaning looks at any judgments, attitudes, and interpretations communicated through the language choices of the author. Interpersonal meaning can be realized in a variety of language forms and choices. These choices are identified by moving through the text selection again, clause by clause, and identifying language choices that reflect mood and modality. Mood can be seen in an author’s statements, questions, or commands, and modality can be seen in an author’s insertion of judgment, particularly in expressing possibility, usuality, obligation, and inclination (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Mood and modality can reflect a particular perspective that the author is putting forth. Specific examples of an author’s perspective may be reflected in language such as: who or what is described or represented as having power, abstract or generalized participants, and adjectives that represent actions or actors in a certain way (Coffin, 2006).

Theme Progression

Another facet of SFL is the identification of Theme progressions. Theme progressions refer to the language patterns used to move the reader from clause to

clause and is a significant factor in determining how a text is organized, or the Textual meaning (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). A variety of Theme progressions may be used, often depending on the genre of the text. Common examples of Theme progression in social studies genres include linear, time, contrast, zig-zag, and multiple Theme pattern (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

A linear Theme progression occurs when the same element is repeated as Theme in multiple clauses (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).¹

(8) The Cherokee also created a government system inspired by the U.S. Constitution. They established an election system, a bicameral council and a court system, all headed by a principal chief. Voters elected John Ross, a successful plantation owner, as the first principal chief. (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

A time-based Theme progression occurs if clause themes introduce when an event happened, in order to move the reader through a series of chronological events (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Examples include phrases such as, *over the next decade, in September of 1776, or during the next month* (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

(9) Late in 1803, the Senate voted to ratify the Louisiana Purchase treaty. (History Alive!, p. 402).

A Theme progression of contrast occurs when themes begin by showing a contrast to previously stated information, and may be introduced explicitly using conjunctions (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Common contrast conjunctions include, *although, but, therefore, and since* (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

¹ Linear Theme progression is also referred to as Theme reiteration according to Achugar and Schleppegrell (2005).

(10) One newspaper declared that Texas was “worth ten Floridas.” Even so, the Senate ratified the Florida treaty two days after it was signed. (History Alive!, p. 402)

Another Theme progression is the zig-zag pattern. This pattern occurs when what was new information in a previous clause becomes the Theme in the next clause, leading to a chain of reasoning that develops as clauses follow one another and build upon one another (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

(11) By 1929, American factories were turning out nearly half of the world’s industrial goods. The rising productivity led to enormous profits. However, this new wealth was not evenly distributed. (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

Finally, a multiple Theme pattern refers to the presence of a clause that presents multiple ideas. These ideas then become the Theme in future clauses (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005).

(12) When Japanese people write their language they use a combination of two separate alphabets as well as ideograms borrowed from Chinese. The two alphabets are called hiragana and katakana. The Chinese ideograms are called Kanji. (Paltridge, 2012).

The first sentence in this text sets up what the rest of the paragraph will explain: that the components of Japanese writing include two separate alphabets and ideograms borrowed from Chinese. Each of these components then becomes a Theme in the next two clauses.

Theme progressions are important indicators of textual organization, and are part of the research questions guiding this project.

Systemic Functional Linguistics in the Classroom

The demands of academic language at the secondary levels of school necessitate language instruction that goes beyond the emerging literacy level. In

order to provide this instruction, attention must be paid to the proficiency of teachers in the language of their specific discipline. Unfortunately, language has not received the same focus as the content, resulting in a tendency to focus on the content ideas, while little attention has been paid to how language is employed to present that content (Schleppegrell, 2002). Schleppegrell (as cited in Fang, 2012) further notes that many teachers may not be prepared to effectively teach language skills in their content areas due to a lack of training or understanding of the linguistic resources of their content. SFL provides a framework for equipping teachers and students alike to understand how language is used to make meaning in the different subject areas.

Proponents of the SFL perspective would argue that in order for students to succeed in secondary schooling and, indeed, in their school and work beyond, they must develop advanced literacy skills that are specific to each content area (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). To develop these advanced literacy skills, there must be explicit teaching of language forms, noting the connection between these forms and the purpose of the text (Celce-Murcia as cited in Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). It has been found that students who notice linguistic forms and recognize the complexities of readings have a higher probability of understanding and using advanced language (Scarcella, 2002). Thus students who are exposed to direct instruction on linguistic resources of texts can not only comprehend advanced complex language, but also produce it. This is particularly relevant, as part of the skills of critical literacy involves responding to ideas, using the language forms of that discipline.

Given the demands of academic language at school, and the drastic gaps in students', especially ELs, proficiency at the secondary levels, the SFL approach is a relevant and useful tool for teachers in developing understanding and teaching the linguistic systems of the content areas. (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002).

The Gap

Research and application resources for the SFL approach are robust. However, most of these resources focus on the rationale for SFL, how to analyze a text, or how to apply the strategies in the classroom. There is, I believe, an additional and individual resource needed, which has become the aim of this research. In order to effectively develop explicit genre-based language instruction in one's own classroom, extensive analysis of the text being used is required. This analysis will discover which language forms exist in the text and are most relevant to the particular topic at hand. Without this text analysis, this language approach cannot be fully adapted or implemented. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze, through the SFL approach, the common linguistic features that are present for structuring text in the seventh grade U.S. History textbook, *History Alive!* This data can then be used to inform and develop language instruction that advances academic literacy in the social studies classroom, particularly for ELs.

Research Questions

There are two primary questions guiding this research:

- What genres and Theme patterns are common in the *History Alive!* text that students need to understand in order to engage in critical academic literacy?
- What linguistic resources are used as Themes in the *History Alive!* text?

Summary

This chapter affirmed the importance of academic language as it relates to literacy proficiency, particularly among ELs. It examined the idea of a genre-based approach to language development, then introduced the specific methodology taken in this project, SFL. The approach and its rationale were presented in detail, highlighting its focus on identifying the language forms and linguistic features that are prevalent in the various content areas.

Chapter Three Preview

Chapter Three will detail the methodological approach for analyzing the text according to the SFL framework with text samples as models for the techniques that will be used in this project. Additionally, common language forms and genre types in social studies texts will be discussed. Finally, the study design will be outlined in detail.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach for analyzing the text according to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The study purposes are stated, followed by an explanation of the methodology and highlighting common linguistic resources included in my analysis. The text selection and data collection process is then outlined. Finally, the pilot study that informed the methodology of this study is presented.

Study Purposes

The primary purpose of this research is to study the relationship between linguistic resources and the genre of social studies. This is accomplished by taking a SFL approach to analyze a seventh-grade history textbook. This will inform my language instruction for ELs in this content area.

While various sources of text are employed in a social studies classroom, including graphics, video, original documents and more, the main ideas of the content are often drawn from textbook reading (Fang & Schleppegrell 2008; Schleppegrell, 2012). Therefore, the best place to go to for understanding how the language of social studies operates is a classroom textbook. A single textbook contains a variety of sub-genres within the umbrella of the social studies context.

There may be, for example, a historical account, which retells the events of the past, a factorial explanation, explaining the reasons a particular event occurred, a consequential explanation, which explains the effects or consequences of a situation, and a discussion, arguing two or more points of view, (Coffin, 2006) all within one chapter of a book. A textbook then, provides valuable insight into the breadth of language forms, grammatical features, and text organization that a student will encounter, comprehend, and be expected to produce in some form.

Methodology of Systemic Functional Linguistics Analysis

SFL provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and analyzing how language choices contribute to the meaning of the content. This approach sees that different genres utilize varying registers, or language choices to accomplish their unique goals (Schleppegrell, 2012). These language choices can take various forms, and more distinctions will be made later in this chapter. In general, among genres we see different language structures, language forms, and vocabulary (Coffin, 2006). These language forms correspond to the construction of different meanings in a text.

Text Selection

The text excerpts used in the text analysis research were taken from the social studies textbook *History Alive! The United States*. This textbook is currently used for the 7th grade United States history curriculum in my school district. This text was chosen because of its use and relevance to my own classroom.

In order to narrow the scope of this project, one chapter from the book was selected for analysis. While text excerpts from throughout the book could have been

selected, analyzing one chapter gave a more cohesive picture of the variety of genres and linguistic resources that will likely be encountered throughout a classroom unit. The selected text is *Chapter 15: Manifest Destiny and the Growing Nation*. This chapter was considered a representative sample of the text because of its variety of sub-genres and average length. It is also part of the Focused Instruction standards for my district, and positioned in the first semester, ensuring that its material will be covered.

Within this chapter, five topic sections exist. Out of these sections 10 multi-paragraph sub-sections were identified for analysis. These sub-sections represent a variety of social studies sub-genres, which are generally characteristic of the text as a whole. Each sub-section begins and ends at a natural breakpoint indicated by a heading.

The entire *History Alive!* text is about 475 pages long. Chapter 15 comprises thirteen pages, thus this project's analysis represents approximately 2 percent of the text as a whole.

Data Collection Design

From a broad perspective, the methodology of this study focuses on the experiential and textual meanings, and follows a clause-by-clause analysis, looking at each meaningful part of the clause. It is guided by two of the questions that Schleppegrell (in Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008) poses as a guide for identifying each of the meanings. The two questions this project follows are: How did the author organize this section?, and What is going on in the text?

Within this larger framework, the research followed several steps to complete the clause-by-clause analysis. The process is outlined below.

(1) A preliminary identification of the genre of the text selection was made using Coffin's guidelines (Coffin, 2006, p. 11). In this text analysis, all text excerpts were categorized into one of the sub-genres of social studies text that Collins outlines in her genre identification. Coffin's genre classification chart was referenced to determine the text genre, and confirmed once Themes and Theme progressions were identified.

(2) The Theme of each clause was identified. The Theme analysis was used to confirm or re-identify the text genre.

(3) The Theme progression pattern of each clause was identified based on Theme identifications.

(4) The Theme progressions were analyzed to determine whether the progression patterns reflect the genre. Genre categories were reconsidered based on the Theme progression analysis.

(5) Every occurrence of non-finite terms that begin a clause were marked. In sections with high frequency non-subject beginning clauses, the experiential meaning was analyzed by compiling a chart to identify the participants, processes, and circumstances.

(6) The linguistic resources used as Themes were identified.

As I collected data through the text analysis, I used a few methods for recording it. First, I kept annotated copies of the texts in which elements such as Theme, Theme progression patterns, and linguistic resources were identified.

Second, this data was transferred and reanalyzed in electronic copies. Third, I compiled charts in which the data was quantified. Finally, I kept notes recording my observations and possible implications the data has for the instruction of ELs.

Theme Identification Specifications

In this study, Theme is defined as the first unit of a clause, including the first participant, process, or circumstance, and serving as the departure point of the message (Coffin, 2009; Halliday, 1984). Two specifications within this definition will be applied throughout this analysis.

First, any clause that includes two tensed verbs that are part of one idea and relate to one subject will be considered only one clause. Example (13) illustrates this distinction.

(13) In 1843, about 1,000 pioneers packed their belongings into covered wagons and headed for Oregon.

This keeps the focus on the primary Theme, rather than parsing a sentence into many different clauses, which are part of the same main idea.

Second, anytime a Theme begins with a discourse connector, the process, participant of circumstance immediately following the discourse connector will be included. (14) and (15) demonstrate this point.

(14) Instead of a city, suddenly the United States had the opportunity to buy an area as big as itself!

(15) As a result, Napoleon no longer needed Louisiana.

This allows the experiential meaning of the text to remain primarily in focus during the analysis.

Reliability

To account for the accuracy of my Thematic analysis, a reliability measure was put in place. Another reader, also a capstone candidate, read over ten percent of my work and carried out her own Theme analysis. The first step in our process was to identify the Themes of a common text together. Next, we looked at a different text and analyzed it separately and compared our results. Results will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four Preview

Chapter Four will present the results of the SFL analysis on the selected text excerpts. Findings will be outlined according to the research questions, including data around identified genre types, Theme progressions, and the linguistic resources of Themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the text analysis of the *History Alive!* social studies textbook. Research questions are reviewed, followed by a presentation of data from each of the questions of this project. First, data regarding the genre of the text excerpts is presented. Second, Theme progression findings are discussed, and finally data on the linguistic resources used as Themes are outlined.

Text Corpus and Analysis

In an attempt to remain as relevant as possible to the researcher, all text selections for this study were chosen from the social studies textbook, *History Alive!*, being currently used in seventh grade classrooms. All excerpts came from chapter 15, on the topic of westward expansion. Text selections represent a section within that chapter, and begin and end at natural break points as designated by the author. Data was collected from each text selection and was totaled for the whole text corpus and differentiated by genre. The text analysis followed the steps outlined in Chapter Three, which are aligned with the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) method. The purpose of the analysis was to answer the following research questions:

- What genres and Theme progressions are common in the *History Alive!* text that students need to understand in order to engage in critical academic literacy?
- What linguistic resources are used as Themes in the *History Alive!* text?

Results: Genres

In chapter 15, where the text excerpts were drawn from, there are 27 sub-sections within the seven sections. The data analyzed in this study represents eight sub sections of text. When the eight texts were selected, the first step was to make a preliminary identification of the genre. The next step was to identify the Theme of each clause, being “everything in a clause up to and including the first participant, process, or circumstance” (Coffin, 2009). This information was then used to confirm or re-identify the genre. Figure 1 shows the results of this analysis.

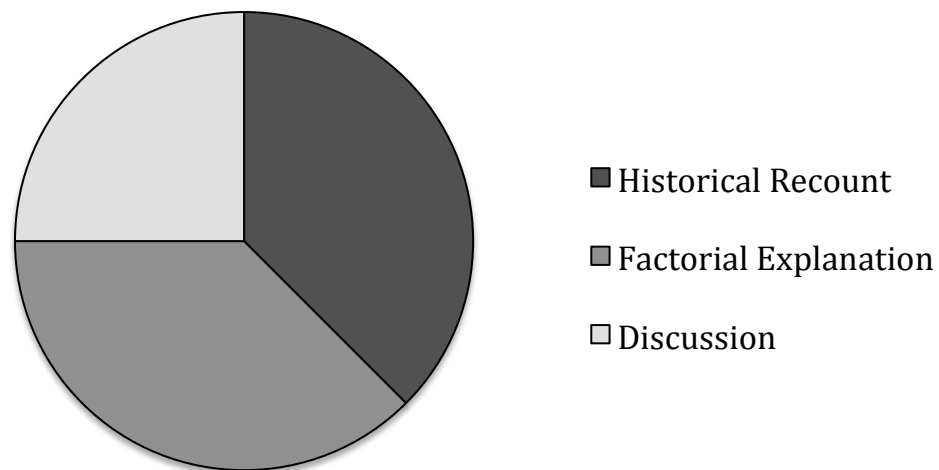


Figure 1. Genre Percentages of Total Text Selection

This figure describes what percentage of the whole text selection each genre represents. Historical recounts make up 37.5 percent of the total, factorial explanations make up 37.5 percent of the total, and discussions make up 25 percent of the total. Of the eight text excerpts, three are historical recounts, three are factorial explanations, and two are discussions.

The purpose of the historical recount genre is to retell events in the past (Coffin, 2006). Theme indicators identified in this analysis that are consistent with the historical recount genre are Themes of time, noun groups, and Themes of circumstance showing place or manner.

The purpose of the factorial explanation genre is to explain the reasons or factors that contribute to a particular outcome (Coffin, 2006). Theme indicators identified in this analysis that are consistent with the factorial explanation genre are Themes of circumstance, Themes of time, and Themes including connectors or other language features to show cause and effect. The presence of language features showing cause and effect is one of the distinguishers between a historical recount and a factorial explanation (Droga, Humphrey & Feez; 2012).

The purpose of the discussion genre is to argue the case for two or more points of view about an issue (Coffin, 2006). The Theme indicators identified in this analysis that are consistent with the discussion genre are Themes of nouns and noun phrases following a multiple Theme progression pattern, revealing the various perspectives of the noun groups.

Results: Theme Progression

The text analysis identified a variety of Theme progressions across the text samples. Theme progressions identified include linear, time, zig-zag, contrast, multiple theme, and no Theme progression. The analysis was completed by identifying by which progression, if any, each Theme connected to another Theme within a proximity of two clauses.

The results of the analysis, shown in Table 2, reveal that the three most common Theme progressions across these texts are no Theme progression, linear Theme progressions, and zig-zag Theme progressions. These three are comparably common, making up 25, 18 and 18 percent of Theme progressions respectively.

Table 2

Theme Progressions for all Text Selections

Type	Number Identified	Percentage of Total Theme Progressions
None	32	25
Linear	23	18
Zig-Zag	23	18
Time	21	17
Multiple Theme	17	14
Contrast	10	8

Note. Theme progressions do not equal the total number of Themes for two reasons. First, the first clause of each text carries no progression. Second, nine additional progressions are included when contrast is indicated by a discourse connector or coordinator, in addition to the progression carried by the rest of the clause.

No Theme progression occurs when the Theme of a clause cannot be linked back to the Theme of the one or two preceding clauses or sentences. There may be a

connection to another part of the text, but there is not enough proximity for it to be considered a Theme progression. Example (16) shows no Theme progression.

(16) Northerners who opposed slavery wanted to keep Texas out. Others feared that annexation would lead to war with Mexico. The 1844 presidential campaign was influenced by the question of whether to expand U.S. territory.

The third Theme in (16), *the 1844 presidential campaign*, is new information that does not directly link back to the prior two themes, *others* and *northerners*. Those Themes are discussing various perspectives on the possible annexation of Texas. The rheme, or second part of the final clause references this expansion of territory, but the Theme is not connected to prior Themes.

Time Theme progressions can take a variety of forms, with the purpose of indicating to the reader a series of chronological events (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Examples (17) through (21) from the text excerpts reveal the variety of ways in which a Time Theme progression can be constructed.

(17) In 1800, the French ruler Napoleon Bonaparte convinced Spain to return Louisiana to France.

(18) Over the next few years, Spain's control of Florida weakened.

(19) When Moses died suddenly that year, his son Stephen took over his father's dream.

(20) Now Texas was a part of Mexico.

(21) Stephen arrived in Texas just as Mexico declared its independence from Spain.

Temporal phrases and clauses used to create Theme progressions of time use not only dates, but words marking length of time (*few years*), general expressions of time (*it didn't take long*), and discourse connectors indicating a time or moment (*when, now, just as*).

Example (22) shows a Time Theme that is slightly different from the others.

(22) It didn't take long for Monroe to agree.

In this case, *it didn't take long* is a meaningful chunk that, taken together, conveys a sense of time. While adverbs, in this case *long*, are traditionally not included in Themes, here it is part of the whole phrase that communicates an expression of time. For this reason, the whole phrase is considered in this analysis, as time Theme progression.

Zig-zag Theme progressions are one of the most common types identified here, however it is important to note that a modification was made during this analysis due to the unique structuring of zig-zag Theme progressions in these particular texts. A zig-zag Theme progression, as noted in Chapter Two, occurs when new information in a previous clause becomes the Theme in the next clause, leading to a chain of reasoning that develops as clauses follow one another and build upon one another (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005). Traditionally, this involves at least three clause progressions. As this text analysis was conducted, however, three clause progressions were extremely rare. What was more common were two clause progressions. Example (23) illustrates a two-clause progression.

(23) Over the next few years, Spain's control of Florida weakened. The Spanish government could do nothing to stop the raids on farms in Georgia by Seminoles and ex-slaves.

The rheme of the first sentence, "Spain's control of Florida weakened," is taken up as the Theme in the next clause, which explains that the government was helpless against the attacks. This pattern still requires the reader to connect the chain of reasoning between the two clauses, so for the purpose of this study, I

identified those as zig-zag Theme progressions. It is important to note that the author of these texts chose to utilize primarily two clause zig-zag Theme progressions.

While it is beneficial to identify the Theme progressions of all the texts as a whole, it is helpful to analyze them according to their respective sub-genres so that more specific patterns can be seen. The next section discusses these results.

Results: Theme Progressions in Each Genre

The analysis of Theme progressions according to the text sub-genres showed results both consistent and divergent from typical genre characteristics. Each sub-genre had dominant and less dominant Theme progression types, and each genre had a significant number of no Theme progression occurrences. The results of each genre's analysis is presented below.

Table 3 shows that the three most common Theme progressions in Historical Recount texts are no Theme progressions, linear Theme progressions, and zig-zag Theme progressions. This is mostly consistent with the text sample as a whole. In these genre excerpts, no Theme progressions have only slightly more frequency than linear or zig-zag progressions. Time Theme progressions follow closely in their percentage of the whole. It is somewhat surprising that time Theme progressions are not one of the most frequent patterns in this genre, as they are noted to be common linguistic features in recount texts (Coffin, 2006; Droga, Humphrey & Feez; 2012). This finding will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Table 3

Theme Progressions in the Historical Recount Genre

Type	Number Identified	Percentage of Total Theme Progressions
None	11	25
Linear	9	21
Zig-Zag	9	21
Time	8	19
Multiple Theme	5	12
Contrast	1	2

Table 4 shows that the three most common Theme progressions in the Factorial Explanation genre are time progressions, zig-zag progressions, and no Theme progression. Remaining consistent with the whole text corpus, no Theme progression is the most common. This is the one genre, however, in which time progressions are one of the most common, making up nearly 23 percent of the total Theme progressions. This finding is surprising because time Theme progressions are considered a strong characteristic of historical recount texts (Coffin, 2006; Droga, Humphrey & Feez; 2012). This will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Table 5 shows that the three most common Theme progressions in the Discussion genre are multiple Theme progressions, no Theme progressions, and linear progressions. Interestingly, this is the only genre in which multiple theme progressions are most common, in this case being equal with linear progressions.

Table 4

Theme Progressions in the Factorial Explanation Genre

Type	Number Identified	Percentage of Total Theme Progressions
None	13	30
Time	9	20.5
Zig-Zag	9	20.5
Contrast	5	11
Linear	5	11
Multiple Theme	3	7

Table 5

Theme Progressions in Discussion Genre

Type	Number Identified	Percentage of Total Theme Progressions
Multiple Theme	9	23
Linear	9	23
None	8	21
Zig-Zag	5	13
Time	4	10
Contrast	4	10

The identification of multiple Theme progressions is another case in which a modification was made due to their non-traditional structuring in these texts.

Multiple Theme progression refers to the presence of a clause that presents many

ideas. These ideas then become the Theme in future clauses (Achugar & Schleppegrell, 2005). During the analysis, several occurrences of multiple Theme progressions were identified that aligned with the definition only in part. In all of the examples from the text selection, there was a clause that introduced an idea that would have multiple elaborations, but these ideas were not listed in that clause. Instead, they were introduced as they appeared in the Theme position in the proceeding clauses. Examples (24) and (25) illustrate these findings.

(24) People in the United States were divided over whether to annex Texas. Southerners were eager to add another slave state. Northerners who opposed slavery wanted to keep Texas out. Others feared that annexation would lead to war with Mexico.

The first clause introduces the idea that there are multiple perspectives on the issue of annexation. The next three clause Themes, then, introduce those different perspectives.

(25) These early settlers wrote letters home describing Oregon as a “pioneer’s paradise.” The weather was always sunny they claimed. Disease was unknown. Trees grew as thick as hairs on a dog’s back. And farms were free for the taking.

In (25), the first clause introduces the idea that Oregon is a “pioneer’s paradise.” The next three clause Themes give three examples of why it was considered a paradise. These three reasons are not listed in the initial clause as they would be in a true multiple Theme progression. However, because the reader must still follow the clauses and make the logical connection of information back to the original clause, they are identified as multiple Theme progressions in this study.

The multiple Theme progression technique accords with the description of a discussion genre, that two or more points of view are presented and discussed

(Coffin, 2006). It should be helpful for readers to realize that the textual organization of these excerpts predictably line up with the characteristics of this genre. The prevalence of multiple Theme progressions and the fact that the varying points of view are introduced in clause Themes could be a helpful organizational feature to aid readers in sorting through the information according to the purpose of the text, which is to understand varying points of view on a topic. The implications of this will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Results: Linguistic Resources of Themes

The second research question of this study sought to discover what linguistic resources are used as Themes in these text selections.

The analysis of Themes as processes, participants, or circumstances revealed that the majority of Themes in these texts are oriented around participants, followed in frequency by Themes of circumstance, and with only a small number of process Themes, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Categorization of Themes as Process, Participant or Circumstance

Category	Number Identified	Percentage of whole text selection
Process	7	6
Participant	85	68
Circumstance	33	26

A little over two thirds of the Themes are participants, and about one fourth are circumstances, with the remaining small percentage being processes. This is

important to identify as it shows that in this text, the majority of the clause Themes orient themselves around the subject. A Theme as a participant can take a variety of forms, as (26) through (32) demonstrate.

(26) The first American settlers to travel through South Pass to Oregon were missionaries.

(27) These reports inspired other settlers who were looking for a fresh start.

(28) Napoleon had plans for Louisiana.

(29) New Orleans was part of Louisiana.

(30) The Texas tale begins with Moses Austin, a banker and businessman.

(31) Not all Americans were happy about leaving Spain in charge of Texas.

(32) You have procured an immense and fertile country: and all these great blessings are obtained without war and bloodshed.

As the examples show, a participant Theme may be a specific person, generalized participants, a group of people, a pronoun, a place, an object, or an abstract idea.

While the majority of Themes are participants, it is important to note that nearly a third of the Themes are circumstances, which readers will need to comprehend in order to understand the rest of the clause or sentence. (33) through (38) are examples of circumstance Themes.

(33) Now an independent country, Texas became known as the Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag.

(34) Fearing war, Monroe asked his cabinet for advice.

(35) In exchange, the United States agreed to pay off \$5 million in settlers' claims against Spain.

(36) Having acquired Louisiana through diplomacy, President Jefferson turned next to Florida.

(37) Rather than lose Louisiana, it made sense to sell it to the United States.

(38) On April 30, 1803, he signed a treaty giving Louisiana to the United States in exchange for \$15 million.

Themes of circumstance can take a variety of forms, such as a temporal clause or phrase, a non-finite term that gives important background information (*fearing war*), a description of the current status of something (*now*, referring to the new status of Texas), or a prepositional phrase to explain an outcome (*in exchange*).

Example (33) serves as an interesting example of circumstances of time.

(33) Now an independent country, Texas became known as the Lone Star Republic because of the single star on its flag.

The circumstance Theme, *now*, presents a potentially confusing comprehension issue for readers. In this case, *now* isn't referring to a statement that is true of Texas in the present moment for the reader, but rather a past date in Texas' history. It is useful for instructors to anticipate phrases such as this that could be problematic for students.

In addition to discovering whether Themes can be categorized as a process, participant, or circumstance, this analysis sought to discover what specific linguistic resources make up the Themes of these texts. The analysis revealed that noun phrases and pronouns are the most prevalent, followed by temporal phrases and clauses. Various forms of discourse connectors also have a notable presence. A variety of other linguistic resources are employed, though not in numbers frequent enough to merit further analysis or implications.

Table 7

Linguistic Resources of Themes

Linguistic Resource	Number of Occurrences in Text Selection
Noun phrases and pronouns	71
Temporal phrases and clauses	21
Contrast discourse connector plus noun or verb phrase	8
Result discourse connector plus noun phrase	2
Result discourse connector plus temporal phrase	1
Additive discourse connector plus noun phrase	2
Coordinator plus noun	1
Complementizer plus noun	2
Verb	3
Verb phrase	1
Conditional plus noun	1
Modifier	2
Conjunction plus noun or pronoun	2
Conjunction plus verb	1
Prepositional phrase	4
Adverbial relative clause	3

Of the two most prominent linguistic resources used as Themes, noun phrases and pronouns account for 57 percent of the total number of Themes. Thus, a noun of some kind is the most common Theme used in this textbook. This aligns

with the fact that named or general human participants and extended noun groups are common language indicators of these genres (Droga, Humphrey, Feez, 2012). The second most prominent linguistic resources are temporal phrases and clauses, accounting for about 17 percent of the total number of Themes. Time connectives are also identified as key language features especially of the Historical Account and Factorial Explanation genres (Droga, Humphrey & Feez, 2012).

Also important to note from this table is that, taken together, discourse connectors comprise about 10 percent of the total Themes. (39) through (41) are examples from the text excerpts.

(39) Rather than apologize, Adams convinced Monroe to send a blunt message to Spain.

(40) Even so, the Senate ratified the Florida treaty two days after it was signed.

(41) In addition, white landowners in Georgia were upset by Seminole raids on their lands.

10 percent of the total number of Themes is a meaningful number when taking into account that students will need to recognize these discourse connectors, which take a variety of forms and meanings, and understand their meaning to comprehend what the text is communicating.

Results: Non-finite Terms

Step five in the methodology outline indicated that any non-finite terms in the Theme position would be marked so that in text excerpts with a high frequency of non-finite terms, a process, participant, circumstance chart would be compiled. However, in the entire text corpus, there are only three occurrences of non-finite

terms in the Theme position. This comprises two percent of the total Themes, which is not frequent enough to merit further analysis.

Reliability Results

To ensure the reliability of my findings, I put a reliability measure in place. After analyzing the Themes of each text excerpt individually, I had another reader, also a Capstone candidate, analyze a text alongside me as a reliability measure. First, we analyzed one text together, to ensure we were following the same process and guidelines. Then, we analyzed one text separately and compared our results.

After our individual analysis, we had an 81 percent matched accuracy rate. Three of the differences were subordinate clauses which I had missed in my analysis and which the reader pointed out. The remaining difference was a clause where we differed on whether or not it was a separate clause that carried a Theme. After checking with a second reader, my Capstone advisor, my analysis of this clause was deemed correct.

The three clauses which I overlooked all followed the connector “that.” After identifying this through the reliability measure, I went back through the remaining texts and re-analyzed each part to make sure I hadn’t overlooked any of these types of clauses. Through this check I found three clause Themes I had missed in the first analysis and so adjusted my notes to include them.

Conclusion

In this chapter the results of this text analysis were presented. First, genre identifications were discussed, followed by the results of the Theme progression analysis, and concluding with data identifying the linguistic resources that make up

the Themes. Findings for genre identifications included the presence of three social studies genre types: historical recount, factorial explanation, and discussion. Historical recount and factorial explanations made up 37.5 percent of the texts each, with discussions comprising the remaining 25 percent. Findings around Theme progressions revealed that across all the texts, the three most common Theme progressions were no Theme progressions, linear progressions, and zig-zag progressions. When analyzed according to genre, important results included time Theme progressions being less prevalent in the historical recount texts than anticipated, time Theme progressions being more common than anticipated in factorial explanations, and multiple Theme progressions being most common in discussion genre texts. One important finding regarding the linguistic resource make up of Themes was that 57 percent of the Themes are a noun of some form. Other relevant findings were that temporal phrases or clauses make up 17 percent of Themes, and discourse connectors make up 10 percent of Themes. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter five.

Chapter Five Preview

Chapter Five will discuss the findings from this analysis and the implications they have for the classroom with EL students, making relevant connections to the research outlined in Chapter Two. Following the discussion the chapter will suggest limitations of this study as well as possible future projects. The chapter will conclude with the researcher's plan to disseminate the results and a personal reflection.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of the results of my text analysis. In this study, I sought to answer the following questions:

- What genres and Theme progressions are common in the *History Alive!* text that students need to understand in order to engage in critical academic literacy?
- What linguistic resources are used as Themes in the *History Alive!* text?

The results of these research questions are discussed with connections made to the research presented in Chapter Two. In addition, a reflection on possible implications for learners and instructors, and recommendations for future projects is included.

Discussion: Themes

One of the research questions posed sought to find what linguistic resources are used as Themes in the text. One important finding was that 66 percent of the themes are categorized as participants. This means they are made up of a noun or noun phrase (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Participant Themes are also the subject

of the clause. The participants in these text excerpts fell into two general categories: that of a person, group of people or an entity, or of an abstract idea. Examples (42) through (45) illustrate this.

Person, group of people, or entity

(42) Napoleon knew that he might lose Louisiana to the British.

(43) Politicians in the East fretted that they would lose power.

(44) The Spanish government could do nothing to stop the raids on farms in Georgia by Seminoles and ex-slaves.

An abstract idea

(45) The Texas tale begins with Moses Austin, a banker and businessman who dreamed of starting an American colony in Spanish Texas.

When a subject is in the Theme position, it generally follows the simpler clause structure of a subject verb ordering. Readers tend to be more accustomed to simpler clause structures that are more closely aligned with spoken language (Fang, 2008) and therefore would likely be able to better comprehend the meaning. Thus, it is relevant that these types of Themes account for approximately two thirds of the text samples. This provides a sizable amount of text whose format is easier for the reader. There are, however, other factors besides clause structure that contribute to text comprehensibility, such as vocabulary and assumed inference, which will be discussed later.

An important related finding was that 30 percent of Themes are categorized as a circumstance. A circumstance Theme gives the background information of how, where, when, or why, and is constructed using prepositional phrases, adverbs, and conjunctions (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). (46) demonstrates this.

(46) On April 30, 1803, he signed a treaty giving Louisiana to the United States in exchange for \$15 million.

This Theme of circumstance explains when a particular event happened, thus time is used as the context for understanding the idea in relation to the rest of the text. Example (47) shows a unique example of a circumstance.

(47) Equally fearful of war, Spain decided to get out.

This example is somewhat divergent in that it is not constructed in a typical way, instead using an adjective phrase. However, it is still considered a Theme of circumstance, providing the background information for the reader to explain the rest of the clause, Spain's decision.

This information helps give context, may help explain actions, or directs the reader to make inferences about the subject. However, when a clause takes on a more complex form, including subordinate and embedded clauses or containing semantic links or dependency relationships it can lead to comprehension difficulty because it takes time to make sense of the information (Fang, 2008). Readers are first given situational information before the subject is introduced, and so may also have difficulty in making the connection to the participant and process. This adds to the structural complexity and may make the reading process more difficult for students.

In the process of identifying Themes, it was also observed that the use of quotes has an impact on clausal complexity. Throughout the eight text excerpts, five quotes were included. The quotations introduced complexity in two ways. First, they often include vocabulary or phrasing that is old-fashioned and not commonly used, which adds to the lexical complexity. Second, and most significantly, they are

sometimes written in a more complex manner using embedded clauses. (48) and (49) illustrate this.

(48) "We are to give money of which we have too little," wrote a Boston critic, "for land of which we already have too much."

(49) "You have secured to us the free navigation of the Mississippi," a grateful westerner wrote Jefferson. "You have procured an immense and fertile country: and all these great blessings are obtained without war and bloodshed."

In (48), the single quote contains four separate clauses. The nature of the phrasing is one reason for this complexity, but complexity is also introduced when the author makes a stylistic choice to embed the source into the quote itself. It not only breaks up the flow of the quoted information, but it distances the speaker from the subject pronoun, *we*, requiring the reader to make this connection. Additionally, the reader must know what group the author or speaker of the quote belongs to, in order to understand who the pronoun *we* refers to. In (49), each sentence of the quoted information contains two clauses. The main complexity in this example is that the quote begins with the pronoun *you*, referring to President Jefferson, yet he is not introduced as the recipient of the quote until the second clause. Again, readers must make this connection backwards to comprehend the meaning of the quote. This text organization of introducing the speaker and or recipient in the middle of the quote, likely for stylistic reasons, adds another layer of clausal complexity and Themes that must be connected that students may find difficult to comprehend.

Discussion: Discourse Connectors as Themes

The analysis of the linguistic resources of Themes revealed that a variety of language forms may be used. Importantly, discourse connectors are used to begin

about 11 percent of Themes. A discourse connector connects one sentence to the next and may be used to indicate relationships such as a contrast, result, or an addition (Cowan, 2008). Examples of these forms of discourse connectors are seen in (50) through (53).

(50) Rather than lose Louisiana, it made sense to sell it to the United States.

(51) Despite their wishes, Texas remained independent for ten years.

(52) In addition, France and Britain were on the brink of war.

(53) Still, not everyone approved.

Discourse connectors are important vocabulary words used with frequency in these text excerpts. It is imperative then, that students know and understand the meanings of these words. Without knowing what *rather than*, *despite*, *so*, *in addition*, and *still* mean, the student cannot make the connections the author is intending, or come to the conclusions the author is indicating. These types of vocabulary words convey deeper meanings of cause and effect and reveal the unique perspectives of different groups of people in relation to one another. These meanings are essential to critical academic literacy, which moves beyond simply facts, to a deep comprehension of the text's message (Colombi & Schleppegrell, 2002). ELs and other students may not be familiar with or in command of these terms, so this vocabulary must be taught to ensure comprehension of the text.

Discussion: Temporal Clauses and Phrases as Themes

Another finding of the linguistic resource analysis of Themes was that temporal phrases and clauses make up 16 percent of Themes. This corresponds with other findings that time indicators and a chronological presentation of events

is common in social studies genres (Coffin, 2006; Coffin, Donohue & North, 2009). As discussed in Chapter 4, these time indicators take on many different forms in addition to the citing of a specific date that students need to expect and be familiar with.

(54) It didn't take long for Monroe to agree.

(55) Over the next few years, Spain's control of Florida weakened.

(56) When Moses died suddenly that year, his son Stephen took over his father's dream.

(57) Now Texas was a part of Mexico.

(58) Stephen arrived in Texas just as Mexico declared its independence from Spain.

In (54) through (58), students need to understand that specific vocabulary words, such as *now* and *when*, signal an event whose timing is important, or whose timing relates to other information already presented. Students also need to understand time expressions, such as *it didn't take long*, *over the next few years*, and *just as*. In the case of *just as*, the author may be pointing out the connection between two events or perhaps highlighting the importance of one event's timing for other events which would follow. The fact that vocabulary like this appears in about 16 percent of Themes reveals the importance contribution that these words make toward real comprehension of a text. Because this vocabulary is not exclusive to social studies, it is an important piece of the technical academic vocabulary that students, especially ELs, need for academic literacy in this genre.

Discussion: Theme Progressions

One important finding from the Theme progression analysis is that the most common progression is in fact no Theme progression. This means that the Theme of a clause does not link back to the Theme of the one or two prior clauses. It is important to note, however, that a clause with no Theme progression may link back to something in a previous paragraph, but it lacks the proximity to be considered an actual Theme progression. The prevalence of no Theme progressions is significant on two accounts. First, students may struggle to connect new information to prior ideas or the main ideas of the text when that information is not included in the Theme, or launching point of the clause. Example (59), discussed in Chapter 4 serves as an illustration.

(59) Northerners who opposed slavery wanted to keep Texas out. Others feared that annexation would lead to war with Mexico. The 1844 presidential campaign was influenced by the question of whether to expand U.S. territory.

In the third clause, the 1844 presidential campaign is new information that does not immediately connect to the prior discussion, which presents the varying perspectives on the annexation of Texas. It is not until the rheme, or second part of the clause, that the connection to Texas, or expanding U.S. territory, is made. Even then, a synonym phrase is used. This requires readers to go back to the Theme to understand why the presidential campaign is related, and then connect forward to the proceeding discussion on the candidates' differing points of view on the annexation of Texas. When no clear Theme progression is present, readers will likely need time to sort through the information to comprehend all the meanings and connections. No Theme progressions are also significant because the Theme

may in fact have a connection to another portion of text, just not within a two-clause proximity. Therefore, students may benefit from instruction on going back through the text to make these connections.

Another finding around Theme progressions was that Multiple Theme progressions occur in each of the three genres, but are most prevalent in the discussion genre. It makes sense that multiple Theme progressions would be most common in this genre, given that the purpose is to present and discuss two or more points of view (Coffin, 2006). It is important then, for students to anticipate that in this genre differing points of view will be presented, and that the different groups will typically be introduced in the Themes.

The most common occurrence of multiple Theme progressions in these text excerpts is to discuss varying opinions from different groups of people. Example (60) illustrates this.

(60) Still, not everyone approved. Some people worried that such a large country would be impossible to govern. Politicians in the East fretted that they would lose power. Sooner or later, they warned, Louisiana would be carved into enough new states to outvote the eastern states in Congress.

Others fussed about the \$15 million price tag. "We are to give money of which we have too little," wrote a Boston critic, "for land of which we already have too much."

Opponents also accused Jefferson of "tearing the Constitution to tatters."

The first clause introduces the idea that there were people who did not agree with the decision. Then follows a series of clauses that detail the different groups of people and their specific objections. As explained in Chapter Three, these are only partial multiple Theme progressions, as there is no introductory clause that outlines each of the people or ideas which will be discussed. This makes the multiple

perspectives less explicit than in a traditional multiple Theme progression. For this reason, it is important for students to know how to recognize a series of perspectives in a text. One way to do this is to identify the nouns or noun phrases in each clause Theme. These nouns or noun phrases introduce each person or group of people connected with a certain view. In the example above, students must recognize that the Themes *some people*, *politicians in the East*, *others*, and *opponents* are all nouns representing groups of people who have a particular view. Being able to identify these noun phrases helps a reader organize and attribute the information presented.

Another finding of the Theme progression analysis was that some clauses have a linear or zig-zag progression, but require an inference or contextual understanding in order to understand the connection. (61) and (62) demonstrate this point.

(61) The 1844 presidential campaign was influenced by the question of whether to expand U.S. Territory. One of the candidates, Henry Clay, warned, "Annexation and war with Mexico are identical."

(62) Frontier farmers cheered the news. "You have secured to us the free navigation of the Mississippi," a grateful westerner wrote Jefferson.

In (61), the reader needs to know the word *candidate*, and understand that presidential campaigns have various candidates with differing opinions, in order to make the linear connection between the clauses. In (62), the reader must have the contextual understanding that the *grateful westerner* is one of the *frontier farmers* who was happy about the deal and cheered the news. Students are required to infer that the frontier refers to the people who moved west at this point in history. Linear Theme progressions often provide a simpler progression of information for the

reader, but instructors must be able to recognize when students' comprehension will be impeded by assumed inferences or vocabulary context.

Discussion: Genre

The analysis of these text excerpts found that three sub-genre sections exist within this chapter of the textbook. The three sub-genres are historical recount, factorial explanation, and discussion, which are common social studies genres (Coffin, 2006; Droga, Feez, & Humphrey, 2009). It is likely that sub-genres occur throughout the text, or perhaps more commonly in other chapters; however, it was beyond the scope of this project to analyze a larger text corpus. One sub-genre that I did not encounter in my analysis, but expected to be common, is a consequential explanation. This genre of texts seeks to explain the effects or consequences of a situation (Coffin, 2006). While it did not occur in my text samples, it is probable that this genre exists in other sections of the text.

In this text, each chapter is organized into sections, which are in turn organized into several sub-sections. Another finding was that the sub-sections tended to remain in the same genre. Further research would be needed to determine if this finding can be generalized to the entire text.

The text excerpts selected for this analysis were a sample of convenience, so it is not possible to say to what extent different sub-genres appear in any sequence. However, one observation from this analysis is of note. Three sub-sections from section 15.2, were analyzed and in this instance, the sub-sections follow a progression of historical recount, factorial explanation, and discussion. These sub-sections focus on the Louisiana Purchase, and the sequencing of the sub-genres is a

logical progression. The first sub-section, a historical recount presents an account of the Louisiana Territory and important facts about it. The second sub-section, a factorial explanation, then explains certain events that led to Napoleon's decision to sell the territory to the U.S. Finally, the third sub-section is a discussion that presents the various opinions different groups of people held regarding the purchase.

Another finding this analysis revealed about genre is that it is not always clear which sub-genre a text falls into. Even when there are characteristic traits of a particular sub-genre, it may be difficult to distinguish from another sub-genre that also shares this trait. One example that clearly emerged from this project is the prevalence of time indicators in the factorial explanation genre texts. While time indicators are often found in factorial explanations (Droga, Feez, & Humphrey, 2009), they tend to be even more prevalent in historical recounts as the information is commonly organized chronologically. Therefore, it seemed unusual that in this analysis, the factorial explanation texts had a higher number of time indicators. One possible reason for this is that the author may have been attempting to explain how the timing of certain events contributed to a particular outcome. In this case then, the time indicators were not to show chronology, but to explain or show cause and effect. This variation can lead to difficulty in determining precisely which sub-genre a text belongs to. For ELs reading these texts, this lack of clarity could lead to comprehension issues. If students are using genre identification in the classroom as a reading tool, they may misidentify the genre, thus possibly misunderstanding the purpose of the information in the text. Even if students are not using genre

explicitly, they may easily assume the time indicators are intended to highlight the ordering of events, thus missing the important explanatory nature of the information.

Limitations

While this study yielded many important conclusions, it does have several limitations. One limitation is its small text sample size. Only eight excerpts from one chapter were analyzed, out of the entire text book. This is a limitation because excerpts from other chapters may have added other findings, for example, other sub-genre classifications with different Theme progressions and linguistic resources. Another limitation is this analysis' focus on the textual and experiential meanings. Under SFL analysis, there are typically three meanings analyzed, experiential, textual, and interpersonal; however an analysis of all three parts was beyond the scope of this project.

Future studies

To extend the findings of this project, many opportunities for future studies exist. An analysis using a larger number of texts from across all chapters of the textbook would give more representative information about the types of linguistic resources, genres, and Themes present in this text. The experiential meaning could be analyzed more through the use of process, participant, and circumstance charts, and the interpersonal meaning could be analyzed by examining how language choice reveals the perspective of the author and the highlighting or downplaying of certain events, circumstances, or people. Another study could focus on other linguistic resources which are known to be common in social studies texts, such as

nominalizations and generalized participant groups (Coffin, 2006; Schleppegrell, Achugar & Oteiza, 2004; Unsworth, 1999), as well as stylistic language choices which could be problematic, such as lexical cohesion devices. These linguistic resources could be analyzed to assess the extent to which they exist and may impact comprehension for readers. To extend the scope even further, other middle school level social studies texts could be analyzed to observe possible trends or generalizations, or any differences between the different grade level texts or texts of different subjects within social studies.

Implications

The findings of this text analysis have several implications for instruction in the secondary classroom. One of the primary implications is to prepare instructors for teachable moments when using a social studies text. One of the aims of this research was to raise teacher awareness of the types of language forms used in middle level social studies textbooks. If teachers are aware of the language demands, forms, organization, and potential challenges, they can not only anticipate the needs of their students, but also be equipped to help students make sense of these language features. For example, if a teacher knows there are temporal clauses the students may not be familiar with, she can be prepared to walk the students through a critical analysis and discussion of their meanings. A teacher may also recognize that a section of text has many Themes of circumstance, resulting in more complex sentences with two or more clauses. Knowing this, she may have supports ready, such as helping students rephrase difficult sentences using simpler clause structures. Finally, if a teacher recognizes a text as being a particular sub-genre, she

can guide students in looking for certain linguistic resources that are often used in meaning making for that genre. This kind of anticipation of student need and preparedness for teachable moments helps students observe and practice skills that can help them to become better critical readers on their own.

Another implication of this study for the classroom is the ability for instructors to teach students strategic skills to sort through the linguistic resources of a text in order to aid their comprehension. For example, a teacher may model how to underline noun groups in the Theme position of a text that contains primarily Themes of participants. This immediately draws students' attention to the people, groups, or entities driving the flow of events. Similarly, a teacher could have students underline temporal phrases and clauses in Theme position in instances where the text is being organized in a chronological order, or where the position of events in time is being used to explain certain actions or outcomes. If a teacher sees these organizational patterns first, and recognizes how they contribute to its meaning, she can teach these skills to her students, with the aim of increasing their comprehension through tools that unlock the language of a text. These skills can also help students to grow their own critical literacy skills, promoting greater independence in their reading and comprehension.

A third implication is for teachers to recognize potential disconnects in a text when there is no Theme progression within the proximity of one or two clauses or sentences. The analysis revealed that there are times when no Theme progression within proximity exists, yet the information connects to information discussed earlier in the text. Teachers may find it valuable to guide students in making these

connections to link important information, and also to see the cohesiveness of a segment of text in its entirety.

A final implication of this study is that it can increase teachers' ability to recognize when a text does not follow anticipated or conventional patterns. For example, in this analysis, it was discovered that the factorial explanation genre text excerpts actually contained a higher percentage of time Theme progressions than did the historical recount text excerpts. Time Theme progressions are used frequently in historical recount texts because their information is often organized chronologically (Droga, Feez & Humphrey, 2012). While time indicators are also a common feature in factorial explanations (Droga, Feez & Humphrey, 2012), they may serve a different purpose in that sub-genre than in recounts. They may, for instance be highlighting how the timing of events or actions resulted in particular outcomes. A teacher's ability to recognize this and point it out to her students will promote deeper understanding of the author's purpose of the text, which in this instance was to explain an event or outcome, not simply record it. This is important because students may be expecting temporal phrases to be simply recounting information, rather than explaining it. This awareness can also be useful for teachers to recognize when a text does not have a clear sub-genre. Knowing this, she can anticipate that students may lack clarity about the purpose of the text, or struggle with other comprehension issues.

Dissemination of Results

Upon the completion of this capstone, I will share the results of my research with other colleagues in the hope of promoting informed practice with the

instruction of ELs. The primary way I will share my findings is through meeting with colleagues at my school, both ELL and mainstream teachers, and discuss how we might use this information to design instructional practices that support academic literacy in mainstream social studies classrooms, sheltered classrooms, and through co-teaching.

Personal Reflection

The process of completing a capstone has been a journey of ups and downs, but in which ultimately, the gains certainly outweigh the sacrifices. It was a big step for me to take on this project as a new teacher, still at the height of my learning curve in my profession, and adjusting to a leadership position at my school. There were many times when I second-guessed the timing of completing my capstone, when I doubted my ability to manage all my responsibilities, and to do my work, both on this capstone and at school, with excellence. When I started graduate school five years ago, one thing I declared adamantly was that I wasn't coming out without my Master's degree. It was a goal I had set firmly before me. And so, during this year, I held that goal in front of me, and the journey toward it has taught me invaluable lessons about perseverance, diligence, and discipline. I learned to keep going through doubt and frustration, even when I was stumbling through research, lacking clarity on my project, and reading texts that I thought were beyond the scope of my competence. Looking back those moments of doubt seem almost funny, because I discovered that if you keep working at something, it will turn out. I learned that a long-term project requires diligence through pacing and incremental goal setting. I was incredibly fortunate in the support of my primary advisor who organized a

capstone group that met bi-monthly. We discussed our progress and set goals that the rest of the group would hold us accountable to. These sessions taught me invaluable skills about outlining and managing progress on a long-term project. Finally, I learned much about discipline during this journey. There were many weekends and evenings, when after an intense week of work or busyness in my personal life, what I most wanted was to forget about my capstone and relax. I learned, however, that goals require discipline, and as I opened my computer to type, or pored over research articles at my table late into the night, this characteristic began to instill itself in my being more and more. I learned when to say no to other commitments, and how to think about my time carefully, balancing the parts of my life that bring happiness and health. I also learned the importance of putting my computer away and resting, trusting that my mind would be renewed in energy and clarity after relaxation and fun. I am grateful for a project of this size and scope because it has helped develop and nourish characteristics in my life that I desire to possess, and which will continue to serve me well in the future as I pursue other endeavors.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to better inform the instruction of ELs when using a secondary level social studies text, by understanding how language is used in this genre. One of the primary outcomes has been an increased awareness on my part of the language and organizational characteristics of this genre, as well as potential obstacles to comprehension due to the way in which language is used. One of my concerns as a teacher was not having the right strategies to help my students

navigate a text like this. One of the important results of this research is that applying the SFL method to analyze a text not only raises awareness for teachers about the academic language demands, thus equipping them to anticipate student need and be prepared for teachable moments, but it also reveals which aspects of language may help unlock a passage for students. Using this data, a teacher could narrow down the most relevant language features or text organizational strategies and help her students focus on those. Some SFL strategies may even be taught or taught in modified form to help students focus in on important language use or organization in an increased independence context.

The level of textual understanding that results from an in depth SFL analysis goes beyond basic literacy strategies. It uncovers the unique ways that language is used to make meaning in the social studies genre. This knowledge provides an opportunity for teachers to tailor their instructional and literacy strategies to fit the demands and traits of the text. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for teachers to broaden the literacy skills of students, going beyond general strategies, to really see the language of the text and make meaning from it. These skills can not only develop the academic language necessary in social studies, but can be extended as students grow in becoming critical readers and thinkers across the content areas.

REFERENCES

- Achugar, M. & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2005). Beyond connectors: The construction of cause in history textbooks. *Linguistics and Education, 16*, 298-318.
- Christie, F. (2011). Developing and implementing a genre-based pedagogy: A systemic functional linguistic perspective. *Caminhos Em Linguística Aplicada 4*(1), 1-21.
- Coffin, C. (2006). Learning the language of school history: The role of linguistics in mapping the writing demands of the secondary school curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 38*(4), 413-429.
- Coffin, C., Donohue, J., & North, S. (2009). *Exploring English Grammar: From formal to Functional*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Colombi, C.M. & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2002). Theory and practice in the development of advanced literacy. In M.J. Schleppegrell & M.C. Colombi (Eds.), *Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power* (pp. 1-19). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Cowan, R. (2008). *The teacher's grammar of English: A course book and reference guide*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Derewianka, B. *Exploring how texts work*. (1990). Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Fang, Z. (2008). Going beyond the fab five: Helping students cope with the unique

- linguistic challenges of expository reading in intermediate grades. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 51(6), 476-487.
- Fang, Z. & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2008). *Reading in the secondary content Areas: A language-based pedagogy*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Fang, Z. (2012). Approaches to developing content area literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(2), 103-108.
- Fang, Z. & Schleppegrell, M.J. (2010). Disciplinary literacies across content areas: Supporting secondary reading through functional language analysis. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(7), 587-597.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *Introduction to functional grammar*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hart, D. (2002). *History alive!: The United States*. J. Hayes (Ed.). Palo Alto: CA. Teacher's Curriculum Institute.
- Humphry, S., Droga, L., & Feez, S. *Grammar and meaning*. (2012). Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Hyon, S. (1996). Genre in three traditions: Implications for ESL. *TESOL Quarterly* 30(4), 693-722.
- Martin, J.R. (2002). Writing history: Construing time and value in discourses of the past. In M.J. Schleppegrell & M.C. Colombi (Eds.), *Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power* (87-117). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Miller, C. R. (1994). Genre as social action. In A. Freeman & P. Medway (Eds.), *Genre and the new rhetoric*. (pp. 23-42). London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Morris, J. & Hirst, G. (1991). Lexical cohesion computed by thesaural relations as an

- indicator of the structure of text. *Computational Linguistics* 17(1), 21-48.
- Paltridge, B. (2012). *Discourse analysis: An introduction*. London: UK. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Scarcella, R. (2002). Some key factors affecting English learner's development of advanced literacy. In M.J. Schleppegrell & M.C. Colombi (Eds.), *Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power* (pp. 209-226). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Schleppegrell, M.J. (2012). Academic language in teaching and learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 112(3), 409-418.
- Schleppegrell, M.J., Greer, S. & Taylor, S. (2008). Literacy in history: Language and meaning. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 31(2), 174-187.
- Schleppegrell, M.J. (2004). *The language of schooling: A functional linguistics perspective*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Schleppegrell, M.J., Achugar, M. & Oteiza, T. (2004). The grammar of history: Enhancing content-based instruction through a functional focus on language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(1), 67-93.
- Schleppegrell, M.J. & Achugar, M. (2003). Learning language and learning history: A functional approach. *TESOL Journal*, 12(2), 21-27.
- Schleppegrell, M.J. (2007). At last: The meaning in grammar. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 42(1), 121-128.
- Unsworth, L. (1999). Developing critical understanding of the specialized language of school science and history texts: A functional grammatical perspective. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 42(7), 508-521.

Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

APPENDIX A: PILOT STUDY

To begin solidifying my methodology, I ran a pilot study with a sample text from *History Alive!* The full text sample can be found in Appendix A. I completed the pilot study following the steps outlined below.

1. Genre (Using parameters by Coffin, 2006)

Genre family: Recording

2. Theme identification – bolded in text

3. The content of the text was also organized in a process/participant/circumstance chart. Process and participants are also highlighted in the text sample.

The selection is primarily organized by presenting the main ideas of the Declaration of Independence through the lens of Thomas Jefferson’s (participant) agency and drafting. The last paragraph shifts to organizing the ideas through outlining time sequences.

5. Examples of lexical cohesion:

a. “a document” and “this declaration of independence” and “Jefferson’s words”

b. “his task was to...” and “prepared him for this task”

c. “...a new nation based on ideals” and “the ideals that Jefferson mentioned”

6. Language choices of mode or modality (underlined in the text sample):

a. “Explain to the world”, “would change the world” both position America’s independence on the center stage of world events, implying that America’s fate would impact or change what happened throughout the world.

b. The remaining underlined portions all place an extremely strong emphasis on Jefferson as the “force” behind the Declaration. The emphasis on Jefferson seems to emphasize that Jefferson was a representative spokesman for the “American mind.”

Notes and implications for instruction

1. Use themes to understand that this event is being recounted through the actions of a particular person.
2. Use time indicators to give context to the central point, which is the actual drafting of the Declaration of Independence and its content.
3. After examining the content and organization, students should be able to discuss the author’s perspective.

Pilot Study Implications

The pilot study outlined above informed a few aspects of my methodology for the whole study. First, the pilot study revealed that it will be beyond the scope of this project to complete a process and participant chart for every text excerpt. Therefore, analyzing the processes and participants will be limited to sections where complex clauses that begin without subjects occur with high frequency. A process participant analysis is more suited to sentences such as these because the meaning can become obscured in a clause structure that does not follow a traditional subject verb progression.

Second, the pilot study revealed that identifying and analyzing every occurrence of a nominalization will also be beyond the scope of this research.

Third, the pilot study had no specific framework for which linguistic resources were going to be identified. After doing the study, I narrow the scope of the analysis to the linguistic resources of the Themes, therefore not including nominalizations and lexical cohesion devices.

Fourth, I decided to narrow the focus on text organizational resources by identifying Theme progression patterns.

APPENDIX B: PILOT STUDY TEXT

Pilot Study Text: *History Alive! Lesson Sampler*

2.1 Introduction

On a June day in 1776, Thomas Jefferson set to work in a rented room in Philadelphia. His task was to draft a document that would explain to the world why Great Britain’s 13 American colonies were declaring themselves to be “free and independent states.” The Second Continental Congress had appointed a five-man committee to draft this declaration of independence. At 33, Jefferson was one of the committee’s youngest and least experienced members, but his training in law and political philosophy had prepared him for the task. He picked up his pen and began to write words that would change the world.

Had he been working at home, Jefferson might have turned to his large library for inspiration. Instead, he relied on what was in his head to make the declaration “an expression of the American mind.” He began,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

—Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence, 1776

In these two sentences, Jefferson set forth a vision of a new nation based on ideals. An ideal is a principle or standard of perfection that we are always

trying to achieve. **In the years leading up to the Declaration,** the ideals that Jefferson mentioned had been written about and discussed by many colonists. **Since that time,** Americans have sometimes fought for and sometimes ignored these ideals. **Yet, throughout the years,** Jefferson's words have continued to provide a vision of what it means to be an American.

APPENDIX C: TEXT EXCERPT SAMPLE

15.2**Louisiana***124 words*

Across the Mississippi lay the unexplored territory of Louisiana. This immense region (zig) stretched from Canada south to Texas. From the Mississippi, (linear) it reached west all the way to the Rocky Mountains. First claimed by France, Louisiana (none) was given to Spain after the French and Indian war. In 1800, (time) the French ruler Napoleon Bonaparte convinced Spain to return Louisiana to France.

Napoleon (none) had plans for Louisiana. He (linear) hoped to settle the territory with thousands of French farmers. These farmers (zig) would raise food for slaves who (zig) toiled on France's sugar plantations in the Caribbean.

Napoleon's plans (none) alarmed frontier farmers. New Orleans (none) was part of Louisiana. If Napoleon (linear) closed the port to American goods, farmers (linear) would have no way to get their crops to market.