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### Journal Item

How to cite:

Coffin, Caroline (2004). Learning to write history: the role of causality. *Written Communication*, 21(3) pp. 261–289.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1177/0741088304265476>

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# *Learning to Write History*

## *The Role of Causality*

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*Historians generally agree that causality is central to historical writing. The fact that many school history students have difficulty handling and expressing causal relations is therefore of concern. That is, whereas historians tend to favor impersonal, abstract structures as providing suitable explanations for historical events and states of affairs, students often focus on human "wants and desires." The author argues that linguistic analysis can offer powerful insights into how successful students use grammar and vocabulary to build different types of causal explanations as they move through secondary schooling. In particular, the author shows how functionally oriented linguistic analysis makes it possible to discriminate between "narrative" and "analytical" explanations, to distinguish between "enabling" and "determining" types of causality, and to reveal the value of assessing degrees of causal impact.*

**Keywords:** *school history; writing; causality; functional linguistics; history writing*

*This article demonstrates how linguistic analysis provides insight into the way in which students use causal expressions to explain historical events. In particular, it shows how successful secondary school students move from explaining the past in the form of historical narratives to providing more complex, structural analyses of events. I argue that functionally oriented linguistic analysis is a powerful tool for enhancing both teachers' and students' awareness of the way causality operates in historical discourse. It provides, for example, insights into the way students use language to create, on one hand, "billiard-ball" models of deterministic cause-and-effect chains and, on the other hand, analyses in which causal relations form complex webs of interconnections.*

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: Many thanks to Kieran O'Halloran and Sarah North for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION, Vol. XX No. X, Month 2004 1-29  
DOI: 10.1177/0741088304265476  
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The nature of causality within history has been explored within various disciplines, including history, the philosophy of history, and education. In the next section, I show how many of these explorations offer important insights. However, they do not provide a fine-grained account of the different forms of causality over which school history students need to exercise control if they are to be successful.

In the following three sections, I therefore use the tools of functional linguistics to provide such an account, making the case in the section "Causal Analysis: Key Findings" that an explicit and conscious awareness of the role of causality in school history writing is relevant and important for the teaching and learning of the subject.

#### CAUSAL RELATIONS: VIEWS FROM HISTORY, THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY, AND EDUCATION

Historical causality is a complex topic. In this section, I summarize the main ways in which causality has been investigated and conceptualized. In the section "Narrative and Analysis: Using Genre to Extend the Standard Frameworks," I go on to show how such investigations can be complemented and extended through linguistic description.

##### **Classifying Causal Relations: The Standard Frameworks**

Within the history community, there is a general acknowledgment that it is causality that gives meaning to the discipline, with Mandelbaum (1967) asserting that the "explanatory objective is arguably constitutive of Western historiography" (p. 417). There is, however, considerable debate as to the types of causal relations or frameworks that best account for the past. For example, some historians argue that it is useful to distinguish between "causes" and "conditions" or relations of "sufficiency" and "necessity" (see, e.g., Voss, Carretero, Kennet, & Silfies, 1994). Following this framework, relations of sufficiency involve the idea that whenever a particular cause (in the form of an event or condition) arises, then a particular effect occurs. Relations of necessity, on the other hand, involve situations in which a cause has to be present for a particular effect to occur.

Some historians and philosophers of history, however, have questioned whether such distinctions are useful or can be applied in

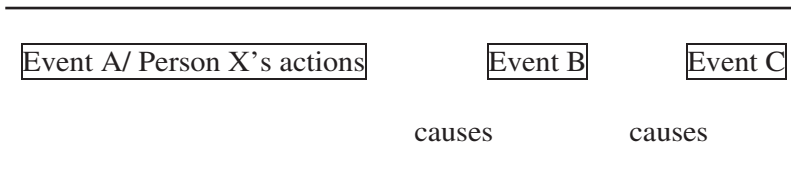
complex historical situations. Carr (1987 **PLS. CONFIRM: 1964?**), for example, noted that “nothing in history is inevitable, except in the formal sense that, for it to have happened otherwise, the antecedent causes would have had to be different” **PLS. CONFIRM BEGINNING & END OF QUOTE** (p. 96). Carr drew attention instead to the multiplicity of causes operating in history (see also Jenkins, 1991). Others have called attention to the way in which historical writing frequently differentiates between long-term, fundamental causes and more immediate, triggering causes (Stanford, 1994). Such distinctions, it will emerge in later sections, can be expressed through a diversity of linguistic forms, a dimension not previously explored.

It also emerges from the literature that historians discriminate between human agency and nonhuman causal forces, such as social and economic processes. To some extent, the distinction between human and nonhuman causation overlaps with the general view held by historians, philosophers of history, and educators that there are two main ways of writing about the past: narrative and analysis. Within this framework, the narrative form explains the past in terms of linear cause-and-effect chains, with the focus often being on human agency and specific historical events. The analytical form, in contrast, takes into account the role of social, economic, and political structures and trends. In this form of writing, explanations are not restricted to chronological cause-and-effect chains. Rather, the focus is on more complex, laterally interconnected causal relations.

Although the literature does not exemplify the difference between narrative and analytical forms of historical writing (e.g., by using extracts from historical writing), data collected for the research reported in this article can be used to illustrate the two types. The type of cause-and-effect chain common in historical narratives is illustrated in the following extract from a student’s essay (causal expressions are in boldface type) and schematized in Figure 1. The essay deals with the topic of early contact between Australian Aborigines and Europeans:

**As a result of** their belief in ‘terra nullius’, from 1788 onwards, the English began to occupy sacred land and use Aboriginal hunting and fishing grounds.

This abuse by the new British government soon **led to** Aborigines becoming involved in a physical struggle for power. The first main period of Aboriginal resistance was from 1794 to 1816 when the Eora



**Figure 1. Linear Cause-and-Effect Chains in Causal Narratives**

people, under the leadership of Pemulwuy, resisted the Europeans through guerrilla warfare.

This Aboriginal resistance **resulted in** the colonisers using different methods of control. In the 19th century Protection stations were set up where Aboriginals were encouraged to replace their traditional lifestyles with European ones. Many Aborigines resisted, however, and **as a result** were shot or poisoned.

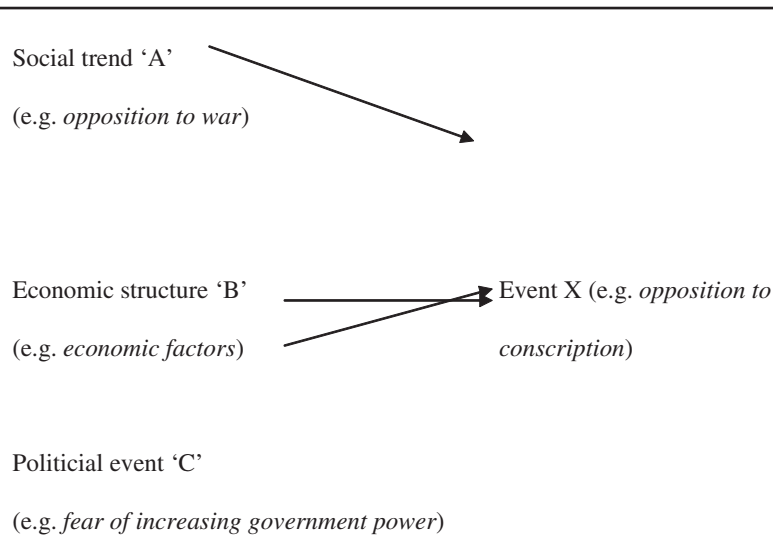
The nonlinear approach manifested in historical analysis is illustrated in the following introductory paragraph. It is taken from a student's essay in which the writer sets out the factors leading to opposition to conscription during World War I (causal expressions are again in boldface type). This "causal analysis" approach is schematized in Figure 2.

There was a lot of opposition to conscription **for the following reasons**:  
 - opposition to the war among different groups; fear of increasing government power and economic **factors**.

In the section "Narrative and Analysis: Using Genre to Extend the Standard Frameworks," I show that although the distinction between narrative and analytical forms of writing captures some important differences in the way causality operates, it is a relatively crude form of categorization and one that can be refined on the basis of linguistic (genre) description.

### **Learning to Express Causal Relations**

As stated earlier, within educational research, there is wide recognition that understanding and being able to express causal relations is a key aspect in the process of learning history (Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Perfetti, 1994; Hallden, 1997; Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby, 1996, 1997;




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**Figure 2. Causal Analysis**

Leinhardt, 1997; Perfetti, Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Mason, 1994). Voss et al. (1994) stated that historical causation is “one of the most fundamental topics of historical understanding, and therefore also one of the most important aspects of history instruction” (p. 403).

To date, however, much of the educationally oriented research into school students’ control of causal relations has been conducted within a framework of cognitive psychology (Black & Bower, 1979; Britt et al. 1994; Trabasso & van den Broek, 1985; van den Broek & Trabasso, 1986) whereby rather than investigating students’ developing control of causal relations as expressed in their writing, researchers have been more concerned with examining the relationship between causal relations in textbooks and students’ ability to recall historical content.

One area of investigation into students’ use of causal resources that has provided some interesting insights is Hallden’s (1997, 1998) comparison of students’ and professional historians’ orientations to causality. This research shows that whereas professional historians generally explain historical events at a structural level, student historians tend to construct linear explanations in which “the wants and desires of persons constitute the explanans” (Hallden, 1997, p. 205; see also Limón & Carretero, 1999). In other words, whereas historians draw

on traditions both from the social sciences (with its emphasis on impersonal structures) and the humanities (with its emphasis on the actions of individuals), “students . . . seem to have both feet in the humanities, thus leaving out the impersonal structures altogether” (Hallden, 1997, p. 205).

Research such as that carried out by Hallden (1997, p. 207) suggests that students have difficulty recognizing that it is causal analysis that is valued in historical writing. Leinhardt et al. (1994a **PLS. DELETE CITE OR ADD REF.**) also made the point that school students, unlike professional historians and history teachers, tend to not understand that writing history is primarily an exercise in argumentation. In other words, students fail to recognize that their explanations of the past will be more highly valued if they are framed as analysis and argumentation rather than simply as narrative. The valuing of analysis and argumentation over narrative is particularly true in senior secondary schooling. Here is an example of the way in which historical explanation can be framed as a matter of perspective and therefore argument. The text was written by a senior secondary school student (aged 17 years). It is an (abridged) introduction to a discussion essay concerning the extent to which the 1920s was a decade of hope:

The main effects of World War 1 were significant factors in determining attitudes and degrees of optimism and hope in the 1920s. There were factors which greatly contributed to the feeling of hopelessness at the conclusion of the First World War including the loss of some ten million lives and the economic losses of over \$180 billion (Mills 1984 p.25).

In discussing the question as to what extent the 1920s was a decade of hope it is necessary to examine the perspectives of the countries of the United States of America, Great Britain and Germany in relation to their respective participation in the peace settlements of World War 1, and in relation to their foreign policies.

### Summary

In summary, research to date has demonstrated the centrality of cause as a historical concept. However, although there has been some investigation into and discussion of the different causal frameworks that operate within the discipline, there has not been a close examination of history writing to see how these frameworks are construed through grammar and lexis (vocabulary). Nor have the ways in which successful students express causal relations been closely examined. This is despite acknowledgment within the educational literature that

the understanding and control of causal relations is essential to students' progress in history and despite growing recognition of the role of language and writing in subject learning (Martin, 2000; Stockton, 1995).

The study reported in this article therefore aimed to complement and extend existing research by providing more finely grained linguistic accounts of how causality operates within school history. In particular, I show that as successful students move through the secondary school history curriculum, they learn to write different types of causal explanation that enable them to explain and interpret the past in increasingly complex and valued ways. Such a record, it is argued, provides a useful basis for pedagogic interventions.

#### THE STUDY

The study had its origins in a major Australian literacy research project, the Write It Right (WIR) project, whose aims were to use linguistic tools of analysis to research the writing practices of a range of secondary school subjects (see Christie & Martin, 1997).<sup>1</sup> As part of this study, approximately 1,000 samples of writing were collected. These represented the writing practices of junior secondary school history students (aged approximately 12 to 15 years). For the purposes of the follow-up research (reported in this article), texts representing the writing of senior secondary school students (aged approximately 16 to 18 years) were added. These texts were drawn from published sample answers written as part of the High School Certificate (Board of Studies 1991, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). In total, the corpus of texts represented the range of history writing across the secondary school curriculum. It was from this large corpus that a smaller, more manageable corpus of 38 texts was selected. This smaller corpus made it possible to conduct a detailed analysis of the linguistic construal of causality. The texts selected were, however, congruent with the wider corpus and thus represented the types of writing pivotal in fulfilling the aims of the secondary school curriculum. I also ensured that they represented successful text types. There were several reasons for focusing on successful forms of writing:

- They represent typical or "unproblematic" discourse patterns. In other words, they tend to represent the orthodoxy of their field (see Wignell, 1994).



- They capture the key linguistic resources for making historical meaning.
- They represent successful learning (as confirmed by WIR ethnographic data).
- The elucidation of their features (which address the requirements of secondary history curricula) is important for literacy interventions (see Rothery, 1996, who made the case for an explicit focus on language as a means of developing in students higher levels of literacy together with critical orientations to knowledge and text).

In sum, the analysis of successful expressions of causal relations makes it possible to “ground” the notion of causality in a pedagogically useful way.

#### NARRATIVE AND ANALYSIS: USING GENRE TO EXTEND THE STANDARD FRAMEWORKS

In the previous section, I commented that although the distinction between narrative and analytical forms of writing captures some important differences in the way causality operates, it is a relatively crude form of categorization. In the following section, I show how this standard framework for distinguishing types of historical texts and their use of causality can be extended by applying the linguistic concept of genre. I then show how causal relations are expressed through a number of different grammatical and lexical choices. Finally, in the section “Causal Analysis: Key Findings,” I show how an analysis of grammatical and lexical expressions of causality within the different history genres can illuminate the different ways in which causality operates at different points in the history curriculum.

#### The Genres of School History

Genre, following the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) tradition (the linguistic framework underpinning this research), is the way texts are structured to fulfill their overall purposes, such as telling a story (a recount genre), giving instructions (a procedural genre), explaining past events (an explanatory genre), and so on. Thus, different genres have distinct “beginnings,” “middles,” and “ends” (Martin, 1997, p. 413 **PLS. DELETE CITE OR ADD REF.**), and these stages

can be identified on the basis of shifts in lexical and grammatical patterning that correlate with different functions, for example, providing general background information as opposed to accounting for why events happened in a particular sequence (for an example of how a text can be analyzed using the concept of genre, see the Appendix).

A genre analysis of the corpus of history writing revealed that although narrating and analyzing the past are important, overarching purposes in school history, within those broad categories, there are a number of more specific purposes, such as retelling events in the past as opposed to accounting for why events happened in a particular sequence or explaining the factors that contributed to a particular outcome in contrast to explaining the consequences that arose from a particular situation. Significantly, in terms of causality, the genre analysis made clear that different types of causal relations and explanations operate within each of the genres.

Table 1 shows the set of genres, their purposes and staging, and their relationships to the broader categories of narrative and analysis. From the descriptions of their purposes and staging, Table 1 also shows the role of causality in each genre. Thus, in the historical account (one of the narrative genres), it can be seen that the main stage in this genre is an account of events, whereby a writer explains why a particular sequence of events occurred. It can also be seen that in the factorial and consequential explanation genres (genres relating to the analysis category), key stages are factors and consequences, highlighting the central role of causality. In the arguing genres, by way of contrast, causality is not foregrounded as a primary organizing device. However, in the section “Causal Analysis: Key Findings,” I show that causal relations play an important role in argument genres, even though causal explanations tend to be embedded as part of the evidence for an argument.

Another important finding from the genre analysis (in combination with the ethnographic findings) was the relationship between different stages in the history curriculum and students’ control of different genres: Whereas in earlier years, students tend to write recount and account genres, in later years, they produce explanation and argument genres and are rarely asked to write narrative. By Year 12 (approximately 17 to 18 years of age), the expectation (reflected in assessment practices) is that successful students will primarily write argument genres.

Table 1  
Key History Genres: Social Purposes and Stages

| Genre Family                                  | Genre                     | Social Purpose   | Stages  |
|---|---------------------------|--|---|
| Recording genres<br>(mapping onto narrative)  | Autobiographical recount  | To retell the events of your own life  | Orientation, record of events<br>(reorientation)            |
|   | Biographical recount      | To retell the events of a person's life                                      | Orientation, record of Events<br>(evaluation of person)     |
|   | Historical recount        | To retell events in the past   | Background, record of events<br>(deduction)                 |
|   | Historical account        | To account for why events happened<br>in a particular sequence               | Background, account of events<br>(deduction)                |
| Explanatory genres<br>(mapping onto analysis) | Factorial explanation     | To explain the reasons or factors that<br>contribute to a particular outcome | Outcome, factors, reinforcement of<br>factors               |
|   | Consequential explanation | To explain the effects or consequences<br>of a situation                     | Input, consequences, reinforcement<br>of consequences       |
| Arguing genres<br>(mapping onto analysis)     | Exposition                | To put forward a point of view or<br>argument                                | (Background), thesis, arguments,<br>reinforcement of thesis |
|   | Discussion                | To argue the case for two or more<br>points of view about an issue           | (Background), issue, arguments/<br>perspectives, position   |
|   | Challenge                 | To argue against a view  | (Background), position challenged,<br>arguments, antithesis |

### Causal Categories in History: The Role of English Grammar and Lexis

Having outlined the importance of genre in expanding the understanding of the text types that operate in history, I could then move on to the grammatical construal of cause within each of the genres. To do this, a number of categories for conceptualizing causal relations that are of particular relevance to historical discourse were developed. Each of these is discussed below. The aim was to examine in detail the changes in students' successful deployment of causal resources as they moved from the junior to senior years of secondary schooling and to ground, in linguistic terms, descriptions used in the literature.

*Distinguishing enabling and determining types of causal relations: the role of conjunctions and verbs.* As noted earlier, within the literature on historical causality, there is some debate as to whether a distinction between sufficient and necessary relations is applicable to complex historical situations. Interestingly, within English grammar, a similar distinction is inherent in the conjunction system ("linking" words), in which, according to Martin (1992), determining and enabling conjunctive relations reflect the "natural logic of the distinction between sufficient and necessary conditions" (pp. 193-195). Although there is not a one-to-one relationship between these concepts, the determining-enabling classification can provide some insight into the ways in which different types of causality can be distinguished (illustrated below) and which types are more common within history.

Enabling relations are expressed through manner conjunctions (e.g., *by, through*) and express the means or manner by which an event or situation came about. For example,

They had lived **by** hunting, fishing, and gathering and believed that they were the guardians of the land.<sup>2</sup>

A determining relationship, in contrast, is expressed through conjunctions of consequence (e.g., *as a result of, because, thus*), purpose (e.g., *in order that, so as to*), and condition (e.g., *as long as, if*). The extracts below show how these conjunctions link a reason, condition, or motivation with an outcome:

One year later I sat for my HSC and **as a result of a good pass** I gained entry into university. (Cause; reason or consequence)

Thus when strong leaders came to power, such as Robespierre and Lenin, it was necessary to implement some form of terror, **so as not to lose all gains made by the Revolutions**. (Purpose)

Mao knew that **for revolutions to occur**, the peasantry who made up 85% of China's population must be allied with the communist party. (Condition)

Aside from conjunctive relations, enabling and determining causal relations may also be expressed through causal verbs. For example,

In response to this recommendation a ticket-of-leave was granted to him and this **enabled** him to establish his own business as an architect. (Enabling)

This Aboriginal resistance **resulted in** the colonisers using different methods of control. (Determining)

As a means of illuminating tendencies in historical causation to be of the enabling (necessary) or determining (sufficient) type, the categories illustrated above were used to classify causal conjunctions and verbs. However, it is important to point out that not all instances of these causal resources showed a direct or straightforward correspondence with broader notions of enabling (necessary) and determining (sufficient) types of causal relations. For example, in the example below, the use of the manner conjunction *by* suggests that the causal relationship is enabling. However, the context makes it equally likely that a relationship of cause (and therefore a determining relation) is being expressed:

In conclusion it is clear that the Second World War benefited Australia **by** promoting industrial and economic change.

In the case of causal verbs, it emerged that the sets of verbs listed in Table 2 generally correlated with the concepts of enabling and determining relations and that it was therefore useful to apply such categories to the data to ascertain overall patterns. However, as in the case of conjunctions, there were several ambiguous cases in which it was not clear as to whether a relationship of manner (enabling) or cause (determining) was being expressed. All such cases were therefore not included in the overall counts.

Table 2  
*Causal Verbs Expressing Enabling and Determining Relations*

| Enabling   | Determining        |
|--|--------------------|
| Enable   | Result in          |
| Influence  | Create             |
| Allow  | Led to             |
| Assist (e.g., assist <i>y</i> in coming to the fore) | Cause              |
| Contribute to  | Determine          |
| Promote  | Is attributed to   |
| Affect   | Mean that          |
|  | Come about through |
|  | Bring about        |
|  | Is dependent on    |
|  | Force              |
|  | Make               |

*Cause as abstract thing: the role of nouns.* Causal relations expressed through conjunctions and verbs represent the connections between events in a relatively straightforward way. That is, they represent links between events as they unfolded in time. The use of causal nouns (e.g., *reasons, factor, outcome, consequence*), however, removes the sequential element linking events. For example,

In 1809 Greenway became bankrupt and **so** [causal sequential relation expressed as conjunction] he decided to forge a contract. As a result of this crime he was sentenced to transportation to New South Wales for 14 years.

The **reasons** [causal relation expressed as a noun] for Greenway being transported to New South Wales were due to early bankruptcy and a decision to forge a contract in order to obtain money.

In other words, causal relations expressed in the form of nouns are more abstract—frozen in time, so to speak. In the following extracts, it can be seen that rather than use conjunctions (e.g., *as a result, because*) or verbs (e.g., *resulted in, caused by*), the student writers chose the noun form: *the reason, the consequence*.

The main **reason** was the rejection, by many people, of the war itself. Therefore, there are a number of **factors** that can contribute to the outbreak of revolution.

One of the motivations for expressing causal relations in the form of nouns is that writers are able to enumerate (e.g., a *number of* factors, the *second* factor, etc.) and assess and evaluate (the *main* reason). This is discussed in the following section.

*Causal assessment: measuring causal impact and directness through lexical choices.* The abstract nature of nominal forms of causality makes it problematic to distinguish enabling and determining relations. Therefore, in the case of causal relations “repackaged” as nouns, it makes sense to consider how they construe degrees of causal impact and directness. The following extracts show how cause can be construed as having a major or minor role or more or less direct impact:

The **main reason** was that, at the time, Australia was part of the Empire and therefore the government felt it was their duty to help the Mother land. (Cause has a major impact)

In addition, although the diggers had **little direct influence** [cause has an indirect impact] on the constitutions of the 1850s, it would be fair to state that the men who drafted Victoria’s constitution in the 1850s were certainly aware of the gold diggers, and their demands, and that this may have been **one factor** in explaining why the constitution lacked the conservative elements of the New South Wales constitution. (Cause plays a minor role)

Table 3 displays the most common lexical items used by students to assess and measure causal force by grading impact and directness. Research suggests that lexis that scales the impact of historical causation is a crucial resource for students to have control of, in that measurement and assessment are at the heart of historical interpretation.

*Cause as a tool for deducing historical significance: the role of conjunctions and verbs.* To interpret rather than simply record past events, successful history students frequently engage in a process of reasoning whereby they show clear links between events, conditions, or behavior and their historical significance. Two important resources for representing internal processes of reasoning and deduction are what are referred to in SFL as internal conjunctions and internal causal verbs (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Martin & Veel, 1998, p. 221). Such resources serve to establish how certain events lead to particular interpretations. For example, in the extract below, the conjunction *as a result* links the events in Ben Hall’s life with the deduction (either the writer’s or people’s generally) that he was “a brave and daring person”:

Table 3  
*Evaluating Causal Impact and Directness: Common Lexical Items*

|                   | Less  | More  |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Causal impact     | Radical, to a great extent, instrumental, pivotal, vital, paramount, turning point, considerable, greatly, main, major, crucial, staggering, primary, sole, principally, significant, powerful, a heavier weight, important | Gradual, minor, small extent, to some extent, partial, ephemeral, false dawn, partly, a contributor, to a certain extent, almost no part, short lived |
| Causal directness | Immediate, rapid, direct, short term, sharp, sudden, abrupt   | Long term, indirect, little direct (influence)  |

Ben Hall's career as a Bushranger was shortlived but in that time he managed to lead many raids on towns and homesteads as well as hold up coaches.

**As a result** many people thought of him as a brave and daring person.

In the next extract, the verb *show* likewise links a set of historical events (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact) with a deduction (that native people were ill treated):

The history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact **shows** how badly the native people of this country were treated.

Internal causal relations, in other words, function to construe how *x* causes someone to think *y*:

*X* [the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact] **causes me to think/to know** *y* [how badly the native people of this country were treated].

According to Halliday (1998, pp. 220-221), the use of such verbs to construct the internal steps of an argument is central to scientific English. Research (Coffin, 2000) has suggested that in history too, there often occur chains of reasoning whereby conclusions are drawn on the basis of evidence (such as the events in a historical narrative).



Conjunctions commonly used for this purpose include *therefore*, *as a result*, and *because*. Frequently used causal verbs include *prove*, *show*, *explain*, *illustrate*, *suggest*, *attest*, *be explained by*, *indicate*, and *confirm*.

### Analyzing the Data

Student texts belonging to each genre were analyzed using the causal categories outlined above. By analyzing texts belonging to each genre and which corresponded with different stages of schooling, it was possible to make explicit the types of causal resources operating and therefore needed by history students at different points in the history curriculum.

For each category of analysis, raw frequency counts were calculated. These were then converted as a ratio of instances per 500 words to facilitate comparison across texts. Both averages and ranges of the occurrence of features within particular genres were calculated, as well as an average frequency for each set of related genres. It is important to point out that although the corpus was not large enough for patterns of statistical significance to be identified, results were quantified as a way of grounding the interpretive analysis as closely as possible in the textual data.

### CAUSAL ANALYSIS: KEY FINDINGS

A summary of the findings of the causal analysis is presented in Table 4. The average frequency of the causal resources for each genre or group of genres is displayed. In the case of the explanation and argument genres, the findings were averaged because there were no significant shifts within the genres belonging to the same "family." However, in the case of the narrative genres, there was an important shift in students' use of causal resources as they moved from narrating events in terms of their temporal links (autobiographical, biographical, and historical recounts) to explaining sequences of events in terms of their causal links (historical accounts).

The main aim of the research study was to use linguistic analysis to make explicit the types of causal expressions that occur in secondary school historical writing and on this basis gain insight into the different ways in which causality operates at different points in the curriculum. Table 4 shows that causal relations were expressed through a number of different grammatical and lexical choices and that there

Table 4  
*A Summary of Causal Resources Used by School History Students in Their Written Texts*

| Grammatical Resource                 | Narrative <sup>a</sup>   |                      |                    |                    |  | Analysis <sup>b</sup>             |  |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
|                                      | Autobiographical Recount | Biographical Recount | Historical Recount | Historical Account | Factorial and Consequential Explanations | Exposition, Discussion, Challenge |  |
| <b>Enabling relations</b>            |                          |                      |                    |                    |  |                                   |  |
| Manner conjunction                   | 0                        | 0                    | 2.40               | 1.40               | 0.90                                     | 1.10                              |  |
| Causal verb                          | 0                        | 0.40                 | 0                  | 0                  | 0.90                                     | 1.10                              |  |
| <b>Determining relations</b>         |                          |                      |                    |                    |  |                                   |  |
| Cause conjunction                    | 5.20                     | 1.60                 | 1.20               | 4.00               | 1.90                                     | 2.00                              |  |
| Purpose conjunction                  | 0.50                     | 0.80                 | 2.20               | 0                  | 1.00                                     | 1.60                              |  |
| Condition conjunction                | 0                        | 0                    | 0.40               | 0                  | 1.20                                     | 0.40                              |  |
| Causal verb                          | 0                        | 0.80                 | 0.60               | 5.40               | 1.20                                     | 1.00                              |  |
| Abstract causality: cause as noun    | 0                        | 1.20                 | 0.60               | 2.70               | 8.50                                     | 3.60                              |  |
| Causal assessment: degree and impact | 0.8                      | 0                    | 0                  | 0                  | 3.00                                     | 3.53                              |  |
| <b>Cause plus deduction</b>          |                          |                      |                    |                    |  |                                   |  |
| Internal verb                        | 0                        | 0                    | 0.60               | 2.70               | 2.20                                     | 2.00                              |  |
| Internal causal conjunction          | 0                        | 0.40                 | 0                  | 0                  | 0.30                                     | 0.80                              |  |

a. Genres written in earlier years of secondary schooling (Years 7 to 8, approximately ages 11 to 13 years).

b. Genres written in middle to later years of secondary schooling (Years 9 to 12, approximately ages 14 to 18 years).

were clear trends in their use as students moved from recording the past to arguing about the past. In terms of grammatical form, one of the major shifts was an increase in abstract (nominal) forms of causality from an average of 0.60 in the autobiographical, biographical, and historical recount genres to an average of 8.50 in the explanatory genres and 3.60 in the arguing genres.

Table 4 also shows that causal meaning became more diversified as successful students progressed through schooling. For example, processes of causal reasoning and deduction became more developed from the historical recount onward, and the assessment of causal factors became more pronounced in the explanatory and argument genres. In the following section, I discuss in more detail the key findings.

### Causal Patterns: A Developmental Perspective

The findings of the analysis show that there were changes in how students deployed causal resources as they progressed through secondary schooling and added new genres to their repertoires. The two main shifts occurred in the transition from the recount genres to the account genre and from the account genre to the explanatory genres.

*Conflating causal and temporal meaning: the role of the historical account.* Aside from the historical account, it appears that the narrative genres make relatively little use of causal verbs and nouns. There is little assessment of causation nor a great deal of internal reasoning. The historical account (see the Appendix for an example of a historical account), in contrast, has a relatively high frequency of a range of causal resources. In this genre, causal connections are expressed through verbs rather than just conjunctions, and events are frequently given an agentive role. That is, events are seen to directly produce or cause subsequent events. In the following two extracts, it can be seen how in a historical recount, events typically follow one another along a chronological timeline, whereas in a historical account, events are related through causal connections while still unfolding along a timeline (time phrases are in italics and causal connections are in boldface type):

*When* the Europeans arrived *in 1788* they occupied sacred land and destroyed Eora hunting and fishing grounds. *In 1790* the Eora people began a guerrilla war against the Europeans.

*In 1794* the Eora, whose leader was Pemulwuy, attacked the European settlement of Brickfield. Thirty six British and fourteen Eora were

killed during this attack. *In the same year* the Eora killed a British settler. *Then* the British ordered that six of the tribe be killed. (Historical recount)

This Aboriginal resistance **resulted in** the colonisers using different methods of control. *In the 19th century* Protection stations were set up where Aboriginals were encouraged to replace their traditional lifestyles with European ones. Many Aborigines resisted, however, and **as a result** were shot or poisoned.

*In 1909*, the continuation of Aboriginal resistance **led to** the NSW Aborigines Protection Act which gave the Aborigines Protection Board the power to remove Aboriginal children from their own families and place them into white families, often as cheap labour. (Historical account)

It would therefore seem that learning to construct a historical account marks a turning point in students' progression through the secondary school history curriculum: It gives students practice in explaining rather than simply recording past events, but significantly, it does this without students losing the iconic form of a timeline as a scaffold for text construction. This use of a timeline interprets the past as a space in which causal constructions unfold in tandem with temporal ones. Temporal flow "naturalizes" the chain of cause and effect. The explanatory framework that operates within historical discourse at this stage in students' schooling thus simulates a scientific, billiard-ball model of deterministic cause-and-effect chains, with the chronological unfolding excluding more complex, laterally interconnected causal relations. From the perspective of argumentative power such a model of the past can be compelling in its simplification of causal relations. That is, the momentum created through the unfolding of a single causal thread gives a sense of inevitability to the progression of events.

*Losing the timeline: the role of explanations.* The explanatory genres play an important role in further expanding students' causal repertoire. Table 4 shows the dramatic increase in the use of abstract nominal forms of causality in this genre. This shift marks a comprehensive reframing of the past whereby abstract causal phenomena construe a more complex versioning of reality. In explanatory texts, the timeline is dismantled, and causal relations become packaged as complex phenomena (e.g., "one of the major **effects** of the devastation of World War II"), with the potential for such causal phenomena to be brought into nonlinear, nontemporal relations with other complex phenom-

ena (e.g., “One of the major effects of the devastation of World War II was economic re-structuring”). To illustrate, here is the opening paragraph to a factorial explanation, with different types of causal relations and expressions in boldface type:

World War II **caused** global upheaval which **resulted in** the restructuring of many societies. The following essay focuses, in particular, on World War II’s impact on Europe and **explains how** its economic, political and social structures **were greatly affected by** the six years of constant warfare, from 1939 - 1945.

**One of the major effects of the devastation of World War II** was economic re-structuring.

The causal grammar and lexis of explanations create a causal framework that expands beyond that of a mechanistic, linear cause-and-effect chain in which a single cause is followed by a single effect. The causal frameworks created in the explanatory genres enable events to influence, contribute to, aggravate, and trigger as well as determine and account for. Causes are both short and long term. In addition, the splitting of the explanatory genres into factorial on one hand and consequential on the other leads to the emergence of a set of lexis that clearly demarcates and organizes the explanation around either the beginning or end points of causal processes. That is, whereas lexis such as *factor*, *cause*, and *reason* is concerned with events leading up to and causing a particular state of affairs, lexical items such as *result*, *outcome*, and *consequence* focus on the events and phenomena that emerge from a particular state of affairs. The following opening paragraphs to these two genres illustrates this point.

#### **Why did Australia fight at Gallipoli?**

The Gallipoli peninsula was attacked by the Allies **on 19th February, 1915**, with **the immediate purpose** of gaining control of the Black sea so that food and supplies could be sent to Russia. Many Australians were involved in this attack. **The reasons** for their involvement were both official and personal. (Factorial explanation)

#### **What impact did the Gold Rushes have on Australian Society?**

The gold rushes are an important era in Australian History. They **influenced** many aspects of Australian Society, particularly in the colony of

Victoria. This essay will focus on **the impact** of the rushes in relation to changes in the population, the social structure of the society and in the area of politics. (Consequential explanation)

At this stage of schooling, causality becomes increasingly (though often implicitly) integrated with notions of change and continuity. That is, depending on the degree of causal force (in terms of impact and directness) attributed to historical phenomena, major or minor change is perceived to occur. Indeed, outcomes of causal processes are also often referred to as changes.

Compared with arguing texts, explanatory texts are relatively categorical in the way they explain the past. That is, the causes and consequences of a historical event (such as World War II) are presented as clear-cut, "factual" analyses (e.g., "The main consequences of World War were *x*, *y* and *z*") rather than as an outcome of interpretation and dependent on perspective (e.g., "It could be argued that from Germany's perspective the main consequences of World War were *x*, *y* and *z*"). This strategy can make explanatory accounts persuasive. Their authoritative, definitive stance precludes engagement and debate with alternative accounts.

*Negotiating causal frameworks: the role of the arguing genres.* The trend toward causal abstraction initiated in the historical account and developed in the explanatory genres is maintained in the arguing genres. In these genres, however, competing explanations are debated and argued for, and the assessment of cause in terms of the degree of impact and directness is of considerable importance. The tactics of arguing genres can be persuasive in that they explicitly acknowledge the existence of competing explanations and interpretations of the past. That is, by acknowledging the way in which causal relations can be assessed and modified depending on the perspective taken, and yet simultaneously steering the reader to accept a particular interpretation of the past, the genre is a sophisticated rhetorical form. For example, here is the conclusion to a student's essay (exemplifying a challenge genre) in which the writer assesses that a reasonable position to take with regard to the extent to which the economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s was determined by government policy is to say that it had very little influence:

In the words of Donald Horne 'A Lucky Country Revisited' 'Australia was a second-rate economy run by second-rate men who were lucky' - lucky according to R Ward (A Nation for a Continent) to preside over an

unprecedented boom in which they play **almost no part in causing or continuing**. In light of this, it is reasonable to say that the actions of govt. in economic relationships throughout the '50s and '60s were often misdirected, ill-conceived or non-existent - and had **almost no part to play in causing** the prosperity of the period.

In sum, it is clear that there are distinct causal patterns that map onto the different types of texts that students construct as they progress through secondary education. These shifts in causal realization can be explained by the fact that whereas the recording genres are concerned with specific people and events, arguing genres are concerned with more abstract trends and structures. In addition, whereas autobiographical recounts are personal, genres that students are required to produce at later points demand a more objective, impersonal stance, with increased reflection and interpretation. In other words, as stories of the past are increasingly given "historical" meaning through generalization, evaluation, and interpretation, the human element fades, and the use of abstract forms of causality increases.

### **The Role of Causal Frameworks in Historical Knowledge Construction**

In terms of the importance of cause in historical meaning making and the assertion that the "explanatory objective is . . . constitutive of Western historiography" (Mandelbaum, 1967, p. 417), the linguistic analysis confirms that causal resources are indeed important in all forms of writing about the past. Another measure of the importance of cause is that the more highly valued genres (i.e., the argument genres produced at the end of schooling) are more causally oriented than those that occur at the beginning of students' secondary schooling. Thus, even though in the wider history community there has been some theorizing about the need to move away from cause (e.g., Vincent, 1995, p. 45), this is not found to be the case in educational contexts.

Close analysis of grammar and lexis in school history shows that the different causal frameworks they construe correlate with some of the main distinctions and classifications proposed in the literature (e.g., human and abstract, long and short term). However, linguistically based distinctions revealed in the conjunction system provide another way of looking at and classifying causal relations. From this

linguistic perspective, for example, it can be seen that whereas causal frameworks are construed primarily through conjunctive links (as in the historical account), causal relations tend to be of the determining rather than the enabling type. Determining relations, however, become less dominant relative to other forms of causality in the explaining and arguing genres. In these genres, the increase in abstract forms of causality enable different causal taxonomies to operate. There is a favoring of nonhuman, abstract forces, such as economic and social structures and trends, rather than individual agency, and in addition, lateral causal influences originating in different domains (e.g., economics as distinct from politics) become frequent. Causes are no longer simply construed in terms of whether they are enabling or determining but frequently graded in terms of their impact and directness.

Although philosophers of history have proposed that cause and effect might be best conceptualized as “dimensions of a single process” (Mandelbaum, 1977; PLS. CONFIRM DATE: 1967? McCullagh, 1984 PLS. DELETE CITE OR ADD REF.), to the contrary, the genre classification corroborated by the detailed causal findings demonstrates how school history teases apart causes and consequences in the two types of explanation genre: factorial (focusing on causes) and consequential (focusing on effects). The overt lexicalization of cause in the form of nouns also makes this distinction. That is, there are lexical sets for each side of the “causal coin” (factors, reasons, and causes on one side and results, outcomes, consequences on the other).

A further dimension of causal frameworks and how they operate in school history, and one that the literature does not focus on, is their connection to the construal of change and continuity. This connection is illuminated by the linguistic findings concerning the assessment of causal force. That is, if events are construed to have major impact, they are capable of changing the direction of subsequent events and, depending on their scale, whole societies and nations. The assessment of causal force is pivotal, then, in determining degrees of change and continuity.

### **The Value of Causal Frameworks in History Education**

To date, there appears to be a general consensus in educational contexts that causal explanations are an important part of learning history. The linguistic analysis presented here strengthens such a position. That is, by viewing different types of causal accounts along a



“developmental” pathway, it can be seen that each type plays an important role in scaffolding students into increasingly abstract and complex causal frameworks. This suggests that students need to gain control of the full repertoire of causal frameworks (together with the linguistic resources that construe these) and that both teachers and students need to recognize the value of each in relation to the stage of schooling, syllabus objectives, examination agendas, and assessment tasks.

One important focus of educational research in relation to causal relations has been the disjuncture between students’ tendency to focus on the human and linear and professional historians’ tendency to integrate the structural with the human (e.g., Hallden, 1997). Thus, in student writing, “the wants and desires of persons constitute the explanans,” whereas it is impersonal, abstract structures that are institutionally valued (p. 205). The research presented here does indeed confirm that the more highly valued texts in schooling (the explanation and arguing genres) tend to have high frequencies of abstract causal resources.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would argue that the main importance of the research for the teaching and learning of subject-based writing lies in the fact that by making the linguistic explicit, students’ success and progress (and therefore failure) can be articulated in precise linguistic terms. Such conscious understanding of how cause operates is potentially of high value, particularly to the development of critical thinking. For example, if the linguistic dimension of history writing were incorporated into the teaching and learning practices of secondary schooling, it might place students in a better position to develop the discursive means to identify and challenge “naturalized” causal accounts and produce alternative ones. This would respond to the problem (recognized in the educational literature) of students simply reproducing unreflectively versions of the past, even when they are incompatible with their own values and beliefs (von Borries, 1994; Wertsch, 1991). In addition, it would help develop thinking citizens who see as their task “not to master ‘the past’, but rigorously to lay bare the prejudices, ideological predilections and normative assumptions which a particular version of ‘the past’ articulates or implies” (Mitten & Wodak, 1997, p. 14).

In sum, the linguistic analysis presented here has demonstrated that school history writing has its own particular requirements and that learning to express diverse forms of causality is crucial to students' success. In particular, it has shown that a fine-grained linguistic account complements and extends current research and applications by enabling

- the possibility of teaching students about the way causality operates in history writing in a systematic way and
- the possibility of students reflecting critically on the nature of causality as it currently operates in historical discourse, rather than to be unreflectingly co-opted into the ideological assumptions of the discipline.

## APPENDIX

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The sample text below illustrates the stages of a historical account. The text was written by a secondary school student in Year 10 as part of a unit on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact and was regarded as a successful response to an open-ended writing task in which students were given three photos as a stimulus to answer the question "What has happened to the Aborigines since the time of white settlement?". Although the historical account is a type of narrative in that events unfold in linear fashion, the words and phrases in boldface type in the account sequence stage show how causal relations between some events are made explicit.

### SAMPLE ANALYSIS: WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE ABORIGINES SINCE THE TIME OF WHITE SETTLEMENT?

#### Background

In the late 18th century, when the English colonised Australia, there were small tribes, or colonies of Aboriginal natives who had lived harmoniously and in tune with their surroundings for 40 000 years. However, there were no signs of agriculture or the Aborigines depending on the land. According to English law, this meant that they need not be recognised as rightful residents. The English immediately assumed that Australia was 'terra nullius', or uninhabited; to them it was an unsettled land which they did not have to conquer to gain power.

### Account Sequence

**As a result of their belief in 'terra nullius'**, from 1788 onwards, the English began to occupy sacred land and use Aboriginal hunting and fishing grounds.

This abuse by the new British government soon **led to** Aboriginals becoming involved in a physical struggle for power. The first main period of Aboriginal resistance was from 1794 to 1816 when the Eora people, under the leadership of Pemulwuy, resisted the Europeans **through guerrilla warfare**.

This Aboriginal resistance **resulted in** the colonisers using different methods of control. In the 19th century Protection stations were set up where Aboriginals were encouraged to replace their traditional lifestyles with European ones. Many Aborigines resisted, however, and **as a result** were shot or poisoned.

In 1909, the continuation of Aboriginal resistance **led to** the NSW Aborigines Protection Act which gave the Aborigines Protection Board the power to remove Aboriginal children from their own families and place them into white families, often as cheap labour.

**In response to these injustices** the Aboriginal community began to fight for their rights. In 1967, they won the right to vote and in 1983 their struggle **resulted in** the creation of the NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act. Their fight for land rights continues to-day. The Mabo case is a recent example of their success.

### Deduction

The events of European settlement show the extent of Aboriginal losses. They also show the resistance of the Aboriginal people and some of the gains that they have made. This is an indication that their struggle will continue and more gains will be made. In this way the enormous losses that Aboriginal people have undergone **as a result of European colonisation** might, to some extent, be compensated for.

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### NOTES

1. My earlier involvement in the WIR project as a researcher and literacy consultant provided an opportunity to enhance the linguistic analysis with an ethnographic perspective. For example, the implicit and explicit expectations of teachers, examiners, and

academics were explored both through semistructured interviews and a study of their comments on students' work. In addition, I investigated official documentation, such as syllabus and curriculum documents (Board of Studies, 1992, 1998 **PLS. CONFIRM: NSW?**), national profiles and statements (Curriculum Corporation, 1994a, 1994b), school programs, resource books, and so on.

2. All texts and extracts included in this article were taken from the corpus of student writing collected for the study.

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**PLS. PROVIDE A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**