

# Understanding the Developing Persuasive Writing Practices of an Adolescent Emergent Bilingual through Systemic Functional Linguistics: A Case Study

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**Abstract.** This article presents the findings of a qualitative case study which stems from a teacher action-research project that analyzes the persuasive academic writing practices of an adolescent, beginning-level English language learner (ELL) and the teaching practices of a veteran English as second language teacher (the author). The author, who is also the teacher and researcher, details the implementation of a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)-based pedagogy designed to support ELLs in increasing their control of the linguistic resources necessary to write persuasive texts in school contexts. The SFL analysis of written persuasive arguments composed by the focal student before and after the implementation of the SFL-based pedagogy indicates the student's increased control of both discourse structure and register. This purpose of the study is twofold: to present a detailed exploration of SFL pedagogy in practice and to demonstrate how teachers can use SFL to understand the developing writing practices of their emergent bilingual students.

**Keywords:** English language learners; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Genre based Pedagogy; Academic Writing

## Introduction

Students in US middle schools (years 6-8) are expected to construct cohesive, persuasive arguments using academic language. Employing the expected academic language and discourse structure of persuasive arguments can be a daunting task for emergent bilingual English language learners (ELLs) as they simultaneously learn to negotiate meaning from social as well as academic language (Gibbons, 2015; O'Halloran, 2014). Although research indicates that ELLs may take upwards of seven years to develop academic language proficiency (Collier, 1989), the current instructional context, influenced by the expectations of the Common Core and the standards-based educational reform movement prevalent in US public schools, does not afford ELLs seven years to develop a command of academic writing practices equivalent to that of a native

speaker of English. ELLs who have not demonstrated control of academic language remain at risk of not completing school and, consequently, failing to demonstrate sufficient career and college readiness. Therefore, it remains imperative that ELLs receive instructional scaffolding designed to accelerate the pace of their academic persuasive writing development. Correspondingly, teachers of ELLs need tools for understanding the demands of persuasive academic language and well-researched instructional methods for making those demands visible to their students. With these challenges in mind, I constructed the following research questions to guide my study:

How can systemic functional linguistic-based genre pedagogy support ELLs in expanding their control of the linguistic resources necessary to construct written persuasive texts composed in school contexts?

What can systemic functional linguistics (SFL) tell teachers about the academic writing practices of ELLs?

Recent research indicates a SFL-based pedagogy designed to make the discourse structure and linguistic features typical of persuasive academic writing visible can have a significant impact on the way ELLs shape persuasive texts (Brisk, 2014; O'Halloran, 2014; Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Schulze, 2011, 2015). For instance, Gebhard et. al (2007) demonstrate how SFL-based pedagogy can support 5<sup>th</sup> graders in constructing arguments to change school policies. Schulze (2011) illustrated how SFL-based pedagogy facilitates ELLs in participating in persuasive civic discourse. Both studies indicate that SFL-based pedagogy results in ELLs producing more effective arguments that employed the linguistic features such as syntax, cohesive elements and word choices, and discourse structures expected of academic persuasive writing. While these studies have highlighted the instructional practices that have influenced the academic writing development of ELLs in primary and upper elementary settings, there has not been sufficient research that explores the implementation of SFL-based pedagogy in middle school ESL instructional contexts nor research that clearly shows how teachers can use SFL analysis of student texts to better understand how emergent bilinguals learn to write in academic settings (Schulze, 2016). Additionally, teacher educators and professional educators seeking to develop proficiency in SFL pedagogy need additional, explicit examples that clearly illustrate how SFL theory can be put into practice in ESL classrooms (Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007; Paugh & Moran, 2013; Schulze, 2011, 2015).

As a teacher dedicated to reflective practice, I was eager to discover potential connections between my teaching and changes in my students' academic writing practices. I decided to collect data related to my implementation of SFL-based pedagogy. Creating a teacher-action research project allowed me space to pose questions about the challenges of my teaching practice and my focal student's learning, reflect on the data, and inform my future practice. Focusing on the work of one student through a case study approach allowed me room to conduct an in-depth and intricate SFL analysis of the changing writing practices of an ELL. Through the descriptive case study presented in this article, I illustrate the teaching practices of a veteran ESL teacher (the author) and academic writing practices of a beginning-level ELL. The case study shows how SFL-based

pedagogy provides visible instruction focusing on the organization and linguistic features of persuasive academic writing. Complementing the description of SFL-based pedagogy, SFL analysis of a persuasive argument produced by a focal student seeks to connect changes in the organizational structure and academic language use with SFL-based pedagogy. Last, the study illustrates how the cultural and linguistic resources of ELLs can be embedded in SFL-based pedagogy in ways that promote student investment in improving academic persuasive writing practices.

### **Context**

The study was born from a necessity many teachers encounter in their classrooms. My students needed to learn how to use academic language effectively to read and write in academic contexts and wanted to do so in an engaging manner that promoted their investment in learning. As a teacher providing supplemental English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade ELLs, I was tasked with supporting the academic literacy development of ten Caribbean-born Spanish speakers. The task was made complicated because the instructional materials the large, urban school district provided failed to promote student investment in learning English. The textbook consisted of a series of decontextualized grammar exercises coupled with Mexican-centric reading passages about such topics as the historical contribution of the Aztecs and making tamales, topics which did not resonate with my Caribbean-born students. On the other hand, my students frequently expressed an interest in the musical genre of reggaeton<sup>1</sup> and shared critiques of artists and their latest songs. Therefore, I had what I would describe as a pedagogical epiphany through which I determined that exploring reggaeton would potentially promote my students' investment in learning to write persuasive arguments as it would allow my students to assume the role of content experts apprenticing me into the world of reggaeton, while I apprenticed them into the world of persuasive academic writing in English.

My first step was to design a standards-based instructional unit centered on the topic of reggaeton music. The Common Core State Standards adopted by the majority of US states require students in grades 6-8 to compose persuasive arguments. Therefore, I tasked my students with constructing a persuasive argument in the form of a persuasive music reviewed designed to convince their peers to purchase and download the latest musical work of their favorite reggaeton artist. To do so, I taught students how to compose arguments that employed the discourse structure and register expected of persuasive academic written discourse.

To gain a baseline assessment of their current control of the discourse structure and language features associated with persuasive writing, I invited my students to write an initial draft of their music review. The "un-coached" first drafts of students' writing did not effectively accomplish the persuasive purpose. The text produced by my focal student, whom I will call Laura, demonstrated a significant number of linguistic strengths demonstrated by an emergent

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<sup>1</sup> Reggaeton is genre of music with Latin and Caribbean roots.

bilingual student, but also illustrated significant challenges faced by ELLs learning to control the grammatical and lexical resources necessary for effective academic writing.

Mi nina bonita  
 I like This artist  
 Because the songs are romantic does are chino and nacho. I recommend because is very beautiful And romantic And they can arrive far away with this music because is very nice and cute. Is better than the rest because no serve and I don't like.

**Figure 1. Laura's First Draft of Argumentative Text**

Most noticeably, her text was short because it did not include significant detail that would inform the reader about her artist or the genre of his music. While there were some cohesive devices evident at the sentence level ("because, and"), it generally lacked sufficient use of linguistic devices that contributed to a cohesive and coherent text. Furthermore, although she made a recognizable attempt to convey a positive evaluation of the artist throughout her paragraph, her writing lacks adequate demonstration of the control of the lexical and grammatical resources to convey her positive judgement and evaluation of the artist and his work.

With Laura's linguistic strengths and challenges in mind, I sought to develop an instructional unit that would benefit her as well other students in the class who were also experiencing similar challenges. I decided to implement an SFL-based approach to writing instruction that brought explicit attention to the language features and discourse structure of persuasive arguments to gauge the effects of the pedagogy on helping Laura and students like her to become more effective persuasive writers.

### **Theoretical Framework: SFL, Genre, Schematic Structure, Register**

Before I present details of the instruction, it is important to understand the theoretical basis that informs SFL-based pedagogy. As its name suggests, systemic functional linguists consider language to be a semiotic system which is governed by choices that language users make in particular contexts. These language choices are influenced by one's ideological assumptions such as one's values and biases, the genre one enacts, and the register one employs to construct or react to particular context of situation (Schulze & Ramirez, 2007). *Register* is constructed by three distinct aspects: *field*, *tenor* and *mode*. These register variables can be somewhat simply stated as what is the topic, who or what is referenced, and the manner or channel in which the language act is being presented (Eggins, 2004; Gibbons, 2015). *Field* is concerned with the action happening within the text (the processes), who or what is participating in these events (the participants) and the linguistic features that designate when, where and how the events take place (the circumstances). From an SFL perspective, processes form the principal foundation of a clause given that the clause is mainly about the action or the state in which the participants are involved (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The transitivity system of English grammar construes experience into a controllable group of process types. The central

categories of processes composing the transitivity system are divided into those that represent internal and external experience (the material and mental processes) and those that function to classify and identify (relational processes).

**Table 1. Three Principal Process Types from Focal Student Work**

Process Type	Material	Mental	Relational
Function	Shows external action	Shows internal actions	Classifies and identifies
Example	Drake sings in the genre of hip-hop.	He wants to tell people if you want something you have to work hard to succeed.	Drake is a good artist.

*Tenor* constitutes the second element of register. Language users utilize linguistic resources to create relationships and convey authority within written discourse. These linguistic choices often contribute to what writing teachers call “voice.” SFL theorists explore several linguistic elements to uncover the role language plays in establishing interpersonal relationships within a text. Namely, tenor analysis involves examining an author’s use of *appraisal resources* or, “the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways values are sourced and reader’s aligned” (Martin & Rose, 2008, p.25). Oftentimes such value systems are not made explicit, but are revealed only through close examination of the varying aspects of the system of appraisal upon which authors draw to express their values. Martin and Rose (2008) propose a tripartite system of appraisal involving engagement, graduation and attitude. Due to the space limitations of this article, my analysis will focus on the three principal linguistic elements that construct attitude within a text: affect, judgment, and appreciation.

Within the context of writing a persuasive music review, authors are expected to draw on appraisal resources to express attitude through opinions of various artists and their music. Persuasive writers call on appraisal resources to clarify their attitudes towards a subject or to construct a voice of authority. The three clauses below exemplify the varying appraisal resources as they may appear in the context of the persuasive argument students were expected to construct for this assignment.

**Table 2. Appraisal Value Resources**

Appraisal Aspect	Definition	Example
Affect	Expresses an attitude about an object or thing.	The music was boring.
Appreciation	Expresses thoughts regarding a phenomenon or action.	The audience found the rhythm captivating.
Judgment	Expresses thoughts on justice.	Banning IPODS from school was unfair.

*Mode* has to do with how the message is being conveyed and the role language plays in communicating that message. Spoken and written discourse frequently

rely on different language resources to make meaning. To analyze the mode of written discourse, linguists focus on features such as *conjunction, Theme and Rheme and repetition* (Brisk, 2014; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Schulze, 2011). Theme refers to first part of the message in the clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Rheme is described as what remains in the clause after the Theme. Though the Theme is frequently found in the subject position of the clause, it does not always take this role. Rather, various clause constituents can serve as the Theme, and thus create a marked theme that allows the author to emphasize varying aspects of the clause. As writers begin to develop control of written language, they also typically use patterns of Theme and Rheme to advance ideas throughout a text coherently and cohesively. For instance, writers typically introduce new information in the clause's final position. As the text unfolds, novel information is situated in the Theme position of the subsequent clause (Christie, 2012). The skillful manipulation of Theme and Rheme in a quasi-zig zag pattern is a fairly common way to bring what writers call "flow" to lengthy passages of texts.

With greater frequency, developing writers also begin to rely on repetition as a linguistic resource to maintain textual cohesion. Writers may repeat certain lexical terminology or entire phrases. Repetition is especially useful in texts that address complex or technical subjects as it helps to maintain focus on the topic. Good writers also begin to use cohesive elements to construct a logical flow. The logical relations often include contrast, as exemplified by the conjunctions "but" or "however", or equal relations, held together by the conjunctions "and" or "or." Although not all writers use elements of mode consistently, developing control of these elements typically indicates writing development (Schulze & Ramirez, 2007, Schulze 2011).

From an SFL view, the register variables described above play an important part in the construction of genre. According to SFL theorists, registers combine to form genres which enact socially recognizable meanings and accomplish tasks within a culture. Martin, Christie and Rothery (1987) define genre as a "staged, goal-oriented social process" with "structural forms that cultures use in certain contexts to achieve various purposes" (pg. 59). A genre is said to consist of stages because it usually advances sequentially through these stages to accomplish its purpose. Certain clause level elements like processes, participants, and circumstances tend serve as linguistic signposts through the stages (Eggs, 2004). While a text advances through its stages or "schematic structures" (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 9), the linguistic, syntactical and textual features associated with the genre work to accomplish a text's goal; thus, making genres "goal oriented." Genres are said to realize a social process because they are recognized as purposeful by participants who are members of the culture. The social processes typically associated with academic writing in school contexts involve: describing, narrating, synthesizing, analyzing, defining, explaining, evaluating, and persuading (Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Rose & Martin, 2012). The corresponding genres used to accomplish these social processes include: recounts, narratives, explanations, informational reports, and arguments.

## Persuasive Writing in School Contexts

Written arguments composed in school contexts employ a distinct discourse structure and contain recognizable linguistic feature (Derewianka, 1990). The first stage of persuasive argument usually begins with the presentation of the *issue* in which the author introduces the main topic of the argument and provides any relevant background to the reader. Typical linguistic features that contribute to the fulfillment of the purpose of this stage include the introduction of participants related to the field of discourse and circumstances of time and place used to describe these participants. In the second stage, the author typically takes a *position* and justifies it. During this stage, writers rely primarily on declarative sentence structure. Additionally, the position stage is typically distinguished by the inclusion of conjunctions at the paragraph and clause level that function to facilitate the construction of a cohesive introduction to the argument (Gibbons, 2015; Rose & Martin, 2012; Schulze, 2011). During the third stage, the author may include some form of *resolution* to the argument. Within the fourth and final stage, the author usually restates the position and *recommends* action. Within the entire argument, particular language features assist writers in accomplishing the genre's purpose. SFL linguists have identified linguistic features such as generalized participants, the timeless present tense of processes, emotive vocabulary, and cohesive connectors occurring at the clause and paragraph level (Derewianka, 1990; Schleppegrell, 2004).

## SFL-Based Teaching and Learning Cycle

The initial stage of instruction in the SFL-based teaching and learning cycle begins with the process of deconstruction in which teachers lead students in an analysis of model texts created to bring attention to the typical stages writers follow as they attempt to make meaning and the linguistic features they typically employ within each of the stages to help accomplish the genre's purpose. As part of the initial text deconstruction, teachers make explicit a text's social purpose, intended audience and typical *schematic structure*, the aforementioned stages through which a text typically progresses as meaning unfolds within the text. For teachers of ELLs, this stage frequently emphasizes building the field of knowledge of the topic as new writers may experience great difficulty writing about topics with which they are unfamiliar with in their home culture (Brisk, 2014; Gibbons, 2015). Following the textual deconstruction stage, the teaching and learning cycle continues with teachers and students jointly constructing a text which demonstrates the expected discourse structure and register. In the last phase of the teaching and learning cycle, teachers reduce the amount of direct instructional scaffolding and afford students opportunities to write independently. The teaching and learning cycle is intended to be recursive and allows for teachers to reenter the cycle according to the level of support students need to ultimately develop independent control and a critical orientation to the socially valued genres found in school contexts (Brisk, 2014; Gebhard, Harman & Seger, 2007; Rose & Martin, 2012, Schulze, 2011).

## SFL Intervention in Middle School ESL Classroom

As I implemented the teaching and learning cycle described above with my beginning-level ELL students, the deconstruction stage of instruction focused on building the field of discourse. Although I had heard my students conversing about reggaeton before and after class and had read the initial drafts of their persuasive music reviews, I needed a way of assessing their prior knowledge of reggaeton before continuing instruction. With this goal in mind, I facilitated a guided discussion in which I asked students to tell me what they already knew about reggaeton. I asked students to share which artists were most popular and provided language frames written on the white board such as “*One artist I know is . . .*” to promote the participation of all students in the discussion. I then transcribed the list of artists they identified in the class discussion on chart paper which I displayed in the front of the room. After completing the transcription of the list, I prompted students to tell me what they knew about the origins of reggaeton. To facilitate student responses, I defined the word “origin” in Spanish. I pointed out that the word is a direct cognate of the Spanish word (*Origen*) thereby encouraging them to use their existing knowledge of language to understand the word’s meaning and the meaning of the question. As students shared their responses in the group discussion, I transcribed their responses on a KWL chart. KWL serves as an acronym for What We Know, What We Want to Know and What We Learned. The construction of a KWL chart helped me guide my students’ thinking, as I recorded their understandings of the topic before and after we began a deeper exploration of the topic of reggaeton. Following the co-construction of the KWL chart, I distributed a shared reading about the history of reggaeton intended to answer the questions we constructed regarding the origin of the musical genre of reggaeton. The text provided a comprehensive overview of the history of reggaeton and exemplified several linguistic features expected in written persuasive arguments. For instance, the text contained a number of participants related to the field of discourse of music such as: “reggaeton”, “music”, “singers”, and “rhythm”, among others. Furthermore, the author of the text drew extensively on appraisal resources to convey attitude and evaluation. Last, the text contained a number of logical connectors and pronouns that function to bring cohesion and coherence to the text.

The next stage of the teaching and learning cycle called for me to conduct a modeled writing exercise. During the course of my modeled writing, I employed instructional strategies such as “think aloud” to make my composition strategies visible and to build my students’ metalinguistic awareness related to the organizational and linguistic choices I employed to construct persuasive text. The modeled writing was a complex instructional practice involving frequent recasting of my written text. The entire modeled writing activity took approximately 25 minutes and gave me space to make visible the language choices writers contemplate when constructing persuasive texts. Following the modeled writing, I displayed the teacher-constructed text as an exemplar to the whole group and guided students through an analysis of the stages and linguistic features of persuasive texts. I invited students to read the text aloud with me. As we read the text aloud, we stopped to define new lexical items and discuss how particular word choices contributed to the purpose of persuading



readers to download the work of the chosen artist. As we analyzed the text, I had students chart processes, participants and circumstances in their notebooks. Next, students worked collaboratively in dyads to identify the stages of the text. They had 10 minutes to use their notes and the exemplar texts we had analyzed, to identify each stage of the persuasive argument.

Following the analysis of the teacher-constructed text, we jointly constructed a new text. Throughout the joint construction, students volunteered potential sentences and word choices. My role including offering suggestions, translating, recasting to improve syntax, and insisting on punctuation. I did not edit students' words completely, as constructing an perfect work sample was not the goal of joint construction. Instead, I offered suggestions that I thought would augment my students' understanding of the field of knowledge and discourse structure of the genre. I prompted them to use the model texts and the words and phrases they had recorded in their notebooks. I circled words and underlined phrases that they contributed on the chart paper and stopped to discuss why they chose a particular word or phrase in an effort to bring attention to those choices to all learners in the class. Once the jointly constructed text was drafted, I asked students to evaluate the text to ensure that the stages and linguistic features typical of persuasive text were evident and that the text had ultimately accomplished its task of effectively persuading its audience to download the latest album of a reggaeton artist.

The last step in teaching and learning cycle calls for students to construct texts independently. Although I was not taking a central role at this point of instruction, I did continue to provide instructional support. Namely, I distributed a graphic organizer to assist in organizing their drafts. I also encouraged students to use resources such as the modeled texts and word-lists that they kept in their notebooks, the jointly constructed text which was displayed prominently in the classroom, a bilingual dictionary, and perhaps most importantly, each other. I wanted them to identify as language learners who not only had command of the topic of reggaeton, but also had developed significant content knowledge regarding how to construct an effective persuasive text. After they were finished writing, they conferenced with me individually. During the writing conferences, students edited, conducted organizational revisions, and consulted the graphic organizer to evaluate their work. Following the individual conference, they created their final draft.

### **Methods: Focal student, data collection and analysis**

The instructional unit highlighted in this study took place over the course of approximately five weeks in which I met with students for approximately two hours each day. As I was the teacher of record, I had permission to collect and analyze data related to student performance, however, I did share an overview of the project with parents and obtained their permission to share the results of the study. The focal student for the case study, whom I will call by the pseudonym, Laura, was selected because the linguistic challenges she displayed in her first draft of the persuasive text were representative of the challenges that other ELLs at the beginning stages of English language acquisition experience.

Laura was a 13-year-old from the Dominican Republic who had recently enrolled in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. According to her school records, her parents, and my observations, she was fully literate in Spanish. She had entered the United States within the last year and was identified as a beginning-level ELL.

To gain a deeper understanding of how Laura's writing practices changed during the course of SFL-based instruction, I collected numerous sources of data related to my teaching and her learning. During the study, I collected students' notebooks, written drafts, and made substantial field notes after each class. I collected two versions of students' texts composed during the course of my teaching. The first text was a "first draft" representing the "un-coached" version of a persuasive text created prior to the implementation of SFL-based pedagogy. The second text was composed following the teaching and learning cycle. Figure Three displays the two instantiations of Laura's texts which are analyzed within the findings section of this article.

Laura's First Text	Laura's Text Composed Following SFL-based pedagogy
<p>Mi nina bonita I like This artist Because the songs are romantic does are chino and nacho. I recommend because is very beautiful And romantic And they can arrive far away with this music because is very nice and cute. Is better than the rest because no serve and I don't like.</p>	<p>Drake sings in the genre of Hip Hop  He's a up and coming artist  His most famous song now is "forever"  He was born on October 24, 1986 in Toronto, Canada  Drake is a good artist  Became e he writer interesting lyrics  For example in the song "Forever" he tell a story about a boy who want to learn to play basketball.  He wants to tell the people if you want some thing you have to work hard to succeed.  I recommend that you listen to his music and download it.  I recommend his music became e its emotional and interesting.  I recommend Drake became e his songs are popular and soulful.  He sings in the hip---hop genre. and download his most famous song now.  It is "Forever"  and also his famous song became e it talk about important things.</p>

**Figure 3. Laura's Persuasive Arguments**

I conducted an SFL analysis of Laura's second text to identify changes in the discourse structure and register and subsequently evaluate changes in her

persuasive writing practices following SFL-based pedagogy. To analyze the extent to which Laura employed the recognizable discourse structure expected of persuasive texts, I began by transcribing her writing and then separating each clause. Next, I identified and labeled each stage of the schematic structure typically found in arguments as identified by SFL linguists (Brisk, 2014; Derewianka, 1990; Rose & Martin, 2012). After identifying the recognizable stages of the discourse structure of the persuasive argument, I further identified and labeled the linguistic features indicative of the stage and identified language features that contributed to the accomplishment of the social purpose of persuasive texts.

Following the analysis of the discourse structure, I turned my attention to register, analyzing the language features of Laura's texts to evaluate whether the language choices constructed the expected register of academic persuasive writing. Using the typed transcription of Laura's texts which had been divided into clauses, I analyzed transitivity patterns contributing to the field of discourse (Christie, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The processes were next divided into subcategories of material, relational, and mental processes. Next, to highlight how Laura used appraisal, I made a visual chart that included all lexical items with the exclusion of articles and prepositions that occurred more than twice in her texts. The words and phrases were subsequently transcribed to a chart designed to locate the lexical choices on an appraisal continuum of word choices that indicated positive evaluations or judgments. Words that I interpreted as reflecting a positive judgment or evaluation were placed closer to the plus sign. Last, I analyzed the mode by identifying and labeling cohesive elements such as repetition and conjunctions as well as identifying the Theme and Rheme of each clause.

### **Findings Related to Control of Schematic Structure**

SFL analysis of Laura's text composed following SFL-based pedagogy indicates more effective control of schematic structure necessary to realize meaning within her argument. For example, as her text unfolds, she presents a sequenced discourse structure beginning with an issue statement. Whereas in the first rendition of her argument, she began her text with a fragment identifying the title of a song (Mi Nina Bonita), in her second version she presents a more carefully constructed introduction for her reader that, in turn, more effectively orients her reader to the topic of the text. For instance, within the first two clauses of her text, she efficiently introduces her reader to her topic by introducing the artist in the form of the participant "Drake" and identifying the type of music he composes and reveals her positive attitude/affect towards his music.

*Drake sings in the genre of Hip Hop. He's an up and coming artist.*

Improvement in Laura's construction of an issue statement can be traced directly to two elements of SFL-based pedagogy. First, during the stage of instruction devoted to building the field of knowledge of the purpose and structure of persuasive texts, I had reinforced the important function of the issue statement as we completed a graphic organizer designed to support students

with understanding the function of each stage of persuasive argument. During this portion of instruction, I defined the purpose of the issue statement in terms of its function: orienting the reader to the topic of the writing. Second, during the modeled writing stage of the teaching and learning cycle, I used “think aloud” strategies to explicitly emphasize that effective persuasive writers introduce readers to the topic through a general issue statement. I explicitly taught students how issue statements function to orient the reader to the topic under discussion by introducing the participants that will take part in the text. To exemplify this function directly, I provided constructed an exemplar text that illustrated these stages and linguistic features. The teacher-constructed model text included the following clause:

*An excellent new release from an up-and-coming artist has just arrived in stores.*

Noticeably, the clause from the model text above includes two linguistic features that construct a more elaborate and detailed opening issue statement. First, the model text includes a modified nominalization (an excellent new release) in the subject position. This modified nominalization in the subject position includes a post-modifier that adds further description (from an up-and coming artist). Such changes in Laura’s texts indicate that she was appropriating linguistic resources presented in the model texts to accomplish the purpose of the issue statement stage. As Laura subsequently develops the first paragraph of her final text, she demonstrates her increased understanding of the function of issue statements. Within her issue statement, she shares important information about her artist with her reader. Namely, she informs her readers about what kind of music Drake sings (Hip Hop), the title of his most well-known song (Forever), and his birthplace (Toronto). She accomplishes this information sharing by using circumstances to enhance her issue statement. While I did not conduct direct instruction regarding how to elaborate clauses with circumstances of place and manner, I did provide examples of how to use details effectively through our joint construction of persuasive texts.

A second indication of Laura’s enhanced control over the linguistic resources necessary to construct an effective issue statement is evident in that she immediately clarifies her stance and expresses her opinion about the artist she is writing about through the use of appraisal elements. For example, Laura describes Drake as an “up-and-coming” artist, which represents an additional direct lexical appropriation from the model text. Laura continues to utilize appraisal resources as she advances her text to the argument stage. Within this stage the author is expected to state the argument and justify it by presenting supporting details. Within the second paragraph Laura accomplishes the goals of the argument stage as she states “Drake is a good artist” and supports her assertion by describing the song and interpreting its underlying social message. Her interpretation of his music contrasts greatly with her first text that only gave general opinions about the music being “beautiful” and “romantic” without providing supporting details about why she liked the music.

The most noticeable evidence indicating Laura’s increased control of the linguistic resources necessary to construct an effective persuasive text in school contexts occurs in the recommendation stage. During this stage the author

typically proposes a course of action for readers to follow. In her first text, Laura omitted the recommendation stage. However, following SFL-based pedagogy, she includes a clear recommendation for action. She states that she wants readers “to listen to his music and download it” and supports this call for action by appealing to the sensibilities of her readers by using appraisal resources to describe the music as “emotional” and “interesting.” As Laura concludes her final text, she includes a clear summary statement that, through skillful use of participant repetition, re-orientes her readers to the artist under discussion (Drake), the type of music he sings (Hip Hop) and his most famous song (Forever). Additionally, she repeats her call for action (download his most famous song now) and reiterates her evaluation of the social relevance of the song:

*It is “Forever” and also his famous song because it talks about important things.*

### **Findings Related to Changes in Control of Register**

Analysis of the register of Laura’s final text reveals substantial enhancement in her control of the linguistic resources necessary to construct persuasive music reviews appropriate for school contexts. Examining elements of the field of discourse highlights this development. Most notably, her second text demonstrates an increased number of music-themed processes and participants. For example, in her initial text she writes about the artists and songs in very general ways and never actually names the artist she is discussing. In contrast, in her final text she specifically names the artist, describes the music as “the genre of hip hop” and evaluates the “interesting lyrics” of his song, “Forever.” Additionally, she demonstrates greater expertise in using processes related to the field of music discourse. For instance, in the following clause she uses three processes related to persuasive music reviews:

*I recommend that you listen to his music and download it.*

This particular clause indicates positive changes in Laura’s persuasive writing practices in two specific ways. First, her choice of the mental process “recommend” functions as a linguistic signpost signaling to readers that a specific call to action will follow. Second, the expected, specific actions follow in the second half of the clause, as she instructs her readers to “listen” and “download” Drake’s latest recording. The material process “download” represents a particularly interesting process choice that appears frequently in the context of electronic music transfers, the way music is obtained by the current generation of music fans. Notably, “download” is a process that appears twice in the model texts which exemplifies a lexical appropriation directly from the model text constructed in class. Also worth noting are two circumstances appearing in the first paragraph. Both circumstances function to broaden the depth of the field by providing the reader with personal background information about the artist. The temporal circumstance “on October 24, 1986” pinpoints when Drake was born and the circumstance of location, “in Toronto Canada”, specifies where he was born.

Analysis of the tenor of Laura’s second text also reveals increased control of the linguistic resources necessary to construct a relationship with her readers that ultimately allows her to persuade readers more effectively. Perhaps most effectively, she more readily draws on appraisal elements to express her

judgment and evaluation of her artist and his music. The clauses below highlights several examples of this increased control:

*I recommend his music because it's emotional and interesting.*

*I recommend Drake because his songs are popular and soulful.*

Laura evaluates the lyrics of Drake's songs using lexical choices that have positive appraisal values such as "interesting" and categorizes the songs as "popular" and "soulful" and the music as "emotional" and "interesting." She also expresses her judgment of Drake as person by describing him as "an up-and-coming" and a "good" artist, using the attributive relational process "is" to connect the participant "Drake" to the positive characteristics she attributes to him. She also extends her appreciation of the lyrics of the song as she evaluates them as being "important" separating them perhaps from other lyrics of other artists, these of which deems as having social relevance.

In addition to increased control of the linguistic resources necessary to construct the expected tenor of a persuasive music review constructed in school contexts, Laura's final text demonstrates more skillful management of the linguistic features constructing the register variable of mode that function in the construction of a coherent and cohesive persuasive argument. To maintain this coherence, she utilizes conjunction, repetition, and thematization. At the clause level, she includes conjunctions such as "for example" and "because" to elaborate, illustrate, and advance her ideas through the text. The presence of these conjunctions may be linked to their inclusion in model texts and indicate that Laura was using the model texts and the charts containing these conjunctions as a resource for her own writing. The following clause exemplifies how she took up the resources made available in the SFL instruction to links ideas and elaborates her point using conjunctive elements.

*Drake is a good artist because he writer [sic] interesting lyrics.*

*For example within the song "Forever", he tell a story about a boy who wants to learn to play basketball.*

The conjunction "because" connects her evaluative claim (Drake is good) with the detail supporting her claim (he writes interesting lyrics). She expands her idea using the phrase "For example." Additionally, Laura maintains cohesion through repetition. For instance, she includes an explicit repetition of the name of the artist (Drake) in each paragraph as well as repetition of the title of his most famous song (Forever).

In her final summary paragraph, Laura also employs repetition effectively to reorient her readers to the main ideas expressed in her review and repeats the phrase "I recommend" three times to emphasize her point. Through repetition of the key terms of "genre" and "hip hop" as well as the key process "download" readers are provided explicit direction as to what action they are expected to perform after reading the text. The last indication of her developing control of modal elements is evident in the noticeable change in Laura's negotiation of the thematic elements of Theme and Rheme to advance ideas within her text. The same excerpt from above serves to illustrate her control of theme and rheme:

*Drake is a good artist because he writes interesting lyrics.*

*For example, in the song, Forever, he tells a story about a boy who wants to play*

*basketball.*

By picking up the Theme “lyrics” from the first clause and then elaborating in detail why the lyrics are interesting in her subsequent clause she demonstrates increased control in her ability to advance key concepts and supporting claims in her text.

### **Discussion**

The analysis presented above indicates that SFL-pedagogy had a significant impact on bringing Laura, a beginning-level ELL, closer to the intended goal of writing effective persuasive texts by providing instructional support to demonstrate the connection between form and purpose, but also by strengthening her ability to include academic persuasive language at the clause level. The study shows that through explicit teaching focusing on the stages and linguistic features of persuasive writing, emergent bilingual students may potentially learn to construct detailed and coherent arguments. From the perspective of a teacher and teacher educator, the study also highlights how SFL analysis can pinpoint what our students can do with language and provides a way for us to potentially track that development and design instruction to enhance persuasive writing development. For instance, from my analysis, I was able to identify the next steps in instruction. I noted that Laura would require continued and focused instructional support in learning how to build on the ideas she introduced within the clause and connect and expand those ideas cohesively and coherently throughout the text. That meant that I needed to highlight examples of cohesive elements that appeared in reading and provide direct instruction through language-focused in-class language instruction.

One instructional practice I could implement to support her control of cohesive elements is the presentation of a mini-lessons focused on teaching students how to create nominalizations and use those nominalizations effectively to bundle ideas that can extend throughout a text and thereby develop textual coherence and cohesion. At the clause level, Laura may also need continued support to enhance her control of lexical- grammatical resources, such as the use of the past participle, in order to help her share her ideas without as many indications of non-native English writing. However, as good writers and writing instructors know, writing is a recursive event with opportunities to revise and develop one’s writing.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows how emergent bilingual students can benefit from SFL-based pedagogy in ways that help them develop greater control of persuasive language through instruction that focuses on academic writing both at the genre structure and clause level. Case studies in language teaching and learning remain inherently limited in their applicability to broader contexts because, however in-depth the analysis of the case may be, it is by definition limited to one learner’s experience. To adequately “prove” that SFL pedagogy was the defining factor contributing to the changes in Laura’s writing practices examined in this article is impossible. As a teacher researcher, I recognize that in order to make creditable claims related to the language development of my learners, a larger data set encompassing numerous texts composed over a longer period would be much more informative. Yet, what I sought to accomplish in this paper

was to show how teachers and the teacher educators who prepare them can use SFL as tool to examine their ELLs existing and changing writing practices. The paper also sought to provide a detailed explanation of how SFL pedagogy is implemented in ESL instructional contexts, given that academic language instruction, particularly in the content areas, has become an essential ingredient in effective teaching practice. However, given that teachers have long practiced process-based approaches to writing instruction, having an explicit analysis of SFL pedagogy can serve as guide and example of the ways teachers can bring attention to language and potentially support ELLS in increasing their control of grammatical and lexical resources through culturally-relevant SFL based pedagogy.

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