

Learning the grammatics of quoted speech: Benefits for punctuation and expressive reading



Ruth French

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

Abstract

The integration of knowledge about grammar ('grammatics') within The Australian Curriculum: English could be expected to be more useful to students than grammar taught in isolation, although the potential benefits of an integrated approach to teaching grammatics remain somewhat under-researched. This paper describes a case study in which Year 2 children were taught the grammatics of quoted ('direct') speech using a language description informed by systemic functional grammar. The teaching of grammatics was integrated with literacy and literature studies, although the focus of the paper is not on instruction per se but on the benefits of instruction for children's learning. The children were able to use their knowledge of verbal Processes ('saying verbs') to improve their punctuation of quoted speech and to become more aware of using expression in oral reading of dialogue. Evidence for these claims is provided in the form of pre- and post-tests of punctuation, oral readings of a picture book and interview data. The findings are interpreted using Vygotskian theory, particularly the significance of the conscious control of 'scholarly' knowledge and the role of explicit and integrated approaches to teaching in helping students develop higher order understandings of language.

Introduction

One of the challenges set for teachers by *The Australian Curriculum: English* is for teaching programs to 'balance and integrate the three strands' of Language, Literature and Literacy (ACARA, 2012). This will include the integration of knowledge about grammar ('grammatics', following Halliday, 2002, p. 386) throughout the English Curriculum and should, ideally, see the end of the discrete, unconnected and often discredited grammar program of times past. However the benefits of an integrated approach to the teaching of grammatics 'in context' remain under-researched in comparison with research conducted when traditional, discrete teaching methods were the norm (Myhill, 2005). Furthermore, research has historically focussed on the potential benefits of grammar for improving writing and seldom have other dimensions of the

English curriculum been considered to be within the purview of possible applications of grammatical knowledge.

This paper aims to extend the body of research into grammar teaching by investigating whether learning grammatics, specifically the grammatics of quoted (or 'direct' speech), offers any benefit for children's punctuation of quoted speech or their oral reading expression. Both punctuation and oral reading, but especially the latter, have been largely overlooked in the historical research on learning grammar. Yet they remain important aspects of success in school literacy. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions:

Can a knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes contribute to

- better punctuation of quoted speech?, and to
- improved expression in oral reading?

These questions will be addressed using data from a research project which explored teaching and learning about grammar with young children. The grammatical descriptions taught to the children were based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), although terminology followed the NSW syllabus guidelines under which the project was conducted (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 (1st edition 1998)).

Review of literature

The research literature has very little to say on the first of the specific questions posed above, and almost none on the second.

Punctuation of speech and grammatics

Research on the general subject of learning punctuation is not extensive. According to one of its few and foremost researchers, punctuation is '[o]ne of the less-studied aspects of written language development' (Hall, 2009, p. 271) and furthermore, '[i]f children's understanding of punctuation is as a whole under-researched, then research on their understanding of speech is close to nonexistent' (Hall, 2009, p. 279).

In response to this identified need, Hall led a project which studied primary school children's grasp of punctuation and asked them about the challenges they met in learning to punctuate, including in learning to punctuate speech (Hall, 2002, 2009). He found that the punctuation of speech can be complex and difficult for children in several respects, from apparently minor matters like the directionality of quotation marks to more substantial problems of working out what is quoted speech and what is straight prose. He also found it was not unusual for children to use intuition rather than reasoning to punctuate speech, even at eleven years of age, and rarely did any children use metalanguage to explain their thinking about how to punctuate, including any grammatical terms (Hall, 2002, pp. 6,7; 2009, p. 281). Hall's conclusion is that learning to punctuate speech is often less straightforward than curriculum documents (in the UK) seem to assume.

A further perspective on the question of a relationship between speech punctuation and grammatics can be gleaned from the grammar teaching research. The most recent systematic review of research into the effectiveness of teaching syntactic grammar for improving writing (Andrews et al., 2004a) identified, after a very specific screening process, only three primary studies which addressed punctuation and syntactic grammar. None of these studies seem to deal with the punctuation of speech (see Andrews et al., 2004b for summaries of the studies). The next most recent review of grammar teaching was a meta-analysis of experimental-type studies which focused on teaching written composition (Hillocks, 1984; 1986). Its author offered the following summation regarding grammar and punctuation:

Unfortunately, the research provides no evidence to suggest that the study of grammar helps students become more proficient at placing punctuation in the spots designated by the style sheets. (Hillocks & Smith, 1991, p. 600)

This suggests a bleak outlook for the subject of the present paper.

However at least two important caveats apply. Firstly, the *type of grammar* taught may well be a factor in the apparent failure of instruction. Interestingly, in a more recent version of the above statement about grammar by Hillocks and Smith, the word ‘grammar’ has been replaced with ‘TSG’ for ‘traditional school grammar’ (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 734), allowing for the possibility that different grammatical descriptions might produce different learning outcomes. Secondly, the *kind of grammar teaching* underlying the reviewed studies (traditional discrete ‘formal’ teaching of grammar) is also susceptible to criticism (for example, Kolln, 1981; Tomlinson, 1994). An integrated approach, such as that advocated in the new Australian Curriculum, presents at least the possibility of better results.

Indeed, teaching a *functional* grammar via an *integrated* pedagogy has been shown to have promising results in a research project consisting of five case study sites (Williams, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2006 (2004)). Of direct relevance to the present paper is evidence that a functional description of the grammatics of verbal Processes enabled Year 1 children to learn how to punctuate direct speech (Williams, 1998, p. 38).

Expressive reading and grammatics

Research on the relationship between oral reading expression and the learning of grammar is especially hard to find. In fact the research by Williams cited above, in which young children learned aspects of systemic functional grammar, is the only body of work which could be located on the particular question posed in this paper. Williams reports that:

[F]rom our observational data of six-year-olds’ work on experiential features, the grammatics appears to contribute to ... oral reading fluency for some children (by building their awareness of projections from verbal process clauses) (2005, p. 292)

The present paper investigates this possibility further.

Background to the study

This paper reports on data collected during an exploratory case study of the teaching and learning of grammatics in a Year 2 class (renamed '2B' – pseudonyms are used throughout for all participants) in a public school in inner suburban Sydney. The case study class of 7–8 year olds was a typical, mixed ability mainstream class of children, many of whom had language backgrounds other than English although most spoke English as their first language.

The project as a whole adopted a qualitative approach to data collection, with the bulk of the data being audio recordings of classroom talk and samples of children's work. There was however some use of simple tests – the punctuation tests to be reported in this paper – and also recordings made of a sample of children reading a picture book aloud. These latter data sets are those discussed in this paper. The researcher worked in Class 2B for roughly one hour a week over slightly more than one school term, during which time she team-taught lessons in which children were introduced to some simple grammatics in contextualised ways. The class teacher and researcher adopted a cooperative planning model in which the grammatics lessons were integrated with programmed content studies, such as a unit of work on the Olympics, or with children's literature being read in class (French, 2009).

The data sets which are the focus of this paper were pre- and post-tests of punctuation and oral reading. The pre-tests were done before the children were taught the grammatics of quoted speech, and the post-tests were conducted at the end of the case study period and just before the school year ended. The period of time between the punctuation pre-test and post-test was 9 consecutive school weeks, while the reading pre-test (called 'R1' for 'Reading 1' throughout the paper) was done 16 weeks (13 school weeks) before the reading post-test ('R2' or 'Reading 2'). In the intervening time the children learned the grammatics of quoted speech using a systemic functional description, contextualised in a wide variety of oral and written texts across the genres of news reporting and narrative and in games, readers' theatre and independent writing activities. A chronological summary of these teaching/learning activities is supplied in the Appendix.

The grammatics of quoted speech

The grammatics of quoted speech taught to the children was informed by systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, see especially Chapter 5 and Chapter 7 section 7.5.1). Halliday distinguishes between different Process types (typically realised by the word class 'verb') which indicate different kinds of meanings and which operate somewhat differently from each other in grammatical terms. Two main types of clause, those operationalised by mental or verbal Processes, are distinctive in that they can 'project' other clauses. That is, mental and verbal clauses can set up

the delivery of another clause (or clauses) of quoted or reported thought or speech, metaphorically akin to the way a projector sets up and makes possible the projection of an image. Verbal clauses projecting quoted speech contain (at least) a verbal Process and a Sayer, which is the participant responsible for the verbalising. In the example given at Figure 1, the first clause is a verbal clause and it projects the subsequent two clauses of quoted speech. The use of symbols on this example is indicative of those used to introduce these grammatical descriptions to the Year 2 children: green lips for the ‘saying verb’ and a red box for the Sayer.

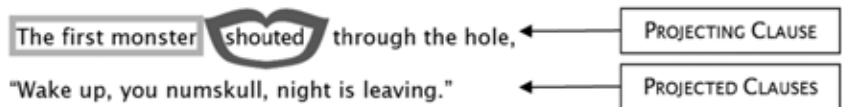


Figure 1: Functional grammar analysis of a verbal clause and quoted speech

Other types of Process such as material (‘action’) Processes cannot project other clauses. It is not possible, for instance, to substitute the verb ‘kicked’ for ‘shouted’ in the Figure 1 example.

The specific grammatical descriptions which were introduced to the children were the terms ‘saying verb’ (for Halliday’s ‘verbal Process’) and ‘Sayer’. The children also learned about ‘quotes’ or ‘what was actually said’, and they referred to quotation marks as ‘inverted commas’ following their teacher’s practice, although alternative terms for this punctuation were also used with the children (the term used in *The Australian Curriculum: English* (2012) is ‘quotation marks’).

Punctuation of quoted speech

Methodology

Identical pre- and post-tests of punctuation were administered. The test consisted of four short passages in which capitalisation was used correctly but no punctuation at all was used. Children were given the following instructions which deliberately made no reference to any particular kind of punctuation: ‘Be the teacher – see if you can put in all the missing punctuation in these pieces of writing.’ It was thus up to the children to recognise that quoted speech was present and then punctuate it accordingly. The children were read the passages aloud while they followed on their own test paper in order to ameliorate any potential interference from differences in reading ability. The test passages included five sections of quoted speech. Tests were scored by awarding one mark for each opening or closing quotation mark which was correctly placed, thus producing a total score out of ten. Quotation marks were

marked as correct regardless of directionality (which not all children could control and so they were given the benefit of the doubt) and irrespective of whether single or double quotation marks were used. Error analysis was used to examine the nature of children's incorrect attempts.

Results

Twenty-four children out of the case study cohort of 27 did both pre- and post-tests. In the pre-test, one third of the children did not attempt to punctuate the quoted speech at all and in fact the mode score for the pre-test was 0. These children did not seem to 'see' the quoted speech as distinct from the straight prose. Several children (n=5) scored full marks, and a remaining eleven children attempted some punctuation of quoted speech but varied in their success. In this latter group, the most common error when attempting to punctuate speech was the inclusion of the projecting clause within the speech marks (for example: 'The teacher said 2B you are a great class'). Seven children out of the eleven did this. The mean score for the pre-test was 4.58 out of 10, and the median was 4.5.

Significant improvements in punctuating quoted speech were evident in the post-test. Twenty-three of the 24 children now recognised the presence of quoted speech and attempted to punctuate it. Many of these children demonstrated considerable confidence in punctuating the speech and indeed, the mode score for the post-test was 10/10 (nine children attained this score). The median score improved from 4.5 in the pre-test to 8 in the post-test, and the mean went to 7.04 – an improvement of 53%. One child produced an anomalous or 'outlier' result (one of the hazards of the one-off test situation) and dropped from an earlier perfect score to only 5/10 – a reminder both that a perfect score does not necessarily mean a completely stable grasp of concepts, and also that caution needs to be exercised in interpreting statistics when dealing with a small sample. If this outlier result is removed, the mean improvement from pre-test to post-test is considerably higher: 64%. Continuing to exclude the outlier, 78.3% or 18 of the remaining 23 children either improved or maintained a perfect or near-perfect score from pre-test to post-test. Furthermore, the error of including the projecting clause within the quotation marks was reduced, with fewer total instances of this error (down from 12 total instances to 3) and only two children were responsible for these instances (down from seven children in the pre-test).

In conclusion, these results indicate a strong positive effect on children's ability to punctuate quoted speech following explicit and integrated teaching of the grammatics of verbal Processes. The children improved in terms of (a) their recognition of the presence of quoted speech, and (b) their knowledge of the difference between quoted speech ('quotes' or 'what was actually said') and the projecting clause, thereby reducing the error of including both projecting and projected clauses together inside the quotation marks. While

it is not possible to attribute these improvements entirely to the teaching of grammatics without comparison with a control group, the evidence is certainly suggestive of a potential use of grammatics in an area of literacy which has been hitherto under-researched.

Expression in oral reading

Methodology

A sample of children from the class were assessed for their use of expression in oral reading, both before (R1 for 'Reading 1') and after (R2) they learned about verbal Processes. A sample of 5 children (all volunteers) with a range of reading abilities was used initially, however one of these children was not available for the R2 assessment and so the results reported here are for the sample of 4 children who undertook both assessments.

The text selected for the assessment of oral reading was a children's picture book: *Two monsters* (McKee, 1985). This entertaining narrative involves a heated argument between two monsters living on opposite sides of a mountain, who cannot agree whether 'day is departing' or 'night is arriving'. The text was selected because it uses a considerable amount of dialogue and provides readers with opportunity to use dramatic expression, including for verbal Processes like 'shouted', 'howled', 'screamed' and (near the end) 'giggled'. Other reasons for the selection of this text included the fact that the children were accustomed to reading aloud to an adult from complete stories (both to their teacher and to parent volunteers in the classroom) and the fact that the text seemed likely to be suited to the children's reading levels and interest.

The children's oral readings were audio recorded and subsequently assessed for reading accuracy, fluency and use of dramatic expression. The children were also interviewed about how they knew what expression to use in their reading – both after R1 and after R2.

Reading accuracy was calculated following the procedure used to score a 'running record' in Reading Recovery (Clay, 2002), this being a simplified form of miscue analysis (Goodman, 1969). Under this method of scoring, children's self-corrections are not counted as errors and do not affect the accuracy calculation. However uncorrected substitutions and omissions, as well as appeals to an adult for unknown words, are counted as errors. The accuracy rate is given as a percentage of total number of correct words divided by the total number of words. A self-correction rate was also calculated using the formula of $((\text{self-corrections} + \text{errors})/\text{self-corrections})$. The self-correction rate is regarded in Reading Recovery as an index of the degree to which readers monitor their own efforts.

The **fluency** of the children's readings was calculated as 'correct words per minute' ('cwpm'). It was decided to include page-turning time within this calculation even though this rendered a slightly lower score of fluency

than when time taken to turn pages was removed from the calculations. The fluency measure was calculated over the entire text of the story.

The measurement of **dramatic expression** was the most challenging aspect of analysing the children’s oral readings, being the dimension most open to the children’s creative, aesthetic interpretation. However, since the aim of the present study was to compare one reading of a text to another reading of the same text, it was decided that it was not necessary to analyse both readings independently of one another and then compare them. Rather, a rubric was developed in which a score was awarded for how R2 directly compared with R1, with small sections of text each being scored individually and then a mean overall rating calculated. The researcher therefore divided the text of *Two monsters* into 32 meaningful prosodic sections, generally one or two sentences long. The children’s recorded readings were listened to section by section (and repeatedly!), and a score given for each section as to whether R2 was basically the same as R1 (score of 0), more expressive (up to a score of +2) or less expressive (down to a score of -2). The rubric for this scoring is included in the Appendix.

Results

The following table summarises the children’s scores on the above measures of oral reading at R1 and R2.

Measures of Oral Reading	Accuracy* (correct words/total words) Self-correction rate*		Fluency* (Correct words per minute)		Expression Mean difference between R1 and R2. Possible range: -2.0 to +2.0
	R1	R2	R1	R2	
Child’s Name					
Karin	97.7% 1 : 4.3	98.1% 1 : 3.0	110.3	114.3	+1.1129
David	98.6% 1 : 7.0	98.6% No SC	90.6	104.2	+0.2813
Shani	94.6% 1 : 4.8	97.4% 1 : 2.8	50.0	53.4	+0.0690
Toula	91.8% 1 : 9.8	92.0% 1 : 4.4	49.8	56.4	-0.0172

* Results rounded to nearest tenth decimal.

Table 1: Oral reading results

From this sample of four children, only Karin made significant overall improvement in her oral reading expression from R1 to R2, although David made a small degree of improvement (at R2 he read more expressively in 7 sections out of 32, but used the same degree of expression as at R1 in the remainder). Karin read more expressively in twenty-nine of the thirty-one prosodic sections of text upon which she was scored, and on seven

occasions she scored +2, indicating that her reading demonstrated '[c]onsiderably improved use of appropriate dramatic expression'. Each of these seven most improved sections involved the reading of quoted speech. Karin's mean improvement on the prosodic sections of the text containing quoted speech was +1.3, while her mean improvement on straight prose was +0.9375, providing evidence that her expressive reading of quoted speech was significantly improved. Shani and Toula scored very close to zero, indicating that their expression at R2 was almost the same as at R1 (and while R1 and R2 were not scored separately, it is the case that both these children used only a small degree of dramatic expression in both readings). Karin was also the most fluent reader based on number of correct words read per minute, and read the text with a high level of accuracy. This helpfully raises one of the issues to do with expressive reading, namely the degree to which use of expression is inclusive of and made possible by accuracy and fluency (for example, see Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker & Stahl, 2004). Certainly it seems from these results that Karin's high level of automaticity in 'recognition literacy' (Unsworth, 2001, pp. 14–15) freed up her attention, permitting her to focus on rendering the story dramatically. Shani and Toula were considerably less fluent and somewhat less accurate in their reading (Shani actually read the story at R2 with high accuracy but quite slowly), and it seemed that their attention was spent on 'working out the words'. It is plausible that a text which was easier to read would have allowed these children more scope to attend to using expression.

This data about the children's oral reading performances was augmented with interviews conducted with them following their readings. In these interviews, the children were asked to identify the kinds of cues they consciously

Cue system (‘How did you know how to read it with good expression?’)	R1				R2			
	Karin	David	Shani	Toula	Karin	David	Shani	Toula
Pictures	✓	✓						
Plot – events	✓					✓		✓
Interpersonal lexis – ‘teasing words’	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Graphological features e.g. font size, exclamation marks					✓	✓		
Verbal processes					✓	✓	(✓)	✓
Extra-text experience e.g. drama class						✓		

Table 2: Results of interviews about reading with expression

used when reading expressively. Specifically, the researcher asked the children, 'How did you know how to read it with good expression?' The children's answers to this question were subjected to content analysis and are summarised in Table 2.

A number of insights into the children's thinking can be drawn from these results. In relation to the specific question of this paper, that of the role of a knowledge of verbal Processes, it is clear that the children did in fact attend to these at R2 while they did not do so in any stated, conscious way at R1. Where one student came close to doing so at R1, she did not in the end refer to the verbal Process in the text but used her sense of the event (possibly including the illustration) to determine what expression might be used. In the following excerpt from the transcript data, Toula is discussing the section from the book which reads: 'He shouted through the hole, "Wake up, you numskull, night is leaving."'

Researcher: And, were there any other things [apart from the book saying the monster was angry] that told you how to say it?

Toula: Mm, yep. How he screams, and 'Wake up, you numskull. Night is leaving.'

Researcher: That's right. How did you know he was screaming?

Toula: Because it sounded like there's a word, and I tried to make it, like he's screaming at the other monster.

If Toula is attending to the word 'shouted', she is not at a point where she is able to consciously identify this.

At R2, in contrast, most of the children were indeed consciously aware of attending to verbal Processes (only Shani's grasp of verbal Processes was still tentative due to a period of absence from school during the teaching/learning of the grammatics). The following excerpt is indicative:

Researcher: Are there any other words there that give you any hints about how to read it with expression?

David: Well, 'he shouted to the hole'. Then you like, would use a louder voice for these words.

Researcher: How come?

David: Well, if it says 'he shouted through the hole', he, he didn't say 'He whispered through the hole.'

Researcher: Oh. OK. So what's the important word there that's giving you the clue?

David: 'Shouted'.

Researcher: Mm. Is that a special type of word?

David: Saying verb.

Interestingly, in none of the R2 interviews were verbal Processes or ‘saying verbs’ mentioned *first* by any of the children. That is, their knowledge of saying verbs did not come to dominate nor replace other kinds of cues for expression, but rather it added another resource to the children’s repertoire of possible sources of information for dramatic reading. This also indicates the children had not been trained to say that they used verbal Processes when reading for expression as a kind of pat answer.

Learning the grammatics of verbal Processes provided most of the children in this sample with an expanded repertoire of strategies for oral reading. That is, knowledge of verbal Processes raised the children’s conscious awareness of how to read aloud ‘with expression’. This did not necessarily translate directly into an obvious improvement in expressive oral reading, although one child, Karin, did demonstrate particular improvement with rendering dialogue from R1 to R2 which seems strongly connected with the work on grammatics, and another child, David, was conscious of using grammatics in some sections of text where demonstrably better use of expression was evident. Of course some degree of the improvement from R1 to R2 may be attributable to the fact that the children were rereading a known text, but the interview evidence suggests that rereading does not fully explain the changes Karin and David consciously made in introducing more expression to their reading of dialogue.

Interpretation of findings

The main findings of this case study are that teaching children about the grammar of verbal Processes contributed to: (i) improved punctuation of quoted speech, and (ii) an expanded repertoire of strategies for children to consciously bring to expressive oral reading. The paper’s findings corroborate earlier observations made by Williams (1998; 2005), although given the recognised limitations of case studies, it would certainly be valuable to conduct further similar research with a larger number of participants across different educational contexts. Nonetheless, the findings of the study resonate with theory in various reasoned ways which suggest they are plausibly transferable. They can thus be interpreted in terms of what they have to say about children’s development of conscious control, their implications for pedagogy, and what they indicate about the kinds of language descriptions which are accessible to children.

Findings (i) and (ii) above can both be summarised as examples of children developing **conscious control** of aspects of literacy. Conscious control involves understanding something sufficiently well that one can deliberately apply that understanding to new situations and problems. It is one of the features of ‘scientific’ knowledge in a Vygotskian view of education and development. L.S. Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) theorised a distinction between ‘spontaneous’ concepts and ‘scientific’ concepts. He proposed that some knowledge is of an everyday

nature, consisting of concepts which develop ‘spontaneously’ in that they are not explicitly taught but are imbibed from and are implicit in common, everyday experiences (and hence are also often termed ‘everyday’ concepts, for example Daniels, 2001; Panofsky, John-Steiner & Blackwell, 1990). A simple example is the concept of ‘brother’ as developed by living in a specific family (‘my mum and dad are his too’, ‘he helps me get dressed’, etcetera). This everyday knowledge can be contrasted with what Vygotsky termed ‘scientific’ concepts (not limited to ‘the sciences’), by which he meant the kinds of knowledge which are typically the object of explicit didactic intent and so are usually developed in the context of formal schooling. This ‘scholarly’ knowledge (Daniels, 2001, p. 55; Wardekker, 1998) is characterised by systematicity and abstraction, so that concepts are not limited to everyday, locally situated experience, but rather they take on a higher order of descriptive capacity, such as learning to think of ‘brother’ as ‘a male sibling’ (Panofsky, et al., 1990, p. 252). Features of ‘scholarly’ knowledge also include the fact that it is learned through, and by its nature demands, voluntary attention. That is, because scholarly concepts are not typically picked up in everyday living, they require the conscious focus of the learner to be given over to their study. Conscious attention leads logically to the possibility of conscious control, that is, a level of mastery of scholarly knowledge which can be purposefully brought to bear on familiar and novel problems.

In the present study, the children were on a path to developing a scholarly knowledge of quoted speech. They learned to understand and use concepts such as ‘saying verb’ and ‘Sayer’ to attend to the functions of words and therefore to which clauses were ‘quotes / what was said’ and which were the projecting clauses. This explicit grammatical knowledge assisted them to recognise and punctuate quoted speech in reasoned ways. They also developed a level of conscious awareness of the ways in which verbal Processes can be used to indicate features of oral expression. That is, they were using concepts which involved a degree of abstraction in order to reflect on language and become consciously aware of the roles of some grammatical elements. Vygotsky himself was interested in the teaching of grammar as a kind of knowledge which fosters in children conscious awareness of language:

[O]ur analysis clearly showed the study of grammar to be of paramount importance for the mental development of the child. ... He may not acquire new grammatical or syntactic forms in school, but, thanks to instruction in grammar and writing, he does become aware of what he is doing and *learns to use his skills consciously*. (Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 183–184, emphasis added)

What is involved in learning grammar, according to Vygotsky, is learning to reflect on language at a more abstract level. Ultimately the object of such learning is the freedom of having a grasp of the language system and its possibilities.

Turning to questions of **pedagogy** and the teaching of grammar, it is clear that the Vygotskian view of ‘scientific’ knowledge involves some level of deliberate instructional design either to explicitly teach scholarly concepts or at least to arrange for their rediscovery by children. In the present study the children were explicitly taught some simple grammatical descriptions, but not as isolated items of knowledge. The terms ‘saying verb’ and ‘Sayer’ took on meaning for the children because they were introduced in the context of meaningful texts, such as children’s picture books, and were used in engaging and meaningful tasks, such as writing a newspaper report which included quotes from a sportsperson. Furthermore, the ways in which grammatical concepts are related to meaning was foregrounded throughout rather than tacked on as an application at the end. That is, an integrated approach was taken such that grammatics was taught in ‘positive, contextualised’ ways (Myhill, 2005, p. 81) closely connected with the literature and literacy priorities of the wider English Curriculum. This pedagogical approach, which resonates strongly with the direction set by The Australian Curriculum: English, encouraged the Year 2 children to see the relevance of grammatics and avoided what many teachers see as a distinction between learning and applying grammatical concepts. The present study provides an indication of the positive possibilities for grammatics taught explicitly but also, importantly, in an integrated way which introduces children to the uses of grammatics from an early stage.

A final observation from the study’s findings is that a **language description based on systemic functional grammar** can be both accessible and useful to small children. This is an important point because the selection of a grammatical description for teaching to school students is not just a matter of linguistic taste. Rather, the ways in which knowledge is mediated to learners are cognitively formative (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). The kind of grammatical description taught to children will necessarily mediate their attention, or focus their thinking, along certain lines. The Year 2 children in this study benefited from being able to distinguish ‘saying verbs’ from other kinds of verbs. This is not a description offered by traditional school grammar. Furthermore, the term ‘Sayer’ has a greater explanatory power and specificity in the context of learning about quoted speech than would the traditional grammar term ‘Subject’, particularly in identifying projecting clauses (every finite clause has a Subject, but only clauses with ‘saying verbs’ can have a Sayer). This is not to suggest that children should never be taught about Subjects, but rather a question of accessible and productive points of entry into grammatical description.

Conclusion

Being able to read aloud with expression and to punctuate quoted speech are literacy achievements which children are reasonably expected to make at school. Seldom however has a knowledge of grammar been thought to have much relevance to helping children make these achievements. This paper has

provided some evidence that young school children can use the grammatics of verbal Processes to improve their conscious control of both these practices. It has also provided evidence of the accessibility and value of a functionally-oriented grammatics taught in the context of a teaching/learning program in which studies in literacy, literature and language are integrated rather than discrete. Such an approach to the teaching of grammatics, organised through varied meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences, holds considerable promise for students – both as a help in mastering practical literacy skills and as a means to a more abstract and powerful ‘scholarly’ grasp of language itself.

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Appendix

Summary of teaching and learning activities relevant to building a knowledge of the grammatics of verbal Processes in Class '2B'

Teaching / learning activities	Main types of data collected
	1st reading (R1) of <i>Two monsters</i> by David McKee (n=5)
	Punctuation pre-test (n=25)
Prior learning: 'Action verbs'	
Introduction of terms ('saying verbs', Sayer, quotes): Shared reading of print media reports about Olympians; with teacher, jointly locating saying verbs and quotes in authentic texts.	Classroom talk
Consolidation through play: Sayer / saying verb game	Classroom talk
Consolidation building towards independence: Reading a print media report, finding saying verbs and quotes at first jointly with teacher then continuing activity independently or in paired work.	Work samples (reports provided by researcher with text then marked up by children)
Using new knowledge: Researching and writing a report which incorporates quotes.	Writing samples
Applying new knowledge in a different context: Saying verbs in a literary text (picture book: <i>Pumpkin soup</i> by Helen Cooper). Identifying saying verbs, Sayers and 'what was said' through readers' theatre; discussing the significance of choice of saying verbs in the development of the narrative (see French, 2009).	Classroom talk
Revision: 'Choose an action or saying verb and draw it.' Children suggested use of speech balloons and size of print to indicate saying verbs. Most however chose to draw action verbs.	Work samples (labelled pictures)
Consolidating knowledge in the context of literary texts: Reading comprehension activity (teacher-devised) – correctly identifying which Sayers were responsible for selected quotes from the picture book <i>Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge</i> by Mem Fox.	Worksheets
Revision: While listening to a story being read (<i>Is it true, Grandfather?</i> , by Wendy Lohse), the teacher invited the children to put their hands on their heads if they heard a saying verb. Some 'tricky' ones were inevitably identified and discussed.	Researcher journal notes
Reflection and conclusion: Summarising knowledge in the form of mini-posters about which grammatical and other textual features are usually found in different types of texts.	Work samples (mini-posters)
	Punctuation post-test (n=26; pre-test \cap post-test = 24)
	2nd reading (R2) of <i>Two monsters</i> (n=4)

Expression Analysis: Rubric for Scoring Scores awarded for second reading (R2) relative to first reading (R1).

Score	Descriptor
-2	Considerably worse use of appropriate dramatic expression from R1 to R2, e.g. loudness / softness used much less suitably, pitch varied in manner more contrary to meaning and/or punctuation, addition of inappropriate pauses. This would be evident over stretch of text greater in length than a single phrase.
-1	Slightly less use of appropriate dramatic expression from R1 to R2, including: - a word or phrase given less dramatic emphasis; - a word or phrase given more inappropriate expression.
0	Expression in oral reading not discernibly different from R1 to R2. Or one section of text is slightly less expressive while another section is slightly more expressive, the effect of which is to cancel out one another in terms of net change in expression.
1	Slightly more use of appropriate dramatic expression from R1 to R2, including: - a word or phrase given more dramatic emphasis, e.g. louder / softer, pitch varied, dramatic pause added; - a word or phrase which in R1 was given inappropriate dramatic expression is corrected in R2.
2	Considerably improved use of appropriate dramatic expression from R1 to R2, e.g. loudness / softness used much more suitably, pitch varied in a manner more consistent with meaning and punctuation, addition of appropriate dramatic pauses. This would be evident over stretch of text greater in length than a single phrase.

Ruth French is an experienced primary school teacher with long-standing interests in language in education, literacy and children's literature. She is currently finalising her PhD at the University of New England, Armidale NSW. Her research is focused on young school children's learning of aspects of functional grammar.