

Systemic functional linguistics and inclusivity in the classroom

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Rini Singh

English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India; rinsingh108@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper contends that pedagogies like genre-based pedagogy and Reading to Learn (R2L), which are informed by systemic functional linguistics (SFL), can help foster inclusivity in classrooms. Both pedagogies are based on the idea that language should be taught functionally and explicitly. SFL informed teaching practices have been used, particularly in educational settings like low-achieving schools, to make the linguistic demands of the curriculum explicit to learners. This has resulted in enhanced student engagement and narrowing of achievement gaps. The paper begins with a brief note on inclusivity and its importance, followed by an introduction to SFL and its architecture. It then explores the applications of genre-based pedagogy and R2L in classrooms (mainly in North America and Australia) as well as the results of such implementations and concludes with an argument that educational research in the Indian context could benefit from applications of Halliday's functional theory to teacher training and teaching practices at the school level.

Keywords: *systemic functional linguistics, inclusivity in the language classroom, genre-based pedagogy, reading to learn, language teaching*

Introduction

The term “inclusive classrooms” can be defined as learning settings, which address the needs of the majority of students (if not all). Inclusive classrooms use instructional techniques, which enable students of diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities to develop to their maximum potential⁹. This paper attempts to show that Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) informed pedagogies offer one way to encourage inclusivity in language classrooms, notably by explicitly teaching students the curriculum's language. Researchers such as David Rose, Frances Christie, Jim Martin, Maria E. Brisk, Mary Schleppegrell, Meg Gebhard have argued that the teaching of academic language is crucial in addressing school failure. It follows then that poor academic achievement can be attributed, in part, to students' inability to grasp the curriculum's language or their need for more assistance with it. In addition to that, (Christie 1994, McCabe 2017, McCabe et al. 2015) have highlighted that the language of education is taken for granted by not only traditional teaching methods but even progressive ones (such the child-centered approach and the communicative approach to teaching). SFL-based teaching methods emerged as a response to such teaching practices and the needs of students and teachers. They are predicated on the notion that all learning occurs through language, and that language must be taught explicitly to the learners alongside the subject matter. This has been crucial for pupils whose

⁹ According to Motschenbacher (2016), the term "inclusive education" originates from the field of education and was developed as a response to traditional teaching methods that assume that all students in a classroom begin at the same level of competence and should progress to the desired level of achievement, and that anyone who does not perform well should receive special education. Those who support inclusive education contend, however, that heterogeneity is common in most classes and should be viewed as a valuable diversity rather than a barrier to learning. In a similar vein, UNESCO (2017) describes inclusion as a process of removing obstacles that prevent learners from being involved, participating, and excelling in educational settings.

home language is not the same as the language of instruction as well as those who come from homes with low levels of literacy in them.

Let us begin by considering why it is necessary to discuss inclusivity in the classroom. According to sociological theories of education based on the conflict tradition¹⁰, educational institutions play a role in both the upkeep and creation of hierarchies. Hierarchies that students already enter the classroom with (e.g., class differences, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and those that are created inside the institutional context (e.g., segregation based on assessment). In other words, students come from a wide range of social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Some students come from homes with high rates of home literacy, a stable home environment, and socioeconomic conditions; in other words, circumstances that enable children to move through the educational environment without difficulty. Others come from difficult backgrounds with circumstances that hinder learning and development, such as poor literacy rates at home, lack of resources, prevalence of violence, to name just a few. These factors have an impact on how well students perform in class and engage with the curriculum. Although many of these background concerns may not be issues educational institutions can directly address or control, educational institutions can certainly influence how these difficulties affect a child's performance and growth through the pedagogy they use in the classroom.

The findings of two significant educational surveys conducted in India provide insights into the role educational institutions play in establishing and maintaining hierarchies. Both the studies reveal poor learning outcomes from the majority of Indian schools.

The first study, the National Achievement Survey (NAS)¹¹, is one of the biggest studies on the standard of education in Indian schools. Students in grades three, five, eight, and ten are tested in all foundational areas. The findings from the latest survey, conducted in November 2021, reveal the following: First, achievement levels declines as we move up the ladder. The national average score for mathematics in grade three is 57%, it decreases to 32% in class ten. The study notes a similar pattern for other subjects as well. According to Yadav (2022), this seems to imply that pupils do worse the more years they spend in school. Second, the learning gap widens as students spend more years in school. The study reports that while there is not much of a difference between the academic achievement of pupils in government and private schools in standard three, the difference widens as we move up the ladder. Third, the difference between students from the general category and those from historically

¹⁰ There are two basic categories of sociological theories of education: functional theories (seen in works of Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, among others) and conflict tradition theories (seen in works of Bowles & Gintis, Pierre Bourdieu, Ivan Illich, Basil Bernstein, to name a few). According to theorists that take a functional approach, educational institutions play a significant role in socializing people and helping them acquire the skills necessary to do a variety of specialised occupations. Conversely, conflict theorists adopt a pessimistic stance toward educational institutions. They maintain that inequality is a feature of society and that educational institutions do not reduce inequality but rather reinforce it. Institutions of higher learning uphold the status quo in their eyes. Although there are major differences among conflict tradition theorists, they all share the core belief that education in an unequal society does not level the playing field and create opportunities for all social classes, but rather contributes to the perpetuation of inequalities (Giddens, 2020).

¹¹ The Ministry of Education, Government of India, oversees NAS. It contains a nationally representative sample. In 1.18 lakh schools throughout India, 34 lakh students participated in the NAS 2021 survey. It is conducted every three years. In grades 3 and 5 children are assessed in a modern indian language (MIL), environmental studies, and math fundamentals; in grade 8, they are assessed in math, science, social science and MIL; and in grade 10 students are assessed in math, science, social science, MIL and English. The sample encompasses a wide range of schools distinguished on the basis of management – central government, state government, government-aided, and private schools. Students from all over the country take the test simultaneously on a single day on the school premises. The test contains multiple choice questions which have been designed and piloted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

marginalized groups like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes widens as well (Ministry of Education 2022, Yadav 2022).

It is important to emphasize that this is the first survey on the quality of education following the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the protracted school closure. It is therefore apparent that there will be a fall in learning levels. However, the survey's findings from before the pandemic also indicate that Indian schools have low learning standards. While describing the overall national performance across subjects and classes NAS 2017 has the following to say, "Thus, there is a total of 45.2% of students achieving targeted levels (Proficient and Advanced) which leaves overall 54.8% of students that need improvements (Basic and Below Basic) as they are achieving below the desired levels" (Ministry of Education 2019: 154). Which is to say that nationally approximately 50% of the students perform below the target level for their grade.

The second survey, known as the Annual Status of Education (ASER)¹², is carried out by an independent organization called Pratham, whose volunteers visit numerous houses in rural areas and ask simple questions about linguistic and mathematical proficiency. The survey looks at the status of schooling and how much children have learned in their foundational years in rural India's districts and states. It is a nationwide survey that changed from being an annual study to being conducted once every two years since 2016. ASER surveys have revealed the subpar learning in rural schools for the past 16 years, and the results have remained mostly unchanged.

The most recent pre-pandemic study, ASER 2018, found that 73% of grade 8 children can read a basic text of standard II level. There has been a decline in students' reading proficiency since 2008 when 85% of students could read a text at the grade II level. On the other hand, the study shows an increase in the reading proficiency of third-grade kids, from 22.2 % in 2008 to 27 % in 2018. However, the issue is present at both the younger and older levels for basic mathematics. In contrast to the 68.4% of students who were able to complete a basic division problem successfully in 2010, only 44% of students in 2018 were able to do so. In a similar vein, the report notes that class 3 students' ability to do simple subtraction has not changed much over time. In 2016, 27.6 % of pupils could attempt it, and in 2018 only 28.1 % could succeed (Pratham 2017, Pratham 2019).

Both NAS and ASER highlight Indian schools' poor learning outcomes and provide credence to the concept that these schools in India seem to be fostering rather than eradicating inherited disadvantages. The condition of education and learning across the country is poor, with the exception of a few elite schools in major cities. Some of the causes of this include poor teaching techniques, pupil undernutrition, classroom overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and inadequate teacher preparation. Teaching strategies that are informed by SFL offer one way to enhance classroom instruction. They are made with teachers and students in mind. Teachers used SFL metalanguage to help students develop academic language, and students are helped with the curriculum's language so they can understand what is being taught and how to go about completing curricular tasks.

The aim of this paper is to make a case that Halliday's functional theory of language – Systemic Functional Linguistics and SFL-informed pedagogies have much to offer educational contexts with low-levels of achievement such as India. The paper begins with a brief overview of the theoretical constructs

¹² ASER 2018 gathered information from 3,54, 944 households in 596 rural Indian districts from a total of 5,46,527 kids aged 3 to 16 years old. It is a household-based survey in which volunteers go door-to-door and assess each child's proficiency in reading easy texts and basic math. In contrast to NAS, which focuses on grade level competence, all kids are tested using the same tool, regardless of age or grade. This is so that the ASER survey can determine if children have mastered the fundamentals of reading and math. Additionally, the study is only carried out in rural areas, but even in those places, it evaluates pupils who attend government, private, and even out-of-school children. This poll is significant because the results revealed that kids lacked fundamental abilities despite the fact that enrolment in schools was rising, which in a way shocked the nation and posed the crucial question, "What is going on in Indian school?"

of SFL. After that, it discussed how the theory has been used to design two pedagogies – genre-based pedagogy and Reading to Learn. This is followed by a review of selected articles that document how SFL based pedagogies have been applied in educational settings to improve learning outcomes as well as to train teachers (mainly in Australia and North America). The paper concludes by arguing that there is a need for debates on literacy in the Indian context to move beyond discussions of the appropriate age to introduce English as the medium of instruction and looks towards pedagogies, which have the potential to improve teaching practices in Indian schools. The paper offers some suggestions for how SFL can be incorporated into teacher training and classroom instruction in the Indian context¹³.

SFL - A brief overview

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a theory of language that was founded by M. A. K. Halliday between 1930s and 1950s (Herriman 2013). It is an approach towards language from the perspective of meaning and function as opposed to rules and structures. Some of the key influences on Halliday and on the development of the theory are the British linguist J.R. Firth, the Polish-British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, and the British sociologist Basil Bernstein. In particular it was Firth's emphasis on the social aspect of language with meaning as its central concern that had an impact on Halliday and the development of the theory (Halliday & Hassan 2006, Webster 2013).

According to Gebhard (2013), using an SFL-based approach to language development means adopting a sociocultural perspective on language and language learning. Such a method of learning languages is distinct from behaviorist and cognitivist methods of language acquisition. According to a behaviorist perspective, language learning is habit formation in the course of which pupils memorize decontextualized language chunks through language exercises. Contrarily, a cognitivist viewpoint asserts that people have the capacity to acquire language over time through oral exchanges and engagement with texts. They concentrate on the cognitive processes in the mind of the language users. Critics of the cognitivist perspective claim that the perspective places an excessive amount of emphasis on an individual's own mental processes at the detriment of the social context in which the user is positioned. They contend that language acquisition should be viewed as a combination of interpersonal, socially created, and contextual processes. Language learning is thus viewed by academics who take a socio-cultural perspective on language as a process of socialization into the discourse community's linguistic practices. Such a viewpoint holds that the role of the teacher is to introduce students to the discourse community's language by examining the usage and thought patterns of that particular discipline.

Language teaching was a primary concern that influenced Halliday to develop his theory of language (Steiner 1997). Halliday was interested in practicing “applicable” linguistics (Webster 2013, McCabe 2017). In other words, a language theory that can be applied in real-world teaching situations. This can be seen in the following quote by Halliday “. . . as a teacher I was a lot more conscious of the need to provide explanations of problems faced by the learners, to try to develop some kind of coherent notion of a language, how it works, how it is learned, and so forth, in order simply to improve the quality of the language teaching” (Halliday & Hasan 2006: 16). The motivation for developing a usable theory of language that instructors can use to teach language and how it functions to create meaning is outlined

¹³ It is important to mention that, to the best of my knowledge, no study has been done that uses SFL-based pedagogies in order to improve students' academic literacy at the school level in the Indian context. This essay makes the case that research on the effects of such pedagogies from underdeveloped countries like India is required. This will contribute to the growing body of literature on the use of SFL in education. It will also offer new insights into what happens when teaching methods that have worked well in English-speaking western contexts are applied in challenging countries like India. With this goal in mind, I wrote this essay. It should be emphasised that at the time I was writing this paper, I was working on an experimental study for my PhD dissertation in a Delhi government school that looked at the impacts of implementing a genre-based pedagogy inspired by SFL to enhance grade 8 students' English language writing skills.

by Halliday in the aforementioned remark. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that systemic functional linguistics lends itself better to the teaching and learning of languages in comparison to other theories of language that have dominated language teaching like traditional grammar or Chomsky's formal grammar. However, McCabe points out SFL uptake in language teaching has been very limited.

Before moving on to how the theory has been applied for teaching purposes, it is important to understand its distinctive aspects.

First, Systemic Functional Linguistics is based on an understating of language, which views language as a semiotic resource for making meaning. By which they mean that language helps us participate in our social world by enabling us to make sense of our world and represent it using language. However, it is important to note that SFL theorists do not work with a simple understanding of the relationship between reality and language in which an 'objective' reality exists and language is simply a means to represent it, rather they see it as a two-way process in which language helps us represent our reality but also constructs that reality for us.

Second, SFL theorists argue that language has evolved to fulfil human communicative needs. Which means that they do not view language as an autonomous system, which exists independently of the social as a set of rules to be studied and acquired. Which is to say that the system of language has emerged in the way in which it exists to fulfil the communicative need of the human society.

Third, SFL theorists view language use as functional. Which means that language is used by its users to perform various functions like arguing, explaining, requesting, expressing opinions, venting, to name a few. They view grammar as a resource that enables its users to perform these functions. Thus, systemacists do not view grammar as separate from meaning.

And finally, SFL analysis focuses on language in use (authentic texts) rather than isolated sentences. The term 'text' is of particular significance to this theory and can be defined as "The term 'text' refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language; we can characterize text as language functioning in context" (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013: 3). Thus, SFL works with language as it is used by people to speak and write it to make meaning and participate in their social work. This is in contrast to theories of language, which make a distinction between competence and performance. Systemic linguists argue that there is no idealized system of language in the head of native speakers, which is distinct from how language exists in use.

The notion of 'context' is an important one in SFL. According to SFL theorists, language use is always contextual and changes depending on the situation in which language is being used. SFL theorists further divide context into context of culture and context of situation.

Context of culture, also known as genre, refers to "the institutionalized way that language is structured in various stages, in order to achieve a certain goal" (Herriman 2013). Simply put, this means that when we use language to achieve something it is usually done in stages. As an illustration, a sales transaction typically includes the following stages: a sales request, a price clarification, and a payment and sales close. According to Eggins (2004: 9), explaining the steps people take to achieve their goal is explaining genre. Butt et al. (2000) go one step further and explain how genres are formed, they write "when texts share the same general purpose in the culture, they will often share the same obligatory and optional structural elements and so they belong to the same genre". Genre theory has been used by educational linguists to explain the organization of texts that learners are expected to read and write in order to do well academically such as reports, narratives, argumentative texts.

In contrast, the context of situation, also referred to as the register, consists of three variables: field, tenor, and mode. The subject matter or topic in a text is referred to as the field of that text. To understand the field of a text SFL theories ask – what is the text about? who are the participants involved? and what are the circumstances involved? The tenor of a text refers to the social relations between those involved in the communicative act. This is so because the linguistic choices made in a text will depend on the relationship between the writer/speaker and the reader/listener. The mode of a

text also describes the type of communication that occurs, such as oral, written, or computer-mediated. This has been shown to be useful in demonstrating to pupils how to transition from spoken language to written academic materials. To conclude, these three variables together determine how language users make choices in a text. Systemic linguists have used the three register variables to deconstruct texts and explain to language learner how writers and speakers of a text make choices to achieve their purpose.

According to Herriman (2013), the three variables—field, tenor, and mode—are connected to the three functions of language - ideational, interpersonal, and textual. According to Halliday (2013) all languages perform these three functions. In other words, all languages help us represent our world (ideational function), they help us establish social relations (interpersonal function), and they help us organize our ideas into a meaningful unit (textual function). Language performs these three functions simultaneously. To put it another way, each clause serves an ideational, interpersonal, and textual purpose. Further, each function has its own system networks.

System networks refers to a finite set of choices that language users draw from when using language. Language users create different types of meanings by choosing from these finite choices that exist in the language system. Choices are made at three levels: semantics or discourse-semantics, syntax/ wordings/ morphology also known as lexicogrammar, and the letters or sounds used to represent them (phonology and graphology). These decisions are influenced by the context of language use, who the language users are and the relationship between them. This is important to understand because as opposed to structural or rule-based theories of language that label language use as "right" or "wrong" SFL contends that language users make choices from the system networks when they use language for varied reasons. Thus, when educationists adopt an SFL perspective towards language it means that language is a system of choices that students must learn to employ to achieve a range of goals - social, economic, and political.

SFL-based approaches to teaching English

SFL was first used to teach academic literacies to students from varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Sydney's primary and secondary schools in the 1980s. In other words, students for whom the language of instruction at school was not the same as their home language. It follows then that students need to be socialized into ways of reading and writing that are prized in schools. It has been seen that it is usually children from low socio-economic backgrounds and/or with low levels of literacy in their home environment who struggle with curricular tasks and benefit from such instruction. Australian educational linguists used SFL to give teachers the resources they needed to explain to learners from historically underrepresented groups how language functions in academic contexts (Rose & Martin, 2012). What is clear is that schools and the different disciplines have ways in which they use language to construct knowledge and more often these disciplinary literacies need to be made explicit to students.

Similarly, in the United States SFL-based teaching practices have been used to develop academic language of English Language Learners (ELLs) (Achugar et al. 2007, Gebhard 2013, Gebhard et al. 2010, Schleppegrell et al. 2004). ELLs refer to those learners for whom English is not their first language, as a result they are not only learning English as a subject but also learning other subjects in English. Studies have shown performance differences between ELLs and children of native speakers in the U.S., with the former struggling to perform up to grade appropriate level. SFL has been utilized by educational linguists in this context to give teachers tools to help students grasp the distinction between academic language and ordinary language. It has also been used to help students understand how academic language functions in the various disciplinary texts they are expected to read and write in school.

In the Indian context students have to contend with English as the medium of instruction. English is now being taught in many schools as early as standard one in response to a demand for "English-medium schools." Due to the fact that English is not the majority of Indian students' first language, this

causes friction. Students struggle to acquire a language that is far away from their everyday environments with the help of teachers who are not proficient in the language of instruction. Given that pupils must comprehend how English functions to represent their world as well as the subject matter of different disciplines (like science, mathematics, social sciences) a functionally focused teaching methodology can be helpful in this situation.

Genre-based pedagogy

The most widely known SFL based practice is the genre-based approach to teaching writing that uses “curriculum cycle” or the “teaching-learning cycle” (hereafter TLC). This approach was designed by educational linguists in the 1980s in Australia. There are different versions of TLC, but largely it consists of the following stages. The first stage is the planning stage, in this stage teachers analyze the curriculum for the genres that students are expected to routinely read and write in school. The second stage is the modelling stage or the deconstruction stage, here teachers introduce exemplary texts of the chosen genre to the class and deconstruct those for the disciplinary knowledge and the language features used by the writer. Deconstructing a text means to analyze it for its structure or stages, which involves looking at how the structure of the text helps to realize its purpose. Next, learners are made to question whom the text is intended for as that determines the language choices adopted by the writer. Further, a detailed linguistic analysis of the text is done to analyze it for the words and phrases used by the writer and how they construct the subject matter of the text (field), its voice (tenor) and the flow of the information (mode).

This is followed by joint construction, in this stage students work with the teacher and their peers and construct a text of the same genre. Students are expected to use the language features of the specific genre they have learnt in the previous stages of the cycle.

The last stage is the independent construction stage, in this stage students work independently to write a text of the same genre. In this way TLC is designed to help students move towards controlling genres that are important for their academic success. In Gebhard’s (2013: 3) words, students learn to attend “to how their linguistic choices construct the subject matter, maintain text coherence, and reflect their voice as members of various discourse communities”.

A popular criticism levelled against genre-based teaching practices is that it imposes academic genres and a particular way of writing on learners thereby curbing creativity and freedom of expression. However, Gebhard (2013) argues that rather than simply imposing genre-based practice as the only way of teaching writing and instead of applying it in an uncritical manner, teachers and educators can perform ‘critical SFL’ which values the social and linguistic worlds that students bring with them to the classroom and supports students “in participating in and creating possible future worlds by expanding the meaning-making resources available to them” (Gebhard 2013: 2).

Reading to learn pedagogy

The Reading to Learn pedagogy (hereafter R2L) includes genre-based writing approach but goes a step further by beginning with reading. It is founded on the notion that reading is a fundamental academic skill and assists students in starting with reading and incorporating what they have read into their writing. R2L is another example of using SFL to plan classroom instruction. David Rose created it to enhance the literacy outcomes of indigenous communities in Australia. Students from this community were three to eight years behind the national average for their grade level when compared to other students in their grade level. R2L includes the following stages:

First is “preparation for reading,” where the teacher summarizes the topic of the text and goes over the genre phases so that pupils are familiar with the topic before they start reading. This lessens the reader's semiotic workload. To aid students in understanding new vocabulary, the teacher can read the

material aloud one more time. This step enables students to comprehend materials that are above their abilities of independent reading.

R2L then moves on to the writing stages called “joint construction” and “independent construction”. In “joint construction,” the whole class collaborates with the teacher to create a text in the genre they have been studying in reading. Students benefit from this scaffolding when they advance to the “independent construction” level. In “independent construction” students work by themselves to construct a text of the same genre but on a new topic.

This is followed by the second stage of reading called “detailed reading”, the sentences in the text are “carefully read” in this stage. The teacher selects key portions from the text, and goes phrase by phrase drawing students' attention to the word groups in each sentence and explains the meaning of the word groupings. The emphasis at this level is on the finer points because students already comprehend the text's broad meaning. Students are urged to point out the wordings, explain what they mean, define new words, and define abstract concepts. By the end of this stage students should be able to read the passage with fluency and comprehension. The instructor may do a critical analysis of the subject and the language at this stage.

This is followed by writing stages called “joint rewriting” and “individual rewriting”. Students work to incorporate the grammatical structures they have learned in the “detailed reading” stage into their writing during these stages. Students first collaborate before working individually.

During the final stage “sentence construction”, sentences from the in-depth reading passage are distributed to groups of students to work on. Important sentences are printed on paper by the teacher, who then directs the students to breakdown the sentences into word groups and then individual words. The cut strips are mixed, and the students are instructed to arrange the strips into coherent phrases and sentences. This is a crucial activity because it allows pupils to take control of the written word without having to worry about having to come up with their own sentences. The teacher can then help pupils spell challenging words by breaking them down into letter patterns and instructing the students to put the letters together to form the right words. This is how students practice sound-letter correspondence in R2L. This is different from decontextualized phonics and spelling activities that are usually done in classrooms. In R2L students practice sentence and word construction in a meaningful context.

R2L includes strategies that allow teachers to integrate reading and writing skills into the general curriculum for all grades and all subjects. It has been applied for over ten years now and has helped to accelerate the learning of all students as well as reduce the learning gap between low and high achievers. The important point is that the strategies are meant to engage all students and can be implemented into the existing curriculum (McCabe 2017, Rose 2018). R2L focuses on skills that students need in order to become independent learners and that are necessary for their academic success.

Advantages of using SFL-based pedagogies

Reforms in the educational sector in the United States have put pressure on instructors to support the development of the academic literacy of ELLs and speakers of non-dominant varieties of English. As a result, many teacher educators have used SFL scholarship to assist their teachers.

In California, Mary Schleppegrell and her colleagues (Schleppegrell 2003) in collaboration with teachers studied the academic language requirements placed on students by the curriculum. This led to them identifying the genres that students were expected to read and write as part of their schoolwork and those that teachers were expected to teach. In the process, they realized that all students required help as they transitioned from elementary to secondary school, not just ELLs. Further, they realized that students need help in developing an awareness of the genre and register features of texts as they transition from reading and writing commonplace texts (like personal narratives) to more technical and grammatical texts (like scientific reports). Schleppegrell and her colleagues found that providing teacher

with a metalinguistic awareness of genre and register features of the academic texts helped teachers enable their students make this transition.

In a different project, educational linguists (Achugar et al. 2007, Schleppegrell et al. 2004) used SFL tools to assist teachers in analyzing primary source documents and passages from history textbooks. This enabled teachers in creating lessons that allowed for more in-depth discussion and knowledge of history. As a result, students' performance on the standardized tests improved significantly and ELLs showed tremendous gains.

Gebhard et al. (2010) used SFL to engage with elementary and middle school teachers in a project called ACCELA (Access to Critical Content and English Language Acquisition). They provided professional development to teacher educators and teachers so that they could use SFL tools to help improve the academic literacy students in urban schools. Teachers designed curricular interventions based on the "Curriculum cycle" to help ELLs negotiate the language demands of high-stakes exams and learn to use academic genres to explore topics of their interest.

In applying the R2L methodology, Rose and his colleagues found that while other teaching methodologies maintain an achievement gap between low-achievers and high-achievers, the application of R2L helped reduce this achievement gap by accelerating the growth of high achievers by 1.5 times their standard growth and accelerating the growth of low-achievers by 4 times. In this way, the teaching methodology was found to accelerate the learning of all students while at the same time narrowing the achievement gap (Rose 2018).

Suggestions for teaching of English in India

The use of SFL-based approaches to language teaching can be applied at two levels: teacher training programs and classroom instruction to teach reading and writing.

Suggestions for Teacher-Training Programs

Gebhard (2013) argues that when teachers were assisted in using SFL-based teaching practices it helped them gain stronger control over the subject they were expected to teach as well as the linguistic practices that go with it. Based on this it would not be wrong to argue that teacher-training programs in India, both pre-service and in-service, could benefit by incorporating a module on SFL. This has implications for improving teachers' knowledge base as well as their proficiency in the taught language. The module should not only introduce teachers to the theory of SFL but more importantly, show them how it can be applied in the actual classroom setting and give them practice in applying it to their respective contexts. Studies that show what aspects of SFL teachers were taught and how that helped to change their understanding of language and teaching practices would be a welcome step in this regard.

Suggestions for Improving Classroom Instruction

SFL-based pedagogies can be applied to improve literacy levels in Indian schools. Large-scale educational research surveys point out that learning levels are poor in many government and low-cost private schools across India. One of the reasons for the low literacy rates is the use of English as the medium of instruction. English is not present in the learner's environment but is the language of instruction and evaluation at school. This creates a problem as the child is unable to follow what is happening in class. The child has only learnt to understand the world and his/her surroundings through their home language/mother tongue. In such a case the child needs instruction to begin to understand the world with the help of English. This would require carefully designed pedagogic practices that can help the students' transition from their L1 to L2. Meanwhile, the L1 should continue to develop as a subject in school. As reported above, SFL-based pedagogies have been used with language minority students in the U.S. and Australia to help them develop the academic literacies they need to succeed in

school. It would be interesting to see how SFL can be applied to address the learning gap in the Indian context.

Conclusion

SFL-based teaching practices have tried to address the issue of inclusivity by arguing for teaching practices that bring a focus on language and explicitly teach the language demands of the curriculum to learners. Proponents of SFL have pointed out that other language teaching practices can be unfair to language minority students or students whose mother tongue is not the same as the medium of instruction. Researchers in Australia and North America have used SFL tools to assist teachers in helping their students understand the differences between every day and academic language. SFL tools have also helped teachers in unpacking the academic language of the different disciplines they are expected to teach. This has further helped teachers develop their own content knowledge and become aware of the language practices of their discipline. On the basis of this, it would not be wrong to argue that an approach to teaching reading and writing as the one elaborated in this paper can have positive outcomes in the Indian context where because of the high demand for English-medium education students learn the English language as well as content subjects in English. Thus, there is a need for research to try SFL based approaches to teaching in the Indian setting to see how the theory and the practice can be adopted to fit the Indian context and contribute to the expanding literature on SFL in education.

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