PAPER 3

Writing for power

Meaning as critical choice

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Critical thinking

But who knows what it actually is?!?!

- Critical thinking increasingly demanded of curricula worldwide
  - Eg Australian Curriculum General Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking; Digital Literacy; Ethical understanding; Intercultural understanding; literacy; numeracy; personal and social capability
- Critical thinking as a 'transferable skill': Blooms Taxonomy, de Bono's 6 thinking hats, SOLO taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1989) etc
- The OECD Skills Strategy 2019 makes an urgent call for 'a paradigm shift' to pay greater attention to **'new sets of horizontal skills'** that transfer across learning contexts (2019, p. 18).

Critical literacy

How does this relate to critical thinking?

- Is critical literacy the same as critical thinking? Many would say no (Temple 2005)
- Halliday – learning language is learning to mean – we can't *mean* outside of language

  *When children learn language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundation of learning itself. (*Halliday, 1993, *Towards a Language-Based Theory of Learning*)

  We contend that the conception of 'knowledge' as something that exists independently of language, and may then be coded or made manifest in language, is illusory. All knowledge is constituted in semiotic systems, with language as the most central; and all such representations of knowledge are constructed from language in the first place. (M.A.K. Halliday & C. Matthiessen, 1993 Construing Experience Through meaning)
- Critical thinking as argumentation, visible in writing, especially though APPRAISAL (Hutasuhut, 2022), especially in anticipation of the putative reader (Hutasuhut et al. 2023)

Transferable skills

Everyone wants them!

- Tension between disciplinary literacy and transferrable skills?
- What is transferable and what is not?
- Generic vs disciplinary literacy

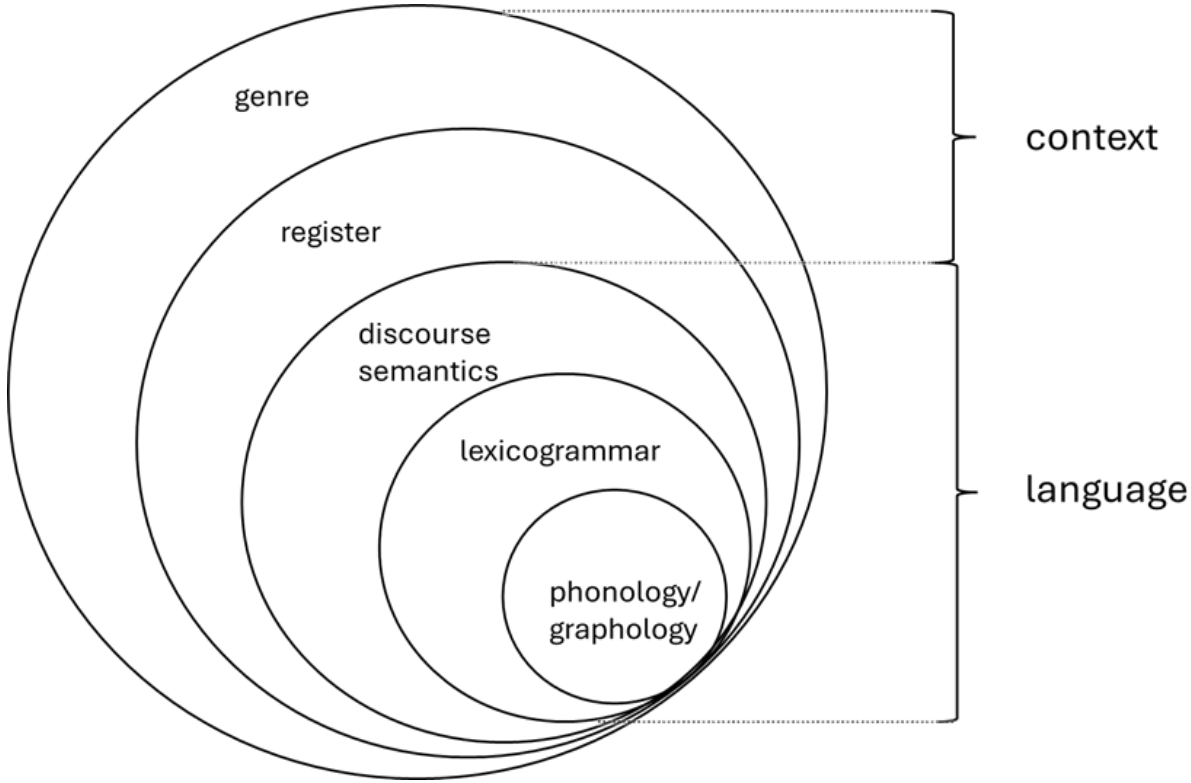
Meaning as critical choice: genre and culture

What is 'genre'?

- Is genre a 'staged, goal-oriented social process'? (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 1)

  ► A view of genre as 'text type'

- A culture is a collection of genres (Martin, 2016) - Cultures and genres are ***intertwined***
- *Bi-directional nature of language and genre*



Understanding genre = understanding culture

And vice-versa

- purposes for and practices of communication vary across
  - countries,
    - cultures,
      - sub-cultures
    - and languages
- Learning how to communicate in different situations is equivalent to learning culture
- writing practices are one particularly codified form of cultural communication (Cocks & Schembri, 2013)
- Emphasise ***adding*** ways of communicating not ***replacing***

Repositioning Culture and Education

Disciplines as cultures > Disciplinary Literacy

- If genres are instantiations of cultures
- disciplines can be understood as particular sub-cultures, with their attendant collection of genres
- different areas of learning have different purposes for communication and different practices around knowledge
- understanding genres as instantiations of culture can also help both students and teachers understand their core business better
- How do different subjects make meaning? Explaining in science vs social studies

Example from science: sequential explanation

PHENOMENON IDENTIFICATION Introducing the overall scientific concept Elaborating the phenomenon	Earthquakes are a natural phenomenon which occurs due to the collision of tectonic plates. The Earth's lang masses are located on seven major plates, separated from a once large continent called Pangea. Those plates are known as tectonic plates.	• First sentence identifies the overarching big idea or scientific concept 'collision of tectonic plates'. The second sentence elaborates the concept.
EXPLANATION SEQUENCE Cause 1 *Effect 1.1* *Effect 1.2* Cause 2 *Effect 2.1* *Effect 2.2* *Conclusion*	Tectonic plates are floating molten interiors that are in a constant state of motion. When moving, these plates collide or their tectonic boundaries come into contact with each other causing earthquakes. The force of collision from the tectonic plates releases energy waves that impact the Earth's surface and the land masses, resulting in instability. Therefore, the theory of plate tectonics is the root source for the emergence of earthquakes.	• Explanation organised into 'causes' and 'their effects' explaining underlying causes of earthquakes step-by-step • ordered temporally (when) • technical and scientific language

Example from Social Studies Consequential Explanation

Explaining multiple effects

Phenomenon: cause	In retrospect, the removal of Aboriginal people from the pastoral industry was a monumental policy failure…
Explanation: Effects	First, the cultural impact of the removal of families from their traditional land in pastoral properties was obviously massive and today inestimable. Second, there are the social results of the removal of Aboriginal families from work on stations to no work on settlements. Third, we would not have had the difficulties in relation to the Wik case and the issue of coexistence of native title non pastoral leases had Aboriginal groups remained on those properties.

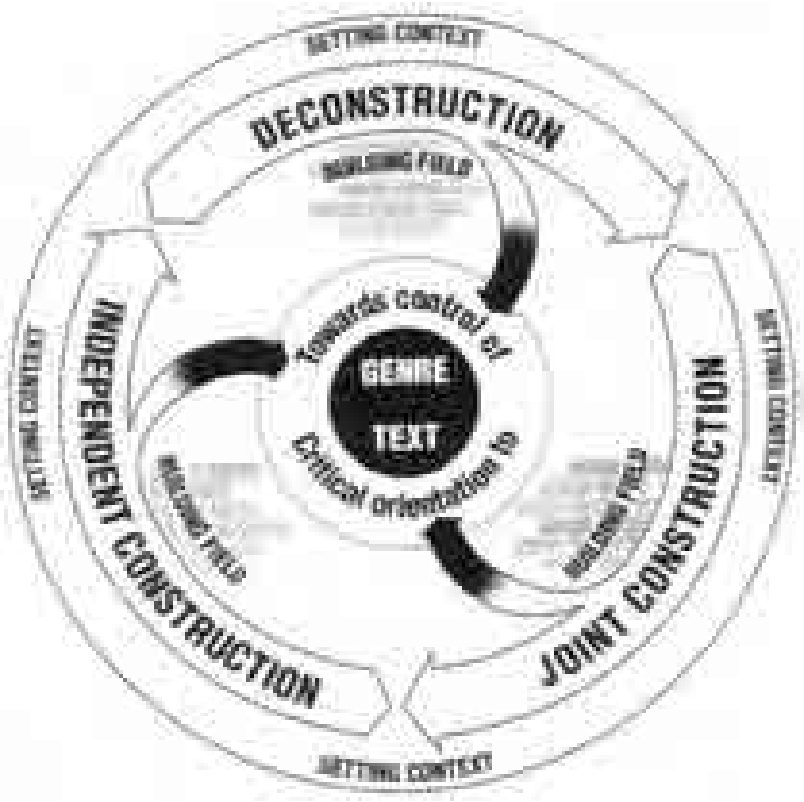
Selected language features

- General abstract technical nouns
- Expanded nominal groups with factual adjectives and classifiers
- Circumstances and dependent clauses to indicate details
- Logical connections of cause and effect
- Cause in the clause (cause as a noun or verb)
- May include logical connections of time
- May include passive voice
- Nominalisation

Critical choice

Challenging the status quo

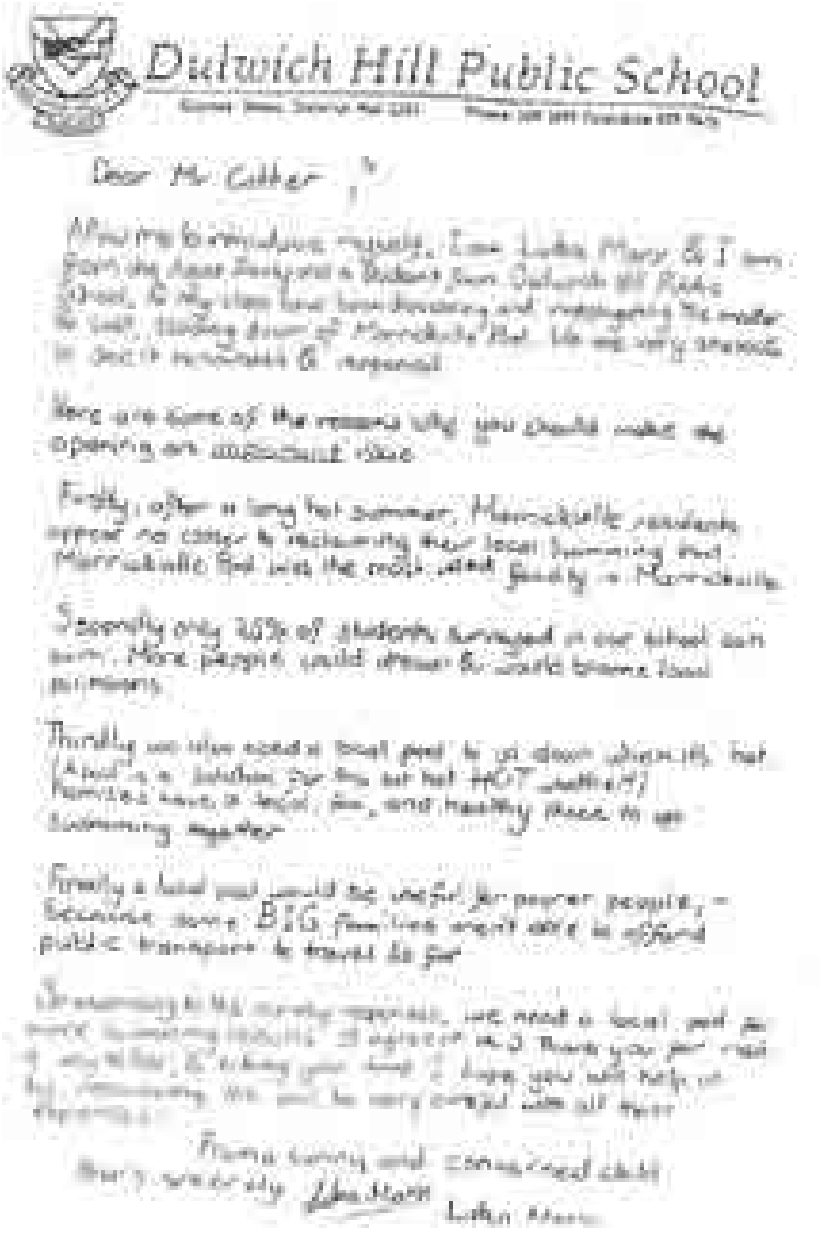
- Control of and critical orientation to language
- First control, then challenge! (Martin, 2016)
- Understanding the positioning of self with relation to other perspectives (Botelho de Magalhães et al., 2019; Burri, 2022



11-12 year olds engaging in their own community

An example of what genre-based teaching can achieve!

- Students' writing skills enable them to engage with deep knowledge
- Students feel empowered (enough to write letters to politicians!)
- But perhaps we don't' WANT our students empowered???
    - "the school's principal received complaints from local politicians about the inappropriateness of students involving themselves in local affairs…" Rose and Martin p79


Dulwich Hill Public School

Dear Mr Collier,

Meaning as critical choice: discourse semantics

Getting beyond the 'feel' of a text

- Language teaching focusses on lexico-grammar and whole text but what about discourse-semantics?
- Many areas of learning occupy a contested knowledge space (Matruglio, 2016; Matruglio, 2018; Carroll, 2021; Christie, 2016; Martin et al., 2010; Maton, 2014)
- Competing perspectives and interpretations
- Students often have to evaluate ideas, evidence, texts and artefacts
- Appraisal is a key resource (Matruglio 2016, 2018; Martin et al 2010)

ATTITUDE

- AFFECT – attitudes about feelings
  - Parents in early stages can feel **isolated** from everyone…
- JUDGEMENT – attitudes about humans and their behaviour
  - …the king's **inability** to return prosperity to the land…
- APPRECIATION – attitudes about things
  - …large & **lavishly decorated** pyramids …

How APPRAISAL helps

Between subjects

- Understanding the basis of achievement in subjects with strong underlying axiologies
- Understanding the values underlying subjects
- revealing tacit values which may not be visible

- My PhD thesis and the 4 ‘similar’ ‘essay subjects’
  - Ancient History
  - Modern History
  - Society and Culture
  - Community and Family Studies

Modern History and JUDGEMENT (propriety)
Modern History as a field of valued ethics

Community And Family Studies and AFFECT
Community and Family studies as a field of valued personal emotions

Ancient History and APPRECIATION
Ancient History as a field of valued evidence

Society and Culture and JUDGEMENT (capacity)
SAC as a field of valued social participation

How APPRAISAL helps

Within subjects

Objective evaluation

- Negotiating multiple perspectives and voices
- Evaluating bias
- Talking about ‘facts’ and interpretations
- Evaluating evidence

Matruglio, E. (2016). Objectivity and critique: The creation of historical perspectives in senior secondary writing. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, *39*(2), 124–134. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03651966

Matruglio, E. (2018). Neutral subjectivity: Facts and evidence in school Modern History writing. *Linguistics and Education*, *48*, 76–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.02.002

Objective Evaluation…

How it works

Ultimately, the fact that de Klerk did not use the military power that Botha used [afford + judge] to suppress Apartheid, is evidence that his decision to give in [afford – judge] to the demands of the non-white majority came in the light of *international* [+force: quant: scope: space] **condemnation** [-prop] if he didn't accept an agreement.

dialogic contraction
inscribed judgement
invoked judgement
graduation

Meaning as critical choice: Clause-Level

Maintaining connection between function and form

- Clause-level grammar is often very familiar, especially in EFL or EAL/D context
- But mostly taught from formal perspective
- Missing the connection to function
- How do ‘rules’ help with critical literacy?
- We need an account of how grammar ***means***
- ***For example, how can clause-level grammar help with objective evaluation?***

see next slide …

Nominalisation

One key to objectivity

- Packaging up of processes as ‘things’ which are less open to negotiation
- Processes/events can be negotiated
  - “the study of art and architecture have also influenced modern knowledge of Pompei’s social structure” (Martin, 2013, p. 31)
    - No they haven’t!!!
      - = no influence of art and architecture
- ‘Things’ are taken as more self-evident
  - “The influence of the study of art and architecture on our understanding of Pompei’s social structure cannot be overstated’”
    - Yes it can!
      - Influence of art and architecture no longer open to debate
      - no = *overstating* the influence

Teaching nominalisation

Empowering students

Disciplinarity, Knowledge and Schooling Project

In year 11, I've had a group of students who were bizarrely excited about the concept of nominalisation. They felt quite empowered by that. They felt that that allowed them more control over their own writing and they were happy to talk about that with me in their free time…The year 11s have been looking for ways to increase what I've been terming the density of their writing and they feel relieved that there are particular ways that they can go about doing that. (research participant, June 2011 – Matruglio 2020, p 472)

Key is teaching the link between ***form*** and ***function***

What have I shown you? Language is power.

In summary

Evidence from various research projects (Language and Social Power Project, my PhD, DISKS, Improving Writing Outcomes)

- How Genre-Based pedagogy can help students engage critically in their society
- How tools from SFL can uncover the values that underlie certain subjects
- How SFL can help show the language demands of ‘objective evaluation’
- How teaching clause-level grammar from an SFL perspective can excite teenagers and give them control over their writing

What makes SFL good for building critical literacy?

Language as meaning-making!!!!

- Not too complicated – real applications with real teachers – and even very young students
- Stratification: Critical literacy at ALL levels of language
- Functional: Strong connection between function and form
- Paradigmatic: Language as meaning potential - a system of choices

Bringing Language out of the hidden curriculum

Giving students conscious control!

- Language can tend to be invisible because we are so immersed in it all the time (Christie, 2000).
- naming and describing something helps make it both visible and more easily objectifiable as an object of study
- Once students learn how language works to make certain meanings in specific ways, they can more easily make choices about how they wish to mean.
- They will also be more aware of how language is used by others to position them as actors in the society in which they live.
- The more knowledge about language they have, the more power they have to use it deliberately, thoughtfully, and critically.

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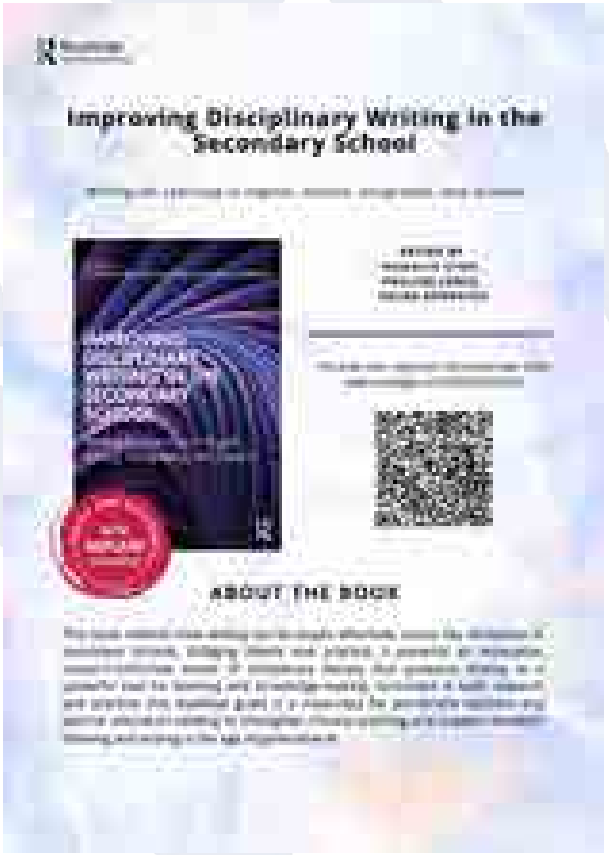

Thank You

Questions & discussion welcome

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