

Reflective Writing in Teacher Education in China: Insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract:

This article aims to demonstrate the application of theory to teaching practice by examining how two teacher educators drew upon systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as a pedagogical and analytical tool to inform their teaching of reflective writing to Mandarin-dominant teacher candidates enrolled in an ESOL course within an educator preparation program at a university using English Medium Instruction (EMI) in China. First, the authors describe how they incorporated the SFL appraisal framework into their teaching to bring their multilingual student writers' attention to the language of evaluation as they prepared to construct reflective language learning autobiographies. Second, the authors demonstrate how SFL-informed text analysis of the appraisal resources used within students' written reflections deepened their understanding of their students' reflective writing practices and informed their teaching and course development. The article concludes with suggestions for using the SFL appraisal framework to support the reflective writing of their multilingual teacher candidates.

Keywords: *second language writing, systemic functional linguistics, teacher education*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, China has experienced an increase in the number of educator preparation programs delivered using English Medium Instruction (EMI) (He & Chiang, 2016; Hu & Lei, 2014; Schulze & Cáceda, 2019). As an increasing number of multilingual, non-dominant English users enter teacher preparation programs that employ English Medium Instruction (EMI) in China, teacher educators need ways to support their multilingual students with navigating the English language demands of the genres of teacher education. Of these genres, written reflection is prevalent in education courses in Chinese, North American, and Indonesian higher education educator preparation contexts and is considered essential to professional development (Suratno & Iskandar, 2010). While reflection may occur within oral class discussions, reflective writing remains a centerpiece of education coursework (Farrell, 2016; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). This written reflection typically occurs within a variety of genres in teacher education such as lesson plans, journal entries, formal essays, or high-stakes teacher candidate exams and assessments.

Engaging in these written genres requires a command of the language of instruction. Teacher candidates in China for whom English is a non-dominant language may experience particular challenges as they construct written academic reflections in English. Beyond utilizing domain specific vocabulary found in the field of education, reflective writing requires students to use precise language to express shades of meaning that work to convey the writer's evaluation, opinion, and value of the subject. Communicating these shades of meaning effectively remains a challenge for all writers, but particularly for students who are using their non-dominant language to participate in a potentially culturally unfamiliar task of critiquing their teachers and themselves.

While formal reflective practice has received attention in teacher education in China for nearly a decade, some scholars have noted that components of reflection uphold Western ideals (Zeichner & Liu, 2010) and this may cause tension across cultural contexts (Zhan & Wan, 2016). Given these linguistic and cultural demands put forth by the task of constructing written reflections, students may benefit from explicit language-based instruction that makes visible the role of evaluative language in reflections and helps them to use this language effectively as they construct their own written reflections in teacher education classes.

The appraisal framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) has been used over the last few decades to understand how language users express evaluation and judgement (Hood, 2004; Oteiza, 2017; White, 2015). Although analysis of linguistic elements comprising the appraisal framework of SFL as a tool for understanding the reflective writing of English language learners has been utilized sparingly in ESL contexts (Harmon & Simmons, 2014; O'Halloran 2015) and even less frequently in EFL contexts (Zhang, 2018), it may prove to be a valuable tool to inform teachers'

understanding of the strengths and challenges of developing English language writers who are engaging in professional reflection in teacher education contexts .

With this need to emphasize the linguistic resources typically used in written reflection in teacher education at the forefront of our writing instruction, we explored two related questions to add insight to our work with Mandarin-dominant teacher candidates who are tasked with writing reflections within an EMI educator preparation program:

- a. How can the appraisal framework of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) be infused into writing instruction to make visible the grammatical resources of English typically used to construct effective reflections in teacher education contexts?
- b. How can teacher educators employ the SFL appraisal framework understand the reflective writing practices of multilingual writers and inform writing instruction?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reflection in Teacher Education

A review of the literature reveals that reflective practice has an important and long-standing role in teacher education. Dewey (1933) defined reflective thought as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads" (p. 118). He understood this process to occur in two phases- through perceiving what happened during a teaching event and towards the interpretation of those events. Building on Dewey's idea of reflection as perception followed by interpretation, Zeichner (1993) recognized that improving one's teaching must start with examination of one's experience. Essential to the act of reflection on the experience of teaching is critical reflection. Critical reflection calls on teachers to examine matters outside a classroom event, to the broader historical, sociopolitical, and cultural issues--those matters that affect the student (Zeichner & Liston, 1987).

For the teacher candidate preparing to teach language, reflective practice plays a crucial component. Farrell (2016) presents a framework for understanding the reflective practices of TESOL educators. The framework includes five stages or levels of reflection: philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and beyond practice. The initial component of philosophy necessitates the teacher candidate to examine the factors that influence their evolving conception of teaching, "such as our heritage, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, and family and personal values that have combined to influence who we are as language teachers" (p.225), so they can begin upon a path of professional growth.

To promote reflective practice in the future teachers they are guiding, teacher educators often create space for written reflection, through journals or short

reflections on lesson plans. As pre-service teachers begin to construct written reflections their reflective processes typically align with two phases of professional development that correspond to the aforementioned phases of perception and interpretation set forth by Dewey. At first, students' written reflections tend to focus on a description of events, emphasizing their role in instruction (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012); however, if written reflection receives emphasis throughout a teacher education program, teacher candidates begin to understand their own teaching styles better, challenge traditional instructional models, and improve their ability to relate with their students (Shandomo, 2010).

Within each of these two phases, writers are called upon to use language in particular ways. To understand how writers are expected to use language within the stages of reflection, the theory of SFL, and particularly its sub theory of the appraisal framework (White, 2015), proves useful. Within the first phase of reflection, description requires writers to use adjectives, adverbs and gerunds, or words or phrases that SFL categorizes as "circumstances." The reflective writing of the later stages of teacher preparation requires students to use language that constructs judgment, evaluation, value, and intensification (or "graduation" in SFL terms) as they self-assess and critique teaching practices. In the subsequent section of this paper, we discuss how the theory of SFL that we introduced above helps us as teacher educators better understand the language practices of reflection writing that plays such an important role in teacher development.

2.2 SFL in Teacher Education

Recent research has addressed how SFL can be infused into teacher education and professional development to increase teachers' knowledge of language and its role in critical reflective teaching practice (Achugar & Carpenter, 2018; Achugar et al., 2007; de Oliveira & Avalos, 2018; Harman, 2018; Potts, 2018; Schulze, 2015, 2016). Much of this work centers on the potential for a shared SFL-based metalanguage to enhance teachers' knowledge of language in a way that builds their professional capacity to design language instruction. Achugar & Carpenter (2018) demonstrate how SFL can be infused into pre-service teacher preparation courses to heighten teachers' awareness of language so that they may create transformative and critical educational experiences for their students. Additionally, de Oliveira & Avalos (2018) explore how SFL helps teachers "to analyze the discourse of different content areas, explore the shifts between everyday and academic registers, and plan lessons that address language and content" (p. 110).

An emerging field of SFL research is also addressing how the theory can support advanced multilingual writers as they engage in response writing, a genre that is akin to reflection in its use of appraisal resources and genre structure (Ramirez, 2018). While the aforementioned work focuses extensively on the potential of SFL to serve as a tool to increase critical linguistic awareness in teachers, research using SFL to analyze the genre of reflective written texts in teacher education is less

prevalent. Notably, Ryan (2011) developed what she called the “Academic Reflective Writing Model” to support students in recognizing the linguistic features evident in academic reflections. Her work demonstrates how SFL can be integrated into teaching practice in a systematic way to build writers’ awareness of the lexical-grammatical and organizational features writers use to accomplish the genre of reflection. These works and many others point to the benefits of incorporating SFL into teacher education; however, researchers also remain transparent about the limitations of their work and the challenges of disrupting traditional approaches to teacher education, especially for those teachers who may find the intricacy of SFL a bit overwhelming at first (Derewianka & Jones, 2010). Nevertheless, Ryan’s work encouraged us to continue exploring empirical aspects of an SFL infused writing curriculum in teacher education, particularly with multilingual students in EMI instructional contexts.

2.3 SFL Theory

SFL conceptualizes language as a meaning making tool in which language users simultaneously construct and respond to contexts by drawing on available grammatical resources to express ideas, construct a voice and enact social roles, and manage the flow of information within a text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & White, 2005; Gebhard, 2019). Unlike traditional grammar, SFL is not driven by a focus on arbitrary rules or appropriateness, but rather, how language users accomplish certain purposes in certain contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Rose & Martin, 2012), such as the multilingual writers engaging in reflection in teacher education.

Halliday (1985), the British linguist who developed the model of SFL, identified three prominent ways in which language plays a role in meaning making. He termed these metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction concerns the ways language constructs social reality and experience. The interpersonal metafunction focuses on the ways in which language is used to enact social roles through interaction (White, 2015). The textual metafunction involves the way language organizes the other metafunctions depending on context. These metafunctions are realized in particular situational contexts as register (Eggins, 2004; Matthiessen, 2019). A linguistic register consists of field, mode, and tenor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2012). The three variables comprising the register are examined below.

2.3.1 Field

The field of discourse is related to the ideational metafunction. The field centers on the action of the clause (processes), who or what is involved in the action (participants), and the manner describing the action (circumstances). Individual clauses may be analyzed for their transitivity, what Halliday (1973) defined as “the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his [sic] experience of the processes of

the external world, and of the internal world of his [sic] own consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances” (p. 134). Transitivity analysis reveals a language users' linguistic style used to express themselves and represent their own reality, in essence, making meaning (Bartley, 2018).

2.3.2 Mode

The textual metafunction is realized as the register variable of mode. Language users typically present ideas in a cohesive and coherent fashion. This presentation of meaning is facilitated at the clause level by resources such as Theme, the initial starting point of the clause, and Rheme (or New) constituting the remainder of the clause. Language users also make choices about language based on whether the text, here defined as any coherent utterance and connected discourse, is primarily intended to be spoken or written. Linguistic resources used to construct mode include transitions, nominalization, and repetition.

2.3.3 Tenor

The interpersonal metafunction is realized by the register variable of tenor. Tenor involves how interlocutors use language to connect, negotiate power, and establish relationships. Language users are always utilizing language in particular ways to establish relationships and teacher candidates writing within written reflections are no different. To facilitate a formal tenor, writers of reflections primarily use declarative statements, technical vocabulary, and rhetorical devices to acknowledge or rebuff particular stances (Pando & Aguirre-Muñoz, 2019).

The three metafunctions exist in all instances of language in use layered upon the clause to facilitate meaning making (Rose & Martin, 2012). Linguistic analysis that highlights the language resources contributing to a particular metafunction by no means is intended to disregard the others. Rather, linguists may employ an SFL-informed text analysis to spotlight the linguistic features that construct meaning within an individual metafunction. In doing so, they highlight how a metafunction is realized within a particular register within a defined context. The information gained from such analysis may be helpful to teachers of emergent multilingual writers as they will have a deeper understanding of how certain grammatical resources support writers in enacting genres like reflection. With this knowledge of language, writing instructors can highlight these register variables and their corresponding grammatical resources in their teaching (Schulze, 2016).

Because reflection requires language users to express a particular stance towards something, and thus, employ linguistic resources that help express evaluation and judgement, our teaching focus, as well as our analysis of students' written reflections composed during our course, highlight the linguistic resources of the appraisal framework and its role in constructing interpersonal metafunction through the register variable of tenor.

In the section below, we introduce the main tenets of SFL appraisal theory and discuss how we drew on the theory to teach elements of reflective writing and gain insight into our students' reflective writing practices.

2.3.4 Appraisal Theory

Linguists working from an SFL perspective developed the appraisal framework to understand aspects of tenor and highlight the varying grammatical devices language users employ as they take a stance or express solidarity with a subject (Oteiza, 2017; White, 2015). The appraisal framework specifically examines the ways language users negotiate attitude, graduation, and engagement. Attitude whereby values and feelings associated with particular participants and processes are communicated has three subcomponents: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Affect concerns expressing positive or negative emotions. Judgement refers to the language used for the assessment of the morality of actions and behavior. Appreciation involves likes and dislikes in regard to objects. Graduation deals with the linguistic resources writers use to amplify feelings and to sharpen focus. Engagement, on the other hand, is concerned with the linguistic resources language users employ to indicate their position in regard to a topic and to engage with the external ideas and voices surrounding their topic (Mori, 2017; Oteiza, 2017; White, 2015).

The intricacy of the SFL approach to language is not meant to overwhelm those who turn to the theory to understand language, particularly teachers who seek ways of deepening their understanding of their emergent multilingual students' writing practices. In contrast, in application and within their teaching practice, both authors have found it to be an informative tool to analyze texts, understand the language demands of the texts they are using to teach, and highlight aspects of students' language development and use, especially those students who are either using English to engage in reflective writing practices for the first time. In short, it can be used, as much or as little as one needs, as a tool for linguistic analysis to develop an enhanced understanding of the language demands of the content areas we teach (Derewianka & Jones, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Context, Participants, and Unit of Analysis

In the summer of 2018, the authors were invited to serve as visiting scholars in an EMI teacher education program at a major university in eastern China. EMI has become increasingly popular in China as universities prepare students to be global citizens while simultaneously increasing their enrollment of international students, particularly from Southeast Asian countries. The students in this program (N=96) were teacher candidates preparing to be early childhood educators within China. Because English is typically taught as a foreign language in many provinces of China beginning in primary school, many teacher education programs require future teachers to demonstrate proficiency in English and English teaching methods. With

that end in mind, our students enrolled in a course designed to introduce the core concepts, principles, and methods of language acquisition and TESOL. The course was delivered in an intensive format. Students attended class four times a week, Monday through Thursday, six hours a day, for two consecutive weeks. All participants were students for whom Mandarin was their dominant language, and many indicated proficiency in the local language of Hu Chinese or Shanghainese. Students had formally studied English as foreign language in China for more than 10 years, albeit with varying levels of academic English proficiency as some students had been afforded the opportunity to study in English-speaking countries and/or had additional private tutoring available to them outside of formal school settings. TOEFL scores were not made available to us; however, we were assured before beginning the class that a high-level of English proficiency was to be expected. Nevertheless, while the students' multilingual communication skills were certainly impressive and appreciated by the authors who do not speak Mandarin Chinese, students' command of academic English varied widely. Some students struggled to communicate orally, whereas others demonstrated oral and written academic language typical of English-dominant speakers.

Upon completing the first week of the class, students completed an assignment that was designed to promote reflection. Namely, we required students to construct a "Language Learning Autobiography (LLA)", a reflective essay of approximately 500 words which prompted them to recount their language learning experience and comment on the atmosphere, instruction, and effectiveness of their formal and informal language learning experiences specifically in terms of instruction that supported their listening, speaking, reading and writing in English (Bailey, 1996; Posada-Ortiz & Garzón, 2019). The assignment is a strong first step in supporting Zeichner's (1983) call for examination of the learning experience and promotes the initial levels of critical teacher reflection outlined by Farrell (2016). To prepare students to write this reflection, we devoted one full class period of approximately five hours to discussion of the language and organizational structure of written reflections. Students were given three days to complete the writing assignment which will serve as the unit of analysis for this study. Before presenting our SFL analysis of examples of student writing, we offer a descriptive analysis of how we incorporated SFL theory into our teaching of writing.

3.2 Theory into Practice: The Appraisal Workshop

To support our advanced multilingual writers in constructing effective LLAs, we created a series of language-focused lessons we called an "Appraisal Workshop." These lessons consisted of approximately five hours of SFL-informed instruction designed to build our students' metalinguistic awareness by highlighting the relationship among the purpose, organizational structure, and linguistic resources that work together to accomplish the goals of reflective writing in teacher education. The lessons were designed to align with the teaching and learning cycle of genre

pedagogy developed by SFL scholars which aims to improve students' writing through deconstruction of model texts, joint construction and examination of writing, and independent writing (Feez, 1998; Gibbons, 2014). In the next section, we detail how we delivered this instruction with special attention to the role that SFL played in that instruction so that teacher educators will have a clear example of how to bridge theory and practice in their own linguistically diverse classrooms.

3.3 The Appraisal Workshop

Our initial instruction focused on building our students' field of knowledge about language learning. We created a connector activity designed to promote students' background knowledge. We grouped students randomly in triads to reflect on their language learning experience through oral discussion using English, Mandarin, or both languages. Following the oral group discussion, we asked students to complete a silent journal activity individually in which we invited them to write about their experience learning English as a new language. We requested they compose the journal response in English to facilitate our analysis as we cannot read Mandarin. We gave them 15 minutes in class to complete this activity and provided a target of approximately 100 words. The assignment called on students to comment on what they remembered about the atmosphere of their EFL class and how it influenced their learning. The discussion and silent journal activity prompted students to not only tap into their background knowledge on the language learning classroom experience, but also facilitated the creation of a sample text that most likely would utilize a sufficient amount of appraisal resources that they would use to analyze later in the workshop.

After students had finished their silent journal writing, we projected two teacher-constructed excerpts from reflective autobiographies (Table 1) and guided our students in a whole-group analysis and deconstruction of the sample texts. Teachers routinely choose exemplar texts to highlight ways language is used during the deconstruction phase of the teaching and learning cycle of genre pedagogy (Gibbons, 2014). We find SFL allows teachers to focus on various aspects of language present in particular genres, in this case tenor and its accompanying appraisal resources. It is also worth noting that we designed the examples to model how writers could use appraisal resources to construct reflections, rather than to highlight the differences between language choices that locate a text on a continuum of spoken or written discourse. While such emphasis on how writers can use resources within spoken or written registers constitutes an important part of SFL based pedagogy, our focus remains on the use of appraisal resources for evaluation (see Dare, 2010) for an example of how teachers can teach spoken and written register variables).

Table 1: *Teacher-Constructed Reflective Writing Samples*

Example One	When I was twelve years old, I started to learn the Spanish language. The language was interesting to me because I had made friends in school who could speak it. My teacher was an excellent teacher and I learned a lot from her.
Example Two	When I was twelve years old, I was <u>told to study</u> the Spanish language. The language <u>intrigued</u> me because I had friends who could speak it. My teacher was an <u>inadequate</u> instructor, and I learned <u>absolutely nothing</u> from her.

To start the conversation about the role appraisal resources play in reflective writing, we first asked students to read and contrast the examples. Next, we posed the question, “How do the underlined language choices change the meaning of the reflection?” Students formed dyads at their tables to discuss the differences in the exemplar texts. After five minutes, we regrouped and students shared their thoughts on the question. One student noted that the phrase “told to study” made it “sound like they had no choice.” A second student noted that the phrase “I learned absolutely nothing from her” was very negative and made her feel “sad for the student.” After these initial responses, we brought students attention to how particular language choices convey certain aspects of meaning, particularly aspects of attitude such as in the choice of the word “told” rather than “started to learn” and graduation or level of force and focus in the choice “absolutely nothing.” We appealed to our students to consider how the underlined language choices helped realize subtle shades of meaning.

At this point in our instruction, we introduced the aspects of appraisal (attitude, engagement, and graduation) and provided both formal definitions and examples of sentences that employed the resources contributing to the highlighted appraisal resource. We started by providing the example below which we felt would be an obvious illustration of language that realized a negative polarity in terms of attitude. We asked students to read the sentence, determine if it was negative or positive in its judgement and evaluation of the teacher, and note which words or phrases lead them to determine the polarity of the selected clauses.

Table 2: *Linguistic Resources Contributing to Attitude*

Definition	Positive and negative emotional reactions that show Affect, Judgment and Evaluation.
Example	The teacher <u>was disgusted</u> by her students’ errors.

Students were quick to note the obvious negative connotation of the sentence, so we asked them to provide alternative phrasings that would alter the “negative” polarity of the clause. Responses included, “The teacher was surprised by her students’

errors” and “The teacher was worried by her students’ errors.” These examples provided us an opportunity to discuss how the language of reflection often includes emotionally charged terms that reveal our inner thoughts and judgment on moral actions and evaluation of performance and how those choices of mental processes (i.e. surprised vs. worried) influence the meaning of the clause.

Next, we introduced the aspect of graduation. We acknowledge that students may know this word from another context (i.e. school graduation), but that in this case, the word refers to the way language is used to show intensity and force. We provided the following examples for students to consider and brought their attention to how each of the underlined phrases amplified the force or sharpened the focus of the sentence.

Table 3: *Linguistic Resources Contributing to Graduation*

Definition: Using language to demonstrate levels of force and intensity.
Examples: She is the <u>most talented teacher</u> of languages in China. She is an <u>incredibly talented teacher</u> and linguist who knows how to explain complex language patterns. He is the <u>worst teacher in the entire universe</u> who can not explain anything without becoming angry.

Last, we looked at the linguistic resources contributing to levels of engagement in a text by providing a sentence that differed only in its introductory clause. The presentation of sentences with alternative introductory clauses was meant to demonstrate the range of engagement that can be employed in a text.

Table 4: *Linguistic Resources Contributing to Engagement*

Engagement: Using language to demonstrate interaction with external ideas.
Examples: <u>The teacher prepared every lesson</u> with students’ interests in mind. <u>It was obvious</u> the teacher prepared her lessons with students’ interests in mind. <u>It is probable</u> that the teacher prepared her lessons with the students’ interests in mind. <u>I know that</u> the teacher prepared her lessons with the students’ interests in mind.

Following this direct instruction focusing on the linguistic resources of the appraisal framework, we directed students to engage in application and analysis in groups. For this activity, they used the 100-word draft of their responses that they had created earlier in class. In groups, we asked them to choose one of the group members’ drafts and follow steps to conduct a guided analysis of the text.

Group Analysis Directions

- Underline any words that show ATTITUDE in your notes. Put a “+” above if you think your word choice is positive. Put a “-” if you think your word choice is negative.
- Circle any words that you think show GRADUATION.
- Put a smiling face next to any words that show ENGAGEMENT

After students completed this activity, we centered our instruction on the organizational structure of the genre of reflections in teacher education. Through this instruction we sought to make visible how the organizational structure of the genre of reflections helps to accomplish its purpose. We provided a chart that outlined the identifiable stage of the genre, its purpose, and the typical language features that contribute to accomplishing the purpose of the genre.

Table 5: *Typical Stages of the Genre of Reflection*

• Stage	• Purpose of Stage	• Typical Language Features
• Orientation	• To share with your reader the context of the experience (e.g. where, when, who, and how)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First person (I) • Participants to show who is involved in the action • Past tense of processes to describe action • Descriptive Words to pinpoint location, duration, time, manner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episode I • Episode 2 • Episode 3, etc. 	• To describe to the reader moments that illustrate your experience learning a language. These episodes describe events in the process of language learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past tense • Positive or negative appraisal
• Reflection Statement/Conclusion	• To state to the reader how your experience learning English may influence your future practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future verb tense (will) • Modality (may, might, will, shall)

After we provided students with explicit linguistic instruction focusing on the role of appraisal resources in reflections and how they are structured to accomplish their purpose, we asked students to take 30 minutes to outline and begin a first draft in class and finish them for homework over a period of 48 hours.

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Thus far, we have demonstrated how we use the SFL-based appraisal framework in our teaching. In this section of the paper, we shift our emphasis to the second stated purpose of our paper, which is to examine how we use the appraisal framework as an analytical tool to help us understand the reflective writing practices of our multilingual teacher candidates. We give specific attention to grammatical resources comprising the appraisal framework, so we may understand how our students use English to convey a stance and opinion on their language learning experiences within their written reflections.

There is a connection between our SFL analysis and our teaching. Particularly, we hope to use what we learn from our analysis to design lessons that allow students to access content more efficiently, express meaning more effectively, and negotiate the evaluative language typically found in reflective writing more precisely.

The procedure of our analysis included collecting all the students' work samples (n=96). After collecting these samples, we randomly selected the work of two students. We chose a paragraph from each students' work, comprising approximately 100 words each. While we could apply our SFL analysis to the work of all 96 students, and to the entire written work, our intent is to demonstrate application of theory to practice rather than making any broad claims about language development; therefore, focusing our analysis on the work of only two students is sufficient for our goal of demonstrating how teachers and researchers can use SFL as a tool for understanding the use of appraisal resources in students' reflective writing.

3.5 Procedure of Analysis and Coding Protocol

Our analysis was conducted in two distinct phases. First, we individually read through the selected samples and coded these texts according to key aspects of the appraisal framework namely, attitude, graduation, and engagement. Next, upon completing our individual analysis, we shared our initial analytical findings and arrived at consensus regarding what the findings indicated about students' use of the appraisal framework in their reflective writing and what that meant for our future writing instruction. As we shared our individual appraisal analyses, we discovered our interpretations were congruent.

Below, we have transcribed the two writing samples that served as data and follow that transcription with our SFL analysis. Chen and Cali (pseudonyms) were both second-year students who had each reported studying English in school settings in China for over ten years. In both paragraphs, the student writers offer a description of the personal characteristics of their teachers and comment on the teachers' personality as it contributes to the overall atmosphere of the class. Both passages were chosen because they contain examples of evaluative language.

SFL Appraisal Analysis of Student Writing

Sample 1: Chen.

She always encourages us to speak English and write in English. As we persist in writing diaries in English though we make mistakes now and then. She always corrects them patiently, and tells us some methods. The atmosphere of the class was always relax (sic) and happy. The teacher's rigorous teaching style made me learn vocabulary and grammar well. I think what I learned that day was really useful to my English study today. They were the foundations of importance. What's more, the encouraging teaching style made me dare to express myself, because oral English is also important for English learning.

Sample 2. Cici/Cali

The speaking teacher is a talented person and his class was relaxed always full of laugh (sic). He is good at combine (sic) his sense of humor with knowledge and let us learning through laughing. What's more he is very kind and friendly. Why I am shy and afraid of speaking, he smiled at me and encouraged me in a warm and kind way. It is his encouragement that makes me start to be able to talk confidently.

4. FINDINGS

As we turn to sharing the findings of our analysis, we remind our readers that we are not making definitive statements about our students' language development, but instead, demonstrating how teachers can use the appraisal framework to gain a better understanding of the strengths and challenges their students face so they make informed instructional decisions to support students in writing more effective reflections. In this section, we will highlight how our students used elements of the appraisal framework to construct meaning within the genre of reflection. We will also comment on the significance of these findings in terms of understanding our students' writing practices and suggest ways teachers may avail themselves of the appraisal framework of SFL as a tool for teaching and analyzing their students' reflective writing.

4.1 SFL Analysis

Our findings provide significant information about how our focal students, Chen and Cali, negotiated meaning using resources of the appraisal framework when engaging in reflective writing. In terms of Attitude (affect, judgment, appreciation) both students used grammatical resources to offer their opinion on the teaching style and class atmosphere the teacher created. For instance, Chen praises her teacher's supportive tone as she explains, "She always encourages us to speak English and write in English." The mental process "encourages" demonstrates affect by expressing feelings approaching positive polarity. Cali also makes language choices that express a positive evaluation of the atmosphere of the class as she observes that "his class was always relaxed."

In addition to the choice of process types and their contribution to attitude, it is also important to note the clause structure that both students repeatedly employ to realize this function. Namely, both writers employ relational clauses (i.e. Participant + Relational Verb “Be” + Positive Descriptor) to express appreciation, in particular a positive evaluation of the class atmosphere. Both students also realize attitude in their writing through grammatical resources that function to express judgment of the teacher’s behavior. For example, Cali uses a relational clause to comment on her teacher’s demeanor, specifically his skillful combination of humor and knowledge, stating: “he is very kind and friendly.” Additionally, both writers employ grammatical resources to construct the attitudinal subset of appreciation. Within the clause, “It is his encouragement that makes me start to be able to talk confidently”, she encodes her positive attitude within the nominalized form of the process, “encourage.”

In terms of graduation, both writers used grammatical resources to amplify their feelings and sharpen the focus of their evaluation. Chen demonstrated this technique more frequently by using grammatical resources to quantify processes. Notably, she amplifies the positive actions of her teacher by using the modifier “always” including three distinct instantiations of this quantifier. Conversely, Cali uses grammatical resources expressing graduation only once, by including the phrase “What’s more” which functions to not only amplify the focus on the positive behavior of the teacher but also to advance the text by adding an element of cohesion. Coincidentally, this phrase appears in both students’ excerpts functioning to enhance the positive assessment of the teacher’s instructional style.

Last, it is both interesting and important to note that no grammatical resources constructing engagement were noted in our analysis. Writers typically use grammatical resources of engagement to emphasize their point by interacting or bringing in external voices from outside the text. Examples of engagement with external voices include direct references or paraphrasing (See Hood, 2004; Mori, 2017). We believe the context of the class and the parameters of the assignment influenced the lack of inclusion of engagement resources. In terms of the class, the text was completed during the first few days of an intensive two-week class. There was no expectation at that point that students would engage with key theorists or researchers in the field of language acquisition. While strong academic writing typically includes such references, students at the early stages of content learning are less likely to include those resources (Mori, 2017). Secondly, although including outside reference to support claims would be welcomed, writers may be less likely to include engagement with outside voices or external resources at this point in the development of her writing because the writer is focused on interpreting her own experiences. In short, students may take up the assignment as an opinion piece and rely solely on their own ideas to interpret their experiences.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Relation to Other Language Learning Theories and EFL Teaching Approaches

Our study shows how SFL can be incorporated into writing instruction in teacher education to help non-dominant English users negotiate meaning within the genre of written reflection. Particularly, we show how the theory differs from the theories that influence competing approaches to writing instruction which tend to dominate EMI in China (Schulze & Caceda, 2019; Yang, 2016; Zhang, 2018,). Most notably, SFL has little resemblance to teaching approaches influenced by behaviorism which tend to emphasize the use of rote responses, templates, and fixed phrases. Additionally, SFL influenced teaching moves beyond a focus on syntax (Zhang, 2018) to look at meaning beyond the clause (Martin & Rose, 2005), such as the analysis of the interpersonal metafunction presented in this article. SFL allows for a more constructivist and interactionist approach to teaching and learning. This theoretical basis is evident in the discussions of language that we facilitate with students. As illustrated in the data presented above, these discussions brought attention to the way writers make choices in their writing based on context, audience, and purpose rather than prescriptive rules that focus on providing limited linguistic choices for writers to employ to make meaning. These choices help writers to express their opinion, engage with other voices, and organize their thoughts. Our research echoes recent studies by Correa & Echeveria (2017) and Yang (2016). Correa & Echeveria (2017) also found that an SFL approach supported students in moving beyond rules to see writing as situated in context requiring awareness of purpose and audience and employment of language choices that reflected that awareness. Additionally, Yang (2016) constructed a robust comparative study which compared US and Chinese students' use of appraisal resources in argumentative writing and found Chinese students' writing "shows a sign of shortage in indirect attitudinal resources" (2016, p. 1010). As in our study, Yang shows how SFL has the potential to broaden students' ability to examine appraisal resources to understand how they can be used to express opinions and value in a less emotional, more distanced, and increasingly nuanced way as expected by the discipline of teacher education. The study also relates to the work of Zhang (2018) who conducted a longitudinal study using SFL to understand the literacy practices of ELs in an urban university in China. Like her work, we saw how a focus on appraisal resources heightened students' awareness of how language can be used in precise ways to convey attitude and emotion, essential elements of reflective writing in teacher preparation contexts.

Unlike Zhang's study, however, our work provides only a snapshot in time of the teaching practices that aim to accomplish this heightened language awareness. Teachers and teacher educators face the challenge of integrating language support within content courses. These courses are not designed to be language learning

courses, per se, but nevertheless require teachers to be language teachers as they simultaneously teach the content and language expectations of the discipline. This is no easy task for educators who are limited by demands of time and lack of SFL based resources for classroom instruction. It is our hope that this study illustrates how practicing educators can combine language and content learning within writing instruction within existing curricula and in alignment with professional standards.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Application to Teaching

The information provided to us by our SFL analysis of the appraisal resources employed in students' reflective writing allows us to think critically about the next steps in our instruction. Given what our analysis revealed about students' use of the linguistic resources constructing attitude within written reflections, a potential subsequent instructional step might focus on how to support students in more effectively communicating a critical stance on their learning experience. As we mentioned in our introduction, reflection remains a vital aspect of a teacher's professional development as one must learn to not only examine the teacher's role in the learning experience, but also to take a critical stance towards the context of the learning situation, including cultural and linguistic influences that may constrain or promote learning (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). The excerpt from our student writers shows that they are clearly at the early stages of reflection as they describe the central role of their teacher on learning, rather than delving deeper into the broader cultural context that influenced their language learning experience (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012).

Supporting students in taking a more critical stance within their evaluation may prove challenging due to cultural contexts. While teacher evaluation has become prominent in China in recent years (Lingyan, 2020), the struggle to promote the taking of a critical stance in reflective writing may be attributed to a classroom culture that provides infrequent opportunities to offer written critique to those in authority in a way that is not completely anonymous. With that cultural implication in mind, teachers working with students such as ours have an opportunity to engage in content-based language instruction by collaboratively analyzing models of texts that exemplify critical evaluative stances within reflective writing and using those examples to discuss more substantive issues related to the cultural contexts for education. More concretely, content-based language instruction would involve the simultaneous discussion of language teaching pedagogy through examination of students' work followed by students and teachers collaborating to rewrite a paragraph in ways that engage learners with concepts of pedagogy in a more critical fashion. Such collaborative rewriting or recasting (Gibbons, 2014) of paragraphs would involve explicit instruction aimed to make visible to students how writers can use appraisal resources to offer subtle and respectful critique, thus accomplishing the critical aspect of the genre while respecting cultural norms.

An additional example of how we could design content-based language instruction would include focusing on what SFL theorists call the clausal mood, or how the syntactic forms used to express meanings within the clause (i.e. indicative, declarative, or interrogative). To do so, we could design lessons that guided writers to express critique by using passive sentence forms thus deemphasizing agency. With the same goal in mind, we could exemplify how writers may use nominalized forms of verbs that eliminate agency completely. Having command of these syntactic forms allows writers to make their critique less culturally disruptive, avoiding direct challenge to authority in writing.

Regarding linguistic resources to accomplish graduation, our student writers need more choices to amplify meanings, particularly with respect to expressing frequency. As SFL conceives of meaning as something which is constructed through a pathway of linguistic choices (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), each changing and constructing the meaning in subtle ways, we could provide learners synonyms for words such as “always”, but include them on a visual spectrum of linguistic choices for expressing frequency with “always” at the top of the spectrum and “never” at the bottom. Visual tools such as that make the available choices visible to learners and allow them to contemplate, think, engage, and choose; thus, increasing their linguistic awareness and precision as they construct written reflections.

To improve students' use of engagement resources within written reflection, we would show students how to connect their ideas and opinions with existing scholarship. For instance, we could show them models of how proficient writers use clauses to make these connections. We could use sentence frames that include such phrases that facilitate the connections. Creating a co-constructed model in which the students and teachers worked together to create the piece with the teacher providing explicit modeling of the ways students can draw on outside resources to strengthen their claims, would be potentially impactful (See Ngo & Unsworth, 2015; for a robust discussion of instructional strategies involving the appraisal framework).

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to demonstrate how teacher educators may draw on SFL theory, particularly the appraisal framework, to both enrich their teaching and inform their understanding of students' reflective writing practices. Going forward, we recognize there exists a need for more research that examines applications of the theory in linguistically diverse instructional contexts. Such research has the potential to impact teaching positively by demonstrating how the teaching of language and content need not be situated on parallel instructional paths, but instead be closely integrated in ways that support the professional development of multilingual future ESOL teachers.

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