CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A child in his third year of school is reflecting in his ‘learning journal’ upon what he has been learning in some grammar lessons. His class has been exploring the patterns of what systemic functional linguists call ‘Theme’ (for present purposes, ‘sentence openers’) in different kinds of writing – recounts and procedures. In response to prompts for reflection, Kieran writes:

What patterns did we notice in the Themes in the recount?
All the themes were at the start of the sentence.

What differences are there between Themes in this recount and Themes in procedures?
Themes in procedures are all verbs and in recounts they’re not.

What did I learn today?
I learnt about theme.

How did you feel about this work, and why?
😊 I liked this work because it was fun.

Kieran’s learning journal entry is indicative of similar representations of knowledge about language collected in the case studies which provide the data for this thesis. His journal entry is interesting in at least two respects. In terms of conceptual knowledge, it documents his accurate use of metalanguage for whole texts (‘procedures’, ‘recounts’) and grammatical categories (‘Theme’, ‘verbs’), and suggests that he has an emergent grasp of the connection between some types of texts and their grammatical features. In terms of attitudes to learning grammar, Kieran’s journal entry is clearly positive – an attitude shared by the overwhelming majority of his classmates writing about grammar in their learning journals that day.
Both these observations are contra to widespread educational wisdom. Kieran’s early steps towards managing abstract metalinguistic description challenge a common belief that junior primary school children are unable to handle anything beyond the level of the concrete. Furthermore, his unequivocal pleasure in taking these steps stands in opposition to popular expectations about grammar lessons.

This thesis sets out to revisit the historically vexed issue of the teaching of grammar to primary school students. It does so by setting to one side assumptions about what children can or cannot do, and seeks to explore afresh some of the possibilities offered by a knowledge of grammar within the context of contemporary developments in linguistics and education. It does this as a contribution to a discussion of ongoing interest and importance in English/literacy education.

The teaching of grammar in schools has long been the subject of debate: debate about whether or not grammar should be taught; debate about what kind of grammar to teach; and debate in the public domain about the potential for the teaching of grammar to fix a perceived fall in literacy standards over time. Teachers who persist in teaching grammar have been told that they do so against the advice of a body of research providing “no evidence” (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 11) that the time invested may be expected to yield any dividends for students’ literacy outcomes, historically specified in terms of benefits for written composition (cf. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986).¹

One effect of these debates has been that the teaching of grammar has fallen in and out of favour in educational institutions. By the latter decades of the twentieth

¹ The following statement is indicative:

School boards, administrators, and teachers who impose the systematic study of traditional school grammar on their students over lengthy periods of time in the name of teaching writing do them a gross disservice which should not be tolerated by anyone concerned with the effective teaching of good writing. (Hillocks, 1986, p. 248)
century the teaching of grammar to school children, at least in monolingual English-speaking countries,\(^2\) had largely fallen out of favour with educational researchers and with many teachers of English. This is not to say that grammar was never taught but rather that educational researchers did not, on the whole, recommend the teaching of grammar. By the late 1970s the Australian experience was one of “reluctance to teach grammar” (Christie, 2003, p. 104). In New South Wales, the Australian state in which the empirical research for this thesis was undertaken, curriculum documents deemphasised systematic teaching of grammar, recommending instead a ‘point of need’\(^3\) approach:

Grammar and the conventions of writing are most effectively taught in the context of students’ needs and their own writing. Explanation of terms at the time of correction will help to ensure that grammar is meaningful. (NSW Department of Education, 1987, p. 52, emphasis added)\(^4\)

It was thus a distinct shift when in 1994 a new primary school English syllabus for New South Wales reintroduced the explicit and systematic teaching of grammar (Board of Studies NSW, 1994). The motivation for this reintroduction of grammar derived from systemic functional linguistic theory, developed by linguist M.A.K. Halliday, which had been responsible for the establishment of the ‘genre writing’

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\(^2\) The practice of teaching grammar has tended to vary considerably according to the linguistic and geographic context of an education system, as observed for example by Feez (2007). In countries where more than one language is expected to be learnt, grammar has often retained some status in the curriculum. Furthermore, “[t]he continued use of grammar to teach foreign languages and English to speakers of other languages suggests that the study of grammar supports students, at some level, as they learn to use an unfamiliar language” (Feez, 2007, pp. 314–315).

\(^3\) This expression derives from the UK’s ‘Bullock Report’ (Great Britain. Committee of Inquiry into Reading and the Use of English, 1975, p. 174).

\(^4\) Interestingly, the wording of this particular paragraph of the document Writing K–12 must have been the subject of some debate within the Department of Education itself. When Writing K–12 originally went to print, the paragraph was worded much more negatively:

> Schools do not need to provide a systematic study of whole systems of grammar, because such an extensive treatment is of little help to writers, and seriously cuts into time that is more profitably spent in writing itself. (NSW Department of Education, 1987, p. 52, original version)

This original wording was then replaced with a sticker which read as indicated in the quote above. No other part of the professionally produced document was ‘stickered over’ in this manner.
movement influential in many New South Wales schools by that time (Martin, 2000; D. Rose, 2009). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 1994 syllabus sparked another episode in the ‘grammar debate’, fuelled in this instance by the introduction of aspects of systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1st ed. Halliday, 1985a]). Here was a new element in the debate: a ‘wild card’ that could not be accounted for using the existing research which had all been based on the teaching of traditional school grammar or, in a smaller number of studies, transformational/generative grammar (following Chomsky, 1957).

The New South Wales debate was not unique. A similar approach to grammar teaching was attempted in England and Wales, also in the early 1990s. There, the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) Project set out to include ‘knowledge about language’ (‘KAL’) in its teacher training and in the development of a national curriculum in English. LINC’s emphasis, like that of New South Wales’s 1994 English K–6, was on how language functions in social context to create meaning, and it included grammar study as one aspect of ‘knowledge about language’. LINC recommended the introduction of a “new-style grammar” which would be “functionally oriented, related to the study of texts and responsive to social purposes” (Carter, 1990, p. 104). This proposed grammar, based on systemic functional linguistics, was essentially the same kind of grammar as that introduced in English K–6 (Board of Studies NSW, 1994). However, the LINC project’s work on grammar teaching suffered a fate which would prove somewhat predictive of the New South Wales experience:

5 “LINC stresses above all the richness and variety of language: the uses and functions of language over the forms of language; the description of texts in social contexts over the description of isolated decontextualised bits of language.” (Carter, 1990, p. 5)

6 Carter cites, for example, Halliday & Hasan (1989). He explicitly states that the LINC approach “is functional and Hallidayan in orientation” (1990, p. 18).
It was ... a tragic set-back when permission to publish the imaginative materials was withheld by the Minister (after inspection of drafts) in the spring of 1991, on the grounds that the approach taken by the team to the teaching of grammar did not correspond to a view of grammar based, e.g. on sentence parsing according to 1950s models. (Hawkins, 1992, p. 13)

In New South Wales, a review of the primary curriculum was instituted in 1995 by the newly elected state government. While the review’s terms of reference did not in fact refer to grammar, it nevertheless recommended that a new English syllabus be developed in which “conventional terminology” (Eltis, 1995, p. 87) would replace functional terminology. A functional orientation to the study of language was to be retained in the revised syllabus, but it would prove to be in less overt form and indeed most functional grammar terms were removed in the revised 1998 version of English K–6 (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998]). It was this revised English syllabus which furnished the official curriculum within which the present project was conducted, and one of the aims of the thesis is to explore the teaching of grammar based on a functional theory of language within the parameters of this syllabus. It is interesting to note that in 1994 when functional grammar was first included in English K–6, there were no studies which actually documented the teaching and learning of functional grammar in schools, although in ‘genre writing’ classrooms it is probable that some use had been made of grammatical terminology. One of the current project’s contributions therefore is to expand the (still) limited body of research into functional grammar in the primary school classroom, a field

7 The emphasis of the review was to be an evaluation of the ‘outcomes and profiles’ approach to curriculum design upon which the 1994 English K–6 syllabus was based. In hindsight at least some of the motivations for the review appear to have been political rather than educational:

The new Premier was obviously influenced by negative media representations of teacher and community reactions to the [1994] syllabus and saw the possibility of some political kudos in rescuing teachers from what he believed to be unclear, difficult, grammatical ‘jargon’. (Jones & Phillip, 1999, ‘1995: review of syllabus; removal of functional grammar’ section, para. 1)

At the time of the review, however, and given the absence of ‘grammar’ from its terms of reference, the recommendation to remove functional grammar from the syllabus was a “considerable surprise” to many (Jones & Phillip, 1999, ‘1995: review of syllabus; removal of functional grammar’ section, para. 9).
which remains under-researched in comparison with the historical research on the teaching of (especially) traditional school grammar.

In addition to casting doubt upon whether grammar should be taught, and if so which kind of grammar, another effect of the ‘grammar debate’ has been that research into pedagogies for teaching grammar has been neglected; ‘best practice’ tends not to be pursued if the practice is regarded as inherently dubious. Thus if teachers wish to teach grammar, or are required to do so (as continues to be the case in New South Wales), there has been little by way of educational research to help them in the endeavour. This thesis therefore takes as a further aim the exploration and critical appraisal of classroom practices in teaching and learning about grammar. An important dimension of the thesis is the linking of effective teaching with positive learning, the quality of pedagogy being a significant blind-spot in much of the historical research.

Also under discussion in the ‘grammar debate’ over time has been the question of what the teaching of grammar might reasonably be expected to achieve in terms of learning benefits for students. The main benefit hoped for, if apparently unrealised according to much of the literature, was improvement in students’ writing. Thus the three major reviews of research on the value of teaching grammar (Andrews et al., 2004a; Braddock et al., 1963; Hillocks, 1986) have all interpreted anticipated benefits in terms of ‘effect ... on ... accuracy and quality in written composition’ (to paraphrase the title of the review by Andrews and colleagues). This thesis takes a wider approach, seeking to explore a range of applications of functional grammar not confined to writing. In this sense it contributes further to research on the teaching–learning of grammar, expanding the ambit of what might be possible for students.
In broad terms then, the thesis sets out to explore the classroom potential of a functionally-oriented grammar based on Halliday’s systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1st ed. Halliday, 1985a]), with a focus both on pedagogy and on learning outcomes. It does this within the context of two case studies conducted in Year 2 classrooms in an inner suburban primary school in Sydney, New South Wales.

It is argued in Chapter 2 that the historical research on the teaching of grammar is problematic in several respects, including being methodologically flawed as well as giving scant attention to pedagogy, and that conclusions from empirical research are not so clearly negative about the value of teaching grammar as reviews of the literature have often suggested. It is therefore established that the question of whether to teach grammar in schools remains one open to further and fresh exploration in the contemporary environment.

The case for a functional grammar and the importance of coupling a suitable grammar with a theory of pedagogy are discussed in Chapter 3, which outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis as a whole. It is argued that systemic functional grammar offers considerable promise for enhancing students’ understanding and use of language in context due to its emphasis on meaning. It is further argued that a sufficient account of pedagogy needs to be undertaken before drawing conclusions about the value of teaching grammar. A traditional, transmission pedagogy was endemic to the era of the historical research and may well be implicated in the reported failure of grammar to improve student learning outcomes. For the present case studies, the pedagogy adopted was based on socio-cultural theories of learning following the work of Russian thinker L. S. Vygotsky (for example, Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). As such, it aimed to provide support to students in flexibly guiding them
towards new learning, rather than simply delivering the content of a set textbook or course as was often the case in the historical research. In addition, in the present study grammar learning was integrated with other curricular studies and not taught in isolation, again a point of difference from the kind of instruction typically deployed in past research.

The design of the project, described in Chapter 4, entails two ‘exploratory’-type case studies in which the researcher operated as a participant–observer in the case study classes and assisted the class teachers in implementing a functional approach to teaching and learning about grammar. A strong emphasis in the data collection phase was placed on the importance of classroom talk, a further contribution of the thesis being inclusion of the voices of learners and careful consideration of the role of language in mediating grammatical knowledge in the learning process. The thesis makes extensive use of transcribed classroom talk in seeking to explicate situated processes of teaching and learning grammar.

The data from the case studies were ‘sliced’ in order to produce manageable and meaningful units upon which to focus analysis. Thus, Chapters 5 to 8 deal with different ‘slices’ of empirical data: a comparison of two introductory lessons (Chapter 5); learning the grammar of quoted (‘direct’) speech (Chapter 6); grammar for critical reading in a picture book study (Chapter 7); and teaching–learning the grammar of ‘Theme’, including for improving writing (Chapter 8). In each of these chapters, the accessibility of a functional grammar for Year 2 children is critically appraised and in Chapters 6 to 8 some potential uses of systemic functional grammar in literacy learning are explored. It is argued that the case studies provide evidence for the positive possibilities of a functional grammar for student learning, and also that careful attention to pedagogy yields productive insights into ways in which such
possibilities may be realised. Recurrent themes in these chapters include the
importance of the means by which children are taught about grammar, that is, the
forms of ‘semiotic mediation’ by which they learn to understand grammatical
concepts, and the related relevance of Vygotsky’s formulation of voluntary attention
189).

Chapter 9 draws upon sociological theory of education to outline some of the
ways in which grammar teaching might be reformulated as an integrated part of the
curriculum. In considering the ‘transferability’ of the case studies to other
educational settings, some of the challenges for effective teaching–learning of a
functional grammar include the design of curriculum and the quality of teacher
subject knowledge. Both of these are likely to be significant factors if children are to
be supported in moving towards a systematic understanding of how grammatical
patterns work in harmony to orchestrate whole texts for effective social purposes.

One final point to be made before embarking on the thesis proper is that an
important shift in terminology is proposed. This Introduction has thus far used the
term ‘grammar’ for a certain kind of content knowledge taught in educational
institutions, but there is considerable “slippage” (Halliday, 1996/2002a, p. 385)
around the term so that it is not always clear what we mean by children ‘learning
grammar’. In the above discussion, what has actually been meant is ‘learning about
grammar’, rather than ‘learning grammar’ in the sense of learning to communicate in
the mother tongue. An alternative term for the former, and one adopted in the thesis,
is ‘grammatics’. The term ‘grammatics’ follows Halliday (1996/2002a, pp. 384–386)
in discriminating between ‘learning grammar’ in the sense of language development
(such as when toddlers begin to use verbs in their speech), which we achieve without
conscious effort, and ‘learning about grammar’ in terms of conscious metalinguistic knowledge (such as learning what we mean by ‘verb’). The parallel can be made: grammatics is to grammar as linguistics is to language. This distinction is helpful in clarifying what we mean by school children learning ‘grammar’ (actually grammatics, by this definition), and it resists the kind of confusion which suggests that teaching grammar is really only a matter of bringing to consciousness knowledge which is already possessed at a deep level:

A concerted effort is needed to explode the myth, alive even today ... that the native speaker is a person who naturally knows about language: this is typically quite untrue; knowing a language ... does not bestow this expertise about language any more than the ability to breathe proves knowledge about the physiology and the functions of the lung. (Hasan, 2011c, p. 40, original emphasis)

Just as knowing language and knowing about language are different orders of understanding, so also with ‘knowing grammar’ and ‘knowing about grammar’. Halliday’s suggestion of the term ‘grammatics’ is however a fairly recent one in the context of historical research on the teaching of grammar, and the term has only begun to appear more often in educational research of current times. So the distinction is both very helpful and yet difficult to sustain when writing about past studies in particular. In the thesis I have tried to use ‘grammatics’ where I could comfortably do so, particularly in reference to work in a Hallidayan tradition. At times, the discussion may also refer to ‘learning about grammar’ as a synonym for ‘grammatics’, with the inclusion of ‘about’ being a deliberate choice.
CHAPTER 2
Critical review of research into the teaching of grammar in schools

2.1 Introduction
The potential value of teaching school children about grammar is a field of educational research which is in need of further and innovative exploration. Despite past declarations suggesting that the case against grammar was essentially closed (and ‘against’ is the relevant word), there in fact remain serious questions about the strength of the historical research.

This chapter reviews the research literature on the teaching of grammar to school children. It does this by first providing a sketch of some relevant historical background which shows that questions about the value of teaching grammar have been longstanding, and also that the research itself has its own history including what in hindsight may be interpreted as a landmark publication and a watershed event (section 2.2). The chapter then critically appraises in some detail empirical studies on grammar teaching, both from the first three-quarters of the twentieth century (section 2.3) and some more recent research (section 2.4). It is argued that the veracity of what has been called “the huge body of research over the past 100 years” (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 734) is often overstated, proving upon closer inspection to be much more open to question than is typically assumed. It is furthermore argued that recent studies have taken some fresh perspectives on what had become a static field of research, and the thesis proceeds to engage with and contribute to some of these promising developments.
2.2 The prevailing wisdom: “perceived irrelevance”

A longstanding impression of the research, largely unchallenged until relatively recent times and still widely held, is that studies have repeatedly and conclusively shown that learning grammar has no improving effect on students’ results in subject English, specifically writing. These views have become entrenched in educational research, although negative views about grammar teaching in fact existed long before a consensus in the research seemed to confirm them, as indicated in the Australian context by opinion in the press (see sub-section 2.2.1 below). In seeking to understand how negative opinion about grammar teaching became established as ‘fact’, the following discussion identifies two events as particularly significant: the publication of the Braddock Report (2.2.2) and the Dartmouth Seminar (2.2.3). These both, and especially the Braddock Report, provide relevant historical background for understanding how grammar teaching came to be regarded as suspect not only in the court of public opinion but in the realm of research also.

2.2.1 Current and historical opinion

In the most recent systematic review of the literature, Andrews and colleagues conclude that:

> [T]here is no high quality evidence to counter the prevailing belief that the teaching of the principles underlying and informing word order or ‘syntax’ has virtually no influence on the writing quality or accuracy of 5 to 16 year-olds. This conclusion remains the case whether the syntax teaching is based on the ‘traditional’ approach of emphasising word order and parts of speech, or on the ‘transformational’ approach, which is based on generative-transformational grammar. (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 4)

While some qualifications of this statement apply given the specificity of the selection process by which studies were included in the review, the general point is

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8 Two aspects of the selection process in particular are noted: the use of ‘syntax’ as a gate-keeping term, resulting in the exclusion of studies using less syntactically-preoccupied descriptions of language; and the preference of the review for quantitative studies given its concern with evaluating ‘effectiveness’.
clear: “the evidence base to justify the teaching of grammar in English to 5 to 16 year-olds in order to improve writing is very small” (p. 4). This is equivocal at best. A considerably stronger case against grammar has also sometimes been advanced, namely that teaching grammar might actually harm students’ results in written expression.

Such views have a longer history than contemporary readers might expect, and not only in academic writing. There are, for example, Australian newspaper articles going back to at least the 1920s in which the value of grammar teaching is questioned and its potentially negative effects on student writing are raised. The following extract is from an article titled “Too much grammar” which appeared in the Adelaide-based newspaper (a broadsheet at the time), *The Advertiser*:

Prior to the liberalising of the curriculum for elementary schools in Victoria twenty years ago considerable importance was attached to formal grammar, and a good standard of proficiency was attained. It was found, however, that acquaintance with the complexities of voice, mood, and tense did not give the power of self-expression in composition and essays of a pleasant and readable character. The efforts of the pupils were labored [sic] and artificial ... . (“Too much grammar: An education problem,” 1923, p. 9)

The question – then and often now – was whether to continue teaching grammar if its benefits for writing were doubtful. This dilemma was underscored by another problem of schooling, one familiar today but apparently perennial: the ‘crowded curriculum’. The expectation had been that teaching of ‘formal’ grammar would inevitably improve student writing. If it could be shown that formal grammar did not do this, then grammar could be jettisoned from an increasingly busy curriculum in which time for ‘enrichment’ was at a premium:

[S]chool teachers recognised that the offer of an enriched curriculum was a fine one but ... They could only obtain the requisite time by removing the less serviceable matter from the old curriculum. The formal English lesson was one of the things that must go ... This would entail the omission of grammar lessons as such from the school work ... In the limited time of 25 teaching hours a week in the schools the
grammar lesson was not justified as a composition improver. (‘Learning English: Is grammar necessary? Teachers’ varying views,” 1938, p. 20)

This disquiet about grammar’s place in the curriculum may be traced historically to a loss of connection in English teaching between grammatical knowledge and its application in studies of ‘rhetoric’ (Christie, 1993), some discussion of which follows in Chapter 3, sub-section 3.2.1. The unease was not only an Australian phenomenon; dissatisfaction with grammar teaching in its existing form was evident, if not universal, in many parts of the English-speaking world by the middle of the twentieth century (Bernard, 1999; Christie, 1993; Myhill, Jones, Lines, & Watson, 2012, p. 139).9

2.2.2 The Braddock Report

Negative views about the value of grammar in schools were therefore clearly present in Australia among educators and interested members of the public from the early decades of the twentieth century. This questioning of the teaching of grammar did not, however, crystallise into a dominant view held by both researchers and teachers alike until the 1960s. Two important developments of the 1960s contributed to a general decline in the esteem in which grammar teaching was held by these professions: the publication of the ‘Braddock Report’ in 1963 and the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966.

The most important contribution to a view of grammar teaching as a ‘perceived irrelevance’ from the 1960s onwards (in some quarters, into the present time) was the ‘Braddock Report’ (Braddock et al., 1963). The Braddock Report was

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9 For relevant historical discussion, see: Hudson and Walmsley (2005) and Clark (2010b) on grammar teaching in England; Walker (1985, 1986, 2011) on the experience in Canada; Kolln and Hancock (2005) on a range of attitudes to grammar teaching in the USA; and Smith and Elley (1998) in reference to grammar’s “disappear[ance]” (p.91) from the New Zealand curriculum from the 1970s with evidence of decline from at least 1956 when grammar had last been examined in national tests.
the result of a review of research on the topic of the ‘state of knowledge about composition’, initiated by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in the United States and chaired by Richard Braddock. The review committee located over 1000 potentially relevant studies on writing and then narrowed these down to a final number of around 150 studies which were read in full. A privileged few of this number were chosen to be featured in detail in the final report as “highly selected” studies (Braddock et al., p. 4).

While the thoroughness of the committee’s search process is difficult to evaluate fully, it is fair to say that the report creates the definite impression of a thorough and exhaustive search. This made the report’s selection of several studies as “most soundly based” (p. 1) a high stakes business; those studies described in the final report were considered to be the cream. One of those studies was about grammar teaching: R.J. Harris (1962) – discussion of this study is taken up in sub-section 2.3.3 below.

The NCTE report was released in 1963 as Research in written composition, although it is commonly known as the Braddock Report. It included much sound advice for the future of research in the field – a field which it characterised as comparable to “chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy ... laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations” (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 5). However despite these remarks, and the report’s overall careful and cautious tone, it made one very decisive statement in particular which would have an enduring legacy:

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10 The process for selection of studies is not detailed in the way a systematic review might describe its selection processes today. A closer reading indicates that there may have been a US-bias in the search process. All the readers of studies except for two were at American institutions, and one of the main bibliographic sources used was Dissertation Abstracts, which at the time only catalogued North American theses. A sample of the report’s bibliographic list of studies reveals that, for example, of the first 50 studies listed, 22 were theses/dissertations and all 22 of these were done at US institutions.

There was furthermore a preference for studies which employed “‘scientific methods’, like controlled experimentation and textual analysis” (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 1).
In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students and teachers, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing. (Braddock et al., 1963, pp. 37–38)

These words quickly became the “most frequently quoted statement” about grammar teaching in the literature (Newkirk, 1978, p. 46) and would reverberate for years to come. The idea of grammar teaching having a ‘negligible or harmful effect’ became a form of received wisdom amongst English teachers, in part via the momentum of fresh directions in English teaching following the Dartmouth Seminar a few years later.

Certainly the Braddock Report’s statement appears to have gone unchallenged in academic discourse until 1977, when Mellon gave a conference paper (published c1978, pp. 253–254) which expressed some dissent and pointed out that a recent New Zealand study (Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wyllie, 1976) had shown that in fact teaching grammar had no ‘harmful effect’ at all. But dissent was far from widespread. In the same year that Mellon’s critical comments were first aired, the prevailing view received fresh endorsement from a research summary in an NCTE journal, in which the ‘harmful effect’ words of the Braddock Report were echoed: “[t]he study of grammar, while serving no ascertainable purpose, also exists at the expense of proficiency in reading and writing.” (Petrosky, 1977, p. 88)

Some debate seemed to ensue. A year after Petrosky’s research summary appeared, Newkirk published in the same journal a critique of Petrosky’s conclusions in which he argued that Petrosky had overstated the case and he outlined some of the problems with the Harris and New Zealand studies upon which Petrosky had

11 Specifically, Petrosky included ‘reading’ as well as ‘writing’ in the kinds of learning expected to suffer if grammar were taught. No evidence is cited by Petrosky to demonstrate that reading results suffered when students were taught grammar and the inclusion of ‘reading’ would appear to be conjecture only.
relied for his evidence. In a similar vein to that of Newkirk’s, a more extensive and critical survey of research into grammar teaching was undertaken by Kolln (1981), whose criticism was directed both at the recklessness of the ‘harmful effect’ statement and at flaws in the studies upon which it was based (particularly Harris, 1962). Kolln furthermore pointed out the inconsistency of the Braddock Report’s authors pronouncing so definitively on one subject (grammar) while simultaneously claiming that the whole field of research into written composition was still developing out of the ‘alchemy’ age. Her criticisms and others like them (Tomlinson, 1994), should have caused writers and researchers to think twice before making the same assertions again. But these cautions from a number of writers did not apparently enjoy the high profile of the Braddock Report, and prevailing opinion was not easily dissuaded of Braddock’s conclusions.

Thus the bold statement of the Braddock Report has continued to be echoed and even directly, approvingly quoted in writing about research in grammar teaching into the present century. The ‘harmful effect’ quote is used and endorsed, for example, by Hillocks and Smith in their entry for the most recent edition of the widely used *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 729).12

The belief has become persistent: that research has proven that grammar teachers are wasting their own time and the time of their students. The Dartmouth Seminar of 1966 lent this view further endorsement.

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12 Other examples of direct, positive quoting of the Braddock Report’s aforementioned statement can be found for example in Linden and Whimbey (1990, p. 6), Watson (2006, p. 83) and J.D. Williams (2012, p. 278). The quote is also sometimes used not as a statement of ‘fact’ but as a lever for critical reflection on the history of grammar teaching research, for example by Warner (1993, p. 76), Weaver (1996, p. 10), Smith, Cheville and Hillocks (2006, p. 266) and Hancock and Kolln (2010, p. 31).
2.2.3 The Dartmouth Seminar

The Dartmouth Seminar was held over three weeks at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, USA. It was a gathering of close to fifty leading thinkers about English education, mainly from the USA and UK (one was from Canada), who met with the aim of discussing the future of English teaching (J. Dixon, 1969, [1st ed. 1967]). The seminar is regarded in English education as a landmark event (Bernard, 1999; Christie, 1993; J. Harris, 1991) because it assembled and distilled contemporary thinking about English teaching and advised upon, and did in fact influence, future directions for the profession. Some of the features of English teaching to be promoted following Dartmouth, and articulated most famously in Dixon’s book *Growth through English* (1969),\(^\text{13}\) included: the ‘personal growth’ model, from which came emphases on creative writing, journal writing and the valuing of ‘process’ over ‘product’; and a recognition of the importance of encouraging students to use the language of their home, such as writing about personal experience, and speaking using their home dialect without being constantly corrected if it was not ‘standard English’. Aspects of these apparently positive developments had perhaps unintended and unhelpful side-effects. Christie (1993) argues that the favouring and celebration of each student’s personal ‘voice’ led to an allied, diminished interest in teaching students about language and its different uses: an increased emphasis on individual expression but at the expense of teaching about how language operates differently in various social contexts. The individual and the social were not articulated as both being significant and complementary. Thus,

\(^{13}\) The extent to which Dixon’s book represents the actual range of thinking at Dartmouth has been queried, for example: “*Growth through English* tended to report Dixon’s own views as the findings of the seminar” (J. Harris, 1991, p. 632). The subsequent widespread adoption of the ‘personal growth’ model of subject English has probably bestowed a retrospective aura of consensus on the Dartmouth deliberations which is not warranted. Nevertheless, Dixon’s book expresses a vision for subject English held by at least some of the participants at the Seminar and the book captures a shift in thinking about English teaching which is appropriately associated with the mid-1960s.
Chapter 2: Critical review of research

Christie contends, an apparently egalitarian approach in which students’ own voices were to be heard, in itself a desirable thing, became not so much a democratizing force as one in which students were “left to deduce ... for themselves” the ways to use language for success in schooling (1993, p. 100) – something which students of different social classes and language backgrounds were unevenly resourced to do.

On the specific question of the teaching of grammar, Dixon’s *Growth through English* relates that Dartmouth’s participants were dissatisfied with Latinate or traditional grammar. Grammar textbooks were regarded as containing “fabrications [of language] that have no other purpose” (p.78) and it was claimed that textbooks were typically used by the teacher without “the question of relevance [ever entering] his head” (p.75). In the student-centred approach of the personal growth model, it was anticipated that “[l]inguistic discussions ... [would] arise from the pupils’ own questions and observations on the language they use and naturally meet” (p.78) and that “[t]hese scattered and discrete discussions will finally create the study of language” (p.79, original emphasis) – that is, ‘knowledge about language’ would arise spontaneously from students’ experiences rather than being imparted by the teacher. There was some interest at Dartmouth in ‘new’ grammars (apparently transformational grammar – for brief explication see Chapter 3, subsection 3.2.2), although not so much for the classroom as for teachers’ information.

In terms of the Australian context, the influence of the ideas about English teaching promoted by and following the Dartmouth Seminar meant that by the late 1970s the idea of teaching grammar tended to be met with hesitancy at best (Christie, 2003). While some educators still saw a place for grammar taught ‘at the point of need’, others took a “hardline view” about grammar teaching, namely that of its “perceived irrelevance to the processes of promoting growth in language” (Christie,
2003, p. 104). ‘Perceived irrelevance’ is a view of grammar teaching which persists today in no few places.

Dartmouth’s misgivings about the overt teaching of grammar were not mere opinion; they were informed by research: “When we taught traditional grammar we could not, as research showed, claim to affect language in operation” (J. Dixon, 1969, p. 81, emphasis added). While no works of research are specified by Dixon, this view was certainly in accord with contemporary thinking about grammar teaching, including that of the Braddock Report. A critical examination of what ‘research shows’ is the task assuming the rest of the chapter.

2.3 Review of select historical studies

A not uncommon statement is that the body of evidence against the teaching of grammar has a long-established pedigree dating from the first decade of the twentieth century. For example,14 referring both to the Braddock Report and to Hillocks’ meta-analysis of research into teaching writing (1986), Hillocks and Smith state:

From all accounts, despite the huge body of research over the past 90 years, grammar remains a potent force in the curriculum of today’s schools [in the USA]... Why does grammar retain such glamour when research over the past 100 years reveals not only that students do not learn it and are hostile toward it but also that the study of grammar has no impact on writing quality and little, if any, on editing? (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 734)15

In order critically to appraise the historical research, reviews of the research were consulted in order to identify the most widely cited studies.

14 See also: Hillocks and Smith (1991, p. 600), quoted by Wyse (2001, p. 416); Andrews et al. (2004a, p. 5); Wilkinson (1971) and McBride (1979), who identify Rice’s work (1903, 1904) as the first in the field; and Memering (1978), who identifies Hoyt (1906) as seminal.

15 This statement is little altered from an earlier edition of essentially the same text (Hillocks & Smith, 1991, p. 600). It is interesting to observe that the authors see so little change in the field, indicative of a period of stasis in the research. A further point to be noted is that Hillocks and Smith seem not to have updated their numbers consistently; in the above more recent version, both references to the body of research should presumably read ‘100 years’.
2.3.1 Basis for selection of studies

A survey was conducted of reviews into research on the effects of grammar teaching, including substantial systematic reviews and some smaller scale but nonetheless influential reviews (evidenced by their citing in subsequent reviews, for example, or in other research in the field). The systematic reviews included in the survey were the Braddock Report (Braddock et al., 1963), a follow-up NCTE-commissioned report by Hillocks (1986) and, most recently, the ‘EPPI-Centre’ review led by Andrews (Andrews et al., 2004a). Seven other reviews were included based on their appearance in the literature into recent times (Hillocks & Smith, 1991; Kolln, 1981; Memering, 1978; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [UK], 1998; Weaver, 1996; A. Wilkinson, 1971; Wyse, 2001), and a further review using meta-analysis was included even though its relatively recent publication means it has not been taken up very much in the literature as yet (Graham & Perin, 2007a). Thus a total of eleven reviews of varying length and substance were consulted in order to identify well-regarded or at least more often cited empirical research on the teaching of grammar. The reviews yielded 55 empirical studies, which are listed in the table which appears in Appendix A as item A.1.16

From the table summarising reviews into the effects of grammar teaching, it is clear that some pieces of empirical research have featured more prominently than others over time. Most prominent from the 1960s onwards have been the study by Harris (1962, 1965) and the New Zealand study by Elley and colleagues (1976), both of which have had ongoing influence; these two studies are each analysed in the present chapter (sub-sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4). Also dating from the 1960s and 1970s

16 In general, all relevant studies were listed from each review. The exceptions to this were: references which appeared in the bibliography of the Braddock Report only and nowhere else in that report nor in any other review; and references to ‘sentence combining’ studies in both Hillocks (1986) and Hillocks and Smith (1991) which appeared in these reviews but in none of the other reviews.
are studies on ‘sentence combining’, a topic which is also given some attention in this chapter albeit more briefly given its relatively narrow scope (sub-section 2.3.5). From the period before the 1960s, three papers emerge as being more often cited, including into contemporary times: Asker (1923), Symonds (1931) and Macauley (1947). These three provide some indication of the quality of educational research into the effects of grammar teaching from the first half of the twentieth century, and given that the ‘body of research’ is said to have a standing of more than 100 years, these earlier studies provide some insight into the strength of such claims.

2.3.2 Early research on teaching grammar

Asker (1923)

Of the three selected pre-1960 studies, that by Asker (1923) is the oldest and yet it has continued to be cited into the present century – reason in itself to examine it closely. The study set out to compare grammatical knowledge with ability in written composition, taking as its sample 295 ‘freshmen’ at the University of Washington. Scores on four measures were obtained: a test of ability to judge the correctness of sentences; a test of ‘formal grammar’ including parts of speech, case and tense; grades for the college subject ‘Freshman Composition’; and a proxy score of ‘general ability’ which was calculated by averaging the students’ grades at the end of their first year of college. The various measures were compared by calculating Pearson coefficients of correlation.

Asker found that the degree of correlation between the scores on ‘judging correctness’ and ‘formal grammar’ was 0.23, and that between formal grammar and composition was 0.37. ‘General ability’ correlated with results in composition much more strongly than did knowledge of grammar, with a coefficient of 0.63. Asker concluded that “knowledge of formal grammar influences ... ability in English
composition only to a negligible degree” and furthermore that “time spent upon
formal grammar in the elementary school is wasted as far as the majority of students
is concerned” (1923, p. 111). The study has been repeatedly claimed to show that
“training in formal grammar does not improve pupils’ composition” (Andrews et al.,

The study has a number of problems which are not typically discussed.17 Firstly, there is a tendency to overstate conclusions. Most obvious of these is the
generalisation about grammar teaching as “time ... wasted” in elementary school for
the “majority of students” (p. 111). It is spurious to generalise to the wider
population from a sample of university students from the 1920s, in an era when these
tertiary students would have represented an even smaller elite than comparable
groups today. In addition, Asker did not ascertain the quality or nature of the
grammar instruction the college students had in fact received in their elementary
school days, rendering his conclusion on this point pure conjecture.

A second question arises regarding the strength of Asker’s conclusion that
grammatical knowledge had negligible benefit for composition. Asker did not
actually read the college students’ compositions, much less assess the extent to
which the compositions displayed evidence of grammatical knowledge – the scores
of composition writing were global results only and these were obtained from the
university rather than the researcher grading any writing himself. So it is not actually
possible to claim that ‘formal grammar’ had “negligible” influence on composition;
the grammaticality of the compositions was not assessed. The correlation coefficient
of 0.37 between ‘formal grammar’ and ‘Freshman Composition’ would seem to
indicate that only some success in written composition can be predicted by

knowledge of grammar, and that therefore other factors must also be important to success in writing, although this is hardly surprising. That results in a composition course might depend on factors *additional* to ‘formal grammar’ knowledge is not only plausible but predictable; writing well involves more than managing ‘case’ and ‘tense’, to take two examples from Asker’s ‘formal grammar’ test.

A third and substantial problem lies with Asker’s use of end-of-year average grades as a proxy for general ability. It is not clear whether these grades *included* the subject ‘Freshman Composition’, which would of course contaminate the results by failing to secure the independence of the measures being correlated. It is also likely that the students had to *write* in order to earn their university grades, and so the so-called ‘general ability’ measure is clearly not independent of the ‘composition course’ measure, and in fact questions of causality are very cloudy. It is possible that the Freshman Composition course had a learning effect which contributed to overall grades (as may have been the intention of the course), in which case the causality runs *counter* to Asker’s suggestion that “ability to write English composition depends to a considerably higher degree upon general ability” (Asker, 1923, p. 111).

The Asker study is an early one in the field of educational research, interesting for its use of still-developing research methods and for its indication of the longevity of questions about grammar teaching which persist to the present. It does not however carry the weight of evidence against the teaching of grammar for which it is generally credited. It is also interesting that its report of a degree of *positive* correlation between ‘formal grammar’ and ‘composition’ of 0.37 is consistently ignored while its more negative claims are reported and repeated.
Symonds (1931)

The aim of this study was to conduct an experiment into the influence of grammar learning on ‘correct usage’, with the stated intention of improving on the “static” and “extremely limited” correlation methods of studies such as Asker’s (Symonds, 1931, p. 95), correlation analyses having been the mainstay of research on grammar teaching to that time. The experiment followed a pre-test – teach – post-test design, with the duration of the teaching apparently just three weeks (p. 93). Six different groups of sixth grade students in New York City elementary schools were subjected each to a different method of grammar instruction, including methods which were considered “suspect” even at the time of the study (Kolln, 1981, p. 144). The methods of instruction were:

i. repetition of correct forms of usage (reading in unison sentences such as ‘The boy was almost killed by an automobile’), with some classes repeating each sentence only once a day and others up to ten times;

ii. repetition of correct and incorrect forms of usage (for example, reading in unison: ‘The boy was most killed by an automobile – is wrong’ and ‘The boy was almost killed by an automobile – is right’);

iii. drill and memorisation of grammar definitions and rules, with the express forbidding of any practice in application;

iv. exercises in grammatical analysis, again with application forbidden (for example, identification of the part of speech of ‘most’ in ‘Most boats carry life preservers’);

v. practice in choosing correct forms of usage, with learning of grammatical rules forbidden (for example, asking students to choose between ‘most and ‘almost’ to fill an empty slot in a given sentence); and
vi. ‘whole program’ teaching, in which grammar definitions and principles were taught, and students were given practice in grammatical analysis and in choosing forms of correct usage.

The identical pre- and post-tests consisted of 40 sentences, each of which contained one grammatical error and which the students were asked to rewrite in correct form.

The teaching methods produced the following average gains (out of 40 possible marks):

i. repetition of correct forms only (gains listed according to number of times each sentence was repeated), $x_1 +0.36, x_3 +0.34, x_5 +1.50, x_{10} +0.33$;

ii. repetition of correct and incorrect forms, $+10.11$;

iii. drill and memorisation of grammar rules, $+5.89$;

iv. exercises in grammar analysis, $+4.05$;

v. practice in choosing correct forms, $+8.01$;


No indication was provided as to the degrees of significance of the gains. In addition to these test results, Symonds made some use of IQ scores to see if gains on the tests correlated with intelligence. Commenting on the different methods of instruction, Symonds’ observed that “[m]ere mechanical repetition apparently yields almost no learning” and that “[t]he whole program ... yielded results in improved usage better than any one single method alone” (p. 93). Indeed, students in the ‘whole program’ were said to have “made a gain in correct usage which is ordinarily to be expected in three years by working on this program fifteen minutes a day for three weeks” (p. 93). However it was also observed that “repetition of the right and wrong forms in succession so that the distinction between the two is clearly brought out ... had greater influence on usage than any of the work with grammar” (strangely Symonds...
seems not to count the ‘whole program’ method as involving grammar in order to make this point). Apparently in defiance of some of his own results, Symonds was largely negative in his assessment of the value of grammar for improving “correct usage”, arguing that it was “relatively unprofitable for the average child” (p. 94).

Significant problems exist with the methodology and interpretation of results in Symonds’ study, and with the legitimacy of subsequent assertions of his supposed findings. Although the study claimed to be experimental, there were no control groups and so it is not clear whether any of the gains might perhaps have been observed without instruction. The different groups were not matched for ability – in fact in the pre-test the mean scores varied from a low of 5.40 (out of 40) to 20.75, indicating a wide range of prior knowledge about ‘correct usage’. While this is somewhat accounted for in the results by comparing mean gains rather than absolute values, it begs the question of whether the strictly controlled instruction and content were more closely aligned to the learning needs of some groups than others. Symonds in fact acknowledges these “wide differences in initial language usage” (p. 89) and finds that “pupils [with] the lowest initial scores on the test make the greatest gain”, although his explanation that this is “probably an artefact of the test” (p. 90) is at best incomplete. Interestingly, no reason is given for the variation in pre-test scores apart from a reference to “a marked correlation between intelligence and initial score” (p. 91) and no account given of the prior educational or language backgrounds of the student populations of the schools. A further problem probably influencing Symonds’ results is that some of the learning activities very closely resembled the format of the test questions, in which case an element of test practice was almost certainly implicit in a number of the teaching methods (particularly methods ii, v and vi – the three methods responsible for the greatest gains).
Subsequent reports of Symonds’ study have not necessarily paid due attention to its detail. Reviews about the influence of grammar on *written composition* draw a particularly long bow in citing this study. The instructional methods investigated in the study were all divorced from writing of anything more than single sentences, and some methods involved no writing at all. Furthermore the test of ‘usage’ was not an assessment of students’ ability to use correct forms in their own writing, but only an assessment of their performance in an itemized test of 40 single sentences. It is therefore invalid to draw conclusions from this study about the contribution of learning grammar to the improvement of composition (as does Memering, 1978, p. 559).

Another inaccurate interpretation of Symonds’ findings is “that grammar is often taught to children who have not the maturity or ‘intelligence’ to understand it” (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 9, again restating A. Wilkinson, 1971, pp. 33–34). This seems entirely at odds with Symonds’ observation that students who scored lowest on the pre-test made on average the most gains, although to be fair Symonds’ own discussion of these matters is not always clear. Symonds reported that “the correlation of gain and intelligence is negligible” (p. 91), meaning that improvement did not seem to be a function of intelligence, but later stated there were “positive correlations of gains with intelligence” for at least one of the experimental treatments (p. 92). In one school, students “had average IQ’s ... and yet their gains were high” (p. 92). There were no schools in which the average IQ was low in Symonds’ study. On this question, the results are in fact equivocal.

What would seem to be the clearest finding from Symonds’ study is that quality of instruction is strongly implicated in learning and that it is possible to teach grammar very badly, in which case students learn little.
Macauley 1947

Macauley’s is among the more frequently cited of the studies of the earlier twentieth century, and it appears in seven of the eleven research reviews surveyed for this chapter, as well as in other influential studies such as that by Harris (1962, p. 171). It is widely regarded as a study demonstrating the ‘unlearnability’ of much traditional school grammar: “there is no point in trying to teach formal grammar in the primary years” (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 15; see also: Wilkinson, 1971, p. 33; Hillocks and Anderson, 1992, p. 560; Weaver, 1996, pp. 16–20).

Macauley’s aim was to assess the grammatical knowledge of students at the end of their primary education to see if they had learned the parts of speech as expected in Scottish primary schools, or perhaps whether “these minimum essentials [are] still too difficult for the child” (Macauley, 1947, p. 154). His tests of parts of speech consisted of 50 single sentence questions in each of which a word was underlined and students were asked to indicate whether the word was a noun, verb, pronoun, adverb or adjective (there were ten instances of each of these). The tests were initially administered to 131 sixth grade students from five schools in or near Glasgow – the towns all fall within the greater urban area of Glasgow today.

It was found that of the 131 sixth graders, only one student scored a minimum of 50% for each of the five parts of speech tested, with only slightly more scoring a total of 50% or more overall (8). The mean result across all schools was 27.9%. When scores for each of the parts of speech were considered separately, the means ranged from 17.8% of adjectives identified correctly to 43.3% of nouns.

The test was then repeated with some other students – 126 entrants to comprehensive-type ‘junior secondary schools’ (the more academically able students having been streamed off into selective-type ‘senior secondary schools’). Here the
results were quite similar, with a mean result of 23.6%, and with the means for the parts of speech considered separately ranging from 12.4% for adjectives to 37.9% for nouns.

In an attempt to locate at what point in the school years most children could be expected at least to pass, Macauley conducted further testing with even more high school students, finding that means were persistently below 50% until the third year in the senior secondary (that is, academically selective) schools, where the mean reached 62%.

An immediate question which these results raise is whether Macauley’s tests (there were two variants of the test) were particularly hard. Macauley includes an example of one of the tests in his report (pp. 154–155). The questions themselves do not present as universally difficult, although several might be predicted to be harder than others and some are plainly debatable. One of the easiest questions involved identifying the underlined word as a noun in the sentence: ‘His new cycle was stolen’. The noun here is concrete – and indeed Macauley identifies abstraction as a cause of difficulty – and it is also acting in a typical role for a noun, as a participant in a process. One of the hardest questions involved deciding how to classify the word underlined in: ‘We hope to encourage the team spirit’. The correct answer was meant to be ‘adjective’, which was only selected by 13.2% of students from Macauley’s first two groups of subjects – a lower figure than the 20% which might be expected by guessing in the five-option multiple choice. Macauley does not tell us what the other 86.8% of students selected for the question, although ‘noun’ certainly seems a likely candidate. Similarly, ‘my’ in ‘Give me my money and let me go’ was only given as correct if identified as an adjective, although a reasonable case might be mounted for choosing ‘pronoun’ instead. As well as dubious cases such as these,
Macauley also included a number of questions in which the same word or a slight variant of it were used in different ways. The rationale for this, namely to see if students had a sense of the functional role of words from different classes, was in itself an interesting one. However it is problematic to try to make one set of terms do two jobs, that is, to accommodate simultaneously both word class and word function.

In addition, the questions using words with a common derivation may have interacted with each other and caused some confusion. For example:

- You must be patient with me.
- The doctor visited his patients.
- Have patience and I will pay thee all.

and the confusingly similar:

- Are you going to dance tonight?
- Are you going to the dance, to-night?

A further point of difficulty with the tests may have been the fact that students were expected to read the whole test to themselves, and while Macauley deliberately “kept [the vocabulary] as limited and simple as possible” (p. 155), some students may not have read sufficiently well for the test to be a fair representation of their knowledge.

We might then conclude that Macauley’s tests were not ideal in several respects.

Even given these questions regarding the tests, it would still seem from the very low results that these Scottish students had learned much less grammar than Macauley expected. He estimated that grammar instruction occupied “an average of thirty minutes per day at both primary and secondary stages” from age 7½ up (p. 153) and yet few students seemed to have learned very much. Macauley’s conclusion is that “[j]ust as there is a normal age of reading-readiness, a certain stage of mental maturity appears to be required for the understanding of grammatical function” (p. 159), and that “[g]reater maturity than is normally found in the primary school, and
greater intelligence than is normally found in the junior secondary school, appears to be required” (p. 162). This is the conclusion for which the study continues to be cited. It is not however the only possible interpretation.

At no stage did Macauley ascertain the actual experiences of instruction under which his subjects were supposed to have learnt their grammar, which he assumes to have been consistent and in accordance with the designated curriculum. If present day experience is at all comparable, teachers do not universally find the teaching of grammar to be straightforward nor necessarily an area of professional strength. It is at least possible that the teaching of grammar to Macauley’s subjects was inferior in some way. Certainly, if his results and his estimate of time spent teaching grammar are both close to fair, the grammar teaching must have proceeded without due regard for student learning – a kind of ‘transmission’ approach in which content was delivered by the teacher with little regard for students’ capacity to keep up, and no attempt to differentiate the curriculum for learners of different needs. This possibility is one Macauley dismisses too lightly: “The factor ... is not the personality or efficiency or method of the teacher but the age or maturity of the scholar” (p. 159). There is no expectation here that the teacher might attempt to align ‘method’ with students’ ‘maturity’; student failure is attributed to inherent, intra-individual mental functioning and has nothing to do with pedagogy. While students’ cognitive immaturity is one possible explanation for low results, it should be regarded as at best only a partial one.

One final question which hangs over the Macauley study also relates to quality of instruction. This question concerns the a-historical nature of Macauley’s entire discussion. The study is not alone in leaving out any historical or other potentially relevant social context – we might wonder for example about the
Chapter 2: Critical review of research

sociocultural profile of Symonds’ New York City students at the beginning of the 1930s – but in the case of this study some historical background might be particularly warranted. Macauley’s sixth grade study subjects were Glaswegian 12 year olds and the study was apparently conducted in 1946, at the end of the students’ seven years of primary schooling. This means that for the entirety of these subjects’ school years, the Second World War was being waged. Glasgow was a target of air raids and bombings during WWII due to the strategic importance of its industries including shipbuilding. This meant that Glaswegian school students were directly and repeatedly affected by the War. It would be valuable to know if this meant that their learning was seriously disrupted, in order to evaluate with better perspective Macauley’s concerns about his subjects’ lack of knowledge of grammar. It is possible, for example, that the same children may also have scored below expectation on other measures of their education given the extraordinary circumstances of their young lives, but Macauley’s report is silent on this point.

Early studies: Summary

Taken together, these three studies into the teaching of grammar have a range of shortcomings in research design which have been rarely discussed and generally ignored. Furthermore, none of the studies took account of the application of grammatical knowledge in genuine tasks of written composition: Asker made no assessment of the evidence of grammaticality in compositions (and did not himself read any compositions); and Symonds and Macauley did not make any use of

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18 Some examples of widespread effects of the War on Glaswegian schooling, documented for example in personal historical accounts (see TheGlasgowStory, 2004), include: loss of experienced teachers to the armed forces; evacuation of children to the country for periods of time – where not all were able to attend school; air raids – these disturbed rest at night, sometimes classes in the day, and meant that schools often operated on a half-day system so that the ground floors could be reserved for air raid sheltering and only half the usual number of students would attend in the morning, then the other half would attend in the afternoon; use of schools to house the homeless, of which there were thousands in certain periods due to destruction of homes in the bombings.
composition tasks at all. Yet these works have all appeared in reviews where the topic of the review was in fact ‘research in written composition’. As the more-often cited representatives of research into the effects of grammar teaching from the first half of the twentieth century, they indicate that evidence from this period is much more problematic and its conclusions more debatable than reviews would typically have us believe.

2.3.3 The Harris study (1962)

The Harris study was identified as one of the very few “most soundly based” studies included in the Braddock Report, and it was upon this study that the Report based its ‘harmful effect’ pronouncement. The study was conducted under a Ph.D. program and the full text of the study has only recently become more widely available thanks to digitisation and the internet.19 For most of its life, the study has been known to the majority of readers via two published summaries: the detailed summary in the Braddock Report (Braddock et al., 1963, pp. 70–83); and Harris’ own summary of his findings as a paper in The Use of English (R. J. Harris, 1965). The description of the Harris study which follows draws closely upon these two sources, the integrity of which in faithfully representing Harris’ original work is not contested.

The study design

Harris set out to investigate two methods of instruction which he termed ‘grammar’ and ‘non-grammar’. One ‘grammar’ class and one ‘non-grammar’ class in each of five secondary schools were studied over a period of two years. All ten classes followed parallel programs of instruction for most of their English work, that is, for


The work was digitised in 2009 and is now available through the British Library’s ‘EThOS’ service.
four of the five lessons per week. The fifth lesson each week was what distinguished the two groups: “while one form [class] studied and applied the terms of formal grammar in its composition work, the other used none of these terms and devoted the time saved to direct practice in writing” (R. J. Harris, 1962, p. 125).

The ‘grammar’ classes used a grammar textbook and followed the program and exercises therein. They learnt such aspects of grammar as “the names of the parts of speech, subject and predicate, and certain extensions of these” (R. J. Harris, 1965, p. 198). The teacher would also use this traditional grammar terminology when correcting compositions. The textbooks used in all the schools for teaching the ‘grammar’ classes were published in 1939. Not all schools used the same textbook, but both textbooks used were published in the same year, that is, about 20 years prior to the study.

The ‘non-grammar’ classes did not use a grammar textbook and did not use grammatical terminology, but they did discuss common errors and aspects of sentence construction as these were relevant to their own written compositions and classroom activities. These aspects of composition and usage were dealt with “by means of example and imitation, instead of by the abstraction and generalisation of the approach through formal grammar” (R. J. Harris, 1962, p. 131).20 That is, Harris’ ‘non-grammar’ classes did in fact address grammatical aspects of writing, but the method of instruction used exemplification and reasoning rather than learning of rules. In addition, the ‘non-grammar’ classes learned about grammatical matters in

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20 Harris (1962, pp. 131–132) provides a lengthy example which is reiterated in the Braddock Report (p.71). The example is of the correction of the following sentence: ‘Jim and me was going into the cave’. This ‘mistake’ would be addressed in the Grammar stream “by direction to agreement of subject and verb and to the proper use of the nominative forms of pronouns when the pronouns are used as the subject” (p.131). In the ‘non-grammar forms’ the teacher would discuss the suitability of saying ‘We was going into the cave’, discuss how many ‘we’ implies (more than one), and talk about how more than one means that ‘were’ must follow. Students would then be asked to generate more examples along the same lines.
the context of their own learning needs and the revision of their compositions. In 
acknowledgement of this, the Braddock Report actually renamed Harris’ two types 
of instruction as “what might be loosely referred to in the United States as ‘formal 
grammar’ [for Harris’ ‘grammar’ stream] and a ‘direct method’ of instruction [for 
Harris’ ‘non-grammar’ stream]”, since “actually grammar and composition were 
taught in each group” (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 70).

The instruments used to evaluate the programs of instruction were twofold:

i. A formal grammar test (referred to as ‘Test C’) was administered to both 
   strands of students at the beginning and end of the study. The test is 
described as:

   a short answer formal grammar test ... which required the identifying in sentences 
   and naming from recall of the parts of speech, subject and direct object, phrase 
   and clause, tense and mood, and the like. The examinees were also required to 
   explain “in grammatical terms” what was wrong with a number of sentences. 
   (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 72, original emphasis from Harris, 1962)

ii. A composition on a set topic was written at the beginning and again at the 
   end of the study two years later (the same topic both times). Students also 
   wrote a composition at the end of the first year (on a different topic), which 
   Harris used as an intermediate measure of the study’s progress.

**Some inherent problems**

There are a number of problems inherent to the design of Harris’ study. Chief among 
these are the difficulties in establishing a clear distinction between the two methods 
of instruction, and a failure to control for the effect of practice in written 
composition.

Harris’ ‘grammar’ and ‘non-grammar’ groups were not delineated as strictly 
as their names suggest (Kolln, 1981, pp. 146–147; Tomlinson, 1994, pp. 24–25). The 
‘grammar’ groups did indeed study grammar, and did so in what were ‘formal’ ways. 
This ‘formal grammar teaching’, by which both the teaching of grammatical forms
and a *formal* or traditional pedagogy may be understood in this case, seems to have been discrete from students’ other subject English work. This is a reasonable assertion given that the grammar instruction was confined to a separate lesson each week and also given the constraints of a textbook-based program of instruction, where the aspect of grammar being treated each week may or may not have had relevance to students’ concurrent learning in their other English studies. The ‘non-grammar’ groups do not, however, conform well to their label. In what is *not* the contrast that their name implies, the ‘non-grammar’ groups *also* studied aspects of grammar. These were treated as it became clear to the teacher that students needed to be introduced to certain language features, usually because these were areas of uncertainty in their composition writing. While these ‘direct method’ classes did not use grammatical terminology, they did deal with at least some elements of grammar by looking at examples of expression in their own and others’ work. This is characterised by Tomlinson as an “informal, practical” approach (p. 25) to learning about grammatical matters. Thus the two types of instruction in Harris’ study were not demarcated in the strictly bounded way that the terms ‘grammar’ and ‘non-grammar’ would suggest. This represents a serious point of confusion for interpretation of the study’s results.

Interestingly, while conceding the point that Harris’ two streams did not actually represent the contrast their labels suggested, some recent commentators have resisted the implication that this calls the study itself into question (Andrews et al., 2004a; Wyse, 2001). Wyse disagrees with Tomlinson’s critique, insisting that the ‘formal’ approach was “not as ‘rigid’ and ‘taxonomic’ as Tomlinson suggests” (Wyse, 2001, p. 418). He quotes Harris’ thesis (1962, p. 138) to assert that “in fact the formal grammar was accompanied by ‘constant practical application to
composition’ ” (Wyse, 2001, p. 418). This would appear to be a fair point, although the ‘constant application’ phrase is actually quoted by Harris from one of the grammar textbooks and refers to the textbook’s own composition exercises, the relevance of which to the wider writing demands of subject English is not established. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that at least some application of grammar to composition was indeed a feature of the ‘grammar’ stream in Harris’ study.

But this is of course only half an argument. Wyse neglects to engage with the question of the extent to which ‘grammaticality’ was taught in the ‘non-grammar’ classes via what Tomlinson calls an ‘informal’ approach. If the example described in footnote 20 is indicative, as its author certainly intended it to be, then the ‘formal grammar’ work does indeed seem to have been quite ‘rigid’ and reliant on rules about form in a way that the ‘direct’ or ‘informal’ method was not. Wyse feels that Harris’ “reflective and tentative stance” (p. 418) vindicates him on this point, although of course many of the reiterations of Harris’ findings have been quite the opposite of tentative. In other recent commentary, the EPPI-Centre review (Andrews et al., 2004a) seems at first to align itself with critics like Kolln and Tomlinson, recognising that there exist serious questions about the differences between Harris’ ‘grammar’ and ‘non-grammar’ classes; the review refers to Harris’ non-grammar stream as adopting a “‘functional’ or ‘direct’” approach (p. 15). However the review then goes on to concur with Wyse that “such a point does not invalidate Harris’ findings” (p. 17). No reason is given for this leap.

The other important flaw inherent in the design of the Harris study is that the so-called non-grammar groups had extra opportunity to write, and it was to be partly
by means of written composition that they would be judged against the ‘grammar’
groups.

The time saved by not teaching formal grammar in the Direct Method group was
devoted to additional composition work. (Braddock et al., 1963, p. 71)

That is, the ‘non-grammar’ stream had more practice in writing than did the
‘grammar’ stream. It is a critical failure that the study does not control for this
practice effect, as will be seen below in the discussion of the study’s findings.

Results

A. The grammar test

The formal grammar test (‘Test C’) yielded the scores shown in Table 2.1 (R. J.
Harris, 1962, pp. 170–171).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>First Average</th>
<th>Second Average</th>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>Difference in gain between ‘Grammar’ and ‘Non-grammar’ classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>33.03</td>
<td>49.71</td>
<td>16.68</td>
<td>16.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-grammar</td>
<td>34.12</td>
<td>34.69</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>36.33</td>
<td>66.62</td>
<td>30.29</td>
<td>26.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-grammar</td>
<td>34.88</td>
<td>38.20</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>20.10</td>
<td>34.34</td>
<td>14.24</td>
<td>12.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-grammar</td>
<td>22.09</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>19.48</td>
<td>39.96</td>
<td>20.48</td>
<td>19.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-grammar</td>
<td>21.09</td>
<td>21.83</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>15.84</td>
<td>32.84</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>15.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-grammar</td>
<td>22.71</td>
<td>24.21</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The test results show that all the classes in the study had some knowledge of grammar at the outset (‘first average’), with mean scores for classes ranging from 15.84% to 36.33%. This indicates that the ‘non-grammar’ groups did not enter the study as complete grammar novices; all the classes began the study with some degree of grammatical knowledge. This feature of the results is not discussed by Harris (1965). The formal grammar classes made the greatest improvements on Test C over the two years of the study, as might be expected. The ‘grammar’ groups recorded mean gains on their Test C scores of between 14.24 and 30.29 marks out of 100, while the ‘non-grammar’ groups made negligible mean gains of only 0.57 to 3.32 marks out of one hundred. The grammar classes’ mean scores ranged from 32.84% to 66.62% at the end of the two year period. The non-grammar classes’ mean scores at the end of the same period ranged from 21.83% to 38.20%; a lower overall band, although with some overlap in two schools where the ‘non-grammar’ classes had begun the study with a greater degree of grammatical knowledge.

The results from Test C raise a number of problems. Not least of these, for Harris, was the fact that only one ‘grammar’ class had achieved a result greater than 50% at the end of the two year instruction period in formal grammar:

The low ceiling reached in grammatical attainment ... may be seen as a major factor throwing doubt on the advisability of studying formal grammar in the early part of the Secondary School. (R. J. Harris, 1962, p. 198)

What is implied here is the notion of a mismatch between intellectual maturity and the teaching of grammar as previously suggested by Symonds (1931) and Macauley (1947), both of whom Harris cites in his thesis. This explanation situates the causes of failure within students. However, the rather low levels of achievement on Test C by the grammar groups may be interpreted in other ways. While a number of possible explanations exist, such as the test not matching the course of instruction
well or simply being pitched at too hard a level, one glaring possibility is that the low test results may be attributed to poor teaching of the grammar course, rather than poor student learning understood separately from all else as Harris’ comment suggests. In similar vein to Macauley before him, and with Macauley in mind, Harris states that “[p]revious experimental evidence has shown that traditional grammar is unteachable to the point of serious application, certainly to all but the cleverest children” (R. J. Harris, 1965, p. 201). ‘Unteachable’ is a strong choice, especially when it is recognised that the historical research cited by Harris did not set out to describe quality teaching methods or to explore new or better ways in which the ‘unteachable’ might indeed prove capable of being taught. ‘Un teachability’ is here a convenient explanation but it is not proven fact.

A further problem with Test C arises in relation to the non-grammar classes, which as already discussed did in fact learn about grammatical conventions but in a different way from the grammar stream. These classes tended to deal with grammatical questions by way of exemplification and class discussion about usage; their teachers agreed not to use grammatical terminology in class or when marking homework and composition work. Thus, despite having discussed aspects of language usage in class, the ‘non-grammar’ classes were not made familiar with grammatical metalanguage. This means that the nature of Test C may have masked their knowledge of grammaticality to some extent because they did not have mastery of the terminology necessary for high scores in the test. They may, for example, have known how to correct the ‘incorrect’ sentences in the test, but it is likely that they would have struggled with the test requirement to explain “‘in grammatical terms’ what was wrong” (R. J. Harris, 1962, p. 243, original emphasis).
Given the range of questions raised above, it would seem prudent to view the Test C results with some scepticism. The judgment that they indicate the unlearnability of formal grammar cannot be adequately substantiated as there may be other reasons that the formal grammar classes did not achieve at a higher level in the final test. Even the generally better results achieved by the grammar classes over the non-grammar classes may not be reliable indicators of the latter’s knowledge about language since the non-grammar classes did not have access to the terminology rewarded in some parts of the test.

There is, however, at least one important point to be drawn from Harris’ Grammar Test results: that both the ‘grammar’ and ‘non-grammar’ groups began the study with some grammatical knowledge. This is a feature of Harris’ study which this researcher has not seen acknowledged in any other commentaries. The study did not truly contrast students with grammatical knowledge against those with none. For example, the lowest pre-test score on Test C for the ‘direct’ or non-grammar classes was 21.09% in School D. In that same school, the grammar class scored 39.96% on the post-test, so the non-grammar class knew roughly half the amount of grammar at the outset that the grammar class knew at the end. The comparison is thus not ‘grammar versus no grammar’, but ‘more grammar versus less grammar’. This is not the impression one gains from accounts of Harris’ study. It begs a further question: was the lesser degree of grammatical knowledge already possessed by the ‘non-grammar’ classes sufficient for many of their purposes in writing?

B. The written compositions

Harris used a number of instruments to evaluate the compositions written by students at the beginning and end of the experimental period, and also the intermediate essay
written at the end of the first year. There were eleven measures of various aspects of the compositions, all frequency counts. The measures are listed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2  Measures of written compositions in Harris (1962)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. total correct sentences</td>
<td>Very reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. average number of words to each common error</td>
<td>Very reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. number of different sentence patterns</td>
<td>Very reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. number of subordinate clauses</td>
<td>Very reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. number of correct complex sentences</td>
<td>Very reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. instances of the omission of the full stop</td>
<td>Fairly reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. number of simple sentences with two or more modifying phrases</td>
<td>Fairly reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. correct non-simple minus correct simple sentences</td>
<td>Fairly reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. number of adjectival clauses and phrases</td>
<td>Fairly reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. average length of correct simple sentences</td>
<td>Unreliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. total words written</td>
<td>Unreliable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Harris identifies two of these measures as not reliable and the other measures vary in reliability. The measures were developed by Harris himself in a pilot study. By current research standards they provide somewhat limited insight into the quality of the students’ writing, however in the early 1960s frequency counts were the mainstay of composition analysis.

Overlooking the limited descriptive capacity of these measures, Harris’ results indicate that the formal grammar groups did not perform better than his ‘non-

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21 Harris trialled a greater number of measures, but these eleven were those he identified as giving “the clearest evidence of change” (R. J. Harris, 1965, p. 199).


23 The shortcomings of this approach, which tends to focus on the detail and obscure other important aspects of writing, were discussed by the Braddock Report: “A fundamental difficulty with most frequency counts is that they are simply counts of grammatical and mechanical ‘errors’, omitting attention to purpose and main idea, supporting material, organisation, and style ... urgently needed are similar analyses of rhetorical constructions” (Braddock et al., 1963, pp. 17–18, original emphasis).
Chapter 2: Critical review of research

In fact, in some areas the non-grammar groups achieved better results than the grammar students:

These gains by the non-grammar forms cover a wide field. Mechanical, conventional correctness – as in the number of words per common error; maturity of style – as in the variety of sentence patterns used; the control of complex relationships – as in the number of correct complex sentences; as well as general overall correctness, seen in the total number of correct sentences, were all improved significantly in groups practising direct writing-skills as compared with groups studying formal grammar. (R. J. Harris, 1965, p. 200)

Harris describes this as “evidence for the inadequacy of grammatical instruction to produce advantageous changes” (1965, p. 200). But is it?

These results on the written composition scores need to be understood in light of Harris’ essentially flawed experimental design: the ‘non-grammar’ group had extra writing practice while the ‘grammar’ group studied grammar. Harris in fact credited the extra practice in writing for the non-grammar classes’ improvements, but made no acknowledgement of this as a critical flaw in the study:

That significant gains were made by forms [classes] not studying grammar need occasion very little surprise when one considers that an extra writing period in place of grammar must almost double the time given each week to actual written work in class .... (R. J. Harris, 1965, p. 201)

What can be said from the Harris study is that more practice in writing assists improvement to a greater extent than limited practice. If we acknowledge also that Harris’ ‘non-grammar’ groups did learn about language structure, but in a manner directly related to their immediate needs, we might add that writing practice accompanied by relevant knowledge about language is more effective in improving writing than limited writing practice and the learning of grammar as an essentially discrete body of knowledge.
2.3.4 Elley, Barham, Lamb and Wyllie (1976) – the ‘New Zealand study’

This study has been particularly influential for determining the value ascribed by researchers to the teaching of grammar. It is the single most admired study of the teaching of grammar from the last quarter of the twentieth century, having been cited in each of the reviews since 1986 surveyed for this chapter and, in one of the most recent reviews, evaluated as the second to highest quality of all reviewed studies (Andrews et al., 2004a). It has two features which have lent it significant appeal: it was a longitudinal study (conducted over three years – the longest period of all the grammar studies here reviewed); and it studied transformational-generative as well as traditional grammar whereas previous studies had only examined the effects of learning traditional school grammar.

The study was conducted in a New Zealand secondary school and students from eight classes were assessed over three years from third form to fifth form. Three classes studied a ‘Transformational Grammar (TG) Course’ from *The Oregon Curriculum* (Kitzhaber, 1970). The course had three strands: (i) a grammar strand, (ii) rhetoric strand (including writing for different purposes) and (iii) literature strand. Another three classes studied what the researchers called a ‘Reading–Writing (RW) Course’, which consisted of the rhetoric and literature strands of the *Oregon Curriculum*, plus additional reading and creative writing in the time the TG students were studying grammar. A final two classes followed the ‘Let’s Learn English (LLE) Course’, which used textbooks of the same name to teach some traditional grammar. The students in the LLE course also did literature study based on class sets of novels.
Results

The students were assessed on essay writing, a variety of language tests (including reading comprehension, vocabulary, sentence combining and English usage) and surveys of their attitudes to English as a school subject. In summary, Elley and his associates found “the evidence indicated that the different programs had produced no important divergent effects on the pupils” (Elley et al., 1976, p. 16). That is, there were no significant differences in student outcomes between the three courses which would indicate a general benefit to be derived from a particular course. In fact, the gains made by all the students in writing were regarded by the researchers as generally unimpressive, prompting the following conclusion:

…it seems unlikely that the three courses studied in this project have produced a formula for dramatic improvement. The fifth formers were writing with little more control or fluency and with the same kinds of sentence structures as they used in the third form. In the light of this finding, it is not sufficient to claim that the grammar students did not sacrifice any growth relative to the others. It seems that grammar has no practical benefits in an absolute sense. (Elley et al., 1976, p. 16, original emphasis).

Another important result was that students who studied grammar commonly reported negative attitudes to English and to grammar instruction in particular, which they found dull and repetitive.

Questions of methodology and interpretation

It is possible to summarize some of the problems with the New Zealand study, since they have appeared before in studies reviewed in the chapter. The most important problem with the study is its failure to establish an effective control group, with associated interference of the practice effect. The RW (non-grammar) course substituted extra reading and writing for the transformational grammar strand of the Oregon Curriculum. Here is a flaw identical to that of the Harris study. The effects of grammar instruction cannot be isolated from other variables which may have
enhanced performance: the ‘non-grammar’ students wrote more than the ‘grammar’ students.

A further problem lies with extrapolating from the treatment groups in this study to ‘grammar teaching’ in some generalised sense without a proper accounting for quality of pedagogy. In particular, the teaching of grammar in the New Zealand study would appear to have been unconnected with the other aspects of subject English. For example, of the TG course, Kolln states:

...the passive voice is taught as a transformational rule; it is never mentioned in connection with rhetoric or style or sentence effectiveness. Even such basic grammatical terms as “relative clause” and “prepositional phrase”, which the students learn as part of transformational theory, are never mentioned in connection with composition. (Kolln, 1983, p. 497)

So in this study, as with Harris beforehand, grammar was taught as a substantially discrete body of knowledge, with the hope that perhaps students would transfer understandings from one aspect of their English studies to another. If curriculum writers do not make these connections clear, it seems unsurprising that students might find it difficult.

The question of the value of teaching grammar therefore remains considerably less certain than is commonly believed, if these problems with the New Zealand study and studies before it are indicative. Yet in 1991 Hillocks and Smith stated that “[o]f all the studies reviewed, by far the most impressive is by Elley, et al. (1976)” (p. 596). If this is the “most impressive”, or even the next to most impressive as it was judged in the more recent EPPI-Centre review (Andrews et al., 2004a), there is little to encourage the abandonment of all grammar teaching based on the strength of the research to this point.
2.3.5 Sentence combining

Another quite specific avenue of research in grammar teaching has been the largely North American interest in ‘sentence combining’. This method uses demonstration and practice to teach students different ways of combining simple, usually single-clause sentences, to create different effects and to write with more variety, such as by co-ordinating and embedding clauses. ‘Sentence combining’ has been found in a number of studies (early examples widely cited are: Mellon, 1969; O’Hare, 1973) to contribute to greater ‘syntactic maturity’ in writing, measured for example by ‘words per T-unit’ and ‘clauses per T-unit’ (T-unit may be understood in approximate terms as a sentence). That is, sentence combining can contribute to students writing longer and more complex sentences.

Reviewers and sentence combining researchers themselves have regarded these studies as suggestive of positive benefits for students’ writing, although with some qualification. While it is widely acknowledged that sentence combining can have a gainful effect in terms of teaching for longer and more complex sentences (Andrews et al., 2004b), it is also the case that longer and more complex sentences are not necessarily what is needed in all writing and that a sense of the rhetorical advantages of ‘sentence combining’ needs also to be developed.

Careful scrutiny of the evidence for the positive impact of sentence-combining on the quality of children’s writing reveals an ambivalent picture. ... Critics point out that, in some instances, the evidence simply shows that teaching children to write more complex sentences helps them to write more complex sentences, without necessarily improving the quality of writing. (Myhill, 2010, p. 133)

Reflecting more generally on the learning of grammar, Myhill expresses concern that students often do not have a “corresponding understanding of effect and meaning-making”, and “the belief that complex sentences are inherently good is [a] prevailing trend” (Myhill, 2005, p. 91).
Furthermore, from a linguistic perspective sentence combining addresses only one aspect of grammar – that of the logical relations between clauses. A single teaching method communicating a single strand of grammatical knowledge should not be expected to transform entirely students’ written compositions. Sentence combining has, by its nature, limited potential for improving students’ writing, particularly so if not taught with an eye to the rhetorical effects which might be achieved by its meaningful use. This precise point was in fact made by one of the earliest contributors to sentence combining research, Mellon, who cautioned against the “faddishness” of “misguidedly trying to build entire composition programs around sentence-combining practice, as if sentences and discourses were coterminous” (Mellon, c1978, p. 249).

2.4 Recent research in teaching grammar

Despite all the problems discussed above, the Harris and New Zealand studies were persuasive, and they effectively halted research into the teaching of grammar in schools for two decades. However during and since the 1990s a number of new and different perspectives have been taken in research on the teaching of grammar. These include research into the teaching of systemic functional grammar and research which aims to give a better account of the relationship between pedagogy and grammar learning.

2.4.1 Research into teaching and learning of systemic functional grammar in schools

One sizeable research project has explored the potential of systemic functional grammar in primary school classrooms, and a number of other studies have explored applications of systemic functional grammar at the secondary school level. There is

24 Hereafter often simply ‘functional grammar’, following the convention in systemic linguistics.
also a growing body of more anecdotal evidence in the teaching and learning of functional grammar in schools, documented by (often) practising teachers.

‘Children’s Development of Knowledge About Language’ project

In the mid-1990s a research project using primarily qualitative methods was established to investigate for the first time the teaching and learning of aspects of systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1st ed. Halliday, 1985a]). The project, called ‘Children’s Development of Knowledge About Language,’ was led by Geoff Williams (then at the University of Sydney), with active participation from research assistants and also the teachers of the case study classes. The present researcher was a teacher participant in this project, and declares at this point a strong degree of involvement in the project as well as direct familiarity with much of its data. Williams set out to research the teaching and learning of some aspects of systemic functional grammar (‘SFG’) in a number of case studies in primary schools in Sydney, New South Wales (G. Williams, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2006; G. Williams & French, 1995; G. Williams, Rothery, & French, 1994). Specifically, Williams sought to explore: the accessibility of SFG; its utility in English/literacy tasks including children’s writing and talking about texts; and whether students enjoyed learning grammar.

The project incorporated case studies of two Year 6 classes, two Year 1 classes and a fifth group of students from one of the original Year 6 classes which formed a ‘Grammar Club’ during their first year of high school (Year 7). Its approach to the teaching of knowledge about language (‘KAL’) was much in accord with that envisaged by the LINC materials which had not been permitted to progress to implementation in the UK (Chapter 1). All classes were taught aspects of systemic functional grammar. For example, the Year 6 children learnt about aspects of the
‘experiential metafunction’ as it is described in systemic linguistics (such as Process types and some Participant roles) and also about the concept of ‘Theme’ from the ‘textual metafunction’ (see French, 2010, pp. 214–215 for a list of grammatical descriptions which were taught; these terms are explained in the thesis in following chapters). The studies investigated ways of teaching systemic functional grammar using a pedagogy informed by the socio-cultural constructivist theory of L.S. Vygotsky (the main features of which are elaborated in Chapter 3), including a collaborative and flexible approach to the teaching–learning of grammatics. A deliberate feature of the research was the teaching of grammar ‘in context’, that is, as it related to texts written and read in class. For example, one class learned about grammar when redrafting a recipe for food which the class had learned to cook. With the 1994 Year Six case study, a quasi-experimental phase was included, where comparisons were made between the case study class and another class in the same school on a writing task.

A wide range of data is used by Williams to illustrate some of the results of this project, including considerable transcript data where children talk with each other and with teachers and researchers about grammatics. The main findings are:

i. select aspects of systemic functional grammar are accessible to children from at least their second year of formal schooling; and

ii. primary school children are able to use these aspects of systemic functional grammar for genuine purposes in their English/literacy studies.

On the second of these findings, that of areas of applicability of grammatics to the tasks of schooling, there was evidence for the following: utility of grammatics for conscious control of effective writing (such as Year 6 students who could control the linguistic feature ‘Theme’ in their written work and could discuss their meta-
linguistic awareness using functional terminology); utility of grammatics in making critical interpretations of literature; and positive effects on children’s oral reading and ability to punctuate speech. In the quasi-experimental phase of the 1994 study, it was found that when compared with an academically parallel ‘non-grammar’ class in the same school, the case study class exhibited higher performance according to some measures of their written compositions (G. Williams, 1995). A further finding was that of students’ consistently positive attitudes to the learning of a functional grammatics within the particular pedagogical framework which was adopted: “[f]rom the evidence available it is apparent that the children generally enjoyed their experiences” (G. Williams, 1995, p. 161).

The case studies in this project furnish evidence of the accessibility and utility of aspects of systemic functional grammar for even quite young students. They also indicate that research into the teaching of grammar is a topic far from spent; that new insights are possible by designing grammar learning differently from the way it was done historically.

**Systemic functional grammar in secondary schooling**

Systemic functional grammar has also been introduced to different groups of secondary school students and found to be effective for helping students improve their understanding and writing of the ‘academic’ English of the curriculum.

One significant and well-documented project has involved the ‘literacy’ component of a series of professional programs for (mainly) secondary school teachers run out of the University of California, Davis. For a long period coordinated by Mary Schleppegrell, the programs’ aims regarding literacy include the professional development of secondary school teachers in knowledge about language so that they are better aware of the language demands of their teaching subject areas,
and therefore better equipped to help their students negotiate these demands successfully. Participants targeted for the professional development include teachers of English language learners, that is, of students whose mother tongue is not English and who commonly experience some difficulty accessing the academic language of different school subjects. Students learn some aspects of functional grammar as these relate to helping them understand the subject-specific language of their studies, both in terms of reading with understanding and writing effectively within that discipline’s expectations. That is, grammar is taught in the context of what the students are reading and writing, and also within the context of the subject itself, such as learning to write a well-organised argument for a history essay. There is strong evidence for the effectiveness of this targeted and integrated approach to teaching grammatics, including independently audited results showing that students whose teachers can equip them with relevant insights into the language of the curriculum do considerably better than comparable students who are not provided with similar support (Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008).

Some Australian secondary school students have also been found to benefit from being introduced to aspects of systemic functional grammar as these relate to their subject-specific literacy needs. It has been observed, for example, that students are better able to write essays which align with the expectations of different subjects when the relevant language features, including grammatics, are made explicit to them (Christie, 2002b; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007). Although such observations have not been documented in the quantifiable terms often preferred in meta-analyses and systematic reviews, they nonetheless provide further indication of the fertile ground
opened up by fresh approaches to the design and implementation of ‘grammar teaching’.

**Other recent evidence of the potential of systemic functional grammar**

There are other accounts of students learning and using aspects of systemic functional grammar which lend support to the academically documented research summarised above. Many of these accounts have tended to be of a more anecdotal nature and/or more limited in scope. From the later 1990s, for example, Collerson (1997) recounts work by a variety of teachers beginning to work apparently successfully with systemic functional grammar with their primary school age students. Hamilton (1998, 1999) discusses her own work as a teacher of English language learners, successfully introducing children from Year ‘R’ (‘Reception’ – first year of school) to Year 3 to the notions of Process, Participant and Circumstance. Athanasopoulos and Sandford (1997) describe how their upper primary school students used role play to dramatise their learning about modality in language (an aspect related to the communication of attitude) and then redrafted letters to local government altering the modality to make their points more strongly. Into more recent times, and often made possible by improved availability of professional development in ‘knowledge about language’, practising teachers in Australia have continued to describe perceived successes in teaching aspects of systemic functional grammar (for example: Balzarolo, 2010; Black & Bannan, 2010; Carey-Gorey, 2010; M. Daniels, 2010; Herbert, 2012).

Taken together, these anecdotal-type accounts as well as the more academic research into systemic functional grammar in the classroom all point to its practical potential as well as the ‘learnability’ of at least some of its concepts. They also point to the relevance of attention to pedagogical matters when interpreting research into
the effectiveness of teaching grammar, including whether or not grammar is taught in a manner strongly associated with areas of application as was the case in these studies.

2.4.2 Research on ‘embedded’ or ‘integrated’ teaching of grammar

Recent research beyond that undertaken by systemic functional linguists has also taken up the challenge of reimagining grammar instruction rather than abandoning it altogether. This research shares with educational researchers from systemic linguistics an interest in moving the debate about the teaching of grammar forward. The main point of difference between this research and that undertaken in systemic linguistics is in the choice of language description or type of grammar taught.

One large-scale project is of particular note in the recent research: that by Myhill, Jones, Lines and Watson (2012). This project set out to determine whether ‘embedded’ teaching of specific grammatical knowledge might help improve students’ writing, with ‘embedded’ meaning that targeted grammatical concepts were taught in close and overt association with composition tasks where they were anticipated to be useful. The study was conducted with 744 students across single classes in each of 31 comprehensive high schools in the UK, and a mixture of qualitative methods as well as quantitative scores of writing and other measures were employed in order to determine not only whether teaching had any effect, but also the quality of teaching and teachers’ degree of fidelity to the trial’s aims. In order to minimise the kinds of ‘displacement’ problems which beset studies like those of Harris and the New Zealand study, that is, where grammar instruction displaced some writing practice and therefore rendered comparisons on the basis of quality of writing at best dubious, all classes in the trial were involved in very similar writing
programs, which were provided to them by the researchers. The detailed teaching materials covered three focus genres (a story opening, a written speech and three kinds of poem), and in the ‘treatment’ or ‘grammar’ classes, grammatical language was also taught with “[l]inks ... always made between the feature introduced and how it might enhance the writing being tackled” (Myhill et al., 2012). None of the classes knew that the teaching of grammar was a focus of the research, but all knew that the study was examining writing development (hence the researchers were able to control for the Hawthorne Effect). Writing samples were collected as pre- and post-test measures of writing progress, and several other sources of data were used including teacher interviews.

The main finding of the study is that overall there was “a highly significant ($p<0.001$) positive difference of 5.11% marks for the intervention in terms of improvement in writing attainment” and furthermore, “this represents the first robust statistical evidence for a beneficial impact of the teaching of grammar in students’ writing attainment” (Myhill et al., 2012, p. 13). That is, ‘embedded’ grammar teaching did make a difference. Similar positive effects have also been found in two other smaller scale studies (Fearn & Farnan, 2007; Fogel & Ehri, 2000) which took a broadly comparable approach in that grammar was taught in ways which explicitly connected language knowledge with areas of application.

The study by Myhill and colleagues also makes a number of other relevant conclusions regarding its wider interests in the quality of instruction, such as stressing the importance of teacher ‘linguistic subject knowledge’ or ‘LSK’. It also recognises that there is not a simple causal relationship between teaching grammar and writing development, but rather emphasises “the complex interrelatedness of many factors in the realisation of educational benefit” (p. 24) – a point of difference
with the historic research which tended to think of grammar as a straightforward ‘treatment’.

**2.4.3 A recent meta-analysis**

In contrast with the promising findings described above is a recent meta-analysis (Graham & Perin, 2007a) which concluded that grammar instruction had a “small but, ... statistically significant” overall *negative* effect (-0.32) on students’ writing (Graham & Perin, 2007b, p. 21). Meta-analysis involves selecting and statistically synthesising the results of a number of comparable studies. An ‘effect size’ is calculated in order to see if there is an overall pattern of evidence, and if so how strong it might be. ‘*Weighted* effect sizes’ may also be calculated, whereby studies with more participants are given a stronger weighting than those with fewer participants, since it is assumed that a bigger sample will more closely represent wider society than a smaller, more select group. Weighted effect sizes were used by Graham and Perin.

The meta-analysis is not an entirely new instrument in the research on grammar teaching – Hillocks’ follow-up study to the Braddock Report (Hillocks, 1986) also used meta-analysis to synthesise the results of three studies which it identified in relation to the effectiveness of grammar teaching, one of which was the New Zealand study (Elley et al., 1976). Hillocks’ meta-analysis, like the recent study by Graham and Perin, also found a small overall negative effect size for grammar teaching (-0.29). What might we make of these results, which seem to validate Braddock’s warning about the ‘harmful’ influence of grammar instruction on writing?

Meta-analyses present with a certain beguiling convenience in that they summarise and simplify large bodies of research into readily digestible form, but
important qualifications apply to their interpretation. One such caveat is that by their nature meta-analyses are unable to make use of or accommodate qualitative studies, unless such studies have a quantitative component. In the case of the meta-analysis by Graham and Perin, as with Hillocks’ before, the inclusion of only quantitative studies clearly favours research produced under certain paradigms and excludes other perspectives. Thus for example the exploratory research into teaching systemic functional grammar described above, deriving from a tradition in which qualitative methods are valued, was not identified for meta-analysis. The authors of meta-analyses freely acknowledge this limitation, which is definitional to their methods, but secondary reports of meta-analyses do not always acknowledge that findings such as a negative effect size for grammar teaching may be based on relatively few studies (in the case of Graham and Perin’s review, 11 studies) and only quantitative ones at that. In the 2004 systematic review conducted by the UK’s EPPI-Centre (Andrews et al., 2004a), the review team first located what they thought were the best studies within the specific parameters of the review, and then secondly decided what kind of approach to take to synthesising these, rather than the process used in meta-analysis where researchers begin with a method of synthesis and then look for studies which fit the method. The EPPI-Centre review team decided that the studies they found were best explained using a “narrative synthesis” since “[i]t was not felt to be appropriate to conduct a statistical meta-analysis” (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 25), presumably because the studies were not sufficiently similar in ways necessary for legitimate statistical comparisons to be made.

A further caution is that even for those studies which are included in a meta-analysis, it remains salutary for readers to have some understanding of the detail of the studies themselves in order to interpret a meta-analysis with discernment. There
is a danger, common to all systematic reviews and not just meta-analyses, that reading the review becomes a replacement activity for reading the research (MacLure, 2005). In the case of the recent Graham and Perin meta-analysis, and especially also the Hillocks one before it, two studies in particular made a significant contribution to the findings of grammar teaching having an overall negative impact on writing: those by A.E. Thibodeau (1963) and A.L. Thibodeau (1963). These studies were Ed.D. dissertations and they are not readily accessed, so evaluating their substance is not straightforward. It is informative however to glean some details from Hillocks’ report (Hillocks, 1986), which states that both these studies involved an instruction period of six weeks. In contrast, the New Zealand study (Elley et al., 1976) ran for 96 weeks. Despite their short duration, the studies by A.E. Thibodeau and A. L. Thibodeau did have a relatively large number of participants (the figures of 402 and 363 are provided by Graham and Perin, although it is not clear to which researcher’s work each applies), while the New Zealand study had fewer participants (104 in the transformational grammar stream and 122 in the traditional grammar stream). Because ‘weighted effect sizes’ were used by Graham and Perin, the studies by Thibodeau and Thibodeau have a stronger influence on the findings of the meta-analysis than does the longer and more comprehensive study by Elley and colleagues (which found no particular advantage nor disadvantage to teaching grammar). Even in the earlier Hillocks meta-analysis (1986), which did not weight the effect sizes, the studies by Thibodeau and Thibodeau swayed the results to create an overall negative effect size. Without these two studies, Hillocks would have had only one study about grammar instruction in his meta-analysis: the New Zealand study which showed no particular benefit nor any ‘harmful effect’.
Of further interest in the recent meta-analysis by Graham and Perin is the lack of homogeneity of results across studies, so that the effects of grammar instruction on writing varied from quite negative (-1.40) to quite positive (1.07 – in the study by Fearn and Farnan, 2007\textsuperscript{25}). Graham and Perin make particular mention of the markedly positive effect size of the study by Fearn and Farnan, calling for “further investigation” which particularly addresses “type of grammar instruction” (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 466) – a comment which suggests that Fearn and Farnan’s positively evaluated method must have differed from the type of grammar instruction in all the other studies in the meta-analysis. Fearn and Farnan’s successful approach involved “teaching students to focus on the function and practical application of grammar within the context of writing (vs. defining and describing grammar)” (Graham & Perin, 2007a, p. 466). If this approach was exceptional in the surveyed literature, it is possible to interpret the Graham and Perin finding of overall negative effect size for ‘grammar’ as an indictment of approaches where grammar is not taught in contexts of application and not focused on function, or what they term “teaching grammar as an independent activity” (Graham & Perin, 2007b, p. 21).

2.5 Conclusions

The body of research on the teaching of grammar does not in fact constitute the unified and negative edifice which it is often taken to be. Widely cited past studies are subject to critical flaws in design, and it is common for findings to be overstated and partially represented. In this chapter, careful attention to several widely cited studies has shown them to be much more tenuous than the secondary literature

\textsuperscript{25} Graham and Perin cite Fearn and Farnan (2005), which is a conference presentation. The study was later published (Fearn & Farnan, 2007), and it is this latter citation which is accessible to readers and therefore used here.
would typically have us believe. Reflecting upon the ways in which research is received and (mis-)read, the 2004 EPPI-Centre review of research into teaching syntax commented on a tendency to “over-simplify the results of research according to the zeitgeist or the biases of the period” (Andrews et al., 2004a, p. 17).

High profile reviews of research including the Braddock Report of 1963 and Hillocks’ meta-analysis (1986) have thus had a dampening effect on research into the teaching of grammar for some decades, an effect which is only in the contemporary period coming to be redressed: “[f]or many in the United States, those publications closed the books on the issue without hint of the possibility that other, functional approaches to the problem were not only possible, but also under serious development” (Hancock, 2009, p. 201).

In relatively recent times, some new studies have sought to reinvigorate research into grammar instruction in schools. Of note are studies which explore different grammatical descriptions, specifically systemic functional grammar, and studies which seek to design pedagogy in such a way that grammar is shown to be of use for students by the way it is embedded or integrated into curriculum programming (with applications not confined to written composition, such as discipline-specific reading and interpretation of literature). These studies have often adopted qualitative methodological paradigms, resulting in their not being ‘picked up’ in meta-analyses (the recent study by Myhill and colleagues, 2012, may yet prove to be an exception). In the case of research into teaching systemic functional grammar, this has furthermore flown ‘under the radar’ of reviews such as that of the EPPI-Centre (Andrews et al., 2004a) because of the use of gate-keeping terms such as ‘syntax’ which are not sensitive to the general approach to language which systemic functional grammar represents. There exist therefore a number of positive
indications in more recent research that grammar can indeed be learned and applied in meaningful ways although these have not been the subject of as much attention as the historical studies, which in many quarters have taken on the status of canonical knowledge.

The debate about the possible relevance of instruction in grammar to school students’ learning outcomes has therefore taken a number of new turns in recent times. Despite widespread opinion to the contrary, the case is far from closed. In particular, there is considerable scope for further development of sound theoretical and practical accounts of quality pedagogy in the teaching of grammar. There are also more possibilities in terms of choices of pedagogical grammars than there were in the past, with research into the potential of systemic functional grammar in the classroom indicating that the design of the grammatics as well as the design of pedagogy may both contribute to the kinds of learning outcomes made possible in ‘teaching grammar’. These are the two principal concerns of the thesis.
CHAPTER 3

Theoretical orientation

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 it was demonstrated that the value of teaching school children knowledge about grammar remains an open question. Many earlier studies were flawed in design and their conclusions overstated or invalid. Furthermore, the content and methods of the grammar courses were not generally the object of careful study. Regarding content, most of the oft-cited research is of students learning ‘traditional school grammar’, with a proportion of studies also teaching some kind of transformational/generative grammar. These grammars were generally regarded as the only available alternatives at the time the research was conducted, but the question of which grammar to teach is one which can and should be asked afresh. Regarding teaching methods, or more broadly, pedagogy, the approaches to teaching grammatics in much of the research are invisible, and where stated or implied are often questionable. Here again there is opportunity to ask whether there may be different ways of doing things.

The approach taken in this thesis to the study of grammatics is informed by educational and linguistic theories which differ considerably from the orientations taken in the historical studies of grammar teaching in schools. The grammatics taught to the children in the present project was based on systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1st ed. Halliday, 1985a]) and the pedagogy employed drew on the work of L.S. Vygotsky (1978, 1987). But before exploring the reasons for the adoption of these two theoretical positions, it is useful by way of
comparison and contrast to examine more closely their historical alternatives in the research of teaching grammatics.

The chapter proceeds in three main sections. Section 3.2 considers the choice of type of grammar for the purposes of teaching school children. This section addresses firstly the two grammars most studied in schools: traditional school grammar (hereafter often ‘TSG’) and transformational grammar (‘TG’). The preference of the present study for systemic functional grammar (‘SFG’) is then explained. Section 3.3 critically examines the pedagogical practices and educational theories which are implicit in many of the studies of grammar teaching from the twentieth century. Specifically, this section questions firstly the apparently traditional pedagogy employed in most of the well-known historical studies; and secondly, it identifies underlying (Piagetian) assumptions about child development and the cognitive limitations of young school children in terms of abstract thought, of which grammar is a kind. A Vygotskian approach is then proposed as an alternative both in terms of the merits of its educational psychology and the pedagogical implications of the theory for introducing potentially abstract concepts to junior primary school children. In section 3.4, the theories of Vygotsky and of Halliday are brought together and considered in more detail for their compatibilities in reimagining the teaching of grammatics.

3.2 Choice of type of grammar

While today there exist many grammars of English designed for various purposes, this phenomenon is largely due to the growth of the discipline of linguistics over especially the latter half of the twentieth century. The idea of choosing which grammar to teach school children is, in practice, a fairly recent one. Historically there was little choice for teachers about which type of grammar was to be used in
schools: a Latin-based grammar was all that most teachers knew about until well into the 1960s. In the academic field of linguistics, the publication of Noam Chomsky’s work on transformational grammar (Chomsky, 1957) postulated a very different approach to grammar study, and by the late 1960s Chomsky-inspired grammar was considered by some curriculum writers to be a potential alternative for school students to learn (for example, *The Oregon Curriculum*, Kitzhaber, 1970). These two approaches to grammar, broadly considered, thus became the dominant grammars represented in the bulk of research into children learning grammar. In the following section both traditional school and transformational-type grammars will be considered in terms of their suitability and potential as educational resources. The discussion will then turn to the reasons for the choice of systemic functional grammar for the purposes of the present study.

### 3.2.1 Traditional school grammar

**Background**

The description of word classes, syntax and rules of usage which has come to be called ‘traditional school grammar’ had its origins in the study of Latin. In the Middle Ages, Latin grammar formed the entire curriculum of the original grammar schools in Britain. Even well into the Renaissance, the vast majority of English grammar schools still taught grammar only.\(^{26}\) Furthermore, grammar formed part of the medieval university ‘trivium’ – the three subjects which formed what might be equated with undergraduate studies today. The complete trivium was grammar, logic and rhetoric. The grammar taught was Latin grammar, since Latin was the language

\(^{26}\) In a study of the records of a sample of 177 grammar schools in England in 1600, Tompson (1971) found that 155 or over 87% taught grammar only, 12 taught grammar and English, and for a further 10 the curriculum was unable to be confirmed due to a lack of historical documentation.
of learning and religious practice in the Western medieval world.\textsuperscript{27} That is, Latin grammar was taught because Latin was the object of study (and indeed very often the language of instruction).

The Latin language and Latin grammar continued to be central to education into the eighteenth century, when they (and often also Classical Greek) were the staple fare of the original ‘grammar’ schools in England – hence the naming of these schools. During the eighteenth century many grammar schools began to teach English in addition to the ‘classics’, and so English grammar came to be taught in schools. This grammar drew directly on Latin grammar: “grammarians assumed that all relevant grammatical distinctions and standards of use could be obtained by automatically applying the categories and practices of Latin grammar” (Crystal, 1995, p. 192). The first widely available English grammars\textsuperscript{28} had been written on the assumption that Latin was an ideal language, and that English should learn from and preserve Latinate forms. English was essentially analysed in Latin terms, and descriptions of English even used the same terminology as was used for Latin.

Thus English grammar as it was first taught was based on Latin grammar. And Latin-based grammar continued to be the basis of language study offered by English teachers from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century until well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Often this grammar was called ‘formal grammar’ (this was the term more often used well into the first half of the twentieth century) and later ‘traditional school grammar’ became the more common term.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Greek played a similar role in the church in the East from the 4\textsuperscript{th} century onwards.


\textsuperscript{29} ‘Formal’ grammar has come to refer to grammars which focus on logically possible strings of elements in languages, and includes generative grammars and certain grammars for computer languages. The use of the term ‘traditional school grammar’ serves the purpose of distinguishing the grammar taught in schools from other grammars which were developed in academia in the last century, but which were not generally appropriated by educators.
Furthermore, both the type of grammar taught and the amount of content covered in school grammar classes seem to have remained unchanged over long periods. It was thus possible, for example, for Harris (1962) to use textbooks published in the 1930s for the grammar research he conducted in early-1960s secondary schools, without the datedness of the textbooks ever being raised as an issue. Further evidence for the level of stasis in the teaching of English grammar (and more broadly the subject of English in general) can be deduced from the kinds of tasks students were asked to do in external examinations. In the UK, the 1975 ‘Bullock Report’ *A language for life* (Great Britain. Committee of Inquiry into Reading and the Use of English, 1975) reflected on the English examinations at the then O-level (earlier the ‘School Certificate’ level) for secondary students aged 16 or 17:

> [T]he patterns of [the examination] papers were established by the early twenties; forty years later, in the early sixties, they had changed little. There was a précis, letter writing, paraphrase, analysis and other grammatical exercises, the correction of incorrect sentences, the punctuation of depunctuated passages and, of course, an essay, the titles of which in 1961 were sometimes indistinguishable from those of 1921. (Great Britain. Committee of Inquiry into Reading and the Use of English, 1975, p. 177)

A similar story of the stasis and longevity in school curricula of TSG exists in other parts of the English speaking world, including in Canada (Walker, 1985, 1986, 2011) and the USA (Kolln & Hancock, 2005). Walker, Kolln and Hancock identify TSG as the dominant grammar taught in schools into at least the 1960s. Writing for an Australian audience, Collerson identifies a similar situation up until the “diminished role for grammar in schools”, which he also dates from the 1960s (Collerson, 1997, p. 6).

A further historical development, and one which eventually contributed to the questioning of TSG’s value in the English curriculum, was its apparently increasing
distance from actual composition. By the early 1900s, grammar was largely being
taught as a discrete subject with often no connection made with its traditional and
practical partner: rhetoric. Thus the grammar which was originally intended to be
applied in the construction of oratory and prose was now disconnected from rhetoric
and of less obvious applicability to composition. ‘Traditional school grammar’
became a body of knowledge about parts of speech and rules, often based on what
one could and couldn’t do in Latin, and was typically divorced from the rest of the

It was grammar in this form – constrained by its Latin-based origins and
divorced from it rhetorical applications – which was the inheritance of twentieth
century school teachers.

One other point warrants attention regarding the changing historical
justifications for teaching traditional school grammar. Even after losing its
connection with rhetoric, the persistence of TSG was at least in part the product of a
view of mind which was popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the idea
that the brain could be exercised in one area and that this exercise would
automatically benefit intelligence generally. This was known as the ‘formal
discipline’ theory of education. According to this theory, the study of grammar
strengthens students’ ability to think logically and analytically and as a result it
contributes to improved academic performance, even in domains which are
unrelated. A textbook of the early twentieth century summarised the theory thus:

[T]he doctrine of formal discipline … rests on the assumption that a mental power
may be exercised and perfected in a narrow range of activity, and that it may then be
applied in any department of human life. Reasoning power might thus be developed
in geometry, and then be used generally in law or business. (Ruediger, 1910, p. 76)

And Vygotsky offered the following example:
According to this theory, if the student increased the attention he paid to Latin grammar, he would increase his abilities to focus attention on any task. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 82)

This theory was being questioned by the early twentieth century on a number of grounds. These included psychological criticisms, such as what Ruediger called “the antiquated faculty psychology” (1910, p. 93) in which mental faculties (for example, “observation, memory, imagination, reason, feeling”, 1910, p. 76) were deemed to exist as discrete entities capable of being honed in isolation from one another. Further doubt was cast by experimental studies on ‘transfer of training’, most famously those by the American psychologist Edward Thorndike (for example, Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901), although the claims of these experiments may have been overplayed.30 Certainly it is the case that the inclusion of TSG in the school curriculum purely on the basis of its merit for the ‘formal discipline’ of the mind came to be questioned. It was argued that if mental exercise were the only requirement, school subjects which exercised the mind while also teaching ‘useful’ content, such as that directly applicable in society and business, were to be preferred.

30 Vygotsky, for example, commented that Thorndike’s conclusions on the lack of relationship between training in one mental function and another were relevant only to the lower order thinking which Thorndike tested, that is, mental activity at the level of “extremely narrow, specialised, and, therefore, elementary functions” such as “[l]earning to type” (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 200, 198). Vygotsky postulated that there may be value in a theory of formal discipline in relation to higher mental processes: [S]chool instruction is associated with the higher mental functions. Their complex structure distinguishes these mental functions from those studied by Thorndike. ... Given what we know of the higher mental functions, it is apparent that the potential for formal discipline in the domain of the higher processes ... is fundamentally different from its potential in the domain of elementary processes. ... Thorndike’s conception, however, rejects the notion of a qualitative difference between the higher and lower processes. (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 200–201)

Vygotsky’s aim here was not to reinstate the theory of formal discipline per se, but rather to engage with it as a step in furthering his and his colleagues’ work in theorising “the problem of instruction and development ... [i]n our view, they are two processes with complex interrelationships” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 201).
Limitations of TSG for educational purposes

There are a number of criticisms of traditional school grammar which are particularly relevant to the question of its value and potential in the classroom. These include limitations stemming from the extrapolation from Latin, criticisms of its usually prescriptive nature, and most importantly, questions about what TSG is designed to do.

The Latin grammar ancestry of TSG has left a legacy of contested ‘facts’ and ‘rules’ which maintain a stronghold in the minds of many members of the public in defiance of their much-diminished status in modern linguistics (Crystal, 2007). One example is the notion of ‘case’ in nouns. In Latin, different suffixes to the noun indicate the seven possible cases of noun, so that, for example, the word ‘girl’ would have a different ending if the girl is the subject (‘The girl puella studied’) or the direct object (‘The teacher taught the girl puellae’) of a sentence. This practice of altering the ending of nouns – adding inflections – to indicate case is almost entirely absent in English, which instead uses word order, pronouns and prepositions to indicate the role of an entity in an activity, with the only remnant marker for noun ‘case’ being the possessive: ’s. That is, unless ‘case’ is redefined not to mean inflection of the noun, it does not make sense as a description of English nouns.

Similar attempts to impose equivalence between Latin grammar and English grammar have produced other areas of confusion and debate. A well-known example is the ‘rule’ which prohibits the split infinitive: ‘to slowly walk’ is wrong; ‘to walk slowly’ or even ‘slowly to walk’ are right. This point of style derives from the fact that in Latin the infinitive form of the verb is one word, and hence not able to be split, for example ‘ambulare’ – ‘to walk’, making it a nonsense to split the infinitive in Latin. In English, the prohibition is more often today regarded as a matter of style.
Another prohibition stemming from Latin is the infamous preposition at the end of a sentence. ‘With whom are you going?’ is considered acceptable; ‘Who are you going with?’ is not. Again this represents an attempt to impose on English a form which doesn’t even arise in Latin (in Latin prepositions can’t go at the end of sentences and still make sense; also many are incorporated into the various declensions of nouns according to noun case and therefore do not appear as independent words). Thus the limitations of TSG begin with its derivation from Latin grammar and its assumption that Latin grammar can be readily translated into an unproblematic description of the English language.

Furthermore, TSG has been regarded as a prescriptive grammar, at least until possibly very recent times. That is, TSG was typically taught as a set of rules and formulations which should be adhered to in order to produce ‘proper English’, rather than being a descriptive grammar concerned with language in actual use. This was a further result of the enshrining of classical Latin forms and imposing them on English. The rise of published English (Latin-based) grammars in the eighteenth century came with a strong notion of what constituted an educated person. Those who were familiar with and used the rules set out in the grammar books were genuinely ‘educated’, and people who continued to split their infinitives and commit other ‘errors’ could be regarded as ignorant. In England, the fact was that grammar, first Latin and then later English, was for centuries learned only by the elite (and then almost exclusively only its male representatives), who were the only people who could afford to pay to attend school or be privately tutored. So knowledge of grammar prescriptions was the domain of, and one of the marks of membership of, the elite.

It is a short step from this point to realise how a grammar which said that the
way some people spoke was ‘wrong’ or ‘uneducated’ would become a tool of prejudice in English society with its regional and class-associated dialects. In time, school teachers also would question the right of any grammar to demean the language backgrounds of their students and would use this aspect of TSG as a reason not to teach grammar in schools.

Finally, and most profoundly, TSG is limited by what it is intended for or can claim to do – its purpose. Here its chief limitation is that it is not oriented towards meaning. Rather, as outlined above, the TSG of the twentieth century had come to focus upon ‘rules’ and upon words as ‘parts of speech’:

[T]raditional grammar teaching degenerated in schools to the point where it was reduced to learning the names of a few word classes (‘parsing’ the ‘parts of speech’), analysing a few textbook sentences, and learning how to correct a few other textbook sentences with so-called ‘bad grammar’. (Martin & Rothery, 1993, pp. 139–140)

The focus was on word class rather than, or at least over and above, the function of words in creating meaning.

Most traditional school grammars teach that there are seven to nine ‘parts of speech’ or word classes: verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and often also interjection and article. These word classes may at first appear to school students to be a simple and straightforward list. Exercises can be easily constructed in which students are asked to identify the class to which certain words belong, and textbooks have long offered many such exercises. For example:

Circle the word in each sentence that is an adjective:
The lion felt a little tug at his mane.
He came upon a cruel trap which left him tangled in a net.


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31 This is an ironic term given the difficulties TSG has in dealing with actual speech. The peculiarity is in fact the result of a mistranslation: ‘parts of speech’ comes from the Greek meroi logou, which meant ‘parts of a sentence’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 51).
However, this apparently neat classification of words into classes is not as straightforward as first impressions suggest. In English we often co-opt words from one class to serve the function typically ascribed by TSG to another class. In the following sentence taken from a textbook, the word ‘returning’, from the word class ‘verb’, is used to provide more information about a noun:

The *returning* boomerang was sometimes used to frighten birds into nets.


In the classroom, the permeable nature of some of the word classes of traditional grammar can lead to awkward and linguistically unsatisfactory explanations, such as ‘in this example a verb is acting as an adjective’, when one set of labels is made to take account of both word class and function. The above example of the ‘returning boomerang’ not only illustrates this point, but also illustrates the reluctance of TSG textbooks to address such potentially tricky aspects of the language; the sentence is from an exercise on nouns, not adjectives or verbs! In many ways there is a symbiosis between traditional school grammar and textbooks with these kinds of exercises. The word classes are presented as neat and discrete, and in order to maintain this semblance of an ordered language, exercises are generated which permit a single precise answer to a question of word class. But if examples of actual language in use become the focus of study, traditional grammar’s ostensibly tidy pigeon holes are revealed to be inadequate; they are ill-equipped to handle the inventive ways in which we actually speak and write.

TSG is in addition primarily a grammar of written English (Collerson, 1997, pp. 23, 26; Halliday, 1982). It is based on the unit of the sentence, which is an orthographic unit, and it is only by implausible extension that TSG can be applied to spoken English (such as in the nonsensical but persistent notion of speaking in ‘full
sentences\textsuperscript{32}). TSG is inadequate for describing the nature of actual conversational speech, which to TSG would appear scrappy and incomplete. The salience of this point may not be immediately obvious to school teachers, who may wonder whether school children need to have a grammar to analyse spoken language at all — and indeed in the present study the analysis of spoken language was not a focus of the work. However teachers also use grammatical knowledge in their assessments of children’s performance, and it is here that TSG is most obviously limited in its application. The school teacher might use TSG to evaluate children’s written compositions, but would be hard pressed to make sensible use of it to evaluate their spoken language. Furthermore, school students who have learned some grammar to use in working with written texts are ill-served if that grammar is restricted to written text alone, especially if a more generally applicable grammar is available.

TSG is further limited in that it deals only with texts at the level of the sentence, and does not relate sentence level structure to whole text structure (Halliday, 1982; Martin & Rothery, 1993, p. 141). To be fair, description of whole text structure was formerly the job of TSG’s companion, rhetoric. But with the disappearance of rhetoric from the curriculum, a void was created which TSG was never designed to fill. A grammar which operates only at the level of the sentence offers by definition only a partial description of the form of texts.

\textsuperscript{32} The persistence of this view in the mind of the public is exemplified and indeed perpetuated by the media. For example, the following is the leading line from an article in the reputable UK newspaper \textit{The Guardian}: “The number of children who arrive at primary school unable to speak in full sentences is rising” (Curtis, 2008). The article was written about a government-commissioned review of communication and speech services for children in the UK. The review itself did not actually refer to ‘speaking in sentences’ but was glossed in this way by the media.
TSG in education today

There are those who today still see a place for teaching at least some aspects of TSG, arguing for more interesting and applied methods of teaching in order to enhance its relevance and usefulness to students. Perhaps most organised and visible of these advocates is one of the special groups of the National Council of Teachers of English in the United States: The Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG). This group has produced a book which draws on TSG categories to a degree (Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln, & Wheeler, 2003) and the ATEG also provides resources on the internet for teachers interested in teaching grammar in a more interesting and contextualised way than was the case in the past (Kolln & Hancock, 2005, p. 20). In the current Australian context, TSG terminology is present in the recently developed national curriculum for English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012b), although the terminology is sometimes adapted to try to accommodate concepts from systemic functional grammar in what may be interpreted as something of a compromise position.

3.2.2 Transformational / generative grammar

Background

Apart from TSG, transformational grammar (TG), or generative grammar as it is sometimes known, is the other main type of grammar which has been researched in schools. TG refers to a way of describing language which follows from the work of Noam Chomsky, whose Syntactic structures (1957) changed the landscape of modern linguistics, most obviously and extensively in the USA, but with worldwide influence. Chomsky argued that the language of actual utterances (surface structures), which is infinite, was made possible by a finite set of grammatical structures inherent in the brain (deep structures), upon which we perform various
transformations in order to generate language in use. He hypothesised the nature of these deep syntactic structures and created strings of transformations, shown in symbolic form to indicate their logic, in order to demonstrate how, for example, a simple statement can be ‘transformed’ to generate a question, or to convey basically the same information but in the passive voice. Chomsky argued for the universality of deep structures, that is, that all human languages are generated from a common, genetically inherent set of deep structures. In this theory, deep structures therefore become a way of representing something of the essence of humanity.

Transformational grammar has had some influence in education but has been less widely used with school students than traditional school grammar. TG has been taught to school students in the USA (for example in the states of: California – O’Neil, 1968; Oregon and Washington – Kitzhaber, 1970; and Virginia – Meade & Haynes, 1975) and has been trialled in at least one major research study in New Zealand as already discussed in Chapter 2 (Elley et al., 1976). In Australia, there seems to have been no widespread use of transformational/generative grammars in any of the state-run or other systemic schools. In fact, careful searching of the Australian literature yielded no reports of transformational/generative grammars having been researched in the classroom or even having been taught.  

33 As a further indication of the failure of Australian schools to take up transformational grammar, the Oregon Curriculum materials (Kitzhaber, 1970) relating to the ‘grammar’ strand are not held in any of the libraries represented in the Australian National Bibliographic Database (ANBD), even though the ‘literature’ strand materials of The Oregon Curriculum are available. The ANBD provides access to the holdings of most Australian public libraries, including records for almost 17 million book titles (as at February 23, 2012) in university, national, state, public and special libraries.
Limitations of TG for educational purposes

TG has not been more widely adopted as a grammar for school students for at least two important reasons: its purported difficulty, and its self-declared unsuitability for literacy-related purposes. Of these, the latter is the more salient, since if something were expected to be useful, it may be considered worth learning despite its difficulty. So we will address the issue of the suitability of TG first.

TG is not designed to do the kinds of things which it has usually been hoped a school-gained knowledge of grammar would do, namely to improve writing and assist in the analysis of written texts. Even if these uses of grammatical knowledge are widened to address other educational applications, it remains that TG is focused only on the intramental – the workings of the mind, not the workings of actual texts. TG is designed to try to explain the mental computations or logic involved in the production of language. By their nature, grammars in the Chomskyan tradition identify closely with psychology, even considering their type of linguistics as an arm of psychology:

At the level of universal grammar, [the linguist] is trying to establish certain general properties of human intelligence. Linguistics, so characterised, is simply the sub-field of psychology that deals with these aspects of mind. (Chomsky, 2006, pp. 24–25)

Furthermore, TG is explicitly not about meaning (or semantics), arguing that meaning is a separate problem from the production of grammatically acceptable sentences. Chomsky’s famous example of this is: “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously” (Chomsky, 1957, p. 15). While this sentence is clearly grammatical, it makes no sense. Chomsky used this example to argue that meaning is irrelevant to studies of grammar – that we can formulate rules about what constitutes grammaticality without reference to semantics. Thus TG explicitly does not engage with meaning. This is its chief limitation as a candidate for a school-taught grammar.
That TG is not really intended for the improvement of students’ literacy skills was understood by the authors of the most well-known experiment into its use in the classroom, the ‘New Zealand study’, who acknowledged:

[I]t must be stressed that the authors of the Oregon Curriculum did not specify the improvement of writing skill as a goal of their TG course. Their aim was to give students an accurate understanding of how their language is put together, and a means of talking about it, in the belief that language is a fundamental human activity worthy of study for its own sake. (Elley et al., 1976, p. 7)

And one of the developers of The Oregon Curriculum explained of its design:

In the education jargon of the day, grammar was to be studied ‘for its own sake’ ... not for any effect that grammatical understanding might have or not have on language use. Thus, ... the three strands of the language arts trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and literature) were quite separately and distinctly developed. (O’Neil, 2007, p. 615)

That is, the teaching of TG was justified on “humanistic grounds” (Elley et al., 1976, p. 19) and not integrated with writing or reading because it wasn’t expected to be of any direct use. Chomsky himself has stated as much in an informal letter which was subsequently published with his permission:

My uninformed guess would be that the study of grammar would have little detectable effect on writing ability, but I think it should be taught for its own intrinsic interest and importance. (Chomsky, 1984, p. 165)

Interestingly, Chomsky had in mind the teaching of “traditional grammar so-called”, stating that:

I can’t see any reason for teaching structural grammars of English, or for teaching transformational grammar in the manner of some instructional books that I have seen…which simply amount to memorizing meaningless formulas. (Chomsky, 1984, p. 165)

He went on to argue that the teaching in schools of “contemporary linguistics” (by which he clearly meant only linguistics of the kind he helped develop) could be justified essentially on two grounds: as “an incomparable avenue to understanding the nature of the human mind” – the humanistic justification (Chomsky, 1984, p.
165); and as “a way to understand how science works” in order to “be introduced into the marvellous world of inquiry” – a kind of general intelligence justification which rests on the assumption that transformational grammar is “a branch of science” (Chomsky, 1984, pp. 165, 166). This latter justification is not dissimilar to the nineteenth century formal discipline theory in that it argues for teaching grammar in terms of its indirect benefits to general aptitudes (here attitudes of curiosity and skills in questioning and thinking) and not necessarily because the content of the grammar course will have its own direct benefit. It could be argued that the ‘marvellous world of inquiry’ could be explored with subject matter more accessible than transformational grammar (although Chomsky would disagree, arguing that it is “fairly accessible, as compared, say, with quantum physics”, 1984, p. 166).

So TG is not designed for the purpose of helping school students ‘do’ anything better in their language/literacy classes, and in the words of its forefather and by the admission of writers of TG high school curricula, it is not expected to improve students’ writing.

Finally, TG is not only ill-suited for meeting educational needs, it may also be a difficult grammar to learn. This criticism needs to be made cautiously – it is in fact offered not uncommonly as a reason not to engage with or adopt a certain grammar by adherents of other schools of thought. Another reason for exercising caution with this criticism is that typically teaching methods have not been scrutinised as sources of problems affecting the degree of difficulty involved in learning a grammar. Some evidence does however indicate that there can exist a degree of difficulty in learning TG. In a study by Meade and Haynes (1975), eighth

34 For example Bernard (1994), in a contribution to Australian national curriculum debate in the mid-1990s, argued that both traditional school and functional (Hallidayan) grammars were unsuitable for teaching in schools at least in part because of their difficulty, although the argument was made without reference to any ‘unlearnability’ evidence from actual classroom practice.
graders with at least one and up to three years’ lessons in TG struggled in a test of their learning based entirely on what their teachers reported to the researchers that they had in fact covered in class:

> Over half of the students did not answer correctly as many as 70 percent of the items, regardless of I.Q.’s. … For those having I.Q.’s below 119 but above 100, about one third answered correctly as many as 75 percent of the items. Only students with I.Q.’s of 130 or above seemed to be generally successful, and even then not quite three fourths of them. Students in this one school system, then, did not learn very well the transformational grammar items which teachers had indicated they had had. (Meade & Haynes, 1975, p. 191)

These writers also properly point to factors other than TG itself which may be at work, and which they did not assess: “Yet other reasons may well have produced the results obtained: lack of knowledge by teachers, lack of sufficient time spent, lack of student interest, and the like” (Meade & Haynes, 1975, p. 191). Apparently contrary to the findings of Meade and Haynes was the New Zealand study which claimed that “the TG students did master the fundamentals of transformational grammar” (Elley et al., 1976, p. 18) with “94 percent of the TG pupils … largely correct in their grammatical analysis of a set of typical sentences” (Elley et al., 1976, p. 8).

In reflecting on the debateable difficulty of TG, one might speculate that a potential problem for students learning TG relates to the grammar’s purpose. As a grammar designed to uncover unconscious, abstract structures, TG is greatly distanced from school students’ direct, conscious experiences of language. The indifference, even antipathy, of TG to semantics means that its descriptions of language are inherently remote from the actual texts with which and through which children engage with the world. It is possible that these inherent characteristics of TG were what prompted its students in the New Zealand study to express, in terms much more negative than any other groups in the study, their dislike of sentence study and their language textbooks, “especially on dimensions as ‘useless’, 

It can furthermore be argued from within a TG perspective that the learning of transformations by school students is not necessary; that these are structures already in existence in children’s brains, and that it is not necessary to learn them in order to develop competence in using language. The value of learning about transformations is essentially a psycho-linguistic project about how languages considered holistically might be ‘acquired’, and not an educational project about how to improve literacy-related skills in students.

**TG in education today**

While transformational/generative grammars continue to enjoy a strong position in many university linguistics departments around the Western world, TG seems generally not to be taught in Western, English-speaking school systems. In the United States, where TG enjoyed the strongest initial enthusiasm and optimism from school teachers, neither TG nor TSG retain widespread support in the English teaching community, with grammar teaching of all kinds having lost the support of the influential National Council of Teachers of English in the years following the Braddock Report (Braddock et al., 1963), so that from the 1970s:

> [W]hile many classroom teachers continued to teach grammar, often behind closed doors, there were many school districts that simply removed it from the curriculum. As a result, several generations of students have had no instruction in the parts of speech and sentence structure... . (Kolln & Hancock, 2005, p. 19)

There continue to be some academics in the United States who advocate the teaching of some aspects of TG (or what they call ‘linguistics’, signalling their Chomskyan heritage), including members of the ATEG and of the Linguistic Society of America’s committee for ‘Language in the School Curriculum’ (see for example
the teaching ideas to be found on the ‘TeachLing’ website: Western Washington University, 2007–2009). However, the main legacy of TG which remains in school education, particularly in the United States, is ‘sentence combining’. This method was discussed in Chapter 2 (2.3.5), where it was pointed out that it addresses only one area of language – the logical relations between clauses and clause complexes. This is indeed an important aspect of language, being an essential resource for the construction of sequenced and reasoned texts, and in fact always deployed in the making of connections in any stretch of prose. However, the teaching of sentence combining does not require the teaching of TG terms and structures. Sentence combining may be associated historically with the teaching of TG in American schools,\textsuperscript{35} but some advocates insist that a knowledge of TG is not required to teach sentence combining (O’Hare, 1973). In summary, with the possible exception of the offshoot notion of ‘sentence combining’, transformational/generative grammars have not proven well-suited to the purposes of classroom English and are not widely used in classroom teaching today.

\subsection*{3.2.3 Systemic functional grammar}

\textbf{Background}

Systemic functional grammar (hereafter usually SFG or ‘functional grammar’\textsuperscript{36}) operates within the wider theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics

\textsuperscript{35} The idea of giving students exercises where they were expected to combine simple sentences into more complex ones did not originate with transformational grammar. However, the TG notion of combining ‘kernel’ sentences to make more complex ones gave ‘sentence combining’ a new rationale and status (S. K. Rose, 1983).

\textsuperscript{36} The term ‘functional grammar’ may need some clarification. The sense in which it will be used throughout this thesis will be as an abbreviation for ‘systemic functional grammar’, following Halliday’s own practice. Other ‘functional’ grammars exist in linguistics, but these have had little or no impact in school education so far as the author is able to establish. There is, however, one other main sense of the term ‘functional grammar’ which is relevant to a discussion of grammar in school curricula. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, ‘functional grammar’ was sometimes used to describe an approach to traditional school grammar in which students were taught about the
Chapter 3: Theoretical orientation

('SFL'), developed by Michael Halliday. The grammar itself was first published in 1985 (Halliday, 1985a) and is now about to appear in its fourth edition (Halliday & Matthiessen, forthcoming), although the grammar was developed over many years and the theory from which it stems has an even longer history. Halliday acknowledges the influences of, for example, the linguistics of the Prague School (founded in the 1920s) and of his teacher, J.R. Firth (d. 1960) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. xxvi). These influences are manifest in the way that SFG seeks to relate grammar to meaning, with the resources of language being understood as sets of choices (systems – hence ‘systemic’) for the purpose of achieving social goals:

The organizing concept is that of the ‘system’ … The system network is a theory about language as a resource for making meaning. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. xxvi, emphasis added)

Systemic functional linguistics has had a considerable influence on aspects of English/literacy education in Australia over roughly the past two decades. It has also influenced educational practice in other parts of the world, although here the necessarily brief discussion will focus on the Australian context. In Australia SFL has been responsible for the development and application of genre theory to the teaching of (especially) writing in primary and secondary schools (Martin, 2000; D. Rose, 2009), and has also informed programs for teaching English to speakers of other languages (Burns, 2003; Burns & De Silva Joyce, 2007; Feez, 2002) and teaching ‘academic literacies’ to university students (Ravelli & Ellis, 2005). In

It is important to note that ‘functional grammar’ in this curriculum refers to various sentence functions such as subject or object, and that parts of speech are introduced through their function in the sentence. (Bernard, 1999, p. 4 of unpaginated.pdf file)

This use of the term is essentially obsolete in the field of education, at least in Australia, where ‘functional grammar’ has taken on the contemporary Hallidayan sense.
school education, systemic linguistics has been influential to some degree in the
design and content of English teaching programs in some Australian jurisdictions. In
the period from the mid-1990s onwards SFL strongly influenced official English
syllabi for schools in at least the states of New South Wales and Queensland, and in
some other states it was taken up by certain bodies within the education system such
as the Catholic school systems in South Australia and Victoria (often especially in
ESL\textsuperscript{37} teaching). For the current project, the relevant syllabus was the New South
Wales primary school English syllabus. While claiming that it included “different
theoretical perspectives” (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998], p. 7), the
syllabus drew quite clearly, if not explicitly, on SFL. The following quote from the
syllabus is indicative, and echoes strongly the above quote from Halliday’s
*Introduction to functional grammar*:

> At the core of the syllabus is an emphasis on *language as a resource for making
> meaning*. (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998], p. 7, emphasis added)

Furthermore, the New South Wales syllabus categorises student learning
outcomes under the broad categories of ‘learning to read / write / talk and listen’ and
‘learning about reading / writing / talking and listening’ – a distinction which derives
from Halliday’s work from the late 1960s with the ‘Breakthrough to Literacy’
project in the UK, where the complementary notions of learning to *use* language, and
learning *about* language, were first formulated for educational application (Halliday,
1991/2007b, p. 280). There have been, therefore, significant ways in which SFL has
influenced language and literacy education in Australia, from adoption of its
theoretical framework in syllabus writing to its more familiar (to teachers)

\textsuperscript{37} ‘ESL’ stands for ‘English as a Second Language’. Given that a number of so-called ‘ESL’ students
actually learn English as a third language (or more), a preferable term for such students might be
‘English language learners’, although ‘ESL’ is a designation still in use in education departments in
Australia.
manifestation in ‘genre writing’.

However, the sway of systemic functional grammar more specifically has been less substantial. In New South Wales, probably the state where the debate about SFG in Australian schools has been most strongly contested, functional grammar had a rocky introduction to schools in the mid-1990s before being substantially withdrawn and the syllabus rewritten (Chapter 1). When the final version of the rewritten English syllabus was released in 1998, terminology specific to SFG was no longer present in the grammatical terms to be taught to children, with the exception of the single term ‘Theme’. To be fair, there are clear signs of the influence of SFG on the grammatical descriptions used in English K–6 (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998]), such as references to different types of verbs (action, saying, thinking, saying) which draw directly on Halliday’s characterisation of Process types, and an emphasis on word groups (‘noun group’, ‘verb group’) which reflects the way SFG addresses meaningful chunks of language rather than just parsing at the level of single words. A determined and knowledgeable teacher would be able to use the grammatical terms mandated in English K–6 to teach grammar, at least to some extent, in a manner sympathetic to an SFG description.

**Advantages of SFG for educational purposes**

There are a number of features of SFG which suggest it has potential for productive use in education. These include its focus on description rather than prescription, its applicability to oral as well as written texts, and most importantly its orientation to meaning.

Systemic functional grammar is a descriptive grammar. In this sense, SFG does not differ from other grammars in contemporary linguistics, but it does differ from traditional school grammar – or at least how many people recall it (if indeed
they were taught it at all). As a descriptive grammar, SFG does not pass judgement on dialect variations as ‘ungrammatical’ when they differ from the standard form of the language. In this sense SFG may appeal to teachers who worry that teaching grammar necessarily involves the (implicit or otherwise) denigration of their students’ non-standard-English home dialects. Certainly SFG is not characterised by the preoccupation with adhering to ‘approved’ forms of expression which is associated with TSG. SFG involves the study of language in use – what is – rather than the prescription of what ought to be. This is made possible by the systemic linguistic theoretical framework, which sees grammar as a resource from which we make choices in order to create meanings as we operate in society. Thus grammar is about choices of wordings and patterns of these across whole texts. From this standpoint, SFG is not merely a means to analyse and describe how something is being said, but it also describes how different choices in the grammar suggest how it could be said differently. That is, SFG is a grammar oriented to choices in language rather than rules in language. In this sense it also differs from TG, which is oriented to identifying what are essentially underlying rules governing so-called surface structures.

SFG is also amenable to the analysis of texts which sit along the entire continuum from ‘very written’ to ‘very spoken’ language. That is, from texts of written prose which has been carefully redrafted and crafted, to the more spontaneous, sometimes fragmented and interrupted texts of casual conversation (for example, Eggins & Slade, 1997), and the wide variety of discourses in between. This is made possible because SFG takes the clause as its basic unit of analysis, and is therefore able to be applied to language which cannot be said to constitute ‘proper sentences’. SFG can describe language in use in all kinds of contexts, and has also
lent its principles to the description of images and multimodal texts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Unsworth, 2002a). In this sense it can be contrasted with TSG, which uses the basic unit of the sentence, which we have already established is a feature of written language only. Furthermore the applicability of SFG to real texts, and indeed its stated, deliberate interest in language in use, is also at odds with TG, which concerns itself with logically possible syntactic forms rather than actual texts. This is an area of very clear contrast between SFG on the one hand and both TSG and TG on the other. SFG is intended for the description of language in use and therefore has a kind of ‘anthropological’ focus, rather than a focus on the idealised forms which TSG has historically prescribed and which, with a rather different project in mind, transformational/generative grammars have set out to ‘discover’ or perhaps formalise.

Most significantly however, functional grammar is oriented to how meaning is made. It is designed as a way into exploring how choices in wordings create different kinds of meanings and together build up different texts to achieve diverse social purposes. It follows therefore that SFG is able to relate grammatical knowledge with knowledge of whole texts and their structure. This is one of the most powerful arguments for its potential as a resource for children’s learning: that it is designed to relate the ‘sentence (or clause) level’ to the ‘whole text’ level, or, in more profound terms, to relate grammatics with the achievement of social purposes. In fact, for Halliday the ‘way in’ to understanding grammar is from the semantics down, rather than from the word forms up (Halliday, 1994, p. xiv; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 31). Functional grammar sits within systemic linguistics as one of the levels of analysis at which texts may be explored, but ‘above’ the grammar lie descriptions of whole texts: ‘genres’ (in the linguistic understanding of the term) or
‘text types’. In linguistic terms, a genre is a social process – a sequence of stages through which a text moves to achieve a social goal. These stages are identifiable by their typical lexicogrammatical\(^{38}\) patterns and, according to SFG, genres are in fact realised by choices at the level of the grammar. That is, the relationship between grammatical features and generic stages is not merely coincidental; the lexicogrammatical patterns create the stages. This linking of grammar with rhetoric, of parts with wholes, is where much grammar teaching in the past seems to have failed to make a connection for students. Students of grammar might therefore improve at being able to correct sentences with errors, for example, but their writing of essays may not show any commensurate improvement.\(^{39}\) With systemic functional grammar the grammar–meaning connection is part of its design. It is therefore possible to teach children about the structure of a text such as an information report at the genre level and also to look at how features of the language at the lexicogrammatical level build the generic stages of the report.

**SFG in education today**

Australia remains the only country which has developed school-system-wide curricula which draw on systemic functional grammar, and then only in relatively recent times, and in different ways in different states. At the time of writing, the federal government had developed a new national curriculum designed to be incorporated into all future state curricula (ACARA, 2012b). As noted already in the chapter, the grammatical knowledge in this curriculum is informed by a functional

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\(^{38}\) In SFG, the more accurate term for the grammatical level of analysis is the ‘lexicogrammatical’ level, which refers to vocabulary and grammatical structure together, or ‘wording’. ‘Lexicogrammatical’ is often shortened to ‘grammatical’ in order to be more concise, and I have adopted this convention in the thesis.

\(^{39}\) For example, in the New Zealand study (Elley et al., 1976), grammar students marginally outperformed non-grammar students on a test of English usage which required students to ‘correct ‘errors’ in specially-prepared short sentences and continuous prose’ (p. 11). There were however no significant differences between the different treatment groups when their essay writing was evaluated.
Chapter 3: Theoretical orientation

theory of language although the curriculum adopts a compromise metalanguage wherein most terms derive from traditional school grammar and some are given a functional reinterpretation – in many respects along the same lines as the 1998 New South Wales English K–6 syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998]). It is worthwhile noting at this point that the case studies which form the empirical data for this thesis were undertaken while the 1998 New South Wales English K–6 syllabus was the sole source of official syllabus content in New South Wales.

3.3 Choice of pedagogical approach

The manner in which something is taught is enormously relevant to how well that thing is learnt. This is almost an axiom of education: teaching affects learning, and therefore good teaching implies effective learning. This seems so obvious that it is barely worth saying. And yet its corollary, that ineffective learning may be the result of bad teaching, is not so self-evident, at least so far as the bulk of research into grammar teaching would suggest. Despite the fact that poor learning results were often reported by studies into the teaching of grammar (Chapter 2), the pedagogical approaches used in the studies tended to be elided and unscrutinised.

There is therefore a sense in which the heading ‘choice of pedagogical approach’ is a misnomer: it implies a deliberateness about pedagogy, a considered choice of teaching methods, for which there is little real evidence in most of the historical studies of grammar in the classroom. This section of the chapter argues that a traditional, transmission model of teaching lies unarticulated behind many of the historical studies claiming the ineffectiveness of grammar teaching. It is

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furthermore suggested that psychological assumptions about children’s intellectual immaturity underpinned the explanations often given as to why students did not learn grammar as well as hoped. An alternative approach is offered in the form of Vygotskyan theory of child development and pedagogy, an approach which opens up the possibility of reconsidering how children might be taught grammar in productive ways.

### 3.3.1 Pedagogy in earlier grammar research

Historically, studies about the effectiveness of grammar teaching often regarded the teaching itself as an unproblematic, benign element in the experimental paradigm. In reports of these studies the pedagogy was usually implicit. The reasons for this are most likely historical rather than deliberately obscurantist. There was, as outlined in Chapter 2 (2.2.1), a focus on curriculum content in the face of the ‘crowded curriculum’:

>School officials should seek to relieve the pressure now felt in the schools and provide a much better balanced curriculum by eliminating all ‘dead-wood’ from the school program. (Hoyt, 1906, pp. 467–468).

Grammar teaching was therefore to be tested to see if it was ‘dead-wood’ as against other worthy competitors for the attention of educators and students. The emphasis of research was thus on curriculum content rather than curriculum delivery, which would be a secondary matter if the prior question of the value of grammar as a subject was not answered satisfactorily first. It is also likely that there existed an assumption that there just simply weren’t many different ways to teach grammar and that a ‘choice’ of pedagogy was not seriously on offer. Perhaps also it was assumed that everyone reading the studies knew more or less how the grammar must have been taught, presumably (into the 1960s at least) from their own experience in school. Given the level of stasis in grammar teaching identified, for example, by the
Bullock Report (above, sub-section 3.2.1), this is quite plausible.

Whatever the reasons for the virtual invisibility of teaching in earlier studies, its absence from the records is unfortunate for us on at least two counts. Firstly, it calls into question the validity of these studies, because if we don’t know how something is taught, it may well be that limited learning is the product of impoverished instruction (Chapter 2). It is hard to learn well something that is taught badly. Secondly, if we are interested to study what might actually ‘work’ in terms of grammar teaching, it would be helpful to know in some detail what apparently hasn’t worked. From a methodological point of view, therefore, it becomes necessary to try to infer from these studies what the pedagogical approach underlying the grammar teaching may have been.

The first hint to pedagogy in the historical studies is in fact the aforementioned absence of pedagogical discussion. This implies the studies’ use of mainstream or familiar pedagogy of the time, since the pedagogical approach taken in a study would only have been worth remarking upon, it may be assumed, if it was different from the norm.

A second set of clues to pedagogy is in the studies’ descriptions of the different experimental groups which were compared. Even though this information is meagre, it is possible to form some hypotheses about how grammar was taught. Typically the grammar course was set in advance and followed closely, even rigidly. For example, in both the Harris study (R. J. Harris, 1962, 1965) and the New Zealand study (Elley et al., 1976), the traditional school grammar course followed set textbooks. The transformational grammar course of the New Zealand study was similarly a course prescribed at the beginning of the study and taught systematically and apparently without deviation from the set Oregon Curriculum. It is also evident
that in both these studies, and typically in the historical research, the grammar components were quite separate from other elements of the English courses, including written composition. For example, in the New Zealand study, the *Oregon Curriculum* had three strands: grammar (TG), rhetoric (which included writing and speaking practice) and literature. These were each contained in separate textbooks and, as mentioned above on page 78, grammar was not intended to be integrated with other areas of learning (O’Neil, 2007).

It is reasonable to conclude that the pedagogy implicit in these historical studies was a traditional transmission model of education,\(^{41}\) the dominant mode of educational delivery for the first half of the twentieth century and persistent well into the second half. Transmission pedagogy can be characterised as instruction in which the teacher delivers the set content and the students, their minds considered *tabula rasa*, are expected to absorb the information. Today this traditional transmission model of learning has come to be regarded as suspect, particularly in the excessive form adopted in various historic grammar studies, where instruction would seem to have relentlessly followed the textbook regardless of how the information was being received and processed by students (Chapter 2). In fact, it is fair to say that transmission methods were already regarded less than favourably when some well-known grammar studies were undertaken. As an approach which took little account of the knowledge and needs of learners, traditional transmission pedagogy attracted a range of criticism, from the progressivists who argued for ‘learning by doing’ (following Dewey, for example; see Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 4) to political and

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\(^{41}\) *The Oregon Curriculum* as a whole is described as using “inductive methods” and in the transformational grammar (TG) part of the course students “studied and analysed many sentences in order to discover and apply grammatical rules”. While this appears to suggest a kind of ‘discovery learning’, there was also a very large amount of content delivered (see the examples listed in Elley et al., 1976, p. 8) and the students studied three full textbooks of TG in the three years of the study.
sociological theorists and activists who questioned the authoritarian nature of traditional models (for example, Freire, 1972).

Grammar taught badly could not be said to be a fair test of the effectiveness of grammar learning, and the conclusion that grammar teaching is not effective has often been made without due attention to the quality of teaching itself. The writers of the New Zealand study were aware that the approaches to teaching taken in their study were not necessarily the end of the story:

The present [New Zealand] study was evaluative rather than exploratory in its intentions. Therefore, no clear recommendations can be made about the kind of program which might have a striking impact on the composition skills of secondary school pupils. Such a research exercise would seem to require either a more intensive, longitudinal study of the writing development of individual children, or a programme developed from a completely new set of theoretical proposals about the nature of children’s language growth. The time is clearly ripe for more experiments with other approaches to the teaching of English . . . . (Elley et al., 1976, p. 20, emphasis added)

Later in the chapter we return to this important question of pedagogy, and what ‘other approaches’ might be possible given different ‘theoretical proposals’ about children’s development and language.

3.3.2 Psychological assumptions from Piaget: Is grammar too abstract to teach?

The general lack of attention to pedagogical considerations in the historical literature on grammar teaching may furthermore reflect a widespread scepticism, deriving from educational psychology, about the possibility of gainfully teaching any grammatical knowledge to primary school children – regardless of method of instruction. This scepticism expresses concern about how appropriate it is to teach grammar since it involves abstract concepts, which are regarded as beyond the intellectual maturity of primary school aged children. While in the following section it will be argued that this view has been entrenched by the legacy of Jean Piaget
(1896–1980), it is possible to find statements about the inappropriateness of grammatical study for the young child which date from well before Piaget’s studies of children’s intellectual development. For example:

Such instruction [in “an abstract, formal subject like grammar”] cannot be defended psychologically because, with [some exceptions] …, the distinctions in grammar require as a basis for their proper understanding a maturity of thought and experience not possessed by pupils less than fourteen years of age. (Hoyt, 1906, p. 475)

The development of abstract thought has long been considered to begin roughly at the age of eleven or twelve years. Following the work of Jean Piaget (for example, Inhelder & Piaget, 1958), teachers in training have for decades learned that children’s thinking develops through a number of stages as they grow, changing gradually from egocentric and sensorimotor thinking in the preschool child to concrete operational thinking and finally in the adolescent years to formal operations and abstract thought. The means by which this development occurs – whether it is essentially biological, that is, to do with physiological maturation of the brain, or whether there is a significant role for ‘socialisation’ in the development of thought – is one of the great questions of education, and one for which Piaget offered different emphases in different writings (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). In fact despite some impressions to the contrary, Piaget was essentially in agreement with Vygotsky (1896–1934), with whom he is often compared and contrasted, that social interaction does have a role in children’s intellectual development (1978, 1987).

But the Piagetian legacy received by school teachers is not always so carefully qualified. Undergraduate textbooks in educational psychology have typically used Piaget’s stage theory as their benchmark explanation of child development, describing how stages and ages essentially progress together. While contemporary textbooks (for example: Berk, 2013; Woolfolk, 2013) may qualify
Piaget’s work by discussing (usually in less expansive terms) alternative views and critiques, it remains the case that a simplified Piagetian description forms the dominant point of reference on children’s cognitive development for many educators. It has been widely held, therefore, that primary school children are essentially incapable of abstract thought because their brains have not matured sufficiently in biological terms to go beyond the actual and tangible. The logical conclusion is that the ideal primary curriculum should incorporate as much concrete, hands-on activity as possible, since this will match the way young children’s minds work and will therefore be ‘developmentally appropriate’. Children will grasp more abstract ideas when their brains are ready – in adolescence.

For grammar teaching, the Piagetian legacy has been to recommend that grammar not be taught in primary school, since grammar is an abstraction – a language for talking about language – and therefore doomed to disappoint when taught to an intellectually immature audience. Reflecting on when it might be most profitable to begin learning grammar, the writers of the well-known New Zealand study commented:

Certainly, teachers have succeeded in instructing primary school children in the exercise of sentence analysis, but, in the light of the research of Piaget and other developmental psychologists about the limited ability of pre-adolescent children to manipulate abstract concepts, it seems most unlikely that such training would be readily applied by children in their own writing. (Elley et al., 1976, p. 18)

Empirical evidence about the ‘unlearnability’ of traditional school grammar seemed to lend weight to this view (such as Macauley’s much-cited 1947 study, discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 29–33). In light of the psychological assumptions which follow from Piaget, and the apparently confirmatory evidence of inability to learn, it is not surprising that the enterprise of teaching primary school children grammatical knowledge has continued to be contentious in the domain of educational research.
3.3.3 Challenging the assumptions: possibilities from Vygotsky

There are a number of challenges which can be made to the Piagetian legacy, including questioning its view of children’s abilities, and problematising the pedagogy which it engenders.

Firstly, there is considerable evidence that children can perform some cognitive tasks at earlier ages than Piaget suggested. This evidence covers a broad range of concepts across Piaget’s areas of experimentation with children, such as ‘object permanence’ (which babies may exhibit from as young as 3½ months rather than the age of 9 months stated by Piaget – Baillargeon & DeVos, 1991), and spatial reasoning (for example, children entering school aged 5 or 6 may well be able to learn simple mapping abilities – Blaut, 1991, 1997). That is, it is likely that Piaget underestimated children’s abilities to some extent. Within this body of empirical research into Piaget’s ‘stage theory’, the point is also made that the fairly discrete stages described by Piaget may be more productively considered a continuum, with learning as a process of gradually thinking in a more integrated way between and more abstractly about concepts (a point to which we will return in sub-section 3.4.3).

Regarding the teaching of grammar to young school children, it seems premature to conclude from Piaget that the exercise is pointless to begin with.

Secondly, there is a problem with pedagogy. If Piaget’s ‘epistemic subject’ is an individual whose cognitive abilities will mature with age, then the teacher is essentially a facilitator of that development. The teacher’s role involves “providing children with opportunities to create and coordinate the many relationships of which they are currently capable” (McInerney & McInerney, 2006, p. 49, emphasis added). That is, teaching accompanies natural intellectual development. In fact, “[t]eachers should … avoid efforts to ‘push’ a child to the next higher stage” (McInerney &
McInerney, 2006, p. 50). This emphasis on child-centred, ‘developmentally appropriate’ pedagogy represented for many educators in the 1960s a refreshing shift from the very traditional, transmission or ‘teacher-centred’ model of education which had been characteristic of much schooling up to that time. In the primary school context, where children were deemed to be working in Piaget’s stage of ‘concrete operations’, the teacher’s role was ideally to offer many and various opportunities for hands-on exploration and discovery.

In recent decades a qualitatively different approach to pedagogy has been suggested as a result of emerging interest in what have been called ‘social constructivist’ theories of development, based on the pioneering work of L.S. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) and widely known through the later work of Jerome Bruner (for example, Bruner, 1986). According to Vygotsky, culture and society have an enormous role in bringing about intellectual development, and are not merely the setting in which development will naturally occur. In particular, it is in interactions with enabling caregivers that children move from what they already know, to shared understandings with others, and finally to new internalised thinking: the social construction of knowledge. From this theoretical viewpoint, instruction leads development. Teachers and caregivers interact collaboratively with children to support and extend their thinking as children learn to do new things and solve new problems. This pedagogical approach is vividly captured in Bruner’s metaphor of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), or the notion of learning as ‘apprenticeship’ (for example: Waterland, 1985; Wells, 1986) in which someone with mastery of a craft or body of knowledge teaches and supports novices towards their own independent mastery.

42 ‘Progressive education’, of which this kind of pedagogy is characteristic, has a much longer history of course (see Egan, c2002) but became more widely accepted and popular from the 1960s.
In addition, for Vygotsky learning is not only mediated by adults who support and lead children’s development of thought, but also by tools, which may be physical tools but can also be symbolic items and systems, including language itself. In what is a major contribution to educational theory, and a distinctive feature of his approach as against Piaget’s (Cole & Wertsch, 1996), Vygotsky emphasised the role of cultural artefacts or tools which permit thinking to be mediated symbolically as a means towards thought becoming fully internalised: semiotic mediation. In a famous example of this, the ‘Forbidden colours’ game (Luria, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978, ch. 3), children who had previously struggled to solve the game using thought alone achieved much greater success when offered coloured cards by which they could track their thinking symbolically. Social constructivism argues that the question is not simply whether children can learn something or not given their age or stage of development, but rather what interactions and tools might make it possible and easier for them to learn. Here exists the potential to look afresh at grammar teaching in the primary school.

To conclude this section, therefore, we can say that it is possible that primary school children may be able to learn some grammar in a meaningful way, even though it involves a level of abstract thought. Within a Vygotskian pedagogical framework, it is not only possible but to be expected that children learn concepts which have not yet arisen in their own cognitive development, since teaching–learning actually leads development and does not merely accompany it. This is not a return to a transmission model of teaching, the model endemic and largely unscrutinised in many of the historical grammar studies. It is rather a way of opening up the question of what it is possible for young children to learn, and a refusal to underestimate their potential.
Moreover, if learning is mediated by tools as Vygotsky states, then the nature of those tools informs the shape of thought made possible by the learning process. The kind of tool determines the kind of work you can do with it, whether that tool be physical or cognitive, whether the work be manual or intellectual. In teaching about grammar, the grammatical description itself may be considered a cognitive tool – a form of semiotic mediation – since it offers a way of talking about language. Grammar permits us to take language from the immediate (the story, the conversation) to the mediate (a description of the story or conversation). It is in this theoretical context that the choice of systemic functional grammar over other possible grammars is particularly salient. The descriptions offered by SFG create a distinct orientation to the study of text, with a focus on function and semantics. Different grammars, designed for different purposes, will inherently produce different orientations to text. SFG is a particular kind of cognitive tool and its very design will shape the possible ways of thinking about texts to which it is applied.

### 3.4 A way ahead: Bringing together the theoretical approaches of Vygotsky and Halliday

Thus far we have considered the possibilities for exploratory classroom research offered by combining a Hallidayan grammar with a Vygotskyan approach to pedagogy, as if the former were essentially about content and the latter about process. While this has been a useful heuristic to this point, it is important to recognise that the approaches of both Vygotsky and Halliday to learning and language are much broader and have more in common than the discussion has thus far indicated.

At this point, therefore, it is informative to bring together the theories of language and development of Vygotsky and Halliday and to examine in more detail
their sympathies and synergies. Before turning to this task, it is important to clarify that Halliday’s theoretical framework as a whole will be taken into account. The discussion thus far in the chapter has focused gainfully but somewhat narrowly on Halliday’s contribution to the study of grammar. In fact Halliday’s theory of grammatics sits within and forms an integrated part of an holistic theory of language. Thus for the purposes of the exercise of bringing together the ideas of Vygotsky and Halliday, it will be Halliday’s systemic functional linguistic theory by which the latter is represented, and not merely his theory of grammatics. Specifically, this section looks at Halliday’s contributions in terms of a theory of language development and learning. It should also be noted that in identifying connections between the work of Vygotsky and Halliday, the ensuing discussion follows the interests of similarly-minded others. Systemic functional linguists with an interest in education and cultural transmission have explored Vygotskyan insights for some time (for example, Hasan, 2002), as have other researchers with an interest in both language and education (for example, Wells, 1994).

For the purposes of this thesis, the following features of the theories of Vygotsky and Halliday are particularly relevant and these will be discussed, along with their implications for the present research study, in subsequent sections:

- the role of social interaction in development (3.4.1); and
- the role of language in the development of thought, particularly the importance of semiotic mediation via language (3.4.2).

A further section will address contributions of Vygotsky and Halliday which are directly relevant to:

- the teaching of grammatical knowledge to school children (3.4.3).
3.4.1 The role of social interaction in development

Both Vygotsky and Halliday regard social interaction as the means by which children’s development is activated and cultivated. And for both theorists, their views about the role of social interaction derive from careful empirical observations of actual children and their development. In the case of Vygotsky, his theory derives from studies of the development of ‘higher mental functions’ such as memory and voluntary attention, conducted with various groups of children including some with intellectual impairment, and also with some groups of adults for the purposes of comparing intellectual development across different age cohorts and cultural groups. In the case of Halliday, evidence for his theory that social interaction is crucial to language development included his detailed study of one child’s development of his mother tongue from infancy (Halliday, 1975, 2007a). The following section will summarise in turn the theories of Vygotsky and Halliday regarding the role of the social in development, and will then offer some implications of their theories for the problem at hand: the teaching of grammatics to young learners.

Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of development, the ZPD and implications for research in the teaching-learning of grammatics

Vygotsky’s social view of development (introduced in sub-section 3.3.3) is that development is drawn forward by interactions with others, particularly with primary caregivers in the early years, and is not simply the product of biological maturation. Vygotsky does not rule out biological factors, but rather his view is that these are inadequate to explain the development of ‘higher psychological functions’ such as mediated memory and the ability to handle abstract concepts. While Vygotsky accepts the existence of ‘elementary processes’ which are biological in origin (such as involuntary attention and ‘natural’ or direct memory), he argues that these alone
do not explain the emergence of the mediated (or ‘indirect’) operations which are “an essential feature of higher mental processes” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 45). Vygotsky argues strongly against the idea that higher mental processes proceed spontaneously from within the individual:

[I]t would be a great mistake … to believe that indirect operations appear as the result of a pure logic. They are not invented or discovered by the child in the form of a sudden insight or lightning-quick guess (the so-called “aha” reaction). The child does not suddenly and irrevocably deduce the relation between the sign and the method for using it. Nor does she intuitively develop an abstract attitude, so to speak, from the ‘depths of the child’s own mind.’ This metaphysical view, according to which inherent psychological schemata exist prior to any experience, leads inevitably to an a priori conception of higher psychological functions. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 45)

Mediated operations are rather, according to Vygotsky, of socio-cultural origin, that is, the higher mental functions are socio-culturally acquired. Thus development is never a matter of the individual’s cognitive maturation independent of outside influences – what Bruner has called ‘unmediated conceptualism’: “This is the doctrine of the child going it alone in mastering his knowledge of the world” (Bruner, 1986, p. 61). Rather, development is always and ever embedded in, and drawn forward by, social interaction. The child is indeed active in constructing knowledge, but knowledge originates in social interactions and then consequently comes to be ‘internalised’. Vygotsky’s oft-quoted formulation of this is:

Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57, original emphasis)

Therefore a significant contribution of Vygotsky’s theory is that instruction, and the learning which instruction implies, plays an important role in intellectual

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43 Vygotsky often used the Russian word ‘obuchenie’ – a single word for learning/instruction or teaching–learning. The translation of this term into English is difficult and it has been rendered differently by different translators of Vygotsky. This explains why in Mind in society
development. This is instruction in the broadest sense, including both what is learnt in school but also the informal learning of infancy and the preschool years which occurs in everyday caregiver–child interactions. In fact, “learning and development are interrelated from the child’s very first day of life” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84). According to Vygotsky, instruction awakens and contributes to development, so that “instruction moves ahead of development” and “impels or wakens” it (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 207, 212).

In articulating his theory of the relationship between teaching–learning and development, Vygotsky proposed the now famous Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He defined the ZPD as:

\[ \text{The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.} \]

(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

According to the theory of the ZPD, effective teaching–learning occurs when the teacher begins from the point of a student’s existing independent competence. The teacher then works with the student to extend that competence into the realm where the student can at first only complete a task with adult mediation: the ‘zone of proximal development’. Teachers and ‘upbringers’ alike provide support in the process of learning:

\[ \text{The teacher and upbringer direct and guide the individual activity of the students, but they do not force or dictate their own will to them. Authentic teaching/learning} \]

discusses the relationship between ‘learning’ and development (Vygotsky, 1978, ch. 6), while in *Thinking and speech* the same ideas are discussed as ‘instruction’ and development (Vygotsky, 1987, ch. 6). For discussion see Cole (2009).

44 According to my reading of Cole (2009), this word is the translator’s rendering of the Russian ‘obuchenie’ (see discussion, preceding footnote).

45 Again, I believe, ‘obuchenie’.

46 Russian: ‘vospitateli’. The word refers to all adults involved in the child’s nurture and upbringing, not simply to parents / primary caregivers.
and upbringing come through collaboration by adults with children and adolescents. (Davydov, 1995, p. 13, original emphasis)

The ZPD suggests a radically different approach to pedagogy from that used in the historical grammar studies. The traditional transmission model of grammar teaching was characterised by an authoritarian, teacher-centric orientation in terms of curriculum goals, content, sequence and pacing, but also, importantly, a lack of regard for students’ prior knowledge and their capacity to ‘keep up’ with the delivery of content. The ZPD may appear in some ways similar, in that the teacher still has a role in determining educational goals – it is the teacher who ‘directs and guides’. However, this is not a one-way process, since it is in interaction with students that the ZPD is created and developed. Therefore, the sequencing, pacing and even content of learning is flexible to students’ progress and interests; it is dynamic in nature, responding to how students take on new understandings.

For teaching children grammatics, a Vygotskyan approach based on the theory of socio-cultural development and effective instruction via the ZPD would have at least the following implications:

i. recognition of the importance of beginning with students’ existing understandings (about language, about the grammar topic at hand);

ii. deliberate design of teaching–learning activities in which teachers and students operate collaboratively, jointly constructing new knowledge about language and grammatics; and

iii. goal-oriented yet flexible planning of programs of instruction.

In addition, Vygotsky’s methodological approach to studying learning is informative for the design of research into teaching grammatics. Vygotsky argued that currently observed phenomena need to be understood as products of the historical, cultural and social forces which brought them to exist in their present form
(here he was following Marx, whose work he sought to apply to psychological and educational theory). He also argued for the importance of assessing children’s development not only by what they could do independently, but also by how far they could extend their thinking when forms of mediation (what might be called ‘scaffolding’) were made available to them through the ZPD. For researching the teaching of grammatics, a Vygotskyan approach therefore suggests that useful data need not be confined to individual students’ test results and written compositions (as was historically the case in the research). Thus we arrive at a fourth implication from Vygotsky:

iv. productive insights into the teaching of grammatics should include ‘social’ data (for example, whole class and group discussions, interviews, jointly constructed writing) which represent the kinds of shared knowledge which children and teachers construct in joint activity.

**Halliday’s interactionist theory of language development and implications for research in the teaching–learning of grammatics**

Like Vygotsky, Halliday also sees social interaction as the driving force of development – specifically, for Halliday, language development. Language development according to Halliday is the consequence of interaction with caregivers and cannot be adequately explained by the maturation of an inborn cognitive map like the hereditary ‘Language Acquisition Device’ proposed by Chomsky (1965). Thus while people do indeed have a biological capacity for learning language, “just as we have the ability to stand upright and walk” (Halliday, 1978, p. 22), Halliday regards this capacity as insufficient as an explanation of language development. Rather, it is through social interaction that the child learns language. Specifically, primary caregivers interpret the child’s actions and utterances as meaningful,
engaging with and incorporating the child into the social fabric of the family, and thereby supporting the child in ‘learning to mean’. The empirical foundation of Halliday’s claims was the detailed study of one infant’s language development, and complementary work has been conducted others (Painter, 1984; Torr, 1997). On the basis of such evidence, Halliday has argued persuasively for the centrality of social interaction in the development first of a ‘protolanguage’ – those early-developing expressions infused with meanings which are understood only by close carers like the child’s immediate family – and later the development or taking on by the child of the adult language, which is characterised by a lexicogrammatical system hitherto not developed in the protolanguage and which is able to be understood by people beyond the immediate family. The role of social interaction in this process includes both (a) the support of caregivers who interpret the child’s early expressions or ‘soundings’ as meaningful, and (b) the provision of a social environment where the functions of language are enacted continually in the ebb and flow of daily life and from which the child learns what language is for.

Halliday’s social, interactional theory of language development is compatible with Vygotsky’s more general theory of development, even at times invoking some similar language. For example, Halliday says that the child “internalizes” and “constructs” understandings about language from the social environment (Halliday, 1978, pp. 209, 135), and Halliday places a similar emphasis on the critical role of infants’ and children’s caregivers (comparable to Vygotsky’s ‘upbringers’) as supporters and guides of development. He also sees explicit parallel between his

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Halliday identifies several broad functions of the protolanguage, which are later reworked as the child takes on the adult language. In the adult language, Halliday identifies three main functions: telling about the world of experience, relating interpersonally with others, and maintaining the texture and flow of stretches of language. It is from this conception of the functions of language in social interaction that the ‘functional’ dimension of ‘systemic functional linguistics’ derives.
principle of a ‘challenge zone’ in language learning and Vygotsky’s ZPD:

Children will attend to text that is ahead of their current semiotic potential, provided it is not too far ahead. The will tackle something that is far enough beyond their reach to be recognized as a challenge, if they have a reasonable chance of succeeding (cf. Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development”). (Halliday, 1993b, p. 105)

Furthermore, Halliday has long held a special interest in education, including both the implications of a functional linguistics for understanding educational disadvantage within societies and also applying linguistic theory to the design of school curricula. Here again Halliday’s work is compatible with Vygotsky’s. Both theorists share an orientation to education which sees children’s ways of thinking as socio-culturally developed, and hence their educational successes or struggles as not simply matters of individual cognition but as strongly determined by social factors. These similar conceptions of development lead them both to suggest very similar approaches to teaching. For example, in Halliday’s work in Britain developing the *Breakthrough to literacy* materials in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he recommended a very similar pedagogy to Vygotsky’s ZPD. He recommended starting any language work in school by recognising “the importance of what a child already knows about language” (Halliday, 1978, p. 209), akin to Vygotsky’s “actual developmental level” of existing knowledge, the starting point of the ZPD. Halliday also recommended an approach to teaching–learning very much in keeping with Vygotskyan theory:

*Breakthrough* thrives best in a milieu that is child-centred but in which the teacher functions as a guide, creating structure with the help of the students themselves. (Halliday, 1978, p. 210)

This quote captures a pedagogical approach akin to Davydov’s summary of Vygotskyan pedagogy mentioned above, in which the teacher ‘directs’ and ‘guides’ in collaborative activity.
Just such an approach to pedagogy has informed applications of Hallidayan theory beyond his early work with *Breakthrough to literacy*. For example, the ‘genre writing’ movement adopted a teaching–learning ‘cycle’ which deliberately incorporated the joint construction of written texts (for an example of this cycle in diagrammatic form, see Rothery & Stenglin, 1994, p. 8) and in which “the notion of guidance through interaction in the context of shared experience” was “fundamental” (Martin, 2000, p. 126).

Thus in terms of its implications for research in the teaching of grammatics, Halliday’s theory of language development is compatible with the pedagogical implications of Vygotsky’s theories listed above, particularly points (i) to (iii). On the fourth implication above from Vygotsky, that of the value of social data, Halliday would also agree, having made extensive use of such data in the development of his own theory, arguing that we need to understand language, an essentially social phenomenon, as it is used. In fact we are today in what Vygotsky would regard as an enviable position in terms of our ability to collect ‘social’ data thanks to advances in technology.

To these four shared implications of theory we might also add a fifth, which follows from Halliday specifically:

v. the teaching of grammatics should aim to be meaningful to students.

Halliday argues that learning in schools, and particularly learning to do things with language, should be *meaningful* for children. This implication flows from Halliday’s findings about the significance of meaningful social interaction in language development, by which children learn what language is and how it works. It also follows from Halliday’s theory of language as a system of *meaning potential*, that is, that language is best understood as a resource for interacting with others in
meaningful ways (and not as rules, as the Chomskyan tradition characterises language). This is something that children know about language when they come to school – that language is for making sense, that when you say or write or read something, you expect it to mean something. Halliday himself recommends that the teaching of reading and writing, for example, needs to make clear to children how literacy is “an extension of the functional potential of language” (Halliday, 1978, p. 57) by connecting with their existing understandings about how language functions in meaningful ways in their own social context beyond the school.

This implication does not have a direct complement in Vygotsky’s work, although it is certainly not incompatible with Vygotskyan theory. Indeed it may appear to be the kind of statement with which most educators would find it hard to disagree, in that we don’t usually expend effort teaching things considered to be without meaning. Vygotsky’s own view (1987, pp. 205–206) was that studies of grammar were important (a point to which we will return in the next section), although he did not specifically comment that grammar studies should be meaningful – perhaps because this was assumed? However, if we take seriously Vygotsky’s suggestion that effective learning begins with what children already know, a meaning-oriented study of grammatics offers considerable potential to connect with children’s existing understandings and expectations of language.

In summary, there are significant points of agreement between Halliday and Vygotsky in terms of their understandings of the nature of development. They both stress the asymmetrical significance of social interaction over (but not excluding) intrapersonal psychological activity in development. They therefore come to conclusions about the important role of caregivers and teachers in guiding development which are harmonious and which imply similar directions for the
teaching of grammatics. These include adopting an interactional model of learning and cultivating an interest in how children’s knowledge develops dynamically.

3.4.2 The role of language in the development of thought: a form of semiotic mediation

That language has a special and powerful role in the development of consciousness is a feature of the theories of both Vygotsky and Halliday. Vygotsky’s work on the development of higher mental processes identified various forms of cognitive mediation by which higher concepts are attained, including and giving particular prominence to language. Halliday holds a compatible view in which language as a social phenomenon is critical in the formation of personal consciousness. Halliday also provides a comprehensive theory of language which addresses some of the limitations of a focus on ‘word meaning’ in Vygotsky’s insightful and pioneering work.

Vygotsky: language as a form of cognitive mediation

In Vygotskyan theory, as discussed above, mental processes begin in the social realm of interpersonal interactions and only later become incorporated into the intrapersonal realm. But this is not simply a matter of experience being directly absorbed and internalised. Direct learning from experience does occur, such as learning not to touch the oven door as a direct result of a burning sensation, but Vygotsky argues that this kind of learning does not explain the emergence of higher mental processes. As introduced in sub-section 3.3.3, one of Vygotsky’s distinctive contributions was to recognise the particular role of cognitive tools by which higher order thinking is made possible. These are variously described as ‘signs’, ‘psychological / intellectual / cognitive tools’, ‘arti/efacts’, ‘forms of (semiotic) mediation’ and ‘mediational means’ in the Vygotsky literature. Vygotsky was
interested in many different forms of mediation, including “various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs, and so on” (Vygotsky 1981, p.137, quoted in Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 252). A specific example of psychological mediation, in this case of memory, is the coloured cards by which children learned to have more success at the ‘Forbidden colours’ game as mentioned above in sub-section 3.3.3. However, for Vygotsky the “tool of tools” was language (Cole & Wertsch, 1996, p. 252; Wells, 1994, p. 46).

The importance of language to Vygotsky makes eminent sense given his socio-cultural theory of development. Since such a large part of the social interactions by which concepts are learned is constituted by language, language has a huge part to play in the development of thought. This includes the language used by caregivers and teachers to assist children in their learning, but also includes children’s own use of language, even to themselves. For example, Vygotsky (1987, ch. 2) saw children’s ‘to-self’ verbalisations when solving a problem as a very significant intermediate step between talking a problem through with an enabling adult and being able to handle the problem in silent, independent thought. Vygotsky argued persuasively for the functionality of this ‘autistic’/‘egocentric’ speech as a means of children working through solutions to tasks which they are, at an older age, able to accomplish by thought alone: what Vygotsky saw as the audible verbalising having ‘gone underground’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 33). That is, the movement is from external interactions and verbalised problem-solving in, towards internalised verbal thought.

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48 Both Vygotsky and Piaget (2005 [1st ed. 1926]) observed what we might term ‘private’ speech (Woolfolk, 2013, pp. 58–60) as being very typical of young children, although they interpreted it differently (Vygotsky, 1987, especially ch. 2); see also Wertsch & Stone (1985).
In developing his theory of how the social becomes internalised, Vygotsky ascribed particular importance to ‘word meaning’. In ‘word meaning’ Vygotsky identified a ‘unit of analysis’ which connected social interaction with individual thinking; a sign which operated as both external speech and ‘inner speech’ or thought. Vygotsky’s typification of ‘word meaning’, while reasonable in terms of its place in his theory, is not without problems. One issue is to do with the extent to which Vygotsky meant ‘word meaning’ to refer to individual items of vocabulary – an issue which arises partly from matters of translation from the Russian, and partly from Vygotsky’s use of the term in the context of argument (the two being of course connected). Wertsch has suggested that ‘word’ can be taken “too literally” and that, in some contexts at least, “[s]ince it is used in connection with Vygotsky’s general concern with sign mediation, it does not refer solely to morphological units; rather, phrases, sentences, and entire texts fall under this category as well” (translator’s note by J.V. Wertsch in Vygotsky, 1981a, p. 158). A further issue is the question of how well ‘word meaning’ does what Vygotsky hoped, that is, capturing in one unit the relationship of the social/contextual with the psychological. It certainly does this to an extent:

The word does not relate to a single object, but to an entire group or class of objects. Therefore, every word is a concealed generalization. From a psychological perspective, word meaning is first and foremost a generalization. It is not difficult to see that generalization is a verbal act of thought ... . (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 47, original emphasis)

Here ‘words’ are plausibly connected with conceptual knowledge by virtue of words being a generalisation about a class of things. However, ‘word meaning’ only captures some of the kinds of meanings shared in the culture in and through language. Language is more than words, and language mediating human activity as the ‘tool of tools’ begs to be understood in terms more descriptive of social,
contextual factors. Wells argues that “word meaning, the unit of analysis chosen by Vygotsky in his studies of verbal thought, severely constrained the range of meanings that were taken into account in his ontogenetic analyses” (Wells, 1994, p. 85). In a similar vein it has also been commented that Vygotsky’s work was “in need of a more sophisticated theory of language” (H. Daniels, 2005, p. 19). This seems a good place to return to our discussion of Halliday.

**Halliday: language as social semiotic**

Compatible with Vygotsky’s psychological theory of the mediating role of language in the formation of thought is Halliday’s theory, which sees language as a system which both expresses and gives shape to how we see the world. That is, language is not merely a conduit by which messages are delivered, but by its very nature language imposes ways of saying those messages. Therefore, ways of saying are also ways of meaning (and conversely, saying something differently changes the meaning, even if subtly). Or to put it another way, knowledge and ideas are constructed in language and are therefore not simply carried by it in some neutral sense. The implication of this is that language is not merely an expression of thought, it also shapes thought. Such a view of language is also held by other researchers interested in education, not necessarily from a systemic linguistic (although in the following case, sympathetic) perspective, for example:

> ... the medium of exchange in which education is conducted – language – can never be neutral, … it imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but toward the use of mind in respect of this world. Language necessarily imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view. (Bruner, 1986, p. 121)

This means that language functions in society as a form of semiotic mediation – a meaning-sharing and meaning-shaping interface – between the socio-cultural and the psychological, in a very similar fashion to Vygotsky’s view on the role of language.
Halliday argues that “language is the medium through which a human being becomes a personality” (Halliday, 1978, p. 15), both in terms of the individual’s inclusion in social groups through language and by the individual’s occupation of social roles, made possible by the medium of language. Language therefore plays a critical role in the development of personality. While Halliday’s emphasis is more on the social than the psychological, it is clear that his articulation of the role of language in mediating these two spheres accords with that of Vygotsky. Indeed, the social and the personal are deeply interrelated, with language having a formative role in the shaping of consciousness.

Halliday’s theory also offers a comprehensive way of accounting for the range of meanings which are realised by language in social context – the ‘more sophisticated theory of language’ of which Vygotsky might be considered to have been in need. Halliday sees language as a system of choices, a meaning potential which exists as part of the ‘context of culture’. This potential is then enacted or ‘realised’ in social context – the ‘context of situation’ – in what is an instantiation of the meaning potential. Language thus instantiated in social context is what Halliday terms ‘text’, and text for Halliday constitutes the proper unit of analysis of language as social semiotic. Text actually has a two-way relationship with context: it is both an instantiation of the context of culture and situation, and at the same time it is the (linguistic, and dominant) means by which we understand or ‘construe’ the culture. That is, if we have a particular text at hand we can often recover the likely context from which it came, and conversely if we have a context of situation described to us (such as a visit to the doctor) we can imagine the kind of texts which are probable in that context. Here is a helpful and comprehensive alternative to Vygotsky’s ‘word meaning’. The two theorists’ units of analysis do not arise from identical orientations
to the problem, in that Halliday’s emphasis is on understanding language in use in society and Vygotsky is more occupied with language and psychology (although as we have already seen, neither theorist thinks the social and psychological can be divorced). However Halliday’s account should be palatable to those working within a Vygotskyan framework, since it articulates the relationship between what Vygotsky termed ‘external speech’ (parallel to ‘text’ – the actual language used) and the socio-cultural context which Vygotsky saw as so influential in the development of mind. It is interesting to compare Halliday’s account of text with, for example, the following suggestion of the Vygotsky scholars Cole and Wertsch, who argue that since in Vygotskyan theory “the meanings of action and context are not specifiable independent of each other” that an appropriate unit of psychological analysis would be “mediated action in context” (1996, p. 253). ‘Text’ could be readily accommodated in this formulation as the linguistic version of ‘mediated action in context’.

A further aspect of Halliday’s theory is appropriate to include here, if necessarily briefly, in order to flesh out how Halliday relates text with context. He identifies three main components of the context of situation:

– field (what is going on),
– tenor (the roles and relationships of those involved), and
– mode (the role of language in the situation, such as whether it is spoken or written).

These three aspects of the context give rise to three corresponding dimensions of meaning or ‘metafunctions’ of language which will be identifiable in any text:

– the ideational metafunction – consisting of both the language of representing experience (‘experiential’ metafunction) and the relations between events and
ideas (‘logical’ metafunction),

– the interpersonal metafunction, and

– the textual metafunction.

These three metafunctions occur simultaneously in any text, and are made possible by the versatility of the lexicogrammatical system and its relationship to meaning. Halliday connects the lexicogrammatical level of language with the semantic level in a clear and careful manner, characterising the relationship as one of realisation: patterns of wording (lexicogrammar) realise meanings (semantics). Or to put it another way, meanings are construed by the lexicogrammar. It follows that the use of a systemic functional grammatical analysis offers a way of talking about how meanings are made in text, and ultimately about how language mediates meaning.

Implications of language as semiotic mediation for research in teaching–learning grammatics

Both Vygotsky and Halliday offer a theory of learning which places language in a central role. They both see language as the most powerful means by which the culture is mediated and therefore language in education is invested with great importance. For the present study, the implications of their complementary contributions include:

vi. Recognising the importance of the language and metalanguage by and through which children are introduced to grammatical description, since language has a formative influence on thought.

That is, the way you talk about something with learners shapes the way they learn to think about it. Neither theoretical approach denies imagination nor the individual’s ability to think creatively about new concepts, but thinking about a concept will tend probabilistically to follow how it was taught. This point leads logically to the need to
collect and reflect critically on classroom discourse including teacher talk and definitions of grammatical terminology offered to students. The point therefore provides further justification for implication (iv) as stated above on the value of ‘social’ data, particularly talk. Furthermore, the collection and consideration of, so far as possible, complete texts of classroom discourse is also suggested by a Hallidayan orientation to the study of language.

vii. Methodologically speaking, a further implication is that analytical tools from systemic functional linguistics, such as descriptions of text types or genres and lexicogrammatical analysis, may prove useful in exploring how language is operating in the classroom to help form grammatical concepts.

Halliday’s theory of language as simultaneously conveying and shaping meaning offers a productive insight into the relationship between social interaction and intrapersonal thought. This theory sits well with a Vygotskian orientation to the role of language as a cognitive tool or form of semiotic mediation, with Halliday’s account of ‘text’ providing a helpful alternative to the limitations of Vygotsky’s ‘word meaning’ as a unit of analysis. In applying these theoretical approaches to the teaching of grammatics, this thesis places importance on the role of language and metalanguage (such as grammatical terminology) in mediating knowledge about grammar. Other forms of semiotic mediation are also important for children’s learning (such as the visual design of teaching materials), but the interactions through which children learn about grammar are largely constituted by language, and hence the language of classroom interactions forms a significant proportion of the data of the thesis.
Chapter 3: Theoretical orientation

3.4.3 The teaching of grammatical knowledge to school children in the work of Vygotsky and Halliday

Vygotsky and Halliday have much to offer in terms of building a theoretical framework for the teaching of grammatics on the basis of their general approaches. In addition, both theorists have commented specifically on the teaching of grammatical description to school children.

Vygotsky on children learning about grammar

Vygotsky’s brief but interesting comments specifically on children learning grammar are found in the context of his discussion of the development of ‘scientific’ concepts in *Thinking and speech* (1987, ch. 6), and the relationship between instruction in scientific concepts and mental development.

‘Scientific’ concepts are abstract concepts constituting organised systems of knowledge, the teaching of which is usually the domain of the school. They are not limited to ‘the sciences’ – Vygotsky includes grammar as an example – although the systematicity of knowledge in the sciences may be considered archetypical. A compatible analysis proposed by sociologist of education Basil Bernstein helps to clarify what other forms of knowledge might be implied when the notion of ‘scientific’ concepts is expanded beyond ‘the sciences’. Bernstein (1999) identifies some knowledge systems as ‘vertical discourses’, which “[take] the form of a coherent, explicit, and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised, as in the sciences, or [they take] the form of a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts, as in the social sciences and humanities” (Bernstein, 1999, p. 159).

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49 See the editors’ and translator’s notes for *Thinking and speech*, chapter 6 (‘The development of scientific concepts’): “In using the term ‘scientific’ in this context, Vygotsky is emphasizing (1) the systematic nature of scientific knowledge and (2) its association with the peculiar social institutions of science and education” (Rieber & Carton, 1987, p. 388).
‘Scientific’ concepts are contrasted by Vygotsky with ‘spontaneous’ concepts, which are not explicitly taught but are learned implicitly through everyday experiences (not, despite what the term might seem to suggest, arising within the child exclusive of any outside influence). These are therefore also termed ‘everyday’ concepts. 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). In Bernstein’s terms, everyday concepts may be aligned with ‘horizontal discourses’ (1999, p. 159), constituted by ‘common-sense’, local kinds of knowledge.

Vygotsky’s ‘scientific’ concepts have also been called ‘scholarly’ concepts (H. Daniels, 2001, p. 55; Wardekker, 1998) – a helpful term in that it resists the narrowing of Vygotsky’s notion to the traditional sciences while simultaneously evoking some important dimensions of the Vygotskyan formulation. ‘Scholarly concepts’ is a term suggestive of scholarship and academic activity, thus implying engagement with the kinds of knowledge Vygotsky called ‘scientific’ in that academic knowledge is characterised by systematicity and abstraction. That is, ‘scientific/scholarly’ concepts are not limited to locally situated experience, but rather they take on a higher order of descriptive capacity. In the example of the everyday concept ‘brother’ introduced above, a more ‘scholarly’ understanding would be ‘a male sibling’ (Panofsky, John-Steiner, & Blackwell, 1990, p. 252) – a generalisable, abstract definition. There is a further sense in which the term ‘scholarly concept’ is appropriate: it implies being schooled. Precisely because ‘scientific’ concepts tend not to arise in the course of everyday activity, it is necessary for them to be the object of explicit didactic intent and hence they are usually learned in the context of formal schooling.50

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50 There are of course home contexts in which ‘scientific’ concepts are also developed, although here again they would often be the object of didactic intent, in this case by family members rather than school teachers. That families within different parts of society vary in how they are positioned to orient children towards and to support school-type learning of ‘scientific’ concepts is a significant
The development of scientific/scholarly concepts is argued by Vygotsky to occur slowly over time as the child learns to think more abstractly (by virtue of the mediation of cognitive tools) and also as the child connects ideas and forms of knowledge with each other. This is in fact the kind of process alluded to in subsection 3.3.3 above – the process of thinking ‘in a more integrated way between and more abstractly about concepts’. According to Vygotsky, scientific concepts, and higher mental processes more generally, permit reflective thinking and conscious control of knowledge – functions which are not usually associated with everyday, spontaneous concepts. One example is the conscious awareness of the sounds of spoken language: when speaking in everyday spontaneous talk, the child makes the sounds of speech without conscious awareness of doing so (such as being able to say ‘Moscow’), but when learning to write at school the child is required to bring these sounds under conscious control in order to write them down (such as isolating and recording the ‘s-k’ combination). Furthermore, scientific concepts contribute to a reworking of everyday concepts so that the latter are no longer seen only in terms of their original concrete properties but come to be understood in more abstract terms as parts of a wider system of knowledge. Vygotsky offered several examples of this, including the way in which the scientific concepts of algebra bring about a reworking of knowledge of arithmetic at a more abstract level.

It was in the context of his discussion of this relationship between instruction in scientific concepts and cognitive development that Vygotsky made his comments about the teaching of grammar. In terms not so distant from some current concerns, he begins by saying:

factor in the inequities which persist in modern democratic societies. Bernstein’s perhaps pessimistic assessment of this situation is that “the school’s academic curriculum, if it is to be effectively acquired, always requires two sites of acquisition, the school and the home” (Bernstein, 1990, pp. 76–77).
Instruction in grammar does not seem to provide the child with new capacities... The child has the capacity to decline and conjugate [that is, to use language effectively in spontaneous speech] before he comes to school. What does he learn from instruction in grammar? This is the argument that underlies the ‘agrammatical’ movement which suggests that grammar should be removed from the list of school subjects because it is unnecessary, because it provides no new speech capacities. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 205)

However Vygotsky is convinced that the unconscious, everyday use of language is knowledge of a qualitatively different order from the more abstract challenge of describing in conscious terms what one is doing in language:

[The child] does not acquire fundamentally new grammatical or syntactic structures in school instruction... What the child does learn in school, however, is conscious awareness of what he does. He learns to operate on the foundation of his capacities in a volitional manner. His capacity moves from an unconscious, automatic plane to a voluntary, intentional, and conscious plane. Instruction in written speech and grammar play a fundamental role in this process. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 206)

Here Vygotsky accords the teaching–learning of grammar an important role as a means of helping children to be aware of language and to bring its use under their conscious control. And it is this conscious control and capacity to reflect on language which raises the child to “a higher level in speech [language] development” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 206). We thus find in Vygotsky’s own words reason for encouragement in the present endeavour of exploring the teaching and learning of grammatics.

An additional facet of Vygotsky’s theory is also relevant at this point. Vygotsky argued that the process of gradually building intellectual development towards mastery of abstraction is “complex and prolonged” (1978, p. 45). Given that the study of grammar involves various degrees of abstraction, and some aspects of grammatical description can be highly abstract, it makes sense to anticipate that learning grammatics will be a ‘complex and prolonged’ process, and that the more abstract aspects of grammatical description would need to be built towards slowly over long periods of time.
Halliday on children learning about grammar

Halliday has a long history of encouraging the teaching–learning of ‘knowledge about language’ in schools. For example, his work in the UK on the Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching produced, in addition to the well-known *Breakthrough to literacy* resources (Mackay, Schaub, & Thompson, 1970), a set of educational materials about the English language written for high school students: *Language in use* (Doughty, Pearce, & Thornton, 1971). These materials did not deal with teaching grammatics, but they do indicate Halliday’s general interest in introducing students to knowledge about language, that is, language itself as an object of study.

On the specific issue of children learning grammar, Halliday argued thirty years ago, and three years before the first edition of his *Introduction to functional grammar* (Halliday, 1985a) that if children were to be taught grammar, it should be:

> a functional rather than a formal grammar; one that interprets language as a resource, and specifically as a *resource for meaning*. (Halliday, 1982, p. 202, original emphasis)

Halliday’s application of linguistics to educational questions foregrounds the emphases of his general theoretical approach, especially language as meaning-making resource. Any grammar taught in schools should therefore follow consistently from the functional theory of language.

> What is needed is a grammar that is functional; flexible; based on the notion of ‘resource’; semantic in focus, and oriented towards the text. (Halliday, 1982, p. 204)

Halliday highlights what he sees as the shortcomings of traditional school grammar, characterising it more as a grammar of rules than of meaning and function and as typically expressed as isolated exercises on unrelated sentences. He goes on to recommend systemic functional grammar for the advantages discussed above in sub-
section 3.2.3, such as its meaning-orientation and applicability to whole texts, and also its ability to relate text with context (sub-section 3.4.2 especially). Halliday also distinguishes between a grammar for teachers and one for pupils, arguing that the former would have to be adapted to meet the needs of children. His implicit challenge here, to develop ways of introducing children to a functional grammar in ways which make sense to them, is a project to which this thesis seeks to contribute.

3.5 Summary and implications of theory for research

The vexed question of the value of teaching children grammar is not a single, monolithic problem with a simple answer. It is in fact a composite of a number of issues, decisions about which will necessarily lead to different answers about whether or not children should be taught grammar and whether it is likely to make any difference to their literacy learning outcomes. Specifically, both the kind of grammatical description and the pedagogy by which it is taught are highly significant factors likely to give rise to very different learning outcomes for students.

In laying the theoretical foundations for the thesis, this chapter has argued that the complementary theories of Vygotsky and Halliday provide a sound basis for exploring the teaching–learning of a functional grammatics. The major implications deriving from the theoretical orientation developed in this chapter are summarised in Table 3.1 below (implications are listed in order of appearance and as numbered in the chapter, and areas of relevance to the thesis project indicated).

The first implication, the choice of systemic functional grammar, was established in section 3.2, where it was argued that SFG has merit over traditional school and transformational grammars as a description of language for school children. In particular, SFG foregrounds meaning and articulates a relationship between grammatics and whole texts. It was argued that SFG can be considered a kind
Table 3.1  Summary of implications of theory for thesis project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of relevance</th>
<th>Classroom teaching–learning</th>
<th>Research methodology</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major implications of theoretical orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of systemic functional grammar as a meaning-oriented grammatical description for teaching school children.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Recognition of the importance of beginning with students’ existing understandings.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ii) Deliberate design of teaching–learning activities in which teachers and students operate collaboratively, jointly constructing new knowledge about language and grammatics.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iii) Goal-oriented yet flexible planning of programs of instruction.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(iv) Collection and analysis of ‘social’ data including classroom talk.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(v) An emphasis on teaching grammatics in ways meaningful to students.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>(vi) Acknowledgment of the importance of the language and metalanguage by which children are introduced to grammatical description.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) Use of analytical tools from systemic functional linguistics.</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

of cognitive tool in the Vygotskian sense, and that the knowledge mediated by different grammatical descriptions is likely to teach children different ways of reflecting on language. Hence a meaning-oriented grammar is likely to be better suited to helping children learn about the effective use of language in social context than a grammar which is oriented to rules and sentences or intra-individual cognition. The thesis therefore proceeds to explore how a functional approach to grammatical description might take shape in actual classroom practice. The thesis also seeks to take on board Halliday’s recommendation of a ‘grammar for pupils’ by addressing how aspects of SFG might be adapted to classroom use with young children.

The case for adopting a Vygotskian pedagogy was outlined in section 3.3, and this approach and its implications for the present study were developed further in
section 3.4. The explicit concern with pedagogy in this thesis forms a contrast with the bulk of historical research into teaching grammar, where pedagogical effectiveness was rarely given any attention at all. In particular the thesis will pursue the extent to which an interactional, dynamic model of teaching–learning, with teacher as guide, permits young school children to access and use grammatical descriptions in meaningful ways.

Certain additional principles and ideas shared by Vygotsky and Halliday provide theoretical underpinning for the thesis. Chief among these are their complementary beliefs in the formative influence of society in development, and consequently the influence of teaching–learning in shaping thinking; and their sympathetic characterisations of the significant role of language in mediating knowledge. The thesis therefore proceeds with a declared interest in the role of language in the classroom, particularly the way language and the metalanguage of grammatical description shape how children learn about grammar. The theories on which the thesis is developed also have a number of methodological implications which have been touched upon in this chapter. The following chapter takes up these issues and describes the methodological principles and practices which the thesis has adopted.
CHAPTER 4
Methodology

4.1 An exploration in teaching and learning grammatics

The field of research into the teaching of grammatics has historically been dominated by correlational and experimental-type studies focused on whether teaching grammar improved students’ literacy outcomes. The historical studies, those from the early 1900s into the 1970s, tended to regard grammar teaching as a kind of input and grammar learning – or lack thereof – as an output, with little regard for the inner workings of the apparatus by which this system of knowledge (re-)production operated, and scant reasoning offered for when it failed beyond appeals to students’ ‘immaturity’ (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 at 3.3.2). That is, grammar teaching was ‘taken as read’ while the focus was on measuring its effectiveness as a treatment for the ills of, typically, bad writing. The quality, design and nature of the way in which grammar was taught often remained opaque.

This thesis adopts a different perspective in that it views the teaching–learning process as an integrated and dynamic whole in which learning outcomes need to be interpreted in light of the interactions in which learners have participated. According to the theoretical perspective developed in Chapter 3, it makes little sense to form conclusions about students’ learning without a good grasp of how they were taught. The thesis therefore seeks to explore the teaching–learning of grammatics as mutually constituted. It does this in the context of observations of actual classroom practice, where the teaching of grammatics is itself an object of study.

The thesis employs a methodology which is broadly qualitative and carried out using a case study approach. The original empirical research which informs the
thesis was conducted as two case studies in junior primary (Year 2) classrooms in an inner suburban school in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The project set out to explore ways in which young children might be able to learn and make use of grammatics within the context of their broader English curriculum studies, and it also sought to include a focus on how teaching shaped and contributed to children’s learning.

The overarching aims of the thesis are:

• to investigate the potential of some aspects of systemic functional grammatics as a tool for Year 2 students in understanding and creating texts;
• to explore the viability of pedagogy informed by a Vygotskyan–Hallidayan theoretical framework for the teaching–learning of grammatics;
• to extend the body of data on the teaching–learning of grammatics by including as an important feature of the research the collection of examples of classroom talk as well as other evidence of processes of learning;

and, in light of all the above,

• to contribute to the development of theory and practice regarding the effective teaching–learning of a functional grammatics in primary schooling.

For the purposes of specifying the extent of the project and the kinds of methodological approaches which would be appropriate, these broad aims were used to formulate the general research questions which appear in bold below. General Questions 1 and 2 are further delineated by several specific research questions. These specific questions were refined as the project progressed (as appropriate for an exploratory study), so that they appear below in a form which reflects the achievements of the project and enables the reader to anticipate discussion in ensuing chapters, rather than in the somewhat less specific form which characterised their
wording in the original thesis proposal.

**General Question 1**

*What is the potential (within the parameters of the New South Wales English syllabus)* \(^{51}\) *of select aspects of systemic functional grammar as a tool for Year 2 students in understanding and creating texts?*

Specific research questions:

1.1 To what extent does the category of material Process (denoted as ‘action verb’) provide an accessible entry point to knowledge about grammar for Year 2 children?

1.2 How might Year 2 children use a knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes (‘saying verbs’ and ‘Sayers’) to inform:
   i. their punctuation of quoted (direct) speech, and
   ii. their use of expression when reading aloud?

1.3 In what ways might Year 2 children use knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes in developing a critical reading of narrative?

1.4 How might Year 2 children understand the functional grammatical category of ‘Theme’, and to what extent can they apply the notion of Theme in writing when redrafting a ‘procedure’ text?

**General Question 2**

*How might a pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan and Hallidayan theories of language and learning inform the teaching–learning of grammatics with Year 2 children?*

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Specific research questions:

2.1 What existing knowledge and intuitions about language and grammatics can the Year 2 case study children bring to consciousness when asked ‘What is language?’ and when invited to sort and classify words?

2.2 How do teachers and Year 2 children interact in the teaching–learning of grammatics, and how do teachers guide children’s learning, including through jointly developed ‘zones of proximal development’?

2.3 How does teacher talk mediate knowledge of functional grammatical categories for Year 2 children, and to what extent are teacher explanations accessible and helpful to learners?

2.4 How can teaching–learning resources for grammatics instruction make use of non-linguistic modes (such as colour) in mediating grammatical knowledge?

2.5 How can the teaching–learning of grammatics be contextualised within the broader curriculum in ways which assist Year 2 children to understand the construction of meaning in whole texts?

**General Question 3**

*How can the body of data on the teaching–learning of grammatics be extended to include evidence of processes of learning, with an emphasis on classroom talk?*

This general question was designed to guide the entire data collection phase and serve the fulfilment of the specific research questions listed under General Questions 1 and 2. It does not therefore entail its own set of questions but rather exerts its influence on all the aforelisted questions. In Table 4.1 (beginning on p. 150), the column headed ‘main forms of data collected’ gives an indication of the ways in which the general aim of extending the body of data was addressed.
General Question 4

How can data collected through the case study approach contribute, theoretically and practically, to developing effective teaching and learning of a functional grammatics in primary schools?

This general question encapsulates the work undertaken in the thesis to interpret the data for their significance beyond the situated practices from which they originate. That is: how does the data interact with and contribute to our understanding of relevant theory (what will be discussed below under 4.2.1 as ‘analytical generalisability’); and what are the implications of the data for practical classroom application? As with the preceding general question, this question applies across the entire project and does not necessitate an itemised list of additional specific research questions. Relevant discussion of implications for theory and praxis is therefore to be found throughout the ‘data’ chapters (5 to 8) and in Chapter 9.

The choice to adopt a qualitative, case study methodology was strongly influenced by the exploratory nature of these research questions, and in section 4.2 below the reasoning for the choice of methodological approach is explained. The specific design of the case studies is detailed in section 4.3, which also introduces the case study site and describes the procedures followed in managing access and ethics approval. The collection of data is the subject of section 4.4, which outlines the wide range of types of data collected in order to address the research questions listed above. Section 4.4 also includes a table which provides a guide for the reader as to which chapters of the remainder of the thesis deal with each of the specific research questions, although it is also important to point out that some of the research questions apply more globally to the case studies and are therefore dealt with
throughout the thesis rather than being the subject of one section alone. The methods of data analysis are described in general terms in section 4.5, with more specific attention to analysis of some of the data also provided in relevant subsequent chapters where warranted.

4.2 Rationale

A qualitative, case study methodology with the researcher as participant–observer was adopted for the collection of data for the thesis. The reasons for this methodological approach were both principled and pragmatic, and the following section uses the categories of ‘principles’ and ‘praxis’ to distil the reasoning which informed the methodological approach of the thesis.

4.2.1 Principles informing the methodology

The principles informing the choice of methodological approach consisted of the following:

- the suitability of a qualitative approach in recognition of the role of language in learning and in order to gather ‘social’ data for the purposes of investigating teaching–learning following a Vygotskyan–Hallidayan approach (Chapter 3),
- the value of the case study method in educational research, and
- the exploratory nature of the research questions.

The suitability of a qualitative approach

The stated theoretical principles informing the present study (set out in Chapter 3) meant that a qualitative methodological approach would be highly appropriate. In the Vygotsky–Halliday framework which informs the thesis, understanding the role of language is central to understanding learning. For Halliday, language does not
merely describe experience but is the means by which we construe or understand the world. In a similar vein, Vygotsky also identified language as the dominant mediator of concepts in human intellectual development. Furthermore, both theoretical approaches deem social interaction, of which language is a major part, as formative. The thesis project was therefore designed to accommodate careful attention to language, and in particular the ‘social data’ of the language of classroom interaction. While not precluding quantitative methods entirely (of which some use was in fact made – see Chapter 6), the concerns of the thesis implied a strong emphasis on qualitative methods in order to explore the dynamic social processes of teaching–learning grammatics.

**The value of the case study method in educational research**

A *case study design* was adopted in order to give the broadly qualitative approach a clear focus and manageable scope. The case study has a robust and established place in present-day educational research. It is “an empirical enquiry that: - investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18) and is defined by both design features (the macro unit of analysis is ‘the case’ – a bounded entity) and approaches to data collection (particularly the use of multiple sources of evidence).

One of the advantages of case studies is that they are ‘strong in reality’, and in contrast some other kinds of research such as controlled experiments tend to be ‘weak in reality’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 256, who cite Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976/1980). Case studies in education have the potential to provide a sense of what is actually possible in specific, real-life classrooms: “real people in real situations” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). In contrast, a traditional quantitative methodology might indicate what learners can do under certain perhaps
‘ideal’ or at least carefully controlled conditions. Both approaches have merit, although merit or ‘goodness’ criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 2003) tend to be differently interpreted across paradigms, with ‘credibility’ an important factor in evaluating qualitative research.

A further, related advantage of the case study is its ability to accommodate and elucidate the dynamic and complex practices of the classroom, including tracing the detailed pathways in which teaching–learning develops. If the historical research on learning grammar tended to elide teaching practice, in the present work the emphasis is firmly upon what has historically been under-scrutinised: actual observations of classroom interactions in teaching–learning grammatics. Thus the main aim of the case study design in the present project was “the generation of rich knowledge of a given phenomenon”, whereas the well-known historical grammar teaching studies discussed in Chapter 2 followed traditional scientific methodology aimed at “less rich but generalizable knowledge of that phenomenon” (Moriceau, 2010, p. 422).

This is not to say that the case study design of the present study precludes the possibility of generalisation, although generalisation from case study is usually understood in different terms from its meaning in scientific research. Case studies may indeed produce transferable findings, if not ‘statistical generalisations’ as understood in the sciences. Scientific/experimental research typically uses statistical methods to demonstrate how a certain sample is representative of a population to which the findings of research might be generalised. Such sampling is not normally a feature of case studies, in which “the sample sizes are typically quite small and are often not representative of the population”; “cases are not sampling units” (Lindsay, 2010, pp. 892, 893).
There is an argument however that the ‘generalisability’ of case studies (and qualitative research more generally) resides in a different set of factors, often labelled as ‘transferability’ (Jensen, 2008) to signal the distinct contributions offered by a qualitative paradigm. One approach to transferability places the onus on readers of research to determine to what extent the findings of a case study might be transferred to new contexts; readers looks for a fit between the case study and their own sphere of interest/influence. For this purpose, a ‘thick description’ (see below, sub-section 4.4.2) of the case study context is essential, so that readers can ascertain points of commonality with contexts into which they might hope to translate research findings. The present project aims to provide sufficient detail of the cases such that this kind of transferability is a possibility.

Another approach to transferability of case study research is proposed by Yin (2009), who argues that case studies should aspire to ‘analytical generalisation’ rather than statistical generalisation. By this, Yin refers to the capacity of case studies to interact with theory and for case studies to try out, confirm or refute, augment and in other ways contribute to the development of theory. For the present study, the Vygotskian–Hallidayan theoretical framework described in the previous chapter was proposed as holding promise for the teaching–learning of grammatics, and furthermore a pedagogical grammatics drawn from systemic functional linguistics was proposed as a language description likely to be more helpful for school students than other grammars taught in the past. Throughout the thesis project these theories provided the framework by which the case studies were conducted and against which the data were interpreted. In these ways, the thesis project can claim to be designed in such a way that ‘analytical generalisability’ is at least feasible.
An exploratory study

An important consideration in the decision to adopt a case study design was the fact that research into the teaching and learning of functional grammatics in school-age children was an emergent field of inquiry. Indeed even with the contribution of this thesis the field continues to merit more research. Such research was still a relatively new line of academic enquiry when the study was formulated (the only prior study at its inception being Williams’ project of 1994–96), and therefore it was deemed to be important that more exploratory work be conducted with different groups of learners in order to expand understandings about the possibilities and challenges in teaching–learning a functional grammatics. It has already been established that failure to account for the quality of teaching presents a serious obstacle for the meaningful interpretation of historical research about grammar’s role in the school curriculum (Chapter 2). Without studies which demonstrate that grammatics can be taught well, conclusions about the worth (or waste) of learning grammatics remain conjectural at best. It therefore follows that studies which explore actual classroom practices in teaching grammatics have an important role to play in probing what quality teaching of grammatics might look like, and indeed what constraints on quality teaching may present. The choice of a case study approach was therefore appropriate for exploring a relatively new line of research in which the shape of good teaching practice was and is still being formulated.

Related to its exploratory nature was the fact that the project was also designed to examine innovation rather than merely to document existing educational practice. Case study research is highly appropriate for studying innovation: “Case studies are the preferred method for studying interventions or innovations” (Toma, 2009, p. 408). In the present study innovation was actively encouraged and
supported by the researcher, who assisted the teachers in their endeavours to create quality learning experiences. The researcher’s role was therefore that of both participant and observer, including planning cooperatively with the class teachers for the teaching–learning of grammatics (the researcher’s role is expanded upon in sub-section 4.4.1 below). The potential for the researcher to influence and support innovation while exploring the teaching–learning of a functional grammatics contributed to the selection of a case study method for the thesis project.

Summary
The selection of a qualitative methodological approach using a case study design was therefore a principled one. It permitted the kind of attention to language and social interaction advanced by the theoretical framework of Chapter 3, and focused the exploratory study in a manageable way. The selection of a case study design also provided for collection of authentic evidence of situated and innovative practice.

4.2.2 Practical considerations informing the methodology
The decision to collect qualitative data by means of case studies was practical as well as principled. Practical issues which influenced the choice of a case study approach included its suitability in relation to available research resources, and the accessibility of the case study site. Two further practical issues which influenced the design of the study related to the selection of a grade of schooling for the case studies, and consideration for the abilities of the young children in the project.

Practical suitability of a case study approach
One of the distinct practical advantages of the case study approach is that it can be carried out by a single researcher (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 256, who cite Nisbet & Watt, 1984) – a relevant constraint for the present project. This had a number of
further advantages such as relative autonomy when timetabling visits to classrooms and flexibility in organising data collection over a timeframe which could also accommodate competing demands on a part-time researcher’s time. While not necessarily a path to a speedy completion, the case study approach afforded a ‘do-ability’ dimension to the present project which made it a practical choice.

Accessibility of case study site

The research was conducted at a primary school where the researcher had been working as a teacher for a number of years, and specifically with two Year 2 classes. This school was clearly a readily accessible site for the researcher, who also continued to work as a teacher there during much of the data collection. In addition to its obvious geographic accessibility to the researcher, my personal history with the site meant that a number of other advantages followed. In the data collection phase I could anticipate being readily accepted as a participant–observer in the classrooms since the children and teachers already knew me. I could also negotiate data collection around other work demands (my own and those of the class teachers) with a good degree of flexibility given that I was on site already for the greater part of the data collection phase. Furthermore, the case study approach offered potential practical benefits to the school itself, whose principal was keen to see staff involved with professional development and whose trust and official approval was needed for the project to go ahead. A description of the school follows in sub-section 4.3.2 below, but here it is worth noting that it was an ‘ordinary’ school with students from families representing a cross-section of society. That is, the case study site was a regular school and was not a special site such as a school for academically gifted children. In this respect the findings of the project could potentially remain open to being transferred to a wider number of similar contexts than if a special site had been selected instead.
Selection of case study classes

The decision to undertake research in Year 2 classes specifically was to a large extent a practical one, although it was also informed by gaps in existing research. Historically, learning grammar in the younger end of primary schooling has not attracted much research attention because of the Piagetian legacy (Chapter 3). In relatively recent research of a similar nature to the current project, and the only project of its scale which has researched children learning functional grammar, Williams worked initially with Year 6 students and then also Year 1 students (Chapter 2, sub-section 2.4.1). Year 2 was therefore a grade which had not attracted attention in the research either recently or historically.52 In fact, Year 3 was also considered for the present project, and here practical considerations were the greatest factor in selecting the case study classes. A number of pragmatic issues were considered, such as the willingness of teachers to be involved in the project, their degree of flexibility to incorporating the suggestions of others (the researcher), and the likelihood that they would be available for the whole research period. Preliminary conversations were conducted with the school principal and then with relevant staff around these potentially delicate issues before the case study classes and teachers were confirmed and Year 2 thus became the case study grade for the project.

Consideration for the abilities of young children

The research questions were planned around investigating the learning of younger primary school aged children, and ultimately Year 2 children were the focus of the project. The particular children in the case study classes, like many other Year 2

52 See also Wyse (2001, p. 416): “A persistent and severe limitation in the research of the twentieth century is a lack of studies that have addressed the primary age range, in particular children in classes below Year 6.”
children, were in several respects still developing their literacy. For example, a few children had difficulty writing independent texts in such a way that they could be easily read by an adult, including some children who still used many invented spellings and some children with a language background other than English who struggled at times with written expression in English. There were a few children in each of the case study classes who were reading ‘chapter books’ (novels) and were also quite capable writers, but some children were still developing fluency in oral reading of texts, and yet others – a small group in each class – had broader difficulties with reading and regularly used the strategy (amongst others) of ‘sounding out’ words aloud. The challenge for this project, then, was to collect data about their learning from children who were not necessarily proficient, fluent or expansive in being able to express themselves in writing and who may not all have been able to read and interpret instructions and questions on a formal test. That is, some of the children were still developing the competencies needed for many of the kinds of tasks which have characterised the data of historical grammar studies – especially those conducted with secondary and tertiary students – such as silent reading, observation of strict examination conditions, and writing compositions involving stretches of comprehensible, mostly accurately spelled prose. The design of the project therefore needed to accommodate the age and abilities of the young school children being studied. A qualitative approach to data collection was thus a practical choice as well as a principled one as described in the preceding section.

4.3 Study design and preparation phase

4.3.1 Two case studies

The methodological design of the project was a ‘multiple’ (as opposed to ‘single’) case study design (Yin, 2009, p. 46 ff) consisting of two cases – both Year 2 classes.
The case studies focused specifically on the teaching–learning of aspects of functional grammatics, including the integration of grammatics with other aspects of the curriculum and especially subject English. The case study design was thus an ‘embedded’-type design (Yin, 2009, pp. 50, 52), in that it focused on particular aspects of the curriculum within the broader case study. This may be contrasted with an ‘holistic’ case study design in which a case is studied in a more global sense. The ‘bounded entity’ constituting the cases was not the Year 2 classes in their entire schooling experience, but rather the teaching and learning of grammatics in those classes. The design of the case studies is shown in summary form in Figure 4.1. Note that an important feature of the design was that the teaching–learning of grammatics was not in isolation from the rest of the curriculum, and therefore the boundary between the embedded focus on ‘grammatics’ and the rest of the wider class program was a permeable one, indicated by a dotted line in the diagram. Similarly, the case study class programs were themselves influenced by wider whole school and across-grade plans (such as planned topics of study and excursions) and so the case study classes are shown in Figure 4.1 as being connected with the wider context of the school also by means of a dotted line. Thus despite the case study being a methodological approach in which ‘bounded’ entities are the focus, the entities

![Figure 4.1 Case study design of the project](image-url)
within the present project were not tightly bounded although identifiable parameters did exist.

The inclusion in the project of two case studies rather than a single study was in part a practical one, prompted by a desire to collect more data of a wider range of teaching–learning activities than was possible in the comparatively short time the researcher was afforded in Class 2B (the first case study class). A further advantage of having more than one case to study can be that it provides a stronger basis for making more general observations, since commonalities across cases may be identified. More than one case also allows for the possibility of comparison between cases (some of which was undertaken and is described in the following chapter).

4.3.2 Description of the case study site

The case study site was an inner suburban primary school in Sydney, New South Wales, and two Year 2 classes were studied: one called ‘2B’ and one called ‘2F’.

Year 2 is the third year of compulsory schooling in New South Wales, and the children were 7 to 8 years old. The school was a public school, in the Australian sense of the term ‘public’ – that is, a fully government-funded school. The school population of around 400–420 students during the time of the case studies placed it as a larger middle-sized primary school by comparison with other New South Wales public schools. There were at least two classes in each grade (Kindergarten to Year

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53 The school named all its classes using the first initial of their teachers’ family names. The case study teachers were given the pseudonyms of ‘Ms Joanne Baker’ and ‘Mrs Penny Finch,’ hence the classes are referred to as ‘2B’ and ‘2F’ respectively in the thesis. The ‘B’ and ‘F’ designations do not therefore indicate anything about the academic ability of the students in the classes, and indeed the school did not ‘stream’ or academically rank classes. The reader may find it helpful to note that the case study in Class 2B preceded that in Class 2F chronologically just as B precedes F in the alphabet.

54 The Australian convention has been to distinguish between ‘public’ (government-run and funded) schools and ‘private’ schools. However private schools in Australia do in fact receive some level of federal government funding, in many cases to a substantial degree, and the common terminology of public / private is argued by some to obscure such realities (Bonnor & Caro, 2007). Nevertheless, the term ‘public school’ continues to denote a wholly state-run institution in Australia.
6), and classes throughout the school were formed as parallel groups in terms of academic ability. The case study classes were therefore regular mixed ability classes.

The case study school was in a strongly multicultural area and a significant proportion of the student population (at least 40%) had a language background other than English (‘LBOTE’), with Chinese, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish being the largest language groups represented. Only a very small proportion of the school population were ‘Phase 1’ English learners with little or no English. Most LBOTE students were fluent in conversational English, although a significant number struggled with English literacy and with the more academic uses of English, and on this basis the school was allocated a full-time ‘ESL’ (English as a Second Language) teacher. The school had a small but significant indigenous population which varied but was usually at least 3% of total enrolments. The socio-economic profile of the school was mixed. Some children lived in the many apartment buildings nearby, some in the small detached or semi-detached houses typical of the inner suburbs. A very small proportion of the school’s population lived in public (government subsidised) housing. The children’s parents had a wide range of occupations, including professionals, small business operators, customer service workers and labourers. There was not a high degree of unemployment in the parent body, and the school was not classified as being in a ‘disadvantaged’ area (for the purposes of extra funding from the Department of Education and Training), although it had been so in the decade immediately prior to when this research was conducted.

The school as a whole had a reputation in the local area for being successful in meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties and had a long-term interest in developing best-practice literacy programs through thoughtful allocation of resources and through the professional development of staff. The school also had
a history of involvement in action research especially in the area of literacy. It was in the context of this constructive and forward-looking professional climate that the principal agreed to allow the research here described to be undertaken. Furthermore, the two teachers in whose classrooms the research was conducted were enthusiastic professionals committed to their own ongoing learning and receptive to the innovation and cooperative teaching which the project envisaged.

4.3.3 Ethics approval

The project was begun and the data collection phase completed while the researcher was enrolled at the University of Sydney. Therefore ethics approval was sought from the University of Sydney’s Human Ethics Committee and also, as required by government school policy, from the NSW Department of Education and Training. After a period of bureaucratic hiatus during which each institution withheld support pending the endorsement of the other, the project and its attenuated consent forms were approved.55 The NSW Department of Education and Training had one important caveat: the project was to use ‘conventional’ terminology as set out in the NSW Board of Studies syllabus documents.

The informed consent of participants was an important dimension of the ethical implementation of the project and represented a substantial part of the preparatory phase of work in each case study class. Both the classroom teachers and the students (by parent proxy) were invited to give their informed consent.

The classroom teachers in both case study classes were informed of the scope of the study and their anticipated role of participating in collaborative planning and team teaching. The approximate time involved in researcher visits and meetings was

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55 University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee reference number: 00/05/29. NSW Department of Education and Training Strategic Research Directorate ‘SERAP Number’: 00.45.
estimated. The teachers were also asked to keep a journal reflecting on the project and the children’s learning – something which neither teacher in the end embraced, although for reasons of time rather than any sense of resistance to the project. The teachers were also provided with a copy of the researcher’s thesis proposal, thus making available to them some of the knowledge base from which the researcher would be operating, and hopefully indicating the researcher’s regard for them as colleagues and not simply research ‘subjects’.

The informed permission of parents was also sought for their children’s inclusion in the study. Parents were informed in writing of the aims of the study, the fact that it would involve classroom work which was already part of the curriculum, and that children’s talk would be audio recorded and relevant work samples collected. Children’s anonymity would be protected.56 In both case studies, parents were also invited to an information session held in the early evening in the children’s classroom, where the class teacher and researcher were available to explain the study further and answer parents’ concerns and questions.

In the first case study class, ‘2B’, there were 29 students, and consent forms were signed by parents on behalf of 27 of these children. About ten parents from this class attended the evening information session and they were forthright in asking insightful questions about the project’s aims and about grammar in education more generally.

In the second case study class, ‘2F’, there were 27 children enrolled in the class over the course of the year, but 26 when the study began and permissions were sought. Even though in this class the same offer was made of an evening information

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56 This was achieved by adopting pseudonyms for all participants. The children’s pseudonyms were designed to be reflective of their cultural backgrounds in order to maintain a genuine sense of the varied backgrounds of the case study participants.
session about the project, none of the parents in this class took up the offer. Nevertheless, most parents consented readily to their children’s participation in the project. Of the initial 26 children in this class, permissions were received for 22 of them to participate in the project. Of these, only 20 children would remain for the duration of the study (another child arrived in the last month of the school year and was not included in the study).

For the two children in Class 2B\textsuperscript{57} and the four children in Class 2F\textsuperscript{58} from whom no consent was received, their participation in grammatics lessons (contributions to classroom talk, work samples and so on) was not included in the data, including omitting any of their comments from transcripts of audio recordings.

### 4.4 Data collection phase

#### 4.4.1 Role of the researcher

My own role in the case studies can be broadly characterised as ‘participant–observer.’ I attended almost all of the grammatics lessons held in the Year 2 classes, making notes and ensuring that lessons were audio recorded and work samples collected. I also assisted with the teaching of the lessons, sometimes by leading the lesson but often by asking a clarifying question or providing an answer to a query

\textsuperscript{57} In Class 2B there were two children from whose parents permission was not obtained for their inclusion in the study: one was a child with profound intellectual disabilities who in any case followed a largely individualised program; the other child followed the mainstream program of the class but the child’s mother was concerned that the project might place undue scrutiny on her child and she was also not able to be reassured that the child would not be identifiable in reports of the research.

\textsuperscript{58} The four Class 2F children from whom no permissions were received included one child whose family were professional performers, and who regularly took the child out of class for long periods when they were touring. This child would have been only intermittently represented in the data anyway given these frequent absences from school. The three other children from whom permission could not be obtained were from families which had little contact with the school and from whom the teacher often had difficulty getting notes returned, such as for excursions. At least one of these families consistently spoke a language other than English in the home and they may not have been equipped to deal with the detailed consent form (it was necessarily so to comply with ethics approval guidelines), despite offers to talk about the form in person and for a community language teacher in the school to assist with interpretation if that would be helpful. That this child’s comments had to be omitted from the transcripts was unfortunate because he was a lively student whose contributions were usually apposite.
from the children or teacher.

My role was, however, broader and more participatory that merely observing and participating in the actual grammar lessons. I worked collaboratively with the classroom teachers well in advance of the lessons to plan the broad sweep of how we might integrate learning grammatics with the demands of the designated curriculum (such as how we could incorporate initial grammar lessons with a programmed theme on ‘The Olympics’). My role was also to assist in the detailed preparation of the grammatics lessons. This included preparing materials, writing sample texts for use in class or offering suggestions for use of a text the teacher had selected, and often writing complete lesson plans and then reviewing these with the teacher before the lessons. Following a lesson, my role sometimes involved typing up the children’s writing for ‘publication’ (some form of sharing the writing with an audience) or creating and maintaining a classroom display about what we had been learning. In these senses, my role was not merely to observe lessons while participating in them (and sometimes leading them), but also to mentor and support the classroom teachers in their teaching of grammatics.

As noted (p. 137 above), at the time of the case study data collection I was also employed at this school. The principal gave her permission for me to use my scheduled allocations of time when not face-to-face teaching to conduct the research. This meant I had a maximum of 2 hours a week when I could work in the case study classrooms – usually I visited for around one hour. In neither of the case studies was I in the role of work supervisor of the classroom teacher or her educational program, and no duress was involved in my relationship with either teacher. Furthermore, I had known and worked collaboratively with both teachers for more than 2 years when we began to work together on the grammatics research. Prior to my research in
their classrooms, the teachers and I had worked together regularly through my role as
the school’s teacher-librarian, which involved cooperative planning for their classes’
educational use of the library and then team-teaching lessons on a weekly basis. We
were comfortable teaching together and in making suggestions and responding to
each other’s ideas. I am confident that there were no undue pressures or constraints
on the case study teachers as a result of my employment position at the school. On
the contrary, there were substantial advantages to my existing familiarity with the
school. For example, I already knew well the children in the case study classes and
indeed many of their families, having taught the children in the school library since
they began at the school. The children certainly did not go through any obvious
period of hesitation or adjustment when I began to visit their classrooms for the
research and they gave all indications of accepting my presence instantly. The
parents’ familiarity with me may also have been beneficial for the project,
contributing to their confidence in providing consent for their children to participate.

4.4.2 Forms of data

One of the distinctive features of case studies is their use of multiple sources of data.
This is important in establishing the credibility of case studies, or what might be
explained in more traditional terms as an aspect of ‘internal validity’. Multiple
sources of data provide the basis for a rich or ‘thick’\textsuperscript{59} description and also help to
ensure that case study findings are not skewed for want of more complete and
possibly divergent evidence. This is sometimes discussed in terms of ‘triangulation’,
a metaphor deriving from mathematics and surveying wherein multiple

\textsuperscript{59} Geertz (1973). The term ‘thick description’ is taken from ethnographic anthropology. While the
present study is not an entirely ethnographic one in that it explores innovation in educational practice
rather than ‘naturalistic’ cases, and it uses some mixed methods to do so, it nevertheless
acknowledges a debt to ethnographic traditions.
measurements are used to locate a point. In educational research, triangulation might refer to the use of more than one researcher as observer (not available for the present study) and more often refers to “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141). In qualitative research in particular, triangulation of data provides a greater degree of certainty that findings are based on a thorough and fair understanding of what is being studied rather than a partial representation which might follow from reliance on a single method of data collection.

The following forms of data were collected during the case studies:

- audio recordings of children’s talk with each other and the teacher as they worked on teaching–learning grammatics, both in whole class lessons and in smaller groupings when opportunity arose;
- researcher observation notes;
- audio recordings of children’s oral reading;
- structured interviews with samples of students;
- children’s work samples, such as worksheets, ‘learning journal’ reflections on class activities and written compositions (the ‘learning journal’ is a small book in which children are encouraged to reflect upon their own learning); researcher devised tests, such as tests for punctuating direct speech (Class 2B) and a test on verb identification (Class 2F);
- lesson artefacts, such as jointly constructed class texts, displays and lesson plans;
- photographs of teaching aids (such as wall displays and teacher/researcher devised games); and
• (in the second case study in Class 2F) some semi-structured interviews with the class teacher, and some audio recordings of the teacher’s reflections on the project made by her without the researcher present.

A summary of how these forms of data were related to the specific research questions of the thesis is provided in Table 4.1 on the following pages.

Two additional forms of data were initially planned to be included but were not in the end possible to obtain. One of these was a teacher journal of reflections on the project, which as already mentioned was not embraced by either participating teacher. While such data could have been valuable for corroborating or correcting researcher observations, the extensive audio recordings proved more than adequate for such purposes. In the Class 2F case study, the teacher did provide some personal reflections by occasionally relating her thoughts aloud and audio recording these. These reflections were consistently supportive of the research project and positive about its impact on the children in her class but have not in the end featured in the thesis itself, which relies on direct evidence of children’s learning where it was available rather than on the teachers’ impressions.

The other form of data initially hoped to be collected was video recording of some lessons. Unfortunately there were not the technological nor human resources available to do this. The school did not own a video camera of any kind (nor did the researcher), and in any case it would have been very difficult for the researcher as participant-observer to operate a camera while also making notes and interacting in the lessons. In hindsight, the absence of video data does not seem problematic as the extensive and high quality audio data provide a clear and coherent picture of the classroom interactions. Furthermore, the children and teacher quickly became accustomed to using the audio recorder and were not self-conscious in the manner that
### Table 4.1  Research questions, data and relevant thesis chapters

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<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Main forms of data collected</th>
<th>Relevant chapter/s of thesis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General Question 1: What is the potential (within the parameters of the New South Wales English syllabus) of select aspects of systemic functional grammar as a tool for Year 2 students in understanding and creating texts?</strong></td>
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| 1.1 To what extent does the category of material Process (denoted as ‘action verb’) provide an accessible entry point to knowledge about grammar for Year 2 children? | Audio recordings of classroom talk  
Children’s work samples | Chapter 5                                                 |
| 1.2 How might Year 2 children use a knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes (‘saying verbs’ and ‘Sayers’) to inform:  
   i. their punctuation of quoted (direct) speech, and  
   ii. their use of expression when reading aloud? | Tests of punctuation of direct speech  
Audio recordings of four children’s oral readings  
Structured interviews with the children whose oral readings were recorded | Chapter 6                                                 |
| 1.3 In what ways might Year 2 children use knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes in developing a critical reading of narrative? | Audio recordings of classroom talk, specifically small group work led by the researcher | Chapter 7                                                 |
| 1.4 How might Year 2 children understand the functional grammatical category of ‘Theme’, and to what extent can they apply the notion of Theme in writing when redrafting a ‘procedure’ text? | Children’s work samples including ‘learning journals’  
Audio recordings of classroom talk | Chapter 8                                                 |
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<td><strong>General Question 2: How might a pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan and Hallidayan theories of language and learning inform the teaching–learning of grammatics with Year 2 children?</strong></td>
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| 2.1 What existing knowledge and intuitions about language and grammatics can the Year 2 case study children bring to consciousness when asked ‘What is language?’ and when invited to sort and classify words? | Children’s work samples, specifically:  
- ‘What is language?’ mind maps, and  
- word sorting activity | Chapter 5, section 5.2 |
| 2.2 How do teachers and Year 2 children interact in the teaching–learning of grammatics, and how do teachers guide children’s learning, including through jointly developed ‘zones of proximal development’? | Audio recordings of classroom talk | Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive |
| 2.3 How does teacher talk mediate knowledge of functional grammatical categories for Year 2 children, and to what extent are teacher explanations accessible and helpful to learners? | Audio recordings of classroom talk – with analysis particularly focusing on teacher explanations of grammatical categories | Chapter 5, especially sub-section 5.4.3  
Chapter 6, especially sub-section 6.7.2  
Chapter 8, especially sub-section 8.3.1 |
| 2.4 How can teaching–learning resources for grammatics instruction make use of non-linguistic modes (such as colour) in mediating grammatical knowledge? | Lesson artefacts  
Photographs and / or originals of teaching resources | Chapter 5, especially sections 5.4 and 5.5  
Chapter 6 sub-section 6.7.2  
Chapter 7, sub-section 7.5.2 |
| 2.5 How can the teaching–learning of grammatics be contextualised within the broader curriculum in ways which assist Year 2 children to understand the construction of meaning in whole texts? | Audio recordings of classroom talk  
Children’s work samples | Chapters 5 to 8 provide examples of the contextualised teaching–learning of grammatics. |
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| **General Question 3: How can the body of data on the teaching–learning of grammatics be extended to include evidence of processes of learning, with an emphasis on classroom talk?** | Audio recordings of classroom talk  
Children’s work samples - these regularly included an invitation for children to indicate their *attitudes* to the grammatics work  
Children’s learning journal entries  
Audio recordings of conversations / interviews between children and researcher | Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive |
| General Question 3 operates in service of the specific research questions under General Research Questions 1 and 2 and does not entail its own set of specific questions. |                                                                                             |                                        |

| **General Question 4: How can data collected through the case study approach contribute, theoretically and practically, to developing effective teaching and learning of a functional grammatics in primary schools?** |                                                                                             | Chapter 9 provides a more general, ‘capstone’ analysis. |
|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                             |                                        |
| General Question 4 operates across General Research Questions 1 and 2 and relates to the purposes of the thesis in terms of generalising the findings. |                                                                                             |                                        |
|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                             |                                        |
|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                             |                                        |
might be anticipated if they had been facing a video camera, especially if video
recording had only been available occasionally. To the children and teacher, the
audio recorder became ubiquitous and routine.

4.5  Data analysis phase

4.5.1  ‘Slicing’ the data

The accumulated data provided a rich source of information for addressing the aims
of the thesis. From this rich data it was necessary to draw out and report those
aspects which best addressed the research questions, focusing the thesis upon
identifiable themes in the data. A focus on certain themes also avoided producing too
diffuse a description of the case studies in which more of the data might have been
presented but could not have been reflected upon adequately. Thus Chapters 5 to 8
discuss findings based on several ‘slices’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that were taken
through the rich data from the case studies, each slice selected for its potential to
contribute to the research questions and hopefully to contribute insights beyond the
commonplace.

The ‘slices’ of data were selected following the researcher’s repeated and
recursive surveying and reading of the data, which was consistently undertaken in
light of the research questions. Some data were collected with a particular research
question in mind, such as the punctuation tests and oral readings collected for
research question 1.2 and reported in Chapter 6. Similarly, the data on critical
reading and grammatics which are reported in Chapter 7 were collected with
research question 1.3 in mind. This latter data set was also delineated by lesson

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60 Glaser and Strauss are credited with the introduction of the metaphor ‘slices of data’, which they
define as “[d]ifferent kinds of data [that] give the analyst different views or vantage points from
which to understand a category and to develop its properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 65). The
metaphor has proved useful beyond its origins in Glaser and Strauss’s ‘grounded theory’ and is used
here in a somewhat less technical but nonetheless sympathetic manner to their original formulation.
‘content’ and timeframe: it was a set of lessons organised around one specific picture book. Other ‘slices’ emerged more organically, such as the decision to compare two introductory lessons in Chapter 5, which became a strategic way to address several different aspects of the project while using an amount of data manageable for the reader as well as the researcher. The data which form the basis of Chapter 8 represent a series of smaller slices, taken to elucidate the teaching–learning of the concept of ‘Theme’ from SFG. In this chapter, the selection of data was organised around the topic being taught and features of the teaching–learning which the researcher identified as trends or common threads.

A number of approaches were taken to analyse the wide variety of data, each approach being selected based on its appropriateness to the types of data and for its potential to shed light on the research questions. The remainder of section 4.5 describes how the main types of data were approached for the purposes of data analysis.

### 4.5.2 Main types of data

The data can be broadly divided into three categories in order to facilitate discussion of the methods of data analysis applied. The first two categories provided direct evidence of classroom interactions: audio recordings and children’s work samples; while the third consisted of researcher notes and other indirect records of lessons such as lesson plans.

The bulk of the data providing direct evidence of classroom interactions fell into the material categories of audio recordings and children’s work samples. Of these, the audio recordings (of classroom discourse and other talk such as interviews) were the more significant data set in terms of quantity of data and also in terms of effort required for transcription and analysis. The principles under which data from
this set were selected, transcribed and analysed are detailed in the following subsection, 4.5.3. The other main body of classroom data consisted of different forms of student work samples, such as learning journal entries, worksheets, independent writing samples, simple tests and the like. Different methods of analysis were applied to these as appropriate and a summary of some of these methods is provided below in sub-section 4.5.4. Where it is warranted, greater detail about the analysis of children’s work is provided in the specific chapters of the thesis in which the particular data are discussed (Chapters 5 to 8).

A third broad category of data can also be identified which provided support for understanding and analysing the aforementioned classroom data (that is, the audio recordings and work samples). This third category consisted of the researcher’s observation notes and the lesson plans and other teaching materials used in the project. This data set was used primarily to clarify and confirm information arising from the other data and was not itself the subject of separate analysis. It is discussed in sub-section 4.5.5.

4.5.3 Analysis of audio recordings

A total of just over 27 hours of audio recorded data were collected during the two case studies (14½ hours in Class 2B and close to 13 hours in Class 2F). This included classroom lessons (the bulk of the data), interviews with students, oral readings by a sample of individual students, and conversations with the classroom teacher of the second case study class. All the audio recordings were listened to in full and a summary created of the contents of each, including brief descriptions of lesson content and samples of the talk recorded. These summaries were then reviewed and potentially relevant sections of the listed contents were highlighted for later transcription.
Principled basis for selecting sections of audio data for transcription

From the large body of available recorded talk, it was necessary to select only the most potentially useful sections for full, detailed transcription.

As an initial step, the type of oral text, or its genre, was used as a way to select certain passages to be transcribed. The oral texts fell broadly into two groups: texts with a small number of participants, such as interviews; and texts of actual lessons, that is, classroom discourse with multiple participants. These two broad groupings of texts provided an initial basis for deciding what to transcribe because of the different practical challenges they posed for transcription.

A small number of the oral texts consisted of the voices of only one or two speakers, for example interviews (between the researcher and class teacher, or between the researcher and individual students) and teacher ‘reflections’ (a kind of oral journal kept by the Class 2F teacher for a short period). These types of recordings were relatively straightforward to transcribe because of the limited number of speaking voices and because there was clear turn-taking in the dialogic texts (interviews). Texts of this kind which had a direct bearing on the research questions were selected to be completely transcribed or at least summarised in detail.

Classroom discourse – the language and interactions of actual lessons – was the other main type of text, representing the greater proportion of the raw audio data. The process of selecting for transcription excerpts of audio-recorded classroom talk was complex, reflecting the complexity of the texts themselves, which were characterised by multiple voices, interruptions, sometimes contested turn-taking, and often a degree of ambient noise (for example, a child with intellectual disability continuing to work on an individualised program with a teacher’s aide while the
main lesson being recorded was in progress). The difficult selection process for the classroom discourse audio data was based on a number of principles:

1. Regulative versus instructional discourse

Pedagogic discourse has been described by Basil Bernstein (1990) as the combination of two kinds of discourse: regulative discourse and instructional discourse. That is, in any pedagogic context (of which the school classroom is one of many – Bernstein had in mind pedagogic contexts more broadly defined, for example, medical specialist explaining diagnosis with patient) there will be a discourse of procedures, routines and rules which constitutes the ‘regulative discourse’, as well as a discourse of pedagogic content: the ‘instructional discourse’. These have also been called the regulative and instructional registers (Christie, 2002a), invoking terminology from systemic functional linguistics in which ‘register’ is used to refer to functionally different uses of language in context.

These two forms of discourse or two registers are interwoven in pedagogic contexts, with the regulative register setting up and maintaining the conditions under which the instructional register is able to operate and curriculum content can be communicated. This relationship is characterised by Christie as one of projection, that is, the regulative projects the instructional. Christie is here drawing on a metaphor from systemic functional linguistics, in which clauses of verbal and mental process are said to ‘project’ other clauses of quoted or reported speech and thoughts, a point which is explained in Chapter 6, section 6.4. For present purposes, it will suffice to say that the regulative register operates to make possible the instructional register in a manner analogous to the way an overhead or data projector makes possible the delivery of visual content. And while the projector’s operation (the ‘regulative register’) may be obvious at times, such as when it is turned on or
requires technical adjustment, for the most part the projector’s presence is taken as
given and the visual content its existence makes possible becomes the focus of
attention. Similarly, the regulative register is always tacitly in operation in pedagogic
discourse even when the instructional register is to the fore. In this sense, the two
forms of discourse or registers co-occur and might seem to be almost inseparable.
However, there are times when the regulative discourse is dominant, and when it can
occur without any obvious curricular import (such as children being asked to pack up
and get ready for lunch). In contrast, the instructional discourse is always made
possible by its framing within regulative discourse, even if the regulative may be
more or less overt at different times.

The process of selection of audio material for data analysis took account of
this regulative / instructional distinction, and as a first step periods of ‘purely’
regulative discourse which were unrelated to the lesson content were not transcribed.
These included requests from children to go to the toilet, interruptions from
messengers, and instructions to the class to get ready for catching the bus to
swimming lessons. In addition the talk involved in observably routine classroom
interactions, such as the teacher directing children to leave the mat and walk to their
desks, was not transcribed in detail, although usually a note was made in the
transcript which summarised such routines. The mentioned examples of regulative
discourse typically fell at ‘change of activity’ points within a lesson, at the very end
of a lesson, or were clearly not part of the lesson itself (such as interruptions for
messages sent from other teachers). In the first case study, the class teacher was also
one of the school’s assistant principals, and as such would occasionally be
interrupted by internal telephone calls about management matters to do with her
executive responsibilities. This kind of interaction was deemed of little relevance to the research questions of the current study.

Other forms of regulative discourse were more closely integrated with (or, to put it another way, less easy to separate from) the discourse of actual lessons. An example of these routine regulative interactions would be the common practice of the teacher directing a child to pay attention or to stop chatting to a friend. Examples of these kinds of overt regulative discourse, often exchanges of a very brief nature, were consistently retained in the transcription process if they occurred within a selected section of audio data. That is, if these regulative interactions fell within some raw data which had been highlighted for transcription for other reasons, they were included in the transcript. The reason for this was that consistent unsettled behaviour from the children (for example) might indicate boredom with the lesson – a matter of relevance when considering quality of pedagogy. These regulative interactions were not necessarily transcribed in full unless they included talk which related back to the lesson content (such as if a child had said, ‘Learning about verbs is boring’ – no-one did, by the way), but were at least summarised and indicated within square brackets, for example: [Teacher asks Simon to pay attention]. The following excerpt from the data provides a small example of regulative discourse within an overtly instructional phase of a lesson.

Teacher: Now we’re going to look for ‘complication’. And in this story, there might even be more than one.

Child: There is.

Teacher: So, without calling out, put your hand up if you can tell me a complication in this story.

(Class 2F, December 5)

The regulative register is most obvious when the teacher reminds the children not to call out and to “put your hand up”, while the instructional focus is obviously on
identifying a complication in a story being studied. Importantly, however, the regulative register operates tacitly throughout, such as the teacher’s inclusion of the students in the activity (“we” are all doing this task together and it is not optional) and the ever-present expectation that students will be paying attention to the instructional content even when not explicitly told to do so.

2. Relevance to research questions

The surveyed audio data were reviewed in terms of relevance to the research questions of the study. In fact a process of revision was undertaken such that the specificity of the research questions was clarified in light of the collected data, with the reciprocal effect that data of greatest relevance were prioritised for detailed transcription.

Not all data of relevance to the research questions was however transcribed. In particular, little of value was expected to be gained by transcribing oral readings of a story book by several children in Class 2B (collected for research question 1.2), and these audio data were analysed using other means (see Chapter 6).

3. Unmarked and marked discourse

Sections of audio data were often selected for transcription because they gave a sense of the usual or common ways children and teachers dealt with certain ideas. Importantly, however, highly unusual or contrary interactions were also highlighted for transcription:

Although it is frequently useful to record typical, representative occurrences, the researcher need not always adhere to criteria of representativeness. It may be that infrequent, unrepresentative but critical incidents or events occur that are crucial to the understanding of the case. (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 257)

This distinction between typical and atypical can also be described in terms of the linguistic distinction between ‘unmarked’ (the usual way something is said)
and ‘marked’ (unusual or noticeable for being different to expectation). The result of this method of selecting data was that not every ‘typical’ interaction was selected for transcription, since these data would become repetitive and therefore redundant at some point. For example, it was not deemed necessary to transcribe every instance of children correctly suggesting examples of a particular grammatical concept in a lesson since the point could be made from a sample of such talk provided the sample was honestly identified as typical. In contrast, the atypical or ‘marked’ comment was often quite significant, not merely for research purposes but also in its original articulation in the classroom, where a slightly different perspective offered by one child could open up new understandings for others. Such kinds of ‘marked’ comments were important to transcribe.

4. Transcription: An iterative process

In the course of data analysis, many recordings were listened to repeatedly. This often led to further transcription of data previously not selected, since what was considered pertinent to the research questions became more refined in the researcher’s mind as the project developed. In all, 54% of all the audio data was transcribed (41% of the Class 2B data and 68% of Class 2F’s data).

Transcription conventions

Table 4.2 lists the main conventions which were followed in presenting audio data in transcript form.\(^{61}\) In much systemic functional linguistic research where conversation is the object of study, it is customary to provide a means for readers to identify particular turns taken in conversation using numbers in a column to the left-hand of

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\(^{61}\) This table is reproduced in Appendix B at item B.1, where it is augmented slightly as a reference for readers of the transcripts in the appendices, which are generally longer and more detailed than the excerpts used in the body of the thesis.
the ‘speaker’ column. This was not considered necessary for the purposes of the present thesis.

**Table 4.2** Key to transcription conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol or convention</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name in left-hand column, followed by a colon</td>
<td>Speaker, identified by name where possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>In left-hand column, indicates some of the text has not been transcribed (often a reason for this or a summary of the talk is provided in the right-hand column).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>In the body of the transcript – indicates a pause of up to 3 seconds. Pauses of longer than 3 seconds were timed and noted as such in square brackets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Talk is unclear – the words in parentheses are the researcher’s best guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Additional information which may not have been part of the audio recording itself but helps to explicate it in some way. May include a note about accompanying activity or a short summary of an ellipsed section of talk. Also used to indicate an indecipherable section of text, to note the length of pauses greater than 3 seconds, and to note tone of address where this might be relevant to a fair reading of the transcript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/</td>
<td>Used to indicate simultaneous talk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of transcript data**

Repeated readings of the transcript data were used to help decide which major themes were worth exploring in depth in the thesis. This provided the researcher with a broad grasp of the content of these data. Within each ‘slice’ of data, represented in each of Chapters 5 to 8, transcripts were reread thoroughly and key ideas and excerpts identified at a more detailed level.

The transcripts were then sometimes analysed further but not necessarily so, and throughout the thesis the transcript data are often used illustratively. Some select aspects of the transcript data were explored in more detail, such as the lessons featured in Chapter 5, which were analysed for the lesson stages through which they
progressed, following Christie (2002a). Content analysis was applied to some
transcripts, such as interview data from children about their use of expression in oral
reading (Chapter 6) and to children’s talk about verbal patterns in a literary picture
book (Chapter 7). There was also some use made of textual analysis using systemic
functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) as a tool for analysing salient
wordings in the transcript data, in particular focusing on the ways in which teachers
used language to teach grammatical concepts. For example, in Chapter 5 there is
some discussion of how teacher talk framed the concept of ‘action verbs’ for
children in the two case study classes, and in Chapter 8 a discussion of the teaching
of ‘Theme’ also draws upon grammatical analysis. In several instances, actual words
or phrases were important to locate, such as the word ‘verb’ in a lesson introducing
that concept (see Chapter 5), and such searches were done both manually – to check
for various wordings of a concept – and also using software (such as the ‘Search’
function in Windows Explorer, the ‘Find’ function in Microsoft Word and using
Leximancer software).

4.5.4 **Analysis of work sample data**

Samples of the children’s work constituted the largest proportion of hard copy, non-
audio data. The type of analysis applied to these work samples depended on the kind
of work the children had produced and on the value reasonably expected to be gained
from a particular kind of analysis. Some work samples were useful as illustrative
examples but did not warrant a detailed analysis. The details about how different
data were analysed will be addressed in forthcoming chapters where the data are
presented and discussed. However it is worthwhile to foreshadow the fact that the
methods of data analysis were mixed, as appropriate to a wide mixture of types of
work samples. For example, content analysis was applied to ‘mind maps’ made by
the children (Chapter 5), while some work samples suggested both simple statistical analysis and error analysis, such as tests of children’s ability to punctuate direct speech (Chapter 6).

4.5.5 Researcher notes and records of teaching materials

The third broad category of data (in terms of data analysis) consisted of the researcher’s participant–observer notes and of lesson plans and other teaching materials. These were records not directly of actual classroom work, but of the preparation for classroom work and reflections on it. This category of data was primarily used to serve the analysis of direct data from the classroom and did not become the subject of data analysis in its own right.

Researcher observation notes

The researcher was often able to make some observational notes while participating in lessons in the case study classes, and also to make notes very soon after a lesson in which the ‘participant’ aspect of the ‘participant–observer’ role had been to the fore. The researcher also consistently listened to audio recordings soon after they were made and summarised these, noting the names of students as they contributed to class discussion so that later, when transcribing lessons, speakers could be identified by name where possible.

Other researcher notes consisted of reflections on lessons such as whether the pacing of work seemed appropriate and whether some students might benefit from extra help. These processual notes, from the learning-focused (“I noticed today several children contributing who have not necessarily been confident before”) to the mundane (“Year 2 are at camp for 3 days next week so there is a limit to what they’ll get done”), helped to guide the development of general plans and specific lessons.
The purpose of these notes was primarily to serve the progression of the research project rather than to serve as a data set in and of itself.

The researcher notes, both observational and processual, have been used to cross-check and confirm other data directly collected from the classroom. They have not however been analysed further in their own right as this was not warranted by the aims of the project.

**Records of teaching materials**

Teaching materials which were collected included lesson plans, copies of texts used in class (such as masters of worksheets, a recipe for chocolate milkshakes, magazines with articles about Olympic athletes), some photos of wall displays and the original cards from grammar games made for and with the children. Lessons in the project were sometimes prepared with quite detailed lesson plans, particularly for when the classroom teacher was to lead the lesson and introduce an aspect of grammatics which she was not experienced in teaching. These lesson plans were not necessarily followed strictly, but were used as a guide by the teacher as she aimed also to incorporate and respond dynamically to the children’s contributions. The lesson plans were often accompanied by texts which were the focus of the lesson, written or prepared sometimes by the researcher, sometimes the teacher, and often both in collaboration. All these teaching materials were collected in order to be able to exemplify and describe sequences of teaching and also to assist in the preparation of transcripts and the analysis of children’s work samples. These records, like the observation notes made by the researcher, thus served mainly to support and enlarge the classroom data rather than as a separate object of study.
4.6 Conclusion: a study of possibilities

In summary, the thesis uses two case studies to explore the teaching–learning of aspects of systemic functional grammar within a pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan–Hallidayan theory. It does this using mainly qualitative research methods and as such represents an in-depth study of possibilities, rather than an attempt to produce universal-type probabilities or statistical generalisations as might be the aim of a project operating under a more experimental-type design. This does not mean that its findings are not able to be transferred, but rather that readers will need to consider the ways in which findings might be relevant to educational settings beyond the case study settings described in the thesis and which are, it is sometimes forgotten, all particular cases of their own. An important further contribution of the thesis is that it seeks to interpret classroom practices in terms of theory, and in this respect the thesis should be understood as having potential ‘analytical generalisability’ even if in different educational contexts actual practices will manifest theory in different ways.

The thesis proceeds with a strong reliance on direct data of classroom interaction, with a particular emphasis on audio recorded classroom talk. The analysis is supported throughout with other forms of data where these pertain to the issues under discussion in each chapter. It is to be hoped that by these means the thesis not only explores the research questions outlined in this chapter, but it does so in a way which gives space and voice to the children who were usually not heard from in the historical literature on the teaching of knowledge about grammar.
CHAPTER 5

Starting points in teaching grammatics: Children learning about ‘action verbs’

5.1 How best to begin?

In the long debates about whether or not young school children should be taught grammar at all (Chapter 2), questions about how best to teach any such grammar have been regarded as secondary and often, by the implication of silence, irrelevant (Chapter 3, section 3.3). The study of English language has gone in and out of favour under the sway of various educational and political influences, and as a result our knowledge base about how to teach grammar is underdeveloped by comparison with other disciplines which have held an established place in the primary curriculum, such as mathematics.62 It is therefore much more difficult to describe what would constitute a typical or even desirable pattern of progression in learning about grammar (if indeed such a thing exists) than it is to describe progression in the learning of, for example, number concepts.63 It is also difficult for teachers to know where to begin should they choose (or be compelled) to introduce grammatical concepts to their students. This is likely to be especially so if teachers prefer not to follow a prescribed sequence of lessons dictated by a textbook and instead aspire to develop a more dynamic and integrated pedagogy for grammatics, as suggested in Chapter 3.

62 Our knowledge base about how not to teach grammar is arguably in better shape. The analysis by Kolln (1981) cited in Chapter 2, for example, identifies outdated and predictably ineffective teaching methods used in some historical studies which claimed that teaching grammar made no difference to writing performance.

63 The NSW DET numeracy program Count Me In Too provides a currently relevant example. The ‘Learning framework in number’ of Count Me In Too details increments of progress which children typically make as they learn early number concepts (State of New South Wales through the Department of Education and Training, 2009).
This chapter takes up the particular pedagogical challenge of how to introduce grammatical knowledge to complete or near novices: where might one begin? The main focus of the chapter is a comparison between two beginning lessons in functional grammar conducted in the case study classes: 2B and 2F. Before looking in some depth at these introductory lessons, however, the chapter canvasses in section 5.2 some preliminary work undertaken in both classes to establish a sense of the knowledge about language which the children brought to their learning of grammatics. These preliminary activities were designed to achieve one of the implications of the theory of learning outlined in Chapter 3, namely “recognition of the importance of beginning with students’ existing understandings” (Chapter 3, subsection 3.4.1). The preliminary activities thus provide some baseline information about the case study classes’ knowledge.

The bulk of the chapter is then given to analysis and comparison of the first lessons in grammatics in the case study classes and to evaluation of the pedagogy in each. In both lessons, the aims of the research were to explore the accessibility of ‘action verbs’ as an entry concept in grammatics (a rationale for which is provided below in section 5.3), and to evaluate critically the pedagogical means by which any such accessibility was achieved. It will be seen in section 5.4 that while in both case study classes the lessons deployed ostensibly similar pedagogical approaches to teaching about verbs, they differed considerably in the ways verbs were introduced and explained to the children, and ultimately, therefore, in terms of the kinds of knowledge made available for the children’s use.

Several features of the case study lessons will be highlighted:

- their shared theoretical underpinnings in terms of both educational and linguistic theory;
• their deployment of a similar range of productive teaching practices;
• the use of language to represent grammatical knowledge, in particular the different ways in which ‘verbs’ were defined for the children; and
• the teaching of grammar in the context of whole texts, especially the significance of the selection of ‘text types’ or ‘genres’ for this purpose.

In section 5.5 the discussion turns to some reflections prompted by the preceding analysis of the two introductory lessons. These reflections are methodological, theoretical and practical, and address the following:

• problematising the use of ‘grammar teaching’ as a variable with an assumed straightforward meaning;
• the significance of Vygotsky’s explication of voluntary attention; and related to this –
• the use of the gloss ‘doing words’; and also
• the use of colour as a semiotic mode in mediating grammatical knowledge; and finally,
• some further practical considerations for teachers.

5.2 Preliminaries: Beginning with students’ existing understandings about language

Knowing what children bring with them to their school learning was discussed in Chapter 3 as being important in establishing a ‘zone of proximal development’ for optimal teaching–learning in a Vygotskyan–Hallidayan framework (recall Halliday’s starting point for language study as “what a child already knows about language”, 1978, p. 209). To this end, and prior to starting the research project’s lessons in grammatics, the present study engaged the children in preliminary activities which
provided some insight into the children’s knowledge about language. While the activities cannot claim to provide an exhaustive account of all the knowledge about language these Year 2 children had developed by the time the research project began in their classrooms, they nevertheless offer some useful baseline information. Given also that this information was able to be obtained efficiently in terms of time and resources and enthusiastically in terms of children’s interest, the activities could furthermore be recommended to teachers for their own use.

An additional motivation for the preliminary activities, and indeed the foremost one in terms of educational design, was that the children would be introduced to grammatics through an initial orientation to ‘knowledge about language’ (‘KAL’, in the terms introduced in Chapter 1). The intention was to begin the research on grammatics by placing knowledge about grammar into a disciplinary context for the children as one form of KAL.

There were two different preliminary activities. In both case study classes, the children were first invited to create ‘mind-maps’ with the focus question ‘What is language?’ at the centre. They were next asked to perform a ‘word sort’ activity to see what features of words they were able to attend to prior to the project’s lessons on grammatics. These two activities are discussed in turn.

5.2.1 ‘What is language?’ mind maps

The selection of this as a preliminary activity drew its inspiration from the project conducted by Williams (G. Williams, 1998, p. 33; G. Williams et al., 1994), from which the present writer had personal experience of its potential for delineating children’s existing knowledge at the outset of a research study. The Year 2 children first rehearsed making mind maps using a more familiar topic to them. For example, in Class 2F the children had just completed a unit of work in Science and
Technology called ‘Communication Past and Present’ and so a rehearsal mind map was made on this topic. Having developed a sense of what the ‘mind map’ task involved, the children next worked in pairs (mostly), on their ‘What is language?’ mind maps.

Content analysis of the children’s mind maps revealed interesting insights into their understandings about language (see Appendix B item B.2 for one example). Table 5.1 summarises the main content items in terms of frequency of occurrences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1</th>
<th>Content of ‘What is language?’ mind maps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content item on mind map</strong></td>
<td><strong>No. of mind maps on which item occurred</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Class 2B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign language</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different languages</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braille</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal language</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of communication technology (e.g. fax / Morse code / email)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many children across both classes had a clear sense of the main modes of language, with widespread recognition of both spoken language (‘talk/ing’) and written language (mentions of ‘writing’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘reading’ and ‘books’). Some children also expressed a general sense of language as ‘communication’. There was
particularly strong awareness of modes of language which differed from the children’s own sighted and hearing experience, with three-quarters of the Class 2B work samples and one work sample from Class 2F mentioning ‘Braille’ and every mind map across both case study groups mentioning ‘sign language’ (in Class 2B this was probably related to the fact that one child suggested it while the whole class were listening, still sitting on the mat prior to beginning the task; in Class 2F the teacher actually knew some Auslan and would teach the children simple phrases such as greetings). There was great interest and goodwill amongst the children to learning about these other modes of communicating in language. The children also knew that there were many different languages, drawing on their own mother tongues and heritages when giving examples and also listing as examples ‘Aboriginal languages’ and the community languages which were taught at the school (Chinese, Greek and Portuguese). The emphasis on ‘body language’ in Class 2B was an artefact, I would argue, of the teacher’s deliberate and consistent explicit teaching of positive behaviours – in part but not only for the benefit of Liz, a child with serious behavioural problems.

There was some use of metalanguage in the children’s mind maps although this was not extensive. The most common examples of metalanguage were terms for different kinds of writing (such as ‘diaries’, ‘letters’, ‘narrative’, ‘recount’). A small number of mind maps mentioned ‘words’ (two in Class 2B and two in Class 2F) and the terms ‘sentence’, ‘alphabet’ and ‘letters’ (meaning graphology, not correspondence) each appeared only once throughout all the mind maps. ‘Grammar’ did not feature at all.

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64 Auslan is the language of the deaf community in Australia.
The mind maps provided the teachers and researcher with useful information about the children’s existing knowledge about language. The open-ended nature of the activity provided insight into what the children were readily able to bring to consciousness about language. As a corollary of this point, it is plausible to argue that what did not appear on the mind maps were aspects of language which the children either did not know about or, importantly, which they could less readily bring to conscious reflection. The fact that ‘sign language’ appeared ubiquitously is consistent with this hypothesis, suggesting that the children readily recognised language in a form about which they had been taught explicitly, whereas familiar activities with language to which they were habituated such as reading were not necessarily so obvious to them. A further feature of the activity was that the children were unfamiliar with being asked to consider language as an object of study. When the task was first proposed, children said things like, “What do you mean?” and Hilary in Class 2B replied to the researcher, “Well, what is language?” – she had no idea where to begin. The children, in company with most of us most of the time, were much more accustomed to using language than to reflecting on it. They nevertheless persisted with and actually enjoyed the mind map activity, being in the end pleased to realise how much they already knew about language when given the invitation to reflect. The mind map activity thus served to orient the children to language as an object of study as well as providing their teachers and the researcher with some insight into what they already knew and perhaps didn’t know.
5.2.2 Word sort activity

The other preliminary task undertaken was to invite the children to sort a collection of words in what might be termed a ‘free classification’ exercise. Like the mind map activity, this task was open-ended and children had to think up their own categories for sorting words and then label the groups of words they had identified. In the first of the case studies, in Class 2B, the word sort activity was conducted once at the outset of the research project and again once at the end. This process was refined for the later case study in Class 2F, in which the children were given the opportunity to sort the words twice at the beginning of the project and twice at the end, and they were encouraged to use a different way of sorting on their second attempts if they could think of one. This was to allow for the likelihood that the children would be able to classify the words using more than one organising principle, and that therefore their rationale for sorting words on a first attempt would not on its own necessarily give a fair indication of the range of features of words to which the children were able to attend. Even though this refinement was not introduced until the Class 2F case study, the results of the word sort activity for both classes are informative and are summarised below in Table 5.2. Note that many children used more than one principle for sorting the words, including use of categories which were not mutually exclusive. For example, ‘rhyming words’ might

65 The list of words provided to the children is included in Appendix B, item B.3. There were thirty-three words in the original word sort task used in Class 2B. For the Class 2F case study, six additional words were included in order to expand the potential for classifying words in different ways, such as ‘peach’ which could potentially be grouped with ‘teach’ and ‘beach’ in a collection of rhyming words, with ‘play’ if initial letters were used as a classifying principle, with ‘biscuit’ and ‘bun’ if a category for foods were established, or in a number of other ways including as a noun/thing.

66 An example of this occurred at the conclusion of the Class 2B case study. The children Lauren and Jennifer explained to the researcher how they had sorted some of their words into the categories ‘action verbs’, ‘saying verbs’ and ‘thinking verbs’. However when it came to pasting their words down in categories they resorted them into new categories from their reading lessons: words that ‘do sound out’ and ‘don’t sound out’. Had they been given two attempts at the task, both their grammatical classifications and the classifications about phonemics could have been accommodated. Data of this kind prompted the refinement of the procedure for the later case study in Class 2F.
be separated as a group, and then the remaining words sorted into ‘things’ and ‘doing words’ rather than a more consistent classificatory system which would instead label the other words something like ‘non-rhyming words’. The practice of not using consistent, mutually exclusive categories meant that the one work sample could appear repeatedly in the content analysis in Table 5.2 and explains why the sums of the values in the table exceed \( n \).

Table 5.2  Categories of classification used in word sort activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of words</th>
<th>No. of work samples which used this classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class 2B (n=14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories to do with orthography / phonology (alphabetical order; initial, final or some other letters in common; rhyming words; words containing same number of letters or syllables; words with ‘tail’, ‘small’ and ‘tail’ letters i.e. letter shape)</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday themes (e.g. ‘alive’ as category for ‘cat, king, we, i’; ‘food’ as category for ‘bun, biscuit, eat’)</td>
<td>5 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Things’ Nouns sorted under this heading but not labelled with grammatical term</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Nouns’ Nouns labelled with appropriate grammatical term</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Things we can do’ / ‘doing words’ Lexical verbs sorted under this heading but not labelled with grammatical term</td>
<td>5 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Verbs’ Lexical verbs labelled with appropriate grammatical term</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual category or ‘leftovers’(^{67})</td>
<td>9 (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words not classified and instead made into simple clauses</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No discernible system of classification used</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here again, as with the mind maps, there are aspects of language (in this case, specifically *words*) to which the children attended more readily than other

\(^{67}\) Some children attempted to label this category. The following terms were all applied, although none of the children were certain they were using the terms correctly: ‘adjectives / describing words’ (\( n=5 \)), ‘pronouns’ (1), ‘joining words’ (1) and ‘fitting in words’ (1). Some merely labelled the group ‘leftovers’ or ‘odd words’. This category was typically comprised of the grammatical words in the word sort list (that is, the ‘non-content’ words – see Halliday, 1985b, ch. 5, and ensuing discussion in this sub-section).
aspects. In both classes there was a considerable proportion of work samples which sorted words in ways which would be familiar to children from their lessons in spelling, handwriting and reading, such as by initial letter (by far the most common of the sorting principles within the ‘orthography / phonology’ category) or whether or not they had ‘tail’ letters (a term used in handwriting for letters such as ‘g’ and ‘y’). In these cases, it is clear that the features of the words to which the children were attending were features they had been taught to notice. It was also common for children to draw on their experience of the wider world and group together words like ‘bun, biscuit, eat’ under what I have termed an ‘everyday theme’ (as opposed to a more systematic, abstract sorting principle).

Of particular relevance to the present study were the categories of ‘things’ (typically filled with the common nouns from the list provided to the children) and ‘doing words’ (typically filled with the lexical verbs from the list). Some children took these classifications a step further and were able to label them as ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’ respectively. Two points at least are warranted by these observations. The first is that for some children, even those without a professed knowledge of grammatical description, it is relatively straightforward to recognise that ‘words for things’ and ‘words for activity’ can be classified from each other and from other kinds of words. In considering starting points for learning grammatics, these distinctions seem to be ones which novices might find accessible. The second point is that in neither class were all the children completely new to learning grammatics, as shown by those who used the terms ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’ knowledgeably. A great

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68 This should not be assumed as recommending that ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’ should be the concepts first taught to children. Consistent with the functional grammatical approach advanced in Chapter 3, this chapter goes on to argue for ‘Process’ as an entry concept. ‘Nouns’ are actually less straightforward than the select common nouns in the word sorting list suggested, and can perform different functions in clauses (such as Participants in Processes, but also Things in prepositional phrases making up Circumstances) which actually make them more difficult and less ‘basic’ than is sometimes assumed.
many children were not however confident to use these terms, and in this free sorting task they mostly chose not to apply grammatical classifications even if they did perhaps know or know of them.

One final comment on the word sorting task was that children struggled, as might be expected, with classifying words which did not have any referential content – what Halliday has termed ‘grammatical items’ (as opposed to ‘lexical items’ which are ‘content words’) (Halliday, 1985b, p. 61). These words (such as ‘the’, ‘in’, ‘we’, ‘I’, ‘was’) typically ended up in a residual category for which the children did not have a satisfactory label and which they could not further subdivide. The significance of this lies not so much in when and how children should be taught the labels for such words (‘pronouns’ etcetera), but in the words’ apparent similarity to the untrained eye, so that ‘was’ is seen as more like ‘in’ than ‘run’. This signals that a level of difficulty might be anticipated in helping novices understand that words like ‘was’ are indeed verbs and in fact have more in common with ‘run’ than with ‘in’ in many respects.

5.2.3 Children’s attitudes and summary of preliminary activities

An important point to be made about these preliminary exercises relates to the issue of children’s attitudes to reflecting on language. Throughout these activities the children were engaged and attentive, with no indication of negative attitude to the tasks and the only occasional negative comment from their teachers being a reminder to the children to watch the volume of noise generated by their animated discussions. Some children made explicit comment to the researcher about their positive attitude to the activities, such as the following unsolicited exchange about the word sort activity (on this occasion at the end of the research period in Class 2B), where Jane and Rosemary were clear that intellectual challenge played a part in their enjoyment
of the work:

Researcher: Anything else you wanted to say, Jane?
Jane: Um –
Researcher: Or have you explained it all?
Jane: Well … we have fun doing things like this.
Rosemary: Yeah.
Researcher: Oh, really?
Children: Yeah.
Rosemary: 'Cause, sort of, you’ve got to think a lot.
Jane: And we like thinking.
Rosemary: And … yeah! It’s good – thinking.

(Class 2B, December 14)

This kind of positive attitude was typical.

In summary, the preliminary activities described above were enjoyed by the children and provided valuable insight into their existing knowledge about language at the outset of the study. This knowledge included little by way of grammatics, although some children knew at least something of ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’ and others seemed to grasp intuitively a difference between ‘things’ and ‘things we can do’/‘doing words’. We now turn to the children’s first grammatics lessons within the research project, where the grammatics of ‘things we can do’ was the focus.

5.3 A rationale for starting with ‘action verbs’

The first grammatics lessons in both the case study classes dealt with the same grammatical description: ‘action verbs’. This term itself requires brief explanation. As outlined in Chapter 3, the present project was informed by a functional approach to language description, following Halliday’s systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 [1st ed. Halliday, 1985a]). The metalanguage used with the children was however that of the New South Wales English K–6 syllabus, in compliance with the requirements of the state school system under whose approval
the project was conducted. Thus in the lessons which are the focus of this chapter, it was ‘action verbs’ (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 74) about which the children learned – a term meant to be understood as equivalent to Halliday’s ‘material Process’. Other Process types referred to in the syllabus include ‘thinking’ or mental Processes and ‘saying’ or verbal Processes.

The selection of ‘action verbs’ as a point at which to start learning about grammar was a considered one, both from the point of view of linguistic theory and also, importantly, from the anticipated point of view of the children. In terms of a theory of grammar, it can be argued that Processes are the central element in language. The Process is the element essential to the making of the most simple message in English (you need a Process to make a clause – the most simple form of message), and Halliday places the Process in the ‘nucleus’ of the clause – it is the element around which all other elements pertain.69 Furthermore, of all the Process types, material Processes are likely to be the most accessible to the uninitiated:

> It does not matter, of course, where we move in [to a description of types of Processes]: we started with the material, partly because they are the most accessible to our conscious reflection, but also because (for that very reason) throughout most of the history of linguistics they have been at the centre of attention. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 171)

And while it may indeed not matter ‘where we move in’ for descriptive theoretical purposes, *it does matter for teaching purposes.*

In planning to begin teaching children grammatics, consideration was also given to the children’s perspective. From the point of view of children, the term ‘action verb’ (for ‘material Process’) is not too far removed from their own activity in the tangible world. If intellectual development involves gradually learning to think more abstractly, as Vygotskyan theory argues, it is likely that grammatical

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69 See Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 176). In a development of this notion to include ergativity, the ‘nucleus’ is represented as a Process+Medium configuration (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 296).
descriptions which are closer to concrete experience will offer more accessible entry points for young children learning grammatics. Abstraction may be conceived as a spectrum, with levels of abstraction akin to ‘degrees of separation’ from the concrete. Material Processes could thus be as little as two degrees of separation away from actual physical activity, for example: undertaking the activity of swimming → representing one’s own experience using the word ‘swimming’ → describing ‘swimming’ as a ‘Process’. In the lessons which follow, the Class 2F children had actually enacted the material Processes which they later learned to identify by first making a string telephone, and the Class 2B children observed material Processes (albeit in static photographic form) in pictures of Olympic sporting activity. From both the children’s perspective and that of linguistic theory, ‘action verbs’ offered a potentially accessible starting point in learning grammatics.

5.4 Comparison of two introductory grammatics lessons

The lessons which are the focus of this next and central part of the chapter were the first lessons of the research project in which grammatics was explicitly introduced to the children. As outlined in section 5.2 above, preliminary activities revealed that some children knew some grammatical terms from prior experiences in school. For example, in both classes some children knew the term ‘verb’; in Class 2F their teacher had also taught them a little about nouns. One or two children had heard of adverbs and adjectives but couldn’t be sure what they were. The evidence indicated that for those children who already had some grammatical knowledge, their understandings were not well-developed or secure. The lessons here described were therefore not necessarily the first lessons ever in grammatics for these Year 2 children. Importantly, however, these could have been the children’s first lessons in grammatics, in so far as no prior knowledge of grammar was assumed. The lessons
can therefore be used as an exploration of ways of introducing grammatical concepts to novice learners.

The two lessons were transcribed almost in entirety, and detailed notes made of any sections which were not fully documented (for reasons such as the content essentially repeated a sequence already transcribed). Appendix B contains summaries of the two lessons as items B.4 and B.5. The lesson summaries are labelled to indicate the stages through which the lessons developed, and illustrative examples of classroom talk from the transcripts are included. The terms applied for the stages of each lesson derive mostly from Christie’s (2002a) work on the structured discourse of classrooms with some additional terms of my own.

Two aspects of methodology need to be noted before dealing with the lessons in some detail. The first is that the opportunity to compare the lessons arose ‘organically’ from the two case studies. The classes were not selected because they were overtly different (they were in fact overtly similar), and the idea of comparing the lessons was not planned in advance to test a particular method or theory but rather the decision to make a comparison study developed post-collection out of the accumulated data. A second point on methodology is that the researcher was present at both lessons but did not occupy the same role in both. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the researcher’s role could be broadly characterised as ‘participant–observer’ and sometimes, more so in the first case study in Class 2B, the researcher led lessons at the invitation of the teacher. Such was the case in the Class 2B lesson featured in this chapter. The Class 2F lesson presented in the chapter was led by the class teacher, who followed in broad terms a lesson plan cooperatively designed with the researcher.

The two introductory grammatics lessons have a number of features in
common and also differ in some significant ways. The following discussion will outline some of their shared features, which relate to pedagogy and lesson content, before going on to discuss some important differences, in particular making use of closer analysis of the language of the lessons. Table 5.3 provides a summary of the main features of the lessons which are highlighted in this section of the chapter.

Table 5.3 Comparison of two introductory grammatics lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Features</th>
<th>Phase 1: Class 2B</th>
<th>Phase 2: Class 2F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior knowledge</td>
<td>• Verbs as doing words (some children)</td>
<td>• Verbs as doing words (most children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nouns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>• Vygotskyan influence (importance of ZPD and semiotic mediation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Quality teaching’ practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content focus</td>
<td>Identifying action verbs in descriptive texts</td>
<td>Identifying action verbs in a procedural text and exploring their role as Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of ‘action verbs’</td>
<td>Use of a variety of wordings to define action verbs.</td>
<td>Dominant use of the gloss ‘doing words’ to define verbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text types as contexts for learning grammatics</td>
<td>‘Description’ genre: limited scope for teaching children about the utility of grammatics</td>
<td>‘Procedure’ genre: greater scope for demonstrating the utility of grammatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• limited scope for teaching children about the utility of grammatics</td>
<td>• high valency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation to grammatics</td>
<td>Experiential metafunction only. Material processes are for representing experience.</td>
<td>Experiential and textual metafunctions working together. Material processes typically in Theme position realising the genre of procedure. Action verbs in procedures tell what to do and shape the whole text so the reader can follow it to achieve a goal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4.1 Similar pedagogical approaches

Both lessons followed a similar pedagogy, influenced by Vygotskyan theory, which sought to extend children’s thinking from the known towards the new using the organising principle of the ‘zone of proximal development’ or ‘ZPD’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The lessons began with the children being invited to use what knowledge the teacher was confident they already possessed: in Class 2B the children described

70 Explanation of this use of ‘valency’ follows on p. 195.
pictures using their own existing language resources; in Class 2F the children told the teacher what they already knew about procedure texts. The teachers then asked the children to observe some features of the texts they were studying and comment on what they noticed: in Class 2B the children suggested their ideas about the commonalities shared by the “words in the green boxes” (all material Processes, see Figure 5.1 example); in Class 2F the children suggested patterns they could see in a procedure text where all the material Processes had been boxed using a green marker (Figure 5.2, which is an excerpt from Appendix B, item B.6). In Class 2B, children

![Figure 5.1](image1)  
**Figure 5.1** Jointly constructed picture description with material Processes boxed in green

![Figure 5.2](image2)  
**Figure 5.2** Excerpt from procedural text with material Processes boxed in green

noted that the ‘words in the green boxes’ often contained ‘ing’ and were often prefaced by ‘is’, and they also variously suggested that the words might be “describing words”, “verbs”, “adjectives” or “adverbs” (see Appendix B item B.4).

71 Photo credit: ©iStockphoto.com/RadeLukovic. Used with permission. The image used here is very similar to the original newspaper image used with the children. It was not possible to include the original newspaper image due to the high cost of the relevant copyright license.
In Class 2F, the children suggested that patterning of the green-boxed words could relate to numbers of letters in the words, repetition (Gareth: “It’s like, it, there, there’s two: pull, tie, pull, tie, in two rows”), or perhaps that many began with a capital letter (Appendix B item B.5). Here in both lessons the children were still drawing on their existing knowledge, but the teachers were offering an opportunity to solve a problem which was novel, thus focusing the children’s voluntary attention on the language of the texts in potentially new ways.

These tasks thus bridged the children’s thinking from the known to the previously unknown, and opened the path for the lesson stages which I have termed ‘instruction in the new’, where the teachers introduced and defined the grammatical terms. The ways in which the teachers defined terms are a point of difference between the classes, to which we return below at sub-section 5.4.3.

In both classes there followed some consolidation of the new grammatical knowledge: in Class 2B the children assisted the researcher to identify ‘action verbs’ in another similar picture description text before going on to write independent pieces (for an example see Appendix B, item B.7); in Class 2F the teacher invited the children to draw upon their concrete experience of enacting the procedure in order to develop their understanding of the meaning of Theme, and then the children wrote some independent reflections on their learning (Appendix B, item B.8).

Thus both of the lessons demonstrate the teaching of grammatics using a pedagogical framework informed by Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development, in which collaborative activity helps to extend children’s thinking from the known to the new.

72 The meaning and significance of voluntary attention is developed subsequently in this chapter in sub-section 5.5.2.
There are also similarities between the lessons’ uses of symbolic means to mediate the children’s learning, particularly the use of colour to draw attention to certain language features – a form of semiotic mediation. For Vygotsky, learning mediated through language and by other symbolic means is the key to higher order or more abstract psychological functions (for example, Vygotsky, 1978, ch. 4). In these lessons the forms of mediation were considered choices, designed to help make grammatical knowledge accessible for the children. For example, green was chosen to symbolise activity (like the green for ‘go’ at traffic lights) to mediate learning about ‘action verbs’ (the semiotic significance of colours is taken up later in subsection 5.5.4). In the Class 2B lesson it was clear that even the simple act of drawing boxes around some words and not boxing others had importance, telling the children that ‘these words have something in common’ – something the children realised by themselves (see Appendix B item B.4: “[t]he children anticipate the researcher’s intended question”).

In terms of pedagogy, a further point of similarity is that both lessons made similar use of state-endorsed pedagogic practices for literacy teaching. Potentially ‘productive pedagogies’ such as shared reading73 and jointly constructed writing are encouraged as part of state literacy initiatives in New South Wales public schools (for example, NSW Department of Education and Training – Curriculum Support Directorate, 2000, pp. 26–32). Also in keeping with state guidelines, grammatical knowledge was taught ‘explicitly’ (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1997, pp. 7, 15) and in the context of whole texts (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 73) and not merely in terms of isolated single-sentence exercises. In addition, the grammatical knowledge was taught in the context of authentic reading and writing

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73 Originally articulated by Holdaway (1979). This activity involves the teacher and children reading a single text which they can all see.
activities which were part of the class’s wider English and integrated curriculum: a study of the Olympics in the case of Class 2B; and a unit of work on ‘Communication’ in Class 2F.

5.4.2 Similar content

The lessons are also similar in terms of the grammatical content which was introduced to the children. They both employed an approach to the study of grammatics deriving from Halliday’s functional grammar, and they both took their terminology from the mandated New South Wales English K–6 syllabus. In both classes the children were introduced to ‘action verbs’ (as mentioned, the NSW syllabus term for Halliday’s ‘material Process’) and in Class 2F the children also learned about Theme, which is defined as “the element which serves as the point of departure of the message” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 64; the thesis returns to a more thorough discussion of Theme in Chapter 8). The Class 2F lesson in particular also drew directly on genre theory from systemic functional linguistics in its focus on the features of the procedure genre (Martin & Rothery, 1986) or procedure ‘text type’, to use the New South Wales syllabus term.

5.4.3 Different ways of defining action verbs

Despite the evidence of sound teaching methods in both case study grammar lessons and their similar content, the introductory lessons also differed in important ways. Among these differences were the ways in which ‘action verbs’ were defined and referred to in the two lessons (the subject of this sub-section: 5.4.3), and the role played by the genres or text types through which the children learned about grammar (sub-section 5.4.4).

The ways in which ‘action verbs’ were represented in Class 2B and Class 2F
differed considerably when a close analysis was done of the language used by the teachers to define these verbs. The transcripts were searched for references to ‘action verbs’ or wordings used as synonyms, and some functional grammatical analysis was applied in order to demonstrate the ways in which this category was defined for the children. The analysis showed that in the Class 2B lesson a varied range of wordings was used to help make ‘action verbs’ an accessible and meaningful concept to the children, while in Class 2F the teacher habitually talked about ‘verbs’ as ‘doing words’, using a narrower range of language resources to define terms and thus potentially leading to a narrower understanding in the minds of the children.

In Class 2B a variety of wordings chosen by the researcher offered the children complementary descriptions of ‘action verbs’, and at the same time the lesson moved between offering definitions and locating examples. The researcher set up the introduction of the term ‘action verb’ by first drawing green boxes around a number of words in a short text (Figure 5.1 above), and the children were told that these were ‘all verbs’ – thus using a number of specific examples to build towards a generalisation. The use of the term ‘action verb’ rather than just ‘verb’ then followed immediately, so that ‘verb’ was classified according to type, with the short-term aim of maintaining a focus on the type of verb being learned about in this lesson, and with the longer term aim of building up the children’s knowledge of the range of types of Processes. That is, the use of the classified term ‘action verb’, rather than simply ‘verb’, left open a space into which other types of verbs could be expected to be introduced (as they were in subsequent lessons). The teacher’s (in this case, the researcher’s) talk then employed a number of grammatical resources to establish the

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74 The lexicogrammatical analysis focused on the experiential metafunction, that is, the role of language in representing experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, ch. 5) – specifically here, to define and describe ‘action verbs’. Illustrative examples of the analysis are included in Appendix B: item B.9 for the Class 2B lesson and item B.10 for the Class 2F lesson.
idea of ‘what an action verb is’. For example, in generalising about what action verbs do, the following was offered: [They are] “the words that are telling us ... what action is happening”. Here ‘the words’ functions as a Sayer, which can ‘tell’ (verbal Process) ‘what action’ (Range – of a general material kind) ‘is happening’ (a very general material Process). Furthermore, action verbs were made ‘more concrete’ to the children through the lesson activity of continuing to search the displayed text for further positive examples:

Researcher: Can you see another verb, an action verb there?

In this wording, ‘action verb’ is something one can expect to observe as the Phenomenon of the mental Process ‘see’. Action verbs were also defined in contrast with an anti-example, where ‘diving’ in ‘the diving board’ was “not being a verb” (in the expression ‘not being a verb’, ‘a verb’ has the function of a grammatical Attribute, thus indicating to the children that words can occupy different roles depending on their context).

In these ways, ‘action verbs’ were defined for Class 2B using a range of linguistic resources, with the lesson ‘shuttling’ between worded definitions and actual examples of action verbs in text, but importantly also the worded definitions used different ways of representing action verbs in language. Thus the children in Class 2B were furnished with a range of resources by which they began to understand the notion of ‘action verb’, a range of resources that might be termed multiple or ‘redundant’ representations. The use of multiple, overlapping or ‘redundant’ ways of communicating essentially the same idea (such as use of

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75 “[S]huttling refers to the ways in which teachers and students engage in movements back and forth, for example between levels of abstraction and technicality in vocabulary, concepts and relations” (Freebody, Maton, & Martin, 2008, p. 196). In the case of the lesson interactions which are the focus of the present chapter, the shuttling is between various more or less technical definitions and between ‘abstract’ definitions and ‘concrete’ examples.
concrete examples along with worded definitions) has an acknowledged if often under-theorised place in education and may be deemed to have potent pedagogical force for children’s conceptual development. In these lessons, the potentially quite abstract notion of verb was introduced to the children by making it less abstract, both in the way it was defined and in the use of examples to reduce the ‘degrees of separation’ between the metalinguistic term and the children’s experience in reading and analysing a shared text.

That this provided the Class 2B children with an accessible start into an understanding of material Processes was clear from their largely successful work on the individual task they were then set: writing their own short texts and locating action verbs in these. For example, most children readily identified material Processes in their own writing, with 83% of the total number of material Processes identified correctly, at least in part, across the class. An indicative work sample is included as Appendix B item B.7.

In Class 2F a much narrower range of wordings was used to define and explain material Processes, and in particular a single formulation was used repeatedly. There was a strong emphasis on ‘verbs as doing words’ and comparatively less variety in the explication of this to the children. In the lesson we have been examining, the teacher referred to verbs as ‘doing word/s’ on twenty occasions. This contrasted with significantly fewer glosses for material Processes,

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76 For example, Feez analyses and evaluates as productive the “presentation of multiple, or redundant, representations of educational meanings” (2007, p. 179) in the design and use of Montessori educational materials. The thinking behind this deliberate and purposeful use of redundancy in Montessori education is traced by Feez to earlier work by Itard (1774–1838) and Séguin (1812–1880), and Feez also identifies its resonance with the thinking of Vygotsky (for example, Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, referred to in Feez, 2007, p.178).

77 Sometimes children identified only part of the verbal group successfully, such as locating the lexical verb but missing the auxiliary (for example, Georgia only identified ‘cycling’ as the action verb in her clause: ‘He is cycling’). The common errors in this task are discussed below in sub-section 5.5.5 in terms of their implications for practice.
such as ‘action word/s’ (5 uses, all by the teacher) and ‘word/s that tell you what to do’ (3 teacher uses in immediate succession in a single speech turn; 1 researcher use). In fact, the Class 2F teacher repeatedly used ‘doing words’ as a gloss for ‘verbs’ not only in this particular lesson but throughout the duration of the research project in her class. Various facets of the broader problems with this gloss are elaborated later in the chapter in sub-section 5.5.3, so at this juncture the commentary will focus specifically on the data from Class 2F.

The Class 2F evidence indicated that the habitual use of ‘doing words’ as a parallel term to ‘verbs’ had the potential to make it more difficult for children to see many other kinds of Process types as verbs. In the context of the procedural text being studied, the Class 2F teacher was of course entirely accurate when she indicated the verbs to be ‘doing words’ – all the Processes were indeed material ones of a ‘doing’ kind. However, this set up an expectation that all verbs were doing words, a definition which quickly breaks down when the full range of Process types is considered: verbs are also ‘saying’, ‘thinking’, and ‘being’ words, to name a few, and material Processes can be ‘happening’ verbs as well as ‘doing’ verbs. The Class 2F children did go on to learn about other types of verbs, but the notion of verbs as ‘doing words’ was a persistent one in the minds of the children. This was evident months later in interviews conducted near the end of the school year, when children continued to use this gloss when deciding if a word or word group was in fact a verb.

Researcher: And what’s a verb?
Simon: A verb is a doing word, like, it’s something that you do. Like, for an example, ‘saying’ and ‘jumping’, um, well like ‘answering’ – things like that.
Researcher: OK.
Simon: Things that you can do, really.  
(Class 2F, December 10)
Simon is not wrong, but he is only partially right: some verbs are doing words, and by extrapolation even some non-material activities, like ‘answering’, can perhaps be interpreted as a kind of doing. But this contorted reinterpretation is foisted on Simon by the nature of the definition he has been given to work with. Simon was quite successful in his identification of verbs and their types at the end of the school year, but despite his proficiency he missed ‘enjoyed’ and ‘has’ as verbs in his test, and he was aware that his working definition of verbs as ‘doing words’ had its limitations:

Researcher: Tell me about the first one that you’ve got here: ‘All the children whispered in the library.’ You’ve circled ‘whispered’.
Simon: I circled ‘whispered’ because, um, you can’t do ‘all’ or ‘the children’. You can’t do all those other words, but you can whisper, so I circled ‘whisper’.
Researcher: And what type of verb is it?
Simon: It’s, um, it’s a saying verb.
Researcher: How did you know that?
Simon: Um, because um, you, you can’t do it – whispering. You can only say whispering. You can’t, well, you can do whispering, maybe. But, um–
Researcher: You mean you do it with your voice?
Simon: Yeah. It’s more likely you would say it, not do it.

(Class 2F, December 10)

The different ways of defining action verbs in the Class 2B and Class 2F lessons are significant because they apprentice children into different orientations to what a verb is. If concept development involves the internalisation of that which is originally social, as Vygotskyan theory would argue, it follows that the manner in which something is introduced and defined in language shapes the way we think about it. Furthermore, systemic linguistic theory argues that language operates to shape the way we think about – or ‘construe’ – reality (for example, Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999; see also discussion in Chapter 3 at 3.4.2). These complementary perspectives suggest that habitual ways of talking about something with children are
likely to become for those children habitual ways of thinking about it (Hasan, 2002). And while the present chapter has focused mainly on one lesson from each class, the wider body of data indicates that there were some observable limitations to the approach which habitually glossed verbs as ‘doing words’. In addition, since verbs are often glossed as ‘doing words’ by classroom teachers, there is value in critically reflecting on the practice.

As a final note here on the issue of defining verbs, it was interesting to realise that one way of thinking about verbs was not mentioned at all in these lessons: the word ‘process’. On reflection this was unfortunate for the children’s development of the concept of verb, since Halliday’s term ‘Process’ offers both resonance with the everyday meaning of the word and a way of talking about the most common function of verbs (we could say ‘verbs typically tell us the process that’s going on’). The New South Wales syllabus inscribes the use of ‘conventional terminology’ (following the recommendation of Eltis, 1995, p. 87) but does not prohibit the use of the word ‘process’ as a way of explaining verbs to children. What the syllabus does insist upon is the use of the term ‘verb’ instead of and to the exclusion of the term ‘Process’, thus offering no way around the tricky problem of confusing class and function (such as ‘diving’ in ‘a diving board’, where it would be preferable to be able to explain that ‘diving’ is not a Process, while it is in fact still a verb). The accessibility of ‘Process’ to school children has however been demonstrated throughout the research by Williams (Chapter 2, sub-section 2.4.1), including work with Year 1 children (G. Williams, 2005); and Polias and Dare (2006) similarly find

78 The claim here relates specifically to the first lesson in each class in which action verbs were introduced. It is however pertinent more generally across the data. There is in fact only one occasion where the term ‘process’ appears in all the transcript material from both classes. This was in a small group lesson with some children in Class 2B (October 5), where the researcher defined the action verb as “the process of what’s happening; it’s what’s happening, what’s going on”.

that seven year olds can grasp ‘Process’ as an accessible concept.

5.4.4 Different genres as contexts for learning grammatics

The written genres or text types through which the Year 2 children were introduced to material Processes were the other most significant difference between the two lessons.

In Class 2B the children located material Processes in picture descriptions. The genre of description is recognised in English K–6 (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, see especially pp. 68–71). It is a somewhat unusual text type in that it can serve a wide range of purposes and often forms part of another type of text (such as narrative or scientific report) rather than standing alone. The picture descriptions in the Class 2B lesson were very short, simple texts, and they performed a limited social purpose: that of displaying knowledge to the teacher and to peers within the classroom. From a grammatical point of view, the texts lacked any real development of a sequential, narrative or logical structure, and were so short that they were not really suggestive of interesting rhetorical examination. This meant that the text type offered limited scope for grammatical analysis to reveal any dimension of meaning that was not hitherto obvious to the reader. While the picture descriptions did serve as an effective text type through which material Processes could be taught, in the end they did not suggest anything that could be done with that grammatical knowledge. The children were engaged and attentive in the task of locating ‘action verbs’ in their picture descriptions, but having found them, they would have been justified in asking: so what?

In Class 2F the children worked on a procedure to identify material Processes, but because of the type of text, they were then able to go a step further. They looked at the patterning of material Processes as Theme in procedures, and
learned about how this pattern in the wording contributes to making the text a functional one for its social purpose of ‘telling someone what to do’. From a systemic functional linguistics perspective, the children were able to operate across metafunctions (introduced in Chapter 3, sub-section 3.4.2); they were making connections between the ‘experiential’ meanings in the text (specifically, material Processes) and the ‘textual’ meanings (Theme and its role in orienting the reader, in this case, to what to do). The children were learning more than the recognition of grammatical features; they were learning something about the role of those features in realising a successful text. This means that they were being introduced to the meaningful significance and the utility of grammatics from a very early point, working with knowledge of only two grammatical categories.

The evidence of the present study suggests that procedures are, by their nature, valuable texts for introducing children to grammatical features and the functions of those features. In this sense the study confirms and complements research by Williams (1995, 1998, 2000, 2004) and anecdotal accounts of classroom practice (for example: Carey-Gorey, 2010; Dare & Polias, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). The Class 2F procedure work also readily suggested some logical next steps in teaching grammatics, such as exploring patterns of Theme in other genres. This was indeed the next move taken with grammatics in this class, and a sensible one given that the children’s notion of Theme after their first lesson was very much embedded in the work on the procedure genre (for examples of how this was the case, see some of the children’s learning journal samples in Appendix B, item B.8). The procedure genre was thus both productive in itself for introducing meaning-oriented grammatics, and in addition it had good potential to inform and interact with ensuing work. Borrowing a term from chemistry, such potential might be referred to as
valency. In chemistry, valency refers to the capacity of an element to react or combine with other elements. In pedagogy, valency may be used metaphorically to describe the extent to which knowledge connects with and even propels subsequent learning. The procedure genre as taught in Class 2F can in these terms be seen to have high valency, whereas Class 2B’s picture description texts had low valency in that they did not obviously prefigure the building of related new knowledge.

5.5 Implications for theory and practice

A number of issues arise from the foregoing discussion in terms of how we conceptualise and how we might choose to practise the teaching of grammatics. This section examines: the problem of assuming ‘grammar teaching’ to be an homogenous treatment in educational research; what constitutes ‘basic’ grammatical knowledge in light of Vygotskian theory on the development of voluntary attention; the problems with glossing verbs as ‘doing words’; and the semiotic mediation and hence pedagogical affordances of using colour coding in teaching grammatics. The section finally addresses some practical points for teachers arising from the case study lessons.

5.5.1 Problematising ‘grammar teaching’ as a uniform variable

One of the strongest implications of the two lessons is that ‘grammar teaching’ is not an homogenous activity. If two lessons undertaken with similar cohorts of children, using similar pedagogy, focusing on similar grammatical concepts and informed by

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79 It is “the quality which determines the number of atoms or groups with which any single atom or group will unite chemically” (S. Butler, 2009).

80 The use of the term here is not unique in discussions of pedagogy. Widdowson (2002) makes similar use of ‘valency’, although in terms of curriculum design for foreign language teaching. He recommends teaching those aspects of language which represent the “best investment” for equipping students to continue learning language beyond the classroom. His use of the metaphor, while applied somewhat differently, is largely compatible with the present argument. For example: “the pedagogic valency of language items [taught in foreign language classes] can be measured by their power, or potential ... for combining with others” (Widdowson, 2002, p. 79).
similar theoretical underpinnings can be seen to have significant points of difference, it is too simplistic to talk about ‘grammar teaching’ as if this term always means the same thing. Yet historical research on the teaching of grammar has tended to view ‘grammar teaching’ as an invariant ‘treatment’ not itself needing careful explication or scrutiny. In Chapters 2 and 3 it was argued that ‘grammar teaching’ needs to be qualified in terms of what kind of grammar is taught, and how it is taught. The analysis presented above adds considerable support to this perspective, demonstrating that even when the bigger questions of types of grammar and pedagogical approach are decided, what happens in individual classrooms can still be more or less productive, more or less obviously useful to students, and more or less helpful in terms of setting up their longer term development of clear conceptual knowledge.

One useful framework for interpreting these kinds of variations in pedagogic practice is that proposed by sociologist of education Basil Bernstein, whose work on pedagogic discourse was given brief introduction in Chapter 4 in terms of his concepts of ‘regulative’ and ‘instructional’ discourse. Bernstein (1990) situates both these registers of pedagogic discourse within a wider analysis which aims to explain at a macro level the kinds of forces operating on what happens in classrooms, or in Bernstein’s terms, what factors influence the ‘structuring of pedagogic discourse’ within official educational institutions. While we will return to Bernstein’s model in Chapter 9, it is useful here to point out that the issue of variable practice as described in this chapter may be understood in Bernstein’s terms as one aspect of the problem of recontextualising knowledge from the ‘field of the production of knowledge’ (here, the academic study of linguistics) for the ‘field of the reproduction of knowledge’ (here, the Year 2 case study classes). In broad terms, the theory helps to
explain such things as what can be said in classrooms (such as whether one is allowed to teach the term ‘Process’ or ‘verb’) and points to an expected degree of variability from one field of knowledge reproduction to another, and one instance of the field to another, depending on the liberties and constraints that pertain in diverse instances of teaching and learning.

The foregoing comparison of two overtly similar lessons has highlighted the variation that is possible even when attempts are made to adopt the same general approach to teaching the same content. It is important to acknowledge that this variation need not in itself present a problem. Indeed, if we aim to make teaching relevant to students and to adopt a collaborative pedagogy in which teachers and students interact in joint activity along the lines envisaged by Vygotsky, we should expect variation. What also needs to be acknowledged, however, are the complexities and nuances which are elided when researchers talk of ‘grammar teaching’ as if it were a simple, straightforward endeavour. This is an important point for the interpretation of educational research into the effectiveness of teaching grammar: ‘grammar teaching’ is not a variable which can be just ‘taken as read’.

A further conclusion from the observed lessons is that there would seem to be much fertile ground to be ploughed in giving close and critical attention to the practices of teaching–learning grammatics in which teachers actually engage, or in Bernstein’s terms, the ways in which grammatical knowledge is recontextualised for the classroom. The thesis continues towards that end in the ensuing three chapters.

5.5.2 Vygotsky, voluntary attention and rethinking what counts as ‘basic’

The preceding discussion took a particular sociological lens to the task of reflecting on the lesson data presented in the chapter, and in doing so stepped back to get a
sense of the lessons as instances within a macro framework of knowledge reproduction. Another productive perspective on the lesson data is offered by Vygotskyn theory, and particularly Vygotsky’s views on the development of ‘voluntary attention’. These views will be outlined below and then subsequently applied to the Year 2 case study lessons under focus in the chapter.

The development of voluntary attention was one of the central preoccupations of the empirical studies conducted and inspired by Vygotsky in the third and into the fourth decades of the last century. Voluntary attention (also called ‘arbitrary’ attention in English translations of Vygotsky’s and colleagues’ work81) refers to the way in which thought is directed in order to complete a task, undertake work, or even in its earliest form for a baby “to concentrate on some parts of the situation, detaching them from the rest of the background” (Luria, 1992, pp. 129–130). Voluntary attention is contrasted with what Vygotsky called ‘natural attention’,82 which refers to behaviour which is “the instinctive-reflex kind” (Luria, 1992, p. 128), such as babies’ coordinated but reflex-driven movements to obtain their mothers’ milk. This contrasting form of attention is therefore ‘involuntary’: it is not under conscious control. Note that both voluntary and involuntary attention produce some form of coordinated behaviour, organised to respond to the stimulus or task presented. They also both involve filtering out or ignoring the immense buzz of stimuli in the environment and attending in a focused way to something specific. But

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81 For example, Luria (1992). The use of the classifier ‘arbitrary’ refers to the fact that this attention is discretionary; one decides (‘arbitrates’) to focus attention on a particular task or thing. Since ‘arbitrary’ can also suggest randomness or capriciousness, and today is commonly used in this sense, a preferable term and one used in contemporary psychology would be ‘voluntary attention’. ‘Voluntary attention’ retains Vygotsky’s notion of organised or planned behaviour, although it suggests a level of individual volition which does not entirely encapsulate Vygotsky’s original and much more dialectical conception.

82 Vygotsky did not coin this term; it was already in use in psychology. The distinction between arbitrary/voluntary and natural/‘compulsory’ attention was in use from at least the mid-eighteenth century, such as in the philosophy of aesthetics (Riley, 2004, ch. 1).
voluntary attention involves a level of planning and sequencing of behaviour which involuntary attention does not. It is the kind of attention which is needed to be able to work and to solve problems. Voluntary attention is also more stable than involuntary attention – it can be sustained after its initial stimulus has gone.

The development of voluntary attention is associated in Vygotsky’s thinking with the demands of children’s social and cultural environments. That is, voluntary attention does not occur spontaneously (unlike ‘natural’ attention) but rather develops as activities – from everyday activities to academic tasks – demand it. Instinctive reflexes prove no longer sufficient to resolve a need or problem, and so the child has to develop more elaborated and well-organised forms of behaviour. This the child achieves chiefly through interaction, rather than spontaneously or alone. The child learns to attend in selective and sustained ways in interaction with others (‘joint attention’) and through the mediation of artefacts or tools (a point introduced in general terms in Chapter 3, sub-section 3.3.3). Voluntary attention is thus learned through meaningful interaction and does not arise spontaneously from biologically given determinants. Voluntary attention does become ‘internalised’, along with other mental functions, but this is the result of learning to attend through the mediation of others (largely via language) and through the mediation of signs and tools:

[During the process of internalisation:] An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally. Of particular importance to the development of higher mental processes is the transformation of sign-using activity, the history and characteristics of which are illustrated by the development of practical intelligence, voluntary attention, and memory. (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 56–57, italics in original, boldfaced emphasis added)

[V]oluntary attention is a process of the turning inward of mediated attention ...[It] is not simply the result of natural organic development of attention, but is the result of its change and reconstruction under the influence of external stimuli-devices. (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 161)
When we come to apply Vygotsky’s theory of voluntary attention to teaching practice, a number of points are relevant to the classroom interactions discussed above. One obvious implication is the value of working jointly with children in helping them learn to attend to something new or intellectually challenging. In this sense, both of the lessons described in this chapter demonstrate ways in which children and teacher collaborated, with the teacher guiding the children’s attention to see new things. The whole class components of the lessons, where all the children were looking at a large print version of the same text and discussing it, are examples of ‘joint attention’. In these joint activities, the children were being supported in attending carefully to the language of texts by the teacher’s guidance and by the class discussion, maintaining and shaping their focus on the topic at hand.

A more profound issue raised by a Vygotskian interpretation of voluntary attention is the question of what counts as ‘basic’ grammatical knowledge. If, as Vygotsky argues, voluntary attention is developed and shaped by mediational means, then the forms of mediation by which one is taught to attend become enormously important. The forms of mediation shape what it is we attend to, what we see as ‘standing out’ from the landscape, what we interpret as salient and what we tend not to see and therefore ignore or give less attention. In terms of a Vygotskian view of voluntary attention, the grammatical description itself acts to mediate what features of language students will learn to see as salient (see also Chapter 3, sub-sections 3.3.3 and 3.4.2).

In the lessons featured in this chapter, the children’s voluntary attention was drawn to functional elements of language from their earliest experiences with learning grammatics. Furthermore the children in Class 2F attended to two intersecting metafunctions of language when they were invited to notice the co-
pattern of material Processes and Theme in procedure texts. This functional approach is a decidedly different take on the way grammatical knowledge has traditionally been introduced to students. In the teaching of traditional school grammar, word classes have typically been considered ‘basic’ and therefore taught first, thus foregrounding a certain way of thinking about language in which syntax and (individual) word form are salient. A functional approach would instead seek to foreground meaning and word / word group function as basic knowledge. Williams (2005) draws attention to the implications of rethinking what we consider ‘basic’ grammatical knowledge, pointing out that:

[B]eginning the study of grammatics through a functional description is likely to lead to a different kind of consciousness about the nature and use of grammatics from that produced by description of, for example, ‘parts of speech’ or a formal description. We are not, therefore, merely exploring differences in the accessibility or ‘meaningfulness’ of grammatics under these conditions, but the possibility of quite different long-term outcomes in consciousness about language in social life. (G. Williams, 2005, pp. 288–289)

For novices to grammatics, the concepts which are considered ‘basic’, and therefore taught first, serve to set up expectations about what grammatics is and what it is for. Given the orientation of SFG to the making of meaning, to begin grammatics instruction with a functional description rather than the word classes of TSG has the potential to set up learners to expect that grammatics will help them understand how language works. The teaching of word classes need not be indefinitely deferred; indeed at some point it may well be advisable since word class labels are in fact used in systemic functional grammar as well as more broadly in society such as in dictionaries and in foreign language learning. However there is significant merit in considering a semantic orientation to grammatics using SFG as a preferable ‘basic’ grammar because of the way it shapes voluntary attention to ‘see’ language in terms of meaning and social purpose:
The question is not whether word classes should be learned, but whether they should form the basic attention-structuring and activity-mediating resources through which children are encouraged to use grammar to think about textuality. (G. Williams, 2004, p. 263)

Furthermore, the teaching of word classes subsequent to a functional description could capitalise on established knowledge of semantic categories (for example, Processes realised by verbs and verb groups, Participants prototypically with a noun as the ‘Thing’ or core element). Such a step was not taken with the Year 2 classes in the present study primarily because their orientation to a functional grammatics was so new, but in Williams’ study of Year 6 children it was found that after almost a year of learning functional grammatics the students were quickly able to grasp some related word class descriptions (G. Williams, personal communication, July 17, 2012).

5.5.3 Problems with calling verbs ‘doing words’

It follows from the preceding discussion that the language by which grammatical concepts are identified and defined – the ‘metalanguage’ of grammatics – is relevant to what learners come to understand, because it serves to structure voluntary attention. We therefore return to the issue of glossing verbs as ‘doing words’ which was identified earlier in discussion of the Class 2F study, giving particular consideration to the limitations of this “most common” representation (Myhill, 2000, p. 155).

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83 The argument here takes a somewhat different position from that of Christie (2004), who proposes “the need to teach word classes carefully as a necessary part of teaching the functional grammar”, and that “one can start with notions of rank and the various elements of structure, and move from these to the functional descriptions” (p.169), or indeed the other way around (that is, first functional elements and then later word class constituents). Christie does however recognise that “to start with the functional categories of process types as Williams did with young learners is the best approach for such an age group. Such functional notions are in many ways very close to young children’s intuitions about language and how it works” (Christie, 2004, pp. 169–170).

(Note also in passing that the word sort activity data discussed at sub-section 5.2.2 indicate for at least a good proportion of the case study children the veracity of Christie’s assertion about “children’s intuitions”.)
There are two main ways in which the designation of verbs as ‘doing words’ is problematic. Firstly, a great many verbs do not fit the ‘doing’ description, and indeed this is one reason why students are sometimes offered a broader gloss for verb, such as “it shows action or state of being” (Fearn & Farnan, 2007, p. 66). However this latter gloss, though inclusive of a wider range of verbs, is couched in comparatively abstract terms compared with the gloss ‘doing words’ and this level of abstraction suggests that it may not be an appealing gloss to teachers of young students. Indeed, in Fearn and Farnan’s study the gloss ‘action or state of being’ was used with secondary school students, who could probably be expected to more readily accommodate its abstraction. Teachers of younger children, such as the teacher of Class 2F, may be drawn to the ‘doing words’ gloss since it is more concrete and it uses familiar words related to everyday notions young students most likely already possess.

Notwithstanding the concrete, everyday appeal of the gloss ‘doing words’, its failure to cover the range of verb types represents a serious weakness for its use as an entry definition for novices. Not all verbs are ‘doing’ verbs. SFG describes a range of Process types which we use to construe different meanings about ‘what is going on’ in the world of experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, ch. 5): material Processes (of ‘doing’ and ‘happening’), verbal Processes (‘saying’), mental Processes (‘thinking’, ‘feeling’ and ‘perceiving’), relational Processes (‘relating’, including ‘having’, and ‘identifying’), existential Processes (‘being’ in the sense of existing) and behavioural Processes (‘behaving’).84 Even if one prefers a traditional grammatical description to a systemic functional one, these differences still pertain; not all verbs are ‘doing’ words, and to call verbs ‘doing words’ is to leave off several

84 For a visual summary of Process types see Figure 5.6, this chapter, sub-section 5.5.4, p. 218.
important branches of the clan. As this chapter has discussed, a serious pedagogical consequence of using the ‘doing word’ gloss is that it orients learners’ voluntary attention solely to ‘action-type’ verbs and thereby renders other types of verbs harder to recognise.

The second reason that the ‘doing word’ gloss is problematic is that it creates an expectation of systematicity which it cannot deliver, and consequently it is a definition which needs to be unlearned or at least held very loosely in order for better understandings to take its place over time. The problem can be explicated by drawing on a functional grammatical analysis (following Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 311–335) of the deceptively simple nominal group ‘doing words’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>doing words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.3* Analysis of experiential elements of nominal group: ‘doing words’

In the nominal group, the function of the Classifier is to “indicate a particular subclass of the thing in question, e.g. *electric trains, passenger trains, toy trains*” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 319). Unfortunately for students’ conceptual development, the Classifier ‘doing’ in the gloss ‘doing words’ is not as clear a description as its face value appeal suggests. In the first instance it is not obvious whether the words themselves are ‘doing’ something (that is, by implication other words are not doing anything) or whether these are the words we use to represent the activity of ‘doing’. This ambiguity is recalled by a teacher reflecting on her own school experiences of learning grammar: “my young mind thought that all the words were ‘doing’ something” (Balzarolo, 2010, p. 20). The confusion here is generated
because Classifiers automatically set up an expectation that other comparable subclasses of the Thing are both possible and predictable (diesel trains and goods trains, for instance, to follow up some of the examples above). The Classifier ‘doing’ sets up an expectation that some taxonomy of the Thing ‘words’ must exist, into which ‘doing words’ fits as one subclass. Balzarolo’s thinking as a child was quite logical: if there were such things as ‘doing’ words, then by implication there might also be – and perhaps even should be – ‘non-doing’ words. She understood that a taxonomic description was being invoked; what was not clear was how the rest of the taxonomy was constituted. One problem then with using ‘doing words’ as a gloss for verbs is the nature of the taxonomy which it hints must exist but which, as the following discussion will show, is ultimately untenable.

One dimension of this untenability is that the word ‘doing’ generates an expectation that other kinds of words also may be classified by a present participle; that there are other ‘-ing’ subclasses of the Thing: ‘words’ (Figure 5.4).

![Figure 5.4](image)

Figure 5.4 Taxonomy implied by ‘doing words’ gloss

However not all grammatical elements can be typified with an ‘-ing’ Classifier, even those from traditional school grammar, and even if some can there are additional problems in doing so. Some of the traditional parts of speech might be glossed as ‘-ing words’, such as nouns as ‘naming words’ and conjunctions as ‘joining / linking’ words’, but this is never without problems – just like ‘doing words’ for verbs these
glosses are not suitable in all cases. In addition, any appearance of systematicity quickly breaks down with other grammatical classes of TSG. For example, while adjectives might seem to be defined quite reasonably as ‘describing words’, the same Classifier of ‘describing’ could also be applied to the class of adverbs, depending on what is being described; and pronouns are also ‘naming words’ and so not discriminated from nouns using this nomenclature.

Furthermore, all these participles demonstrate the same ambiguity as ‘doing words’: does the ‘-ing’ Classifier indicate what the word refers to, or what the word does? In fact, while the ‘doing’ of ‘doing words’ refers outwards to the world of experience being represented by verbs, the ‘joining’ of ‘joining words’ refers to the function of conjunctions within the system of language itself. Hence even in this semblance of systematicity, the participles used to specify subclasses of ‘words’ do not have the same frames of reference despite their morphological similarity.

From a functional grammar perspective the use of ‘-ing’ glosses is also problematic. We will consider here just those grammatical elements which operate within the experiential metafunction: Participants and Circumstances (Processes we have been discussing already as the element sometimes glossed as ‘doing words’). Perhaps the Participants in Processes could be called ‘participating words/word groups’ but the gloss is ambiguous in the same way that ‘doing’ is ambiguous – are not all the words ‘participating’ in some way? It is also uncomfortably long. The Circumstances of SFG would be even harder to assign an ‘-ing’ classification since they vary considerably in the kinds of information they provide.

The gloss ‘doing words’ therefore suggests a taxonomy which is in fact not open to viable development for students in the longer-term, either within TSG or as a functional grammar term. It therefore offers a precarious foundation for building
Chapter 5: Starting points in teaching grammatics

207

towards a systematic knowledge of grammatics, almost certainly needing more
demolition than renovation in order to help learners build a sound understanding
over time.

At least two alternative approaches might be taken to the teaching of ‘verbs’
or, preferably the teaching of ‘Processes’ where the educational environment permits
an overtly SFG-informed grammatics. Where no constraints on terminology exist,
one could simply begin with the term ‘Process’ as in Williams’ research, using such
glosses as “what is going on” (Humphrey, Droga, & Feez, 2012, p. 13). In the
present study, where constraints on terminology were imposed, the researcher’s
choice of metalanguage with Class 2B had a number of advantages. The consistent
use of the term ‘action verbs’ opened up a taxonomic space so that the subsequent
teaching of ‘saying verbs’, for example, represented a predictable development of an
implied system. It also resisted having to start by defining all verbs in general, and
rather built towards a general sense of Process by beginning with specific types. This
way of developing taxonomic concepts actually mimics the way many everyday
concepts develop for children, such as, for example, preschoolers building toward a
sense of the general entity ‘vehicles’ by first being familiar with the subclasses of
‘bus’ and ‘truck’ (Painter, 1999, p. 103) or toy “chuffa” (train) and toy bus (Halliday,
1980, p. 16), even before they know any term with which to label the set.

In summary then, ‘doing words’ is problematic as a gloss for verbs because it:
(i) leaves out all the verbs which are not ‘doing’ verbs, and
(ii) lacks potential development as part of a system of grammatics, and
indeed misleads as to the possible shape of such a system.

Both these problems with ‘doing words’ as a metalinguistic term feed into its
educational limitations as identified earlier in this chapter in the Class 2F case study.
On the basis of this evidence it is clear that the gloss of ‘doing words’ for ‘verbs’ orients learners’ voluntary attention chiefly to verbs of material activity and thereby renders other types of verbs harder to recognise. In Class 2F, the children were oriented strongly to the more concrete types of verbs, those verbs which could be probed with ‘what did x do?’ Alternative approaches to defining verbal groups / Processes have been outlined here, including the idea of not actually defining ‘verbs’ as a general entity as a first step, but building towards an understanding of Processes through familiarity with different subclasses. Certainly it is both possible and preferable to avoid the teaching of partial and unclear definitions such as ‘verbs are doing words’.

5.5.4 The semiotic mediation of colour coding for learning grammatics

Given that the teaching of grammatics is a focus of this thesis, it is worthwhile examining not only the language and metalanguage by which grammatics is taught but also other modes through which grammatical description may be elucidated for learners, that is, other forms of semiotic mediation which might help shape learners’ voluntary attention. In the particular lessons featured in this chapter, the idea of colour coding Processes as green was one of the ways that knowledge of this new concept was mediated to the children.

The application of colour coding to signal different functional grammatical groupings in the present study has its antecedents in the work by Williams (and was first presented in G. Williams et al., 1994). The present author, who as indicated earlier was a teacher participant in Williams’ project, developed the following colour codes in collaboration with the first case study group of the project: green for Processes, red for Participants, blue for Circumstances. These three functional
elements are those which constitute the experiential metafunction of language, that is, they are the elements which function to represent experience. Processes represent the ‘goings on’, Participants indicate who and/or what is directly involved in the Process, and Circumstances provide relevant contextual information (such as when, where and how). Together these elements make up the ‘transitivity’ system – the resources of the lexicogrammar by which the experiential metafunction operates. The following is an example of a transitivity analysis of a single clause sentence (source: Baillie, 1988) with symbolic use of colour incorporated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance (type: ‘when’)</th>
<th>Participant (type: Actor)</th>
<th>Process (type: material/‘doing’)</th>
<th>Participant (type: Goal)</th>
<th>Circumstance (type: ‘where’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At last</td>
<td>Drac</td>
<td>traps</td>
<td>the Gremlin</td>
<td>in the misty valleys of Melachon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.5** Transitivity analysis of a clause showing colour coding for functional elements

At the time of the development of this method of colour coding for the experiential metafunction, the author was not conscious of making the selection of colours on the basis of a reasoned set of principles. However the apparently commonsense appeal of the choice of colours has been such that they have now been adopted in certain teacher training materials\(^85\) and their use has become widespread amongst teachers in Australia and internationally who have completed these and similar courses (Black & Bannan, 2010; M. Daniels, 2010; Dare & Polias, 2001; Hamilton, 1998; Herbert, 2012; Measday, Papas, Clark, Leatch, & Walsh, 2007;)

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\(^85\) A notable example is the course ‘Language and literacy: Classroom application of functional grammar’, developed by John Polias and Brian Dare and delivered through the professional development arm of the South Australian government’s Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). This course ran from 2004 to 2010, when it was replaced by the very similar course ‘How language works’. These courses are run as a commercial enterprise by the DECD and are delivered throughout Australia and internationally. In 2006 the course authors reported that at that stage “over 2000 teachers” had already done the then 27 hour professional development course “in Australia and the rest of the world” (Polias & Dare, 2006, pp. 124, 126).
O’Callaghan & Goodall, 2010). Given that the colour coding has a certain intuitive appeal and has now been adopted in many locations far beyond its origins, it is instructive to consider whether the choice is merely random or whether there is a logic to the colours which explains their ready acceptance by teachers. There is certainly a *prima facie* case for the latter, that is, that the colours tap into a logic of colour which was not articulated at the time of their selection but which with hindsight makes sense of the choices. With this in mind, each of the colours chosen for the experiential elements will be considered in turn. Note that even though the present chapter has only dealt with lessons where the colour coding of Processes was undertaken, it makes sense to take the opportunity here to include Participants and Circumstances in the discussion rather than rehearsing the material at a later point in the thesis.

A foundational point throughout the ensuing discussion is that while colours do not have intrinsic meaning (theoretically any colour could be used to signify any meaning), they nevertheless take on a range of meanings through the consistent association of certain colours with certain aspects of cultures. These “culturally produced regularities in the uses of colour” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 343) make it possible for colours to mean something – not through inherent quality but through borrowed significance. Kress and Van Leeuwen articulate two main ways in which colour makes meaning: by association with other uses of colour in cultures, and by the features of colours and compositions (such as dark/light, pure/hybrid, saturated/pastel). Since for our present purposes the colours were saturated, ‘pure’ colours (green, red, blue), we will focus attention on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s point about the ways in which choices for colours resonate with other places that colour is used in the societal/cultural context. This kind of affordance of colour is described
as: “association, or provenance – the question of ‘where the colour comes from, where it has been culturally and historically’, ‘where we have seen it before’ ” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p. 355).

The choice of green for Processes has already been mentioned as analogous to the green ‘go’ at traffic lights (above, 5.4.1). That is, the green of traffic lights denotes movement and activity, and for this reason green could be justified as a suitable colour to associate with Processes (especially material Processes). The interpretation of green as indicating movement at traffic lights is in addition a globally accepted one and not just a local meaning, further recommending green as a widely recognisable choice if used for colour coding the concept of ‘Process’.

Beyond the traffic light association there are also other connections between green and movement. For example, the large signs on roadways which signal the way to go or how far you need to travel to get to a destination are green. In many countries and in accordance with ISO\textsuperscript{86} standards, the mandatory exit signs in publicly used buildings are also green, again indicating movement. There are therefore strong cultural associations between green (particularly a saturated mid-green like a motorway sign) and activity or movement. Considered together, this range of associations contributes to making green an evocative choice for Processes, most particularly for material Processes of action, and would seem therefore to be a reasonable choice of colour for mediating children’s learning about material Processes.

Using green to signify Processes is not, however, without its problems. Some Processes refer to states of being rather than to activity, while some material Processes are in fact quite stationary. For example, ‘stopped’ is a material or ‘action’

\textsuperscript{86} International Organization for Standardization.
Process which denotes *cessation* of action. There is less commonsense appeal for coding the word ‘stop’ with green than there is coding for coding ‘go’ or ‘run’ or ‘travel’ with green. Yet if all Processes are coded green, then ‘stop’ must be coded green also. This chapter has argued that the more concrete, active-type material Processes make a good starting point for learning functional grammatics, and in this context the choice of green for Processes makes sense, serving to orient learners to activity. It could be further argued that once material Processes are understood, other Process types can be introduced using the same colour coding to show that they, too, are Processes even though they may not denote activity. In this sense the colour coding would help to build a sense of the family of Process types, unifying all Processes under the one colour. However it would be prudent not to push the association of green with movement too much in early learning, lest the colour coding become another way of communicating to students the fallacy that all Processes are ‘doing’ words. In the current project (and in Williams’ work before it), different types of Processes were all coded in green, but with use of different shapes to indicate different Process types such as a green lips shape for a verbal (‘saying’) Process. This was an effective way of mediating simultaneously the commonality of Processes as a family (all green) and the different characteristics of members of that family (via the different shapes). Some examples of classroom work which used ‘green lips’ symbols for saying Processes are recounted in Chapters 6 and 7.

The choice of red for Participants takes its significance partly in contrast with the green for Processes. That is, one of the reasons we might choose red is that it is *not green*. Given that Processes and Participants represent complementary but very different elements in clauses, the use of a contrasting colour makes some sense. Green and red exist opposite of one another on a colour wheel. They are also found
as contrasting (and often coupled) signifiers in a variety of sociocultural contexts, including the obvious example of traffic lights but also in road signage (red signs for ‘stop’ and ‘no entry’, contrasting with green signage for allowed movement), in health and safety colour systems (red for danger and fire, green for first aid), and in buttons used to operate, for example, mobile phones. The traffic light association is again a powerful one here in that it offers both a contrast (if red and still, then not green and moving) and also a meaningful association for redness and Participants – the stillness signified by red resonates with the status of Participants as entities rather than events.

The choice of blue for Circumstances is perhaps less reliant on evoking culturally relevant associations and is more directly related to empirical experience. Blue is the colour usually ascribed to the sky and the sea if they are talked about in general terms, and in a real sense blue is therefore a colour for our real-life ‘circumstances’. This is at least a plausible rationale for using blue for Circumstances, and one which I understand has been used in the ‘Language and literacy’ course (see footnote 85, this chapter). A connection might also be made with the way blue is used in public signage to denote something which should be acknowledged but which is to some extent peripheral to the main activity, such as service signs on roadways (indicating nearby service stations, picnic areas, toilets, tourist information centres and so forth). This association would be an apt one to draw in terms of explaining a choice of blue for Circumstances, since Circumstances (typically realised by adverbial groups and prepositional phrases) function to provide more information about the Process and its Participants – ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’, for example – but are not essential to the forming of a message. While it is possible to form messages without Circumstances, it is not possible to form a message
without a Process and at least one Participant (with the apparent exception of the imperative, where a Participant is still implied: “[You] Help!”).

Considered together, the three colours green, red and blue could also be argued to constitute a palette of something close to a set of primary colours and by association could be interpreted as representing the ‘building blocks’ of language. Certainly ‘red, green, blue’ (RGB) are the so-called ‘additive primary colours’ used in televisions, computer screens and data projectors, although this is an association not likely to make sense to children (nor indeed many adults). Considering instead the more familiar ‘subtractive primary colours’ (red, blue and yellow), green is often included in this set as an unofficial primary colour and therefore borrows a sense of being a ‘basic’ colour from the company it keeps. Examples include the colours of the ubiquitous Google and Windows logos, the Olympic rings symbol and the flags of the world (from which the Olympics logo takes its colours) and, from the world of children, many games such as ludo, ‘Uno’ and ‘Twister’. All these associations indicate that green is often regarded as a ‘basic’ colour like red, blue and yellow, and the inclusion of green for Processes in a set of colours symbolic of ‘basic’ grammatical concepts is therefore reasonable.

It might of course be asked, if primary colours make a sensible set, why yellow would not be preferred over green when choosing colours for representing the experiential metafunction? Yellow was deliberately reserved for a different purpose in the original KAL Project (G. Williams et al., 1994): to highlight ‘Theme’. A yellow frame or highlight could be used to indicate the experiential element (red Participant, green Process or blue Circumstance) which was in Theme position without obscuring the text. The ready availability of the colour yellow in highlighter pens was helpful in this regard. Furthermore, the use of a ‘highlighting’ colour for
Theme served to emphasise the functional role of the thematic element in foregrounding information for the reader, or metaphorically *highlighting* it.

There are also a number of pragmatic reasons for choosing green, red and blue. These colours are readily available in stationery items, for example, they are all included in a regular set of whiteboard markers and are all found in basic sets of coloured pencils for children’s use in school. They are all comfortably readable at some distance on a white background (unlike yellow, for example). The colours are also readily available in paper and card stock so that teachers and students can make their own representations of grammatical elements, and all the colours can be written upon using a black marker and still be readable (unlike, for example, the colour purple which can be too dark a background for a good contrast with print – particularly for the kind of regular use which might be made of these materials with young, developing readers). They are also usually regarded as gender neutral colours and thus can more readily represent grammatical knowledge as ‘for’ everyone.

The choice of colours for symbolising grammatical meanings therefore flows from a constellation of factors, including what with hindsight can be seen to be valid semiotic associations with other uses of colour in the sociocultural and physical environment, and pragmatic reasons including availability and use of materials.

Two further points merit consideration before leaving this issue: a note on the Montessori materials for teaching grammar; and a comment on the compromises which semiotic mediation entails. On the first of these points, the use of colour as a form of semiotic mediation of grammatical concepts in the manner here described is not unique to this project and its direct antecedents. Over a century ago, Maria Montessori developed a thoughtful and innovative array of symbols which made use of colour and shape to help children learn about grammar, specifically the ‘parts of
speech’ of traditional grammar, although the way these were taught was intended to be as functionally oriented as the description allowed (Feez, 2007, ch. 7). These materials were unknown to the present researcher until relatively recent times. They are very interesting in terms of the ways in which they intelligently mediate knowledge about grammar in ways which are not the same as those described in the present project but which are inspired by similar aims, particularly of relating grammatical knowledge to meaning making. The design of the materials and the teacher talk by which they are introduced are both important in the Montessori tradition. For example, verbs are represented as a red ball shape and discussed in terms of the energy they represent, with explicit reference made by Montessori teachers to a comparison with the sun. Nouns are represented as black pyramids, which are stable and still (unlike the ball for verb, which evokes movement), with their colour a strong contrast with the red for verb. The Montessori grammar materials and the pedagogy associated with their use represent thoughtfully reasoned forms of semiotic mediation for introducing knowledge of grammar to young children, albeit from a traditional grammar description of language. The continued use of these materials is suggestive of their perceived ongoing value and relevance in providing meaningful ways of mediating grammatics to children. While the present study was conducted using materials of different design and representing a different grammatical description, it shares with the Montessori approach a concern for using materials and teacher talk which together mediate new knowledge to learners in principled, carefully designed ways.

A further comment on the colour coding adopted in the present project is that compromises inevitably beset the design of materials for educational purposes. In choosing to use colour to discriminate between elements within clauses (Processes,
Participants and Circumstances), this system of symbols mediated certain grammatical knowledge in reasoned ways but at the same time actually obscured other valuable observations which could be made. Of particular relevance to the teaching of the experiential metafunction is the fact that different Process types engage different kinds of Participants, so in a very real sense Processes ‘colour’ the entire clause in which they operate. For example, mental Processes of cognition (‘thinking’ Processes) have a Participant capable of consciousness called the ‘Senser’ and usually a Phenomenon which is the object of the mental activity (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 201–206). In contrast, material Processes are enacted by Actors, possibly upon Goals (in the case of transitive verbs) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 180–182). For careful study of text, a good case could be made for using colour coding for entire clauses according to the type of Process at their heart. In educational practice this could be used to show, for example, which stretches of a passage are mainly to do with action (material clauses) and which are to do with thoughts of a character (mental clauses) and therefore how the language is operating to create a sense of ‘main’ character and to focalise point of view. The practice adopted in the current project of coding Processes, Participants and Circumstances as different units in different colours simultaneously precludes representing whole clauses as whole units ‘coloured’ by the Process type at their core; one form of semiotic mediation makes another less possible.

The potential value of thinking about whole clauses as coloured by their Process types is suggested by the image on the cover of the second edition of Halliday’s *An introduction to functional grammar* (Halliday, 1994), which makes use of the metaphor of the colour wheel in typifying Process types:
One of several points of interest in this image is the invocation of the subtractive primary colours to indicate the main types of Processes: doing (red), being (yellow) and sensing (blue). Here is a use of ‘basic’ colours to establish what are deemed to be basic ideas, in a fashion not dissimilar to the way colours were used in the present project. Of further interest is the clear indication that Halliday sees material Processes as ‘red’ (like Montessori), a point of difference from the choice of colours in the present project. The image is also interesting for the way it shows some Process types as occupying spaces between others to which they have some affinity, such as behavioural Processes which are like material Processes in some ways and like mental Processes in others, and hence their location on the

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87 Image credit: © M.A.K. Halliday. Used with permission.
colour wheel at the border of material and mental and their colouring as purple (both a little like red and a little like blue but belonging to neither red nor blue). Halliday is here deploying an image as a form of semiotic mediation and is using it for instructional purposes to help the reader ‘see’ what is being discussed. And, as with all metaphors, this particular form of semiotic mediation has both affordances and limitations, as Halliday is aware:

[W]hat is important is that, in our concrete visual metaphor, they [types of Process] form a circle and not a line. (More accurately still, they could be shown to form a sphere; but that becomes too complex a metaphor to handle.) (Halliday, 1994, p. 107)

Here Halliday is making a point about the image which might be generalised to all educational forms of semiotic mediation: that the one image does not capture the full story. There are important ideas which the image communicates quite effectively, and others which are inevitably unable to be shown due to the complexity involved. It remains politely unstated for whom the metaphor of a sphere would be “too complex”, but we can guess that what is being managed here is how much complexity a student/reader can handle at once, and from a pragmatic point of view there is the further issue of what can be effectively communicated on a two-dimensional page (you can’t put a sphere in a book!).

In designing forms of semiotic mediation for pedagogic purposes, such as using colours to indicate aspects of grammatics, compromises would seem to be inevitable. For teaching grammatics, some of these compromises arise from the complexity of language itself – one or even two sets of mediating modes (colour, or colour combined with shape) cannot represent all that language can do. Selections must inevitably be made as to what is considered ‘primary’ and what must wait until later, whether because it is logically subsequent or because it is too complex an idea to commence with. There are also pragmatic considerations such as how much
information can be accommodated in a single image or metaphor. In designing ways to mediate knowledge, the overriding concerns must surely be to manage complexity for learners at the same time as maintaining integrity to the knowledge being taught.

In the present project, the colours chosen to represent grammatical concepts have been shown to be reasonable ones in terms of the sociocultural meanings they invoke. Furthermore, colour coding of grammatical elements was observed throughout the project to be accessible and useful in actual classroom interactions. For example, we have seen in this chapter that the Class 2B children understood from the outset that the coding of certain words in green communicated commonality of some kind, which they then learned to interpret as ‘verbs’. In the following chapter we see how these same children learned to attend to both colour and shape in a ‘green lips’ symbol as a meaningful way of mediating the concept of ‘verbal Process’. The use of colour and shapes in these ways provided a visual form of redundant representation of knowledge by which children were supported in developing new conceptual understandings. It is predictable however that, since the voluntary attention of learners is always and necessarily oriented by means of semiotic mediation, such use of colours and shapes will both draw children’s attention to some language features and make others pale into the landscape. That this is unavoidable makes the principled design of such materials a vital project.

5.5.5 Some further practical considerations for teachers

A number of areas of learner difficulty were identified during the introductory lessons described in this chapter. A brief analysis of these is likely to be useful for those particularly interested in the logistical practicalities of introducing a functional grammatics to young novices.
Class 2B: Areas of difficulty in identifying Processes

It was reported above (p. 189) that 83% of the material Processes in the Class 2B children’s texts were satisfactorily identified by the children, or at least identified in part. Where errors were located in the children’s attempts to identify material Processes, these were subject to error analysis. The main areas of difficulty with this task for the children were:

i. **Omission of part of the verbal group** (11 errors in total across all Process types, of which 8 related to material Processes). The most common omission was the failure to include an auxiliary verb (such as ‘is’ in ‘is standing’), although of the twenty-three work samples there were twenty children who included auxiliary verbs in the verbal group at least some of the time. While auxiliary verbs in material Processes were overlooked on eight occasions, they were correctly included in the verbal group on 52 occasions – quite an achievement for beginners, and one most likely facilitated by the teaching which modelled this for the students (‘Researcher: [W]e’re putting all the words that belong together to tell us what the action is.’ – from Appendix B item B.4, emphasis added; see also clause analysis, Appendix B item B.9.4).

ii. **Inclusion in the identified ‘action verb’ of elements which were not part of the Process** (7 errors). The most common errors here were: to include in the verbal group the Goal of a transitive verb (for example, ‘moving their arms’, ‘is lifting his hands up’ – the latter is made especially tricky because of the phrasal verb ‘lift...up’); or to include in the verbal group the Scope/Range (‘wearing a smile’, ‘doing triathlon’). In both these forms of the error, the children’s decisions were understandable given the close association of the Process with the Participant, particularly so in the case of
the inclusion of the Range with the Process since it is “one element which is not so much an entity participating in the process as a refinement of the process itself” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 295).

iii. **Missing the entire material Process** (11 errors). Some material Processes failed to be identified at all in a small but interesting set of instances. These included: *hypothetical* or *future* activity (‘trying to score’; ‘to protect’); activity *not actually happening* (‘will not hurt’); and *less obviously active* material Processes (‘lives’, ‘won’). An overarching explanation for these errors is that the strong orientation of the children at this early stage of learning grammatics is to the most concrete and actual of events. In linguistic terms, the ‘realis/irrealis’ distinction (Crystal, 2008, pp. 402–403) is relevant here. The children’s orientation is to ‘realis’ or actual, manifest events when first learning to identify Processes. Hypothetical or absent events (verbs with negative polarity: ‘not’) may be interpreted by children as ‘irrealis’ as they are not manifest. This observation lends support to the rationale for beginning with material Processes as the least abstract of Process types (outlined above in section 5.3).

**Class 2F: Is ‘carefully’ part of the verb?**

While, as in Class 2B, the children in Class 2F found their introductory lesson in grammatics to be broadly accessible, one area of difficulty for some 2F children related to their early encounters with Circumstances of Manner or ‘how’ adverbs. Specifically, some children found it difficult to distinguish adverbs from the verbal group with which they were associated, especially when the adverb preceded the verb. Thus a typical confusion would be to identify ‘carefully make’ as the Process in a clause like ‘carefully make a small hole’. At this early stage of learning, the
children did not yet know about adverbs or the family of Circumstances to which they typically belong; they had only learned about ‘action verbs’. So they were not equipped to discriminate between verbs and adverbs on the basis of formal technical knowledge.

A number of linguistic reasons may be advanced to explain why this confusion of including the adverb with the verb is not only understandable but also predictable for some novice learners. Firstly there are the features of adverbs themselves, which are intimately related to the verb and in material terms they in fact fuse into a single event (to ‘stir gradually’ is to enact a single physical activity, for example). This means that Processes with an attendant ‘manner’ adverb can be probed by the same kind of probes as material Processes without adverbs. Thus the probe ‘what do you do next?’ in a procedure can be adequately answered by ‘stir’ as well as ‘stir gradually’; the children’s test of ‘Can you x?’, where x is the word being tested for ‘verbness’ is also satisfied by including the adverb (‘Can you stir gradually?’ – Yes). Secondly, it is noteworthy that most other Circumstances apart from the adverbs are prepositional phrases (for example, ‘in the bottom of the cup’, ‘off the diving board’, ‘on Monday’). Prepositional phrases typically incorporate an ‘indirect participant’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 261) such as ‘the diving board’ or ‘Monday’ and are hence less likely to be confused/fused with the verb in children’s minds than are adverbs of manner. There are, it is here suggested, Circumstances which more closely and directly associate with the verb, such as adverbs, and Circumstances which operate at a wider orbit from the verb, such as prepositional phrases – and the case study children’s intuitions would seem to accord with this. Finally, it may also be relevant that verbs can themselves express manner (such as ‘amble’ or ‘strut’ for manners of walking) and hence fuse manner and
activity in the same way that novices might see adverbs and verbs as fused. Certainly the confusion is understandable for novice learners and one which teachers might usefully anticipate. In negotiating the confusion, an SFG-informed approach might profitably distinguish ‘how’ words from material Processes, later incorporating ‘how’ words into the family of Circumstances. Such an approach was used in Class 2F as indicated in this transcript excerpt:

Gareth: It’s ah, when you put the, a nail in a bottom of a cup, you could, you just do it slowly.
Researcher: So it’s telling you how to do it?
Gareth: Yep.
Researcher: Yeah. Good thinking.

(Class 2F, May 14)

The distinction between ‘how’ adverbs and verbs may well have needed further consolidation for some children, however, as evidenced in Class 2F’s end of year ‘verb hunt’ (test) where out of 17 children who were available to do the test, five identified ‘carefully pull’ as the verb in ‘carefully pull the tissue paper’. To be fair, this test was conducted when the children’s work on procedural text types was some months past, and their grammatics lessons had most recently had been on Theme in narratives. The confusion is nonetheless worthy of note and suggestive of a potential need to give a stronger emphasis to distinguishing ‘how’ words from ‘action verbs’ in early work on grammatics in procedural texts, ideally while maintaining the instructional focus on the contribution of such choices in wording to the making of meaning.

5.6 Concluding comments

This chapter has demonstrated that material Processes offer an accessible entry point to the learning of grammatics by young school children, and one which capitalises on children’s intuitions about language (as suggested by the word sort activity data). In
addition, it has provided evidence of the accessibility of Halliday’s grammatical concept ‘Theme’ as a description which permits children to be introduced to how patterns in wordings develop the meanings of a text. This latter observation derives from a case study lesson focused on a procedural text, and the chapter has argued that the ‘procedure’ text type offers a number of valuable affordances for introducing novice learners to the meaningful relationships between grammar and whole texts. In an otherwise similar case study class, the ‘description’ text type was shown to have limited potential for exploring grammatical patterns and meaning, at least as an entry point for novices.

The chapter has furthermore provided transcript evidence of grammatics lessons informed by Vygotskian theory in which consideration was given to the staging of lessons using the organising principle of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The evidence was that by operating in the assisted learning environment of the ZPD, children were able to understand simple grammatical descriptions. These descriptions themselves were selected carefully, with one consideration being that the degree of abstraction was likely to be manageable for the children. Thus the lesson transcript evidence provides a counter to the widely-held assumption that all grammar is too abstract for young learners. An important implication of this finding is that teaching grammatics is likely to be most effective when children’s existing knowledge is ascertained and then ‘stretched’ by ‘instruction in the new’, where the ‘new’ is achievable given the support of the ZPD.

A further implication of the analysis of this chapter is that different orientations to grammatical concepts will be brought about by different ways of defining those concepts. That is, even apparently similar classes of children learning the same content in similar ways (grammar contextualised in whole texts, taught using well-regarded methods) can end up with different orientations to grammatical
knowledge. For example, in one case study class ‘verbs’ were consistently defined narrowly, and ultimately problematically, as ‘doing words’. The effect of this was to orient children to only some kinds of verbs, necessitating a degree of unlearning at a later point in order to bring other kinds of verbs into the fold. Consequently the chapter recommends critical examination of the language by which grammatics is taught, particularly both teacher talk and the text types selected for teaching ‘grammar in context’. These two forms of language-based semiotic mediation were particularly powerful in shaping how children began to understand grammatics in the case studies; they apprenticed children into different ways of knowing about grammar. A further dimension of the semiotic mediation of grammatics was the principled use of the visual mode, specifically colour and (in later lessons) shape, to provide a pedagogically productive ‘redundancy’ which supported conceptual development by making language patterns visibly apparent.

The chapter has shown that teaching grammatics is not simply a matter of coupling good teaching strategies with suitable content, although these will both be important considerations in designing teaching for effective learning. Quality teaching of grammatics also implies considering how the approach taken can best serve children so that their understandings are clear (and preferably can be built upon cumulatively rather than being unlearned later) and so that they are equipped to use grammatics for working meaningfully and productively with texts. Chapters 6 to 8 explore some ways in which the novice learners we have met in this chapter began to do just that.
CHAPTER 6
Children learning the grammatics of quoted speech

6.1 Grammatics – not just for writing

Traditionally, the reasons for teaching school students grammar have focused on grammar’s purported benefits for written composition, usually interpreted in terms of grammatical accuracy and ‘correct’ usage (Chapters 1 and 2). Rarely have other dimensions of the English curriculum been considered to be within the purview of possible applications of grammatical knowledge. In this and the following chapter, we consider some other potential applications of grammatical knowledge. The present chapter provides evidence of benefits flowing from learning the grammatics of quoted (‘direct’) speech for children’s punctuation of speech and their oral reading expression, while in the next chapter the focus is on applications of grammatics for reading critically. The present chapter addresses the following specific questions:

Can knowledge of the grammar of verbal Processes contribute to

i. better punctuation of quoted speech, and to

ii. improved expression in oral reading?

Punctuation and oral reading both, but especially the latter, have been largely overlooked in the historical research on learning grammar (section 6.2). The above questions will be addressed using data from the Class 2B case study, the design of this particular part of the research being outlined in section 6.3. It will be shown that Year 2 children who learned about the grammar of verbal Processes (section 6.4) were able to use that knowledge to improve their punctuation of quoted speech (section 6.5) and to enhance their metacognitive repertoire of strategies for reading aloud with expression (section 6.6). That is, the grammatics assisted children to
bring the language of quoted speech under their conscious control. In section 6.7, the main teaching–learning activities through which this was achieved are explained and salient aspects of pedagogy identified. Section 6.8 interprets the findings of sections 6.5 and 6.6 in light of Vygotskyan theory, particularly Vygotsky’s explication of the development of conscious control via ‘scientific’ or ‘scholarly’ concepts, of which grammatical description is one example. The role of explicit teaching in the development of productive grammatical knowledge is considered within the context of this theoretical framework. It is further argued that a systemic functional description provides an accessible and productive basis for a pedagogical grammatics of quoted speech, with potential applications beyond those explored with the Year 2 children featured in this chapter.

6.2 Research on grammar and quoted speech

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

6.2.1 Punctuation and grammatics

Research on the general subject of learning punctuation is not extensive:

One of the less-studied aspects of written language development is how children come to understand punctuation. ... [T]here has been so little research on the topic. (Hall, 2009, p. 271)

Furthermore,

If children’s understanding of punctuation is as a whole under-researched, then research on their understanding of [punctuating] speech is close to non-existent. (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 punctuating speech (Hall, 2002, 2009). He found
that the punctuation of direct speech can be complex and difficult for children in several respects, from apparently minor matters like the directionality of quote marks to more substantial problems of working out what is quoted speech and what is straight prose. He also found that 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 concludes that learning to punctuate speech is often less straightforward than curriculum documents (in the UK) seem to assume. He does not attempt to detail how to teach punctuation for more effective learning, although his general views are indicated. For example, he recommends teachers include “cooperative punctuation problem solving” activities rather than relying on “individual page-based exercises” (Hall, 2002, p. 8). He critiques teaching methods which “tend to position [punctuation] as an autonomous object to be learned in a relatively decontextualised manner” (Hall, 2009, p. 272), thus implying a preference for teaching punctuation in contextualised ways.

Another way to look at the literature on this question is to begin not with punctuation research but with grammar teaching research. The EPPI-Centre review of research into the effectiveness of teaching syntax for writing (Andrews et al., 2004a) identified after a very specific screening process only three primary studies which addressed punctuation, all of which are unpublished. However a review of their summaries\(^{88}\) suggests that none of these papers deals expressly with the

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\(^{88}\) The technical report of the review by Andrews and colleagues does not in fact identify which three particular papers are to do with grammar and punctuation, but instead includes them in a broader list of 33 primary studies used in the review. This large list was therefore screened to identify which were most likely the three studies which dealt with punctuation. These would appear to be the studies by Calkins (1979 – an unpublished report of a study which is discussed in published form in Calkins & Graves, 1980), Melvin (1980) and Stock (1980). Stock’s study is summarised on pp. 43–44 and 76–77.
punctuation of quoted speech; they are mostly concerned with whether teaching syntax helps with sentence boundary punctuation. The author of a previous review (Hillocks, 1984) later 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)\textsuperscript{89}

This suggests a bleak outlook for one of the main subjects of the present chapter.

However, as established in Chapter 3, at least two important caveats apply in interpreting “the research”. Firstly, the type of grammar taught may well be a factor in the apparent failure of instruction. Secondly, the kind of grammar teaching employed in historical studies did not necessarily help students to apply grammatical knowledge in productive ways. Teaching a functional grammar via a pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan theory presents the possibility of different kinds of outcomes for students. Of direct relevance to the questions posed in the present chapter is Williams’ evidence that a functional description of the grammatics of verbal Processes enabled Year 1 children to punctuate quoted speech (1998, p. 38).

\subsection{Expressive reading and grammatics}

Research on a possible relationship between oral reading and the learning of grammatics is especially hard to find. In fact, the research by Williams cited immediately above and previously in the thesis (Chapter 2, sub-section 2.4.1), in which young children learned aspects of systemic functional grammar, is the only

\textsuperscript{89} In a more recent version of this statement, the exact wording is retained but with one significant change: the word ‘grammar’ has been replaced with ‘TSG’ (for ‘traditional school grammar’) (Hillocks & Smith, 2003, p. 734). This limits the span of the generalisation and allows for the possibility of different outcomes from the teaching of different grammatical descriptions – precisely the possibility explored in this thesis.
body of work which could be located on the particular question of learning grammar and oral reading. 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)

This chapter investigates this possibility further.

6.3 Design of ‘quoted speech’ study

The data sets which are the main focus of the chapter were pre- and post-tests of punctuation and oral reading. These are a subset or ‘slice’ of the data collected in the Class 2B case study, and, while the thesis project adopted a qualitative approach to data collection for the most part, the present chapter also makes use of some quantitative data such as test results and scores of text reading. The pre-test data sets were collected before the Class 2B 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 chapter) was done 16 weeks (13 school weeks) before the reading post-test (‘R2’ or ‘Reading 2’).

In the time between the pre- and post-tests, the children in Class 2B learned the grammatics of quoted speech using a description based on Halliday’s systemic functional grammar, taught in the context of a variety of oral and written texts across the genres of news reporting and narrative, and in games, readers’ theatre and independent writing activities. Grammatics lessons were, furthermore, integrated with programmed content studies such as a unit of work on the Olympics (as introduced in Chapter 5), and with children’s literature being read in class (some
aspects of which are the subject of Chapter 7). A summary of the teaching–learning activities is supplied in Appendix C (item C.1) and some discussion of these activities follows below in section 6.7.

6.4 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 ch. 5 and ch. 7 sub-section 7.5.1). As briefly introduced in Chapter 5, 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,\(^{90}\) 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 6.1,\(^{91}\) the first clause is a verbal clause and it projects the subsequent two clauses of quoted speech. The use of symbols in this example is indicative of those used with the Year 2 children: green lips for the ‘saying verb’ and a red box for the Sayer. 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 6.1 example.

\(^{90}\) Halliday uses ‘quoting’ for ‘direct’ speech and thought, and ‘reporting’ for ‘indirect’ speech and thoughts. For pedagogical purposes this is a helpful suggestion in a number of respects – a point taken up in sub-section 6.8.3 of the present chapter.

\(^{91}\) The example is a slight adaptation of a sentence from the picture book used for the oral reading tests: *The two monsters* (McKee, 1985).
Chapter 6: Learning the grammatics of quoted speech

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 quote marks as ‘inverted commas’ following their teacher’s practice, although alternative terms for this punctuation (speech marks, quote marks) were also used with the children.

6.5 Assessment of the punctuation of quoted speech

6.5.1 Methodology

Design and administration of punctuation tests

Identical pre- and post-tests of punctuation were administered (Appendix C, item C.2). The test consisted of four short passages which incorporated some quoted speech and 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 papers in order to ameliorate any potential interference from differences in reading ability. The test passages included five sections of quoted speech.
Scoring

Tests were scored specifically for the use of quote marks only, since the control of this punctuation was the focus of the study. This meant that the tests were not scored for the correctness or otherwise of any other forms of punctuation – including some of the punctuation relevant to quoted speech, such as a comma after a projecting clause which precedes a quotation. This decision was based on the observation that the correct placement of quote marks is logically prior to the placement of all other punctuation and capitalisation of quoted speech. If the quote marks are not in the right place, capitalisation and commas are not likely to be either. Therefore a focus on the placement of quote marks makes good sense as a starting point when teaching the punctuation of speech.92

The tests were scored using the following guidelines:

- A score was awarded out of ten, with one mark awarded for each correctly placed quote mark at either the beginning or end of each of the five sections of quoted speech. A maximum score was possible by correct placement of all five pairs of quote marks, but if only one quote mark from a pair was correctly placed then a score of one was still awarded.

- No marks were deducted for incorrectly placed quote marks.93

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92 Some children did indeed correctly place some of the commas which would have been needed in a full punctuation of quoted speech, although this was not necessarily in clear recognition of the presence of quotes. For example, on the pre-test 10 children placed a comma after ‘squealed’ in ‘Baby Bear squealed Somebody’s been sleeping in my bed’, however only 5 of these also attempted to use quote marks to indicate the direct speech, and one of the 10 children placed a comma after ‘Baby’ and ‘Bear’ as well, indicating a high degree of confusion.

93 In an earlier reported analysis of these punctuation tests, marks were deducted for incorrectly placed quote marks. The reasoning behind this was that children could conceivably be somewhat liberal and indiscriminate in their placement of quote marks and still score quite well if they used enough of them. Incorrectly placed quote marks were more common in the pre-test, and therefore this method of scoring yielded a higher mean improvement from the pre-test to the post-test, “with the mean result almost doubling” (French, 2010, p. 226). In fact the improvement, with one outlier’s scores excluded, was 91%. The method adopted in the present chapter yields a more conservative but nonetheless still substantial mean improvement from pre-test to post-test.
• Single or double quote marks were both considered acceptable.

• Quote marks which were in the ‘curly’ style (“ ”) were not considered incorrect even if they were facing the wrong way, or were otherwise not quite right (for example, some children drew the sets of quote marks as symmetrical images of one another: « »). That is, children were given the benefit of the doubt regarding the directionality of their quote marks. Usually the quote marks could be seen in context to be inclusive of a certain stretch of text whether their direction was correct or not.

Some analysis of errors was also undertaken, again focusing only on the punctuation of quoted speech and not other errors of punctuation.

### 6.5.2 Results

The following section reports on the results for 24 children who did both pre- and post-tests, out of the case study cohort of 27.\(^{94}\) The results are summarised in the discussion below and in Figures 6.2 and 6.3, and Tables 6.1 and 6.2. The scores are also provided as item C.3 in Appendix C.

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 quoted speech was the inclusion of the projecting clause within the speech marks (for example: “The teacher said 2B

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\(^{94}\) The results of one additional child have been excluded. This child was a recent immigrant to Australia and English was her second language (and a language in which she had no experience at all before immigrating). This child’s level of literacy in English was still very limited at the time of the study and so, while she was not excluded from sitting the test on the basis that she preferred to be included in what her peers were doing, it did not make sense to include her test results.
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. 23 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, representing an improvement of 53.6%. One child, Jamila, produced an anomalous or ‘outlier’ result 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Pre-test /10</th>
<th>Post-test /10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>7.04 (↑53.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>0 (n=8)</td>
<td>10 (n=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 very high score from pre-test to post-test. Furthermore, the error of including the projecting clause within the quote 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).

![Figure 6.3](image.png)

**Figure 6.3** Punctuation post-test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Pre-test /10</th>
<th>Post-test /10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>7.13 (↑64.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>0 (n=8)</td>
<td>10 (n=9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Comparison of punctuation test results with outlier excluded

In conclusion, these results indicate a strong positive effect on children’s ability to punctuate quoted speech following instruction in the grammatics of verbal Processes. The children improved in terms of (a) their recognition of the presence of
Chapter 6: Learning the grammatics of quoted speech

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 quote 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.

6.6 Assessment of expression in oral reading

6.6.1 Methodology

The sample

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.

Assessment material: selection of text

The text selected for the assessment of oral reading was a children’s picture book: The two monsters (McKee, 1985). The same story was read at R1 and R2. 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’.

This text was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, and most directly relevant to the focus of the research, it was selected because the story makes use of 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’.95

A second reason for this choice was that the book seemed likely to be suited to the young readers in Class 2B in a number of respects. These included the fact that the book tells a complete story in 429 words – a length anticipated to be not too tiring for young readers. Furthermore, the story’s illustrations evoke the anger (and, later, the joy) of the protagonists and therefore support the young reader to some extent in interpreting the text. This was considered important since a reasonable level of comprehension could be expected to be relevant to use of appropriate expression. The two monsters also seemed likely to be suited to the children’s interest, senses of humour and reading levels. The selection of a story of a roughly suitable reading level for Year 2 children (now in their sixth semester of schooling) was considered important because it was predicted that a text which is too difficult to read fluently will be very hard to deliver expressively. The extent to which this estimation of the book’s level of difficulty was a fair one is considered shortly in the results.

A third major reason for choosing a complete story in book form for the oral reading test was its ‘ecological validity’ (Cohen et al., 2007, pp. 138–139), in this case referring to its proximity to familiar and genuine classroom tasks. The Class 2B children were accustomed to reading aloud to an adult from complete books. Some formal tests of oral reading use shorter texts, with the text presented on a single page. For example, the Gray Oral Reading Test passage used in Schwanenflugel et al. (2004) is described as consisting of seven sentences, each presented on its own line and all on a single page. Such a test would have been quite foreign to these children and could potentially have made the oral reading tests more uncomfortable for the

95 The Processes which project quoted speech in the story are, in order: called, called, fumed, shouted, answered, called, howled, shouted, replied, shouted, screamed, said, gasped, giggled, chuckled.
children, thereby undermining their confidence to display the qualities of oral reading for which the test had been designed.

**Reading assessment conditions and instructions**

The children’s oral readings were audio recorded. For the pre-test, the children were invited to read to the researcher in a one-to-one situation, working at a desk in the entry vestibule of the classroom, with the door to the classroom open and the rest of the class at work. This was a usual practice in the class (and indeed the wider school), with both learning support staff and parent volunteers being frequent visitors to junior classrooms and with the children very used to reading to these adults. For the post-test, which was conducted in the last days of the school year when classrooms are somewhat chaotic and in the throes of clean-up activities, most of the readings were done in the school library in order to avoid the anticipated series of interruptions which might otherwise affect the recordings.

The reading session was designed to be imitative of school-based oral reading interactions with which the children were already familiar and therefore it did not have the formal character of a strict test. To begin the session, the researcher read the title of the book for the children and then invited the children to look through the book to see what it was about. Children were also encouraged to read the book silently if they chose to do so before being audio-recorded reading it aloud. The purpose of this book orientation period was to facilitate fluent reading by ensuring the children understood the story to some extent. That is, they were set up with a degree of comprehension prior to beginning their oral reading. The illustrations in this book provide a good sense of the basic plot and therefore provide support for reading with understanding. In addition, the opportunity to look through the printed text of the story offered the children the possibility of silently working out some
potentially difficult words before having to read them aloud. During this silent reading time the children were permitted to ask the researcher how to say any words they didn’t know, although this offer was not taken up to any great extent.

The children were next asked to read the book while their reading was audio recorded, with the instruction: “When you read it out loud, I’d like you to use good expression.” This instruction was then followed by a clarificatory question to make sure the children understood what was being asked of them, such as: “What does that mean, when I say ‘good expression’?”

During the assessment of oral reading, and following usual practice at the school, the children were encouraged both to do their best at reading independently and also to feel free to appeal to the adult listener if they were having difficulty. Thus the researcher used the following strategies in listening to the children read: waiting for a child to attempt a word; suggesting ‘try that again’ if the sense seemed to have been lost; telling the word to the child if it was proving too hard to work out and hence interrupting the sense of the story; answering questions if children asked them. In summary, the children were expected and encouraged to do the reading work themselves, but were supported by the researcher as needed in order to maintain a meaningful experience of the text.

**Interviews**

In addition to reading aloud, the children were interviewed about how they knew what expression to use in their reading. Interviews were conducted at both R1 and R2, and took the form of a semi-structured interview which followed their reading of *The two monsters*. The children were asked to explain the cues they used when deciding what expression to put in their voices. For example:

Researcher: How did you know what expression to use?
David: By reading the book.
Researcher: What, what, what told you? When you were reading it, what told you how to use your voice?

(Class 2B, August 24)

These interviews were conducted as a complement to the assessment of oral reading and were designed to provide insight into the children’s level of self-awareness or metacognition about ‘reading with expression’.

**Scoring the oral readings**

The oral readings were scored in two main areas: (a) accuracy and (b) prosodic features. Reading accuracy is a more well-established area of reading measurement and will be considered first in the discussion below. Reading prosody is a less well-defined area of measurement, in part because it involves aesthetic considerations and hence more challenges for making evaluative judgements. The current study focused on two main aspects of prosody: fluency and expression. A justification for how these were scored will be presented in the following discussion.

(a) Scoring accuracy

**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. Children may also attempt a word more than once or reread a section without penalty to their accuracy scores. 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 following formula:

\[
\text{Self-correction rate calculation} = \frac{\text{Number of self-corrections plus uncorrected miscues ('errors')} + \text{Number of self-corrections}}{\text{Number of self-corrections}}
\]

The self-correction rate is regarded in Reading Recovery as an index of the degree to which readers monitor their own efforts. A score of 1:1 would mean a child self-corrected all miscues (and would also therefore have an accuracy score of 100%), whereas 1:2 would mean only half the miscues were self-corrected. The self-correction ratios are included in the results below as a component of reading accuracy, providing more information about each child’s degree of independence in problem solving in text reading.

**(b) Scoring of prosodic features**

Reading ‘prosody’ refers to the expressive features of reading aloud:

> When a child is reading prosodically, oral reading sounds much like speech with appropriate phrasing, pause structures, stress, rise and fall patterns, and general expressiveness. (Schwanenflugel et al., 2004, p. 119)

The measurement of reading ‘prosody’ is not necessarily a straightforward matter. Common measurements of prosody have included: measuring fluency in terms of ‘correct words per minute’; measuring lengths of pauses (at ends of sentences and phrases, as well as pauses in places which are not appropriate for a fluent reading); and assessing whether appropriate end-of-sentence tones have been used, such as a falling tone for the last syllable of declarative sentences and a rising tone for questions (particularly Yes/No questions, in which the typical final rise is more pronounced than in ‘Wh’ questions). Some of these features can today be measured ‘directly’ using audio spectrography, with pitch of voice measured by the frequency
Chapter 6: Learning the grammatics of quoted speech

of sound waves on a graph of sound (‘spectrogram’), volume indicated by the amplitude of waves, and pauses visible as gaps in the charted soundwaves (Schwanenflugel et al., 2004).

Some of these measures of reading prosody were not well-suited to the focus and design of the present study, that is, the dramatic reading of a children’s picture book. For example, the measuring of pauses between sentences (intersentential pauses) is only valid if an entire passage of text appears on a single page, such as in some published oral reading tests. Principled reasons for not using a text presented in this fashion have already been detailed above. In the case of the picture book text used for the present research, the time taken to turn pages and take in the pictures would ‘corrupt’ a typical measure of intersentential pauses.96

Other measures had potential validity but were not of clear relevance to the specific question being addressed in the present study. The measuring of intrasentential pauses, for example, can be used to establish whether an oral reading is phrased in a fluent manner. However it was not obvious how much these measures would contribute to a description of an improvement in dramatic, expressive reading of quoted speech. One could imagine a fluent but fairly monotonous reading of a story and a different, dramatic reading of the same story which both used similar

96 There are of course other issues raised by the measurement of intersentential pauses. One of these is the question of what constitutes a suitable length of pause. For the present study, the length of time taken to turn a page and begin reading the next one was in fact measured for the R2 readings. (This was done in rough terms only, that is, in seconds rather than milliseconds, for the purposes of determining the best measure of reading fluency). While this information was not in the end considered to be particularly relevant for the purposes of the present study, it is interesting to note that long intersentential pauses when page turning were not necessarily a bad thing. For example, on one occasion a child took a full six seconds between pages, and then read the next section of text with great fluency and dramatic flourish. It seemed that she was preparing for reading aloud by first reading at least some of the text silently and gathering it together in her mind. This indicates that even comparatively long pauses between sentences may sometimes be functional for producing high quality prosodic reading.

Very mundane but normal events can also corrupt measures of pauses. In the present study, one child had a slight cold at R2 and consistently sniffed between pages, taking just a little longer to begin reading the next sentence than would otherwise have been the case.
pauses for phrasing. Ultimately intrasentential pauses were incorporated into the assessment, but as part of a set of global descriptors of reading expression (to be explained below) rather than as isolated counts in milliseconds which would still need to be integrated with other measures for them to be meaningful.

One widely acknowledged measure of prosody was however adopted in the present study: the measurement of fluency by calculating the number of words read correctly per minute. Yet even this apparently simple measure was not entirely a matter of a straightforward calculation. Measures of ‘correct words per minute’ (‘cwpm’) may be calculated in different ways. For example, they may be worked out as an average over a whole text, or a simpler method often recommended to teachers is to count the number of correct words during the first minute only of an oral reading (thus doing away with the need for any division calculations). As a further complication, it is often left unstated whether the time taken to turn pages should be included or not when calculating the ‘cwpm’. For the present study, the fluency rate was calculated over the whole text of 429 words, with the number of errors subtracted from the total words read, and then the number of correctly read words divided by the total time taken to read the text, including page turning.97

The measurement of dramatic expression was the most challenging aspect of analysing the children’s oral readings, being the dimension most open to the

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97 Other ways of measuring fluency were also trialled and are mentioned here in brief.

(i) The method of only using the first minute of reading gave better results across the board for fluency, largely because the introductory section of the story had fewer words with which the children struggled than did later parts of the book.

(ii) The issue of the influence of page turning time on the calculation of ‘cwpm’ was also examined, using the R2 data as a trial sample. The method of subtracting page turning time yielded better fluency scores for all children (of course), but these were found to be proportional to the scores which included the page turning time. Given the extra effort needed for these calculations it was not considered necessary to use this method, nor would it be desirable to recommend such a complex method to practising teachers.

Thus the measure of ‘cwpm’ reported in this chapter, which covers the entirety of the text and which includes page turning time, is the most conservative measure of fluency. It is also a method which could easily be used by a classroom teacher equipped with a basic calculator.
children’s creative, aesthetic interpretation. However the focus and design of this specific study suggested a strategic solution to the problem. Since the study set out 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 *The two monsters* into 32 meaningful prosodic sections, generally one or two sentences long. The children’s recorded readings\(^98\) were listened to section by section (and repeatedly\(^99\)) using side-by-side audio players in a double tape deck unit attached to the same set of quality speakers. A score was 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). Half marks were used where the change from R1 to R2 fell between descriptors (for example, more than ‘slightly’ but less than ‘considerably’).

On a very few occasions a section of text was not scored; seven sections were not scored out of a total of 128 across the readings of the four students. This decision was made for number of reasons, all of which had to do with whether it was valid to compare the expression used in R1 with that in R2. These reasons were: the reading of a section at R1 (and in one case also at R2) was very disrupted by errors, thus making any comparison of expression with R2 invalid (5 instances); the reading was

\(^{98}\) The recordings of the readings at both R1 and R2 were done on the same high quality audio recorder.

\(^{99}\) The researcher was the single rater for the present analysis, however the practice of listening to each section of oral reading *repeatedly* contributed to making the scoring reliable. A similar method of one rater “listening ... over and over again” has been used, for example, by well-regarded researcher Katharine Perera for a study in which the oral reading of six children was followed at three-month intervals over three years (Perera, 1996, p. 138).
interrupted by ambient noise and activity (1 instance); a part of the text read expressively at R2 had been omitted at R1 (1 instance).

The rubric for the scoring of changes in expression from R1 to R2 is included below as Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Rubric for scoring dramatic expression in oral reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>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 a stretch of text greater in length than a single phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-1</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>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 a stretch of text greater in length than a single phrase.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This rubric integrates a number of different elements of reading prosody identified as important in the literature, such as pitch, volume and pausing. It also implicitly addresses the prosody of sentence endings in its references to punctuation (such as “pitch varied ... consistent with ... punctuation”). The rubric incorporates these elements into global descriptors rather than separating them into individual scores for pitch contour, volume and so on. The notion of appropriate expression is maintained throughout the rubric, so that the criteria relate the global impression of expressiveness to the meaning of the text. The descriptors thus avoid rewarding
variations in pitch, volume and pausing which detract from a meaningful rendition of the text. It is possible to imagine, for example, an unsuitably melodramatic oral reading where sound contours do indeed vary noticeably but not in ways which help to convey the meaning of the text or where ‘emPHAsis’ does not fall in appropriate places.

There are merits and limitations to this method. On one hand it is economical in terms of technology (not requiring spectrographic analysis and the attendant equipment, software and technical expertise) and potentially more economical in terms of time (note however that in the large study using spectrographic analysis conducted by Schwanenflugel and colleagues, a very short and simple text was set for the oral reading – so costs in one area were offset by savings in another). The rubric used in this study also had the benefit of being able to be applied to audio data collected in the naturalistic setting of a desk just outside the open classroom door (as was the case at R1), whereas audio data for spectrographic analysis are ideally collected in a very quiet space, potentially creating for children a tense ‘test’ situation which might be counterproductive for expressive reading.

It may be argued that the use of the rubric descriptors in Table 6.3 produces a more impressionistic or subjective score than would ‘direct’ measurement of these elements using audiospectrography, with objective measures of sound wave frequency and amplitude, for example. However the interpretation of ‘direct’ data also involves judgments, such as how long a pause may be before it is ‘too’ long, and pitch and volume however measured still need to be judged as to degree of appropriateness to text meaning. Schwanenflugel and colleagues did this by developing a ‘standard’ oral reading profile for their seven sentence text, derived from competent adult readers. It is hard to see how this method could be used to
produce a ‘standard’ reading of a longer, interesting and dramatic story like *The two monsters*. One of the joys of reading stories aloud (and listening to them) is the scope they provide for the reader to be creative in the use of expression while still making choices in use of voice which are consistent with the meanings of the story. For example, a reader will sometimes adopt different speaking voices for different characters. Competent readers will read dramatic stories in different but still successful ways. For this reason it is difficult to see how a story like *The two monsters* could have a ‘standard’ oral reading spectrogram against which other readings could be compared.

### 6.6.2 Results

Table 6.4 summarises the children’s scores on the measures of oral reading discussed above, namely: accuracy (%) and the self-correction rate (1:x); fluency (correct words per minute including page turning time); and expression (a score of the comparative degree to which each child’s expression differed in R2 from R1). A summary of the expression analysis showing the scores awarded for each prosodic section is provided in Appendix C (item C.4). In the following discussion the focus is on the results for reading with expression, but these are interpreted in light of the results for reading accuracy and fluency.

From the sample of four children, only Karin made significant overall improvement in her oral reading expression from R1 to R2, although David also made some improvement. Karin’s score of +1.1129 indicates that on average her R2 reading was at least “[s]lightly more ... dramatic” than her R1 reading, to use the terms of the scoring rubric. Karin in fact 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.

**Table 6.4** Oral reading results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD’S NAME</th>
<th>MEASURES OF ORAL READING</th>
<th>Accuracy %* (correct words/total words)</th>
<th>Fluency* (correct words per minute)</th>
<th>Expression Mean difference between R1 and R2. Possible range: -2.0 to +2.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R1</td>
<td>R2</td>
<td>R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karin</td>
<td></td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>110.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 : 4.3</td>
<td>1 : 3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td></td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>98.6%</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 : 7.0</td>
<td>1 : 7.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shani</td>
<td></td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 : 4.8</td>
<td>1 : 2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toula</td>
<td></td>
<td>91.8%</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 : 9.8</td>
<td>1 : 4.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Results rounded to nearest tenth decimal.

David also made an improvement in expressive reading but of a smaller degree (+0.2813). At R2 he read more expressively in seven sections out of thirty-two, but used the same degree of expression as at R1 in the remainder. Three of these seven improved sections involved the rendering of quoted speech. For example, at R2 he used increased volume to deliver the quoted speech in the following excerpt:

He shouted through the hole, “Wake up, you numskull, night is leaving.” (McKee, 1985, p. 10)

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).
It is noteworthy that Karin, the child whose reading expression was most improved at R2, was also the most fluent reader and she read the text at a high level of accuracy. This observation 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 et al., 2004). Certainly it seems from these results that Karin’s high level of automaticity in ‘recognition literacy’ (Hasan, 1996/2011a, p. 178; 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 for them to read would have allowed these children more scope to attend to using expression.

These data about the children’s oral reading performances were augmented with interviews conducted with them following their readings. In these interviews, the children were asked to identify the kinds of cues they consciously 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 6.5.

100 This argument is often couched in terms of whether ‘decoding’ is necessarily prior to comprehension, and comprehension prior to prosodic reading. Such discussions are sometimes understood to uphold a model of reading in which phonological aspects of reading are foregrounded as ‘basic’ to all other aspects, with the pedagogical implication that they should therefore be taught first and discretely, to the virtual exclusion of other aspects of reading practice in the early school years. What is often not acknowledged in this kind of model is the possibility that non-fluent, ‘word-by-word’ reading may in fact be a product of the methods of instruction rather than a ‘natural’ stage through which readers necessarily pass on their way to more fluent reading. Such models of reading tend to be motivated by individualistic theories of development rather than seeing consciousness as the product of a dialectic, in a Vygotskyan–Hallidayan sense, between the social and the individual. The present study adopts a different model of reading, in which expressive reading is seen as inclusive of comprehension and ‘code breaking’ (Freebody & Luke, 1990) rather than as a later development to be added on to successful decoding (see also Unsworth, 2002a, pp. 70–71). In educational practice, this implies teaching for fluent, expressive reading of meaningful text from the earliest days of instruction.
Table 6.5  Results of interviews about reading with expression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue system</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(&quot;How did you know how to read it with good expression?&quot;)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot – events</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexis with negative interpersonal meanings ¹⁰¹</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphological features</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. font size, exclamation marks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal processes</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-text experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. drama class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of insights into the children’s thinking can be drawn from these results. In relation to the specific question of this chapter, 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?

¹⁰¹ This category includes words or phrases which the children identified as “being really mean and teasing” (Toula, R2 interview, December 14), such as name-calling (“numskull”) and characters’ negative evaluations of the other’s actions (“rotten shot”, “hopeless”).
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.

(Class 2B, August 23)

If Toula is attending to the word ‘shouted’, she is not at a point where she is able consciously to 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.

(Class 2B, December 14)

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.
In summary, 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 previously seen 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.

### 6.7 Teaching and learning the grammatics of verbal Processes: lessons and reflections

The above results provide evidence of some significant benefits for children’s progress in literate practices which followed from learning the grammatics of verbal Processes. Thus far, however, the discussion has focused only upon the beginning and end points of the ‘slice’ of data in which these benefits were observed, merely hinting at the teaching and learning which occupied the space between these points. The following section therefore provides a description of, and some reflections upon, a selection of the teaching and learning experiences through which the children’s knowledge of verbal Processes was developed. The following discussion focuses on a rationale for the teaching of verbal Processes as a subsequent concept to material Processes, and then proceeds to recount select classroom activities and evaluate their
pedagogical design.

6.7.1 Rationale

The Class 2B children learned about verbal Processes after first learning about material Processes. Their introduction to ‘action verbs’ was discussed in Chapter 5, and verbal Processes or ‘saying verbs’ were the immediately subsequent type of Process to be introduced to the children. The rationale for teaching verbal Processes after material Processes was based on both pedagogical and linguistic grounds, including: the contrast verbal Processes provide to material Processes; the degree of abstraction (or ‘distance from the concrete’) of verbal Processes; and the potential benefits of instruction in verbal Processes for meeting the demands of the designated curriculum.

Firstly, and in terms of both pedagogical and linguistic reasoning, verbal Processes present a strong contrast with material Processes. Verbal Processes can project speech whereas material Processes cannot – a difference which is grammatical and also quite stark, and so more easily discerned by young learners.¹⁰² Not all Process types are so easily distinguished from material Processes, particularly behavioural Processes, which sit between material Processes and mental Processes on a continuum (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 255; see also Figure 5.6, this thesis) and which would therefore be better taught at a later point when knowledge of some more obviously different Process categories was secure. Verbal Processes

¹⁰² Vygotsky concurred with the observations of Claparède (a Swiss psychologist of 1873–1940) that “conscious awareness of similarity appears later in the child than conscious awareness of difference” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 183). Vygotsky proposed that this is because “conscious awareness of relationships of similarity requires a more complex structure of abstractions and concepts than the conscious awareness of relationships of difference” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 184) – an explanation which forms part of Vygotsky’s broader argument about the development of ‘scientific’ concepts. It follows that Process types more obviously different from one another are likely to be more accessible to young learners as entry concepts than Processes which are less obviously different because of the relatively lower level of abstract understanding required to grasp difference.
Chapter 6: Learning the grammatics of quoted speech

are indeed quite a distinctive set. It is true that the set of verbal Processes, like all Process types, has permeable boundaries, but these boundaries were not expected to present problems for the Year 2 children in the case study. At one boundary verbal Processes shade into relational Processes with verbs like ‘imply’, ‘indicate’ and ‘suggest’ (Halliday, 1994, p. 142). But these very symbolic-type verbal Processes do not commonly occur in the reading matter of Year 2 children, and it was therefore anticipated that this ‘tricky’ area of the grammar would not need to be addressed with these young children. On another boundary, verbs normally found as behavioural Processes can be co-opted to function as verbal Processes projecting quoted speech, such as ‘sniffed’ and ‘gasped’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 252). Importantly, however, this can only happen with quoted speech; you would not normally use them in reported speech (for example: ‘The monster gasped that the day was leaving’ is not generally acceptable). In the context of the Year 2 children’s work on quoted speech, this shading of behavioural-type verbs into verbal Processes was therefore not anticipated to present any confusion; the presence of quoted speech indicates the verb to be a ‘saying verb’ without need for further explanation (‘The monster gasped, “Day is leaving.”’). Furthermore, since the children had not been taught about behavioural Processes at this point, no misunderstanding was to be expected.103

A further reason to introduce ‘saying verbs’ after ‘action verbs’ is that they are somewhat less concrete than material Processes but are not highly abstract, especially in their role of projecting quoted speech. In the ‘degrees of abstraction’ terms introduced in Chapter 5, verbal Processes can be described as being of a lesser

103 This issue did in fact arise when the class was reading the picture book _Pumpkin soup_ (Cooper, 1998) and proved unproblematic. Item C.9 in Appendix C provides the relevant transcript excerpt in which the class teacher sums up the discussion of possible functions of the word ‘sniffed’ thus: “[T]his way it’s used as a saying verb.”
degree of abstraction than, for example, mental Processes, in that they can be physically sensed and demonstrated. They are, however, slightly more abstract than material Processes, in that they are used to represent experience at a second order level. Whereas material Processes are typically used to tell about what happened, verbal Processes are used to tell that someone is telling what happened. For example, compare the following sentences:

(1) I played parachute games at school camp.

(2) Frank said, “I played parachute games at school camp.”

The first example could be spoken directly to a listener about an event experienced by the speaker. In the second example, the projecting clause ‘Frank said’ makes it clear that the quoted speech which follows is a step removed from the speaker’s own experience. In Halliday’s terms, ‘Frank said’ “represents an ordinary phenomenon of experience”, whereas the quote of what he said “represents a second-order phenomenon” (Halliday, 1994, p. 252). The examples therefore indicate degrees of separation from the concrete, with quoted speech potentially just one step removed from actual events.

These grammatical considerations feed into pedagogical applications. For example, verbal Processes are amenable to being audibly observed and acted out in dramatic play – unlike the grammatically similar mental Processes of cognition, which *do* project other clauses but are not strictly observable (we may infer someone is thinking from observed activity, but we cannot see or hear them thinking). As the Class 2B children were already accustomed to ‘action verbs’ being processes which could be acted out, the idea of teaching ‘saying verbs’ through dramatic verbal play and invention made sense in a pedagogical sequence.

A further and final reason for teaching about verbal Processes relates to the literate practices into which these Year 2 children were expected to be developing.
According to the state English syllabus, the children were expected to be at least “experiment[ing] with... quotation marks” in writing (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 38), and to be able to identify saying verbs and quote marks when reading (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 34). These demands of the designated curriculum were thus being directly addressed in the teaching and learning about verbal Processes.

6.7.2 Some teaching–learning activities and reflections on pedagogical design

The main teaching–learning experiences through which the Class 2B children learned about verbal Processes are examined in this section. Of considerable significance was the introductory lesson on ‘saying verbs’, while further learning and consolidation occurred through two main types of activity: reading activities and a writing task.

Introductory lesson

It was argued in Chapter 5 that the manner in which concepts are taught shapes the way they are then understood by learners. To this we might also add the observation that lessons which introduce new material provide in condensed form a useful insight into how that material is understood by the teacher and how she/he intends it to be understood by students. This is both a valid reflection on the lessons discussed in Chapter 5 and a relevant point for the following discussion, in which Class 2B’s first lesson in the grammatics of verbal Processes is explained in some detail. Particular attention is given to: the preparation of text for the lesson; a description of the main teaching moves taken in the lesson, exemplified using transcript excerpts; and evaluative observations which follow from the transcript data.

Preparation for this introductory lesson on verbal Processes involved the selection of print media articles about Olympic sportspeople. The selection of the
Olympics as a focus of study was made by the class teacher prior to the planning for teaching grammatics, and hence the latter was designed to fit in with the former. The researcher located media reports about Olympians which would be of interest to the children and which were within their reading ability and comprehension given guidance from the teacher (there was some need to explain the occasional use of metaphor or unfamiliar vocabulary). These reports were prepared for classroom use by being typed up in larger font and enlarged on chart paper for ‘shared reading’ (in which the teacher or researcher would read aloud from the text while the children followed or possibly joined in).

The transcript of the introductory lesson on saying verbs is included in Appendix C (item C.5). In broad terms, this lesson involved the researcher reading aloud from a print media article about Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe (an excerpt from D. Williams, 2000) and then inviting the children to identify features of the text “that give us a hint that someone is talking”. The researcher began this process by inviting the children to locate “who said all that”, that is, to identify the Sayer, although this term was introduced after the use of definitions framed in more everyday language. In the following transcript example, the researcher has just read the following news magazine excerpt:

“He marries grace with power,” says 1988 Olympic 200m champion Duncan Armstrong. “He caresses the water, but when it’s time to be brutal he’s like a raging bull.” (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81)

__________

Researcher: Now, who said all that about Ian Thorpe? It’s quite nice things to say about him. … Were you reading it? Did you spot who said it?

Children: Yes. Yes.

Researcher: Who was it, Lauren?

Lauren: Um, I think it was, um, Duncan Armstrong.
Chapter 6: Learning the grammatics of quoted speech

Researcher: Exactly right! I might just put a little bit of a red box around his name so that we can spot who said it. And, um … I’m going to point out something in–, in fact– In this bit of writing, it says that the person who said it was ‘1988 Olympic 200m champion Duncan Armstrong’. All of that is telling us who said it. So we could even put that all together, and say that’s the person who’s saying it. All of that! … But especially it’s Duncan Armstrong, ’cause that’s his name there … [Marks the text, using a red marker to enclose the Sayer].

(Class 2B, October 10)

As well as building towards a concept of Sayer using an everyday-type gloss (“who said it”), it is valuable to note here another important pedagogic point – that this early teaching is also setting up accurate longer term understandings. The children are encouraged to attend to “all of that”, referring to the entire nominal group constituting the Sayer. This draws attention to a meaningful ‘chunk’ of words which are acting in a single functional role. The functional approach adopted here contrasts with traditional school grammar approaches which typically foreground individual words over word group functions, and which typically teach each part of speech before looking at how they might combine in word groups. By focusing the attention of these beginners on word groups and their ‘jobs’, the children are oriented to a functional view of language. The teaching also positively disposes the children towards potential future lessons in the structure of the nominal group. The researcher is here drawing on a framework in which the greater system of language is held in mind even when the teaching focus is on only part of that system.

Later in the lesson the term ‘Sayer’ was in fact introduced, again by drawing upon an everyday description but this time using the everyday gloss in parallel with the technical metalanguage:

Researcher: And, and who did the saying? Who was the Sayer?
Returning to the first part of the lesson, the children next identified punctuation as a way of locating speech or quotes in text:

Researcher: Anybody spot any other words that give us a hint that someone is talking? … Frank?
Frank: I can’t see it but maybe there’s punctuation there? That makes him say it.
Researcher: Come out and have a look.
Frank: Which means he’s saying it.
Researcher: It is hard to see from where you’re sitting. Can you see any punctuation that says that someone’s saying it?
Frank: Yes.
Researcher: Point it out to me.
Frank: Right there.
Researcher: Yeah.
Frank: And right there.
... [Frank locates a further example.]
Researcher: Well done. Do you know what that punctuation’s called?
... ['Speech marks’ are mentioned by the researcher. The teacher asks if the children “remember what we learnt about in Term 1?”]
Child: Um, inverted commas.

It was only after locating ‘who said it’ and identifying the inverted commas that the children finally pointed out the presence of verbal Processes:

Researcher: Anything else that tells you that someone’s talking? I think there’s one more, but you might be able to think of others. Hilary? You’ve been waiting very patiently.
Hilary: Um, there’s a ‘says’ after ‘power’ in the punctuation, after the ‘power’ and the punctuation.
Researcher: Fantastic. Good spotting! It’s a little tiny word tucked in there, isn’t it? That says ‘says’. I’m going to put a shape around it – I wonder if you can see what this shape is. [Draws green ‘lips’ shape around ‘says’.]

The lesson then proceeded with the researcher and children jointly reading the text and continuing to identify Sayers, quotes in inverted commas, and “words like ‘says’ that are telling us that someone is talking”, the last of which were all enclosed within a green lips-shaped symbol. In the following transcript excerpt, the children’s
attention is drawn to the words marked with green lips as a group (or, later, 
“family”) and the term ‘saying verb’ is introduced. The children then enthusiastically 
suggest more examples of saying verbs.

Researcher: Well, let’s have a look at those words. We’ve got ‘says’ and ‘told’ and ‘replied’. Last week we were thinking about action verbs. They’re things you can do. Actions you can make with your body. These are all verbs, but they’re –

Child: – not –

Researcher: – saying verbs. They’re the words that we use when we say someone said something, or told something, or replied. Can you think of any others? … [Suggesting examples:] ‘Ms Baker said’, um, ‘I replied’ – I bet you could think of quite a few more. … Deborah, can you think of one?

Deborah: ‘Tells’?

Researcher: Yes.

Teacher: Well done.

Researcher: [Scribing a list:] I’ve got ‘reply’ here … and ‘say’. What else? Frank’s got an idea.

Frank: ‘Ask’?

Teacher: Oh! Excellent!

Researcher: Fantastic. [Scribes suggestion.] Pass it to Leah, please [unclear].

Leah: They ‘sayed’?

Researcher: ‘Said’? So that goes with ‘say’, doesn’t it?

Leah: Yeah.

Researcher: Yeah. That’s right. [Scribes.] Those two belong to the same word family. They [unclear] the same. Matthew?

Matthew: ‘Apologise’?

Teacher: Oh! Brilliant!

Taken together, the above series of excerpts from the lesson transcript prompt several observations about the children’s knowledge and about pedagogy. Firstly, in terms of the children’s prior knowledge of quoted speech, the transcript material demonstrates that even though the children had learned something about ‘inverted commas’ in Term 1 (it was now early in Term 4), they did not have an holistic understanding of quoted speech. It was only after finding ‘who said it’ and the
relevant punctuation for quotes that a child finally pointed out the word ‘says’ – the word which in fact operationalises the entire business of quoting by projecting the quote and necessitating a Sayer. The children’s somewhat piecemeal understanding at the outset accords with the findings of Hall (above, sub-section 6.2.1) that children often do not have a thorough or reasoned grasp of how quoted speech works. Just such a reasoned explanation is what is offered by a systemic functional description of quoted speech. The introductory lesson in saying verbs recounted above was therefore well-designed in so far as it allowed for children’s initial understandings to be drawn out and subsequently built upon and improved.

A further and related observation on the lesson’s design and progression is the clear influence of Vygotskian theory on pedagogy. The children were supported in moving from their ‘known’ (such as ‘inverted commas’ and their recently prior work on ‘action verbs’) to the ‘new’ (the grammatics of quoted speech); the lesson thus operates to create and sustain a zone of proximal development. This can be seen in the way the researcher used examples in context and definitions initially framed in fairly everyday language to draw out children’s understandings of the features of quoted speech in written text, and then built on these everyday observations to introduce more technical or ‘linguistic’ definitions. The specific grammatical terms introduced were ‘Sayer’ (“who said it”, in everyday terms) and ‘saying verb’ (“the words that we use when we say someone said something” – compared and contrasted with the already familiar term ‘action verb’). As well as moving the children from the known to the new, there is also a move from everyday understandings to more ‘scientific’ knowledge – a concept to which the discussion will return in section 6.8.
Verbal Processes and reading activities

In lessons subsequent to the introduction of the grammatics of verbal Processes, children consolidated their knowledge through several reading activities. One such activity involved the shared reading of a text which would then be reread and the verbal Processes in the text located with the children’s help. The texts used with the children for these shared reading activities included more articles about the Olympics and the picture story books *Pumpkin soup* (Cooper, 1998), *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* (Fox, 1984) and *Is it true, Grandfather?* (Lohse, 1993). Additional, relevant activities undertaken with these texts included readers’ theatre of an excerpt and ‘comprehension’ work in which children reread a text to work out which Sayers were responsible for selected quotes. In the case of *Pumpkin soup*, the children also considered the role of verbal Processes in shaping the narrative (this teaching–learning sequence is the subject of Chapter 7).

A further reading activity was a ‘Saying Verbs Game’ which consisted of red Sayer cards and green ‘saying verb’ cards on which the verb was enclosed in a lips shape. The researcher devised the first of these game cards and then the children invented more of their own (some examples are provided as Appendix C item C.6). The game was played by children selecting a Sayer card and a verbal Process card and then making up a quote to go with them. This was often a source of hilarity as well as a valuable way of consolidating the terms Sayer and ‘saying verb’, building vocabulary, and developing recognition literacy of the words on the cards. In the following example, the student has picked up ‘Mr Hills’ for the Sayer (he was one of the Assistant Principals in the school) and ‘chanted’ for her saying verb. Ms Baker is

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104 The game followed the design of one originally devised by a Year 1 teacher in collaboration with researcher Dr Joan Rothery in a case study class which was part of the ‘Children’s Development of Knowledge About Language Project’ led by Geoff Williams, then at the University of Sydney (for brief description, see also French, 2010, p. 225).
the class’s teacher.

Liz: Mr Hills said– No– Mr Hills … [Child doesn’t know next word–]
Researcher: – chanted.
Liz: – chanted, “Ms Baker, you’re going to be on detention for a week.”
Teacher: [Mock horror:] ṭOh, no!
Children: ḌOh!
Researcher: I wonder what Ms Baker did. Was she ṭout of bounds, was she?
Teacher: I was really naughty!
All: [Laughter.]

(Class 2B, October 19)

An important point to be made about this game is that it was not designed as a way of making otherwise dull grammar lessons ‘fun’, although fun was certainly had. Its point is not primarily to improve motivation to learn grammar. Rather, the game consistently consolidates emergent grammatical understandings by structuring the children’s attention on Sayers, saying verbs and the need to provide a suitable quote to create a meaningful utterance. The use of consistent colours to mediate understanding plays a role in this, such as green for verbs (just as was used to introduce ‘action verbs’ in earlier lessons) and the use of the lips shape to consolidate the idea that in this game the verbs are saying verbs. The game consolidates grammatical knowledge using considered forms of semiotic mediation. It does this at the same time as maintaining playfulness and creativity, even allowing for subversive invention (such as suggesting your teacher deserves to go on detention!). This is play, but play of a ‘serious’ kind, in which the children are experimenting with language while simultaneously building their understanding of grammatical functions.

In Class 2B this game also provided several points of access for incidental teaching. For example, in the following transcript excerpt the researcher points out
how the ordering of Sayer and verbal Process may be varied:\(^{105}\)

Researcher: Do you know what you can do? You can say what they said first, and then put the saying verb and then the Sayer. You can either have ‘Ms Baker whispered’ for this one, or you can have [very softly – pretend speech:] ‘*“Da dee da dee da,”* [louder:] whispered Ms Baker.’

Lauren: Yup.

Researcher: So which way do you want to put it around, Lauren?

Lauren: ‘*[Inaudible]*,’ whispered Ms Baker.

Researcher: Oh! Do it again so that it comes out on the tape.

Lauren: ‘*[Stage whisper:]* “Silence!” *[Normal voice:]* whispered Ms Baker.

Child: (That was a) good one.

(Class 2B, October 19)

In this next example, Rosemary is encouraged to use more appropriate expression in her voice as suggested by the saying verb. This is the kind of teaching–learning which, it is here argued, contributed to raising the children’s awareness of strategies for expressive oral reading as reported above in section 6.6.

Researcher: [Laughs.] Oh – this is a funny one. [Referring to Sayer and saying verb cards Rosemary has selected.]

Rosemary: [Thinks about what she will say. 10 seconds.]

The tooth fairy shouted, ‘*No money for you!*’

Researcher and children: [Laughter.]

Child: Til Christmas.

Researcher: Now, have another go and see if you can do it with a shouting voice, Rosemary, ‘cause when it says ‘shouted’ you can do it with the right sort of voice to match the saying verb.

Rosemary: OK… I might do it different this time.

Researcher: Oh, you’re going to do a different one?

Rosemary: \(^{106}\)Yep.

Researcher: Oh, so creative!

Rosemary: [Thinks for 7 seconds.]

\(^{105}\) It is possible to place the Sayer and verbal Process in either order whether before or after quoted speech and the forms demonstrated to the children in the transcript are what I would argue to be the typical or ‘unmarked’ forms. While I am not aware of any systemic linguistic evidence to confirm this observation, Perera (1996) finds in a study of early reading books that it is more common for projecting clauses to be located at the end of, or included within, some quoted speech, and that “in those positions, inverted verb–subject clauses are more frequent than subject–verb ones” (p. 132). The following ‘marked’ alternative is especially literary: *Whispered Ms Baker, “Silence!”*
The tooth fairy shouted, [much louder:] “Wake up! I’ve got your money here!”

All: [Laughter.]

Teacher: The tooth fairy never did that to me!

(Class 2B, October 19)

So the Saying Verbs Game performed a number of functions in the English teaching–learning program in this class. Its primary motivation in terms of pedagogical purpose was as a vehicle for consolidation of new grammatical concepts through meaningful practice and through the consistent use of colour and shape to mediate conceptual development. In addition however the game also helped to develop children’s recognition literacy by extending their vocabularies and providing some practice in reading specific words. The Saying Verbs Game also promoted the use of a confident, clear speaking voice in oral presentation to a group. As a bonus but not inconsequentially, the game was furthermore encouraging of playful and inventive use of language, with opportunities for children to draw on what they knew about normal discourse and then potentially to subvert expectations by creating humorous examples of unlikely quotes.

**Verbal Processes in a writing task**

The children in Class 2B were also involved in one focused writing activity in which they were actively encouraged to use quotes and quote marks. This writing task is outlined below, followed by some observations on learning based on the children’s work samples.

The writing task was to create a report like the news articles the children had been reading about Olympic sportspeople. As the children had now moved on to learning about the Paralympics, the focus of the report would be the Australian Paralympic swimmer Priya Cooper. The class teacher had access to a video recorded
interview with this sportswoman, and this provided the children with a genuine
source of direct quotes as well as other information relevant to a news profile of an
athlete. In preparation for writing, the children watched this video, made notes, and
wrote down exact quotes from Ms Cooper (they were able to play the recording
again to transcribe these verbatim). They were next asked to turn these quotes and
other factual information into a report. Finally they were encouraged to reread their
work to identify the Sayer of the quote/s, the saying verb/s, and to mark (or check
they had already marked) the quoted speech with quote marks.

Most of the children were successful at incorporating a small degree of
quoting as part of the writing task. 25 of the 27 children in the case study produced a
piece of writing about Priya Cooper, and 20 of these used at least one projecting
verbal clause successfully to incorporate a quote (the most number of projecting
clauses used was three, and the mean for the 20 children who used them was just
1.4). Of the five children who did not use any verbal projecting clauses, three
provided quotes but put them separate to the prose with a subheading ‘quotes’ (a
format which echoed the way in which they had made their notes of the video), one
wrote the news profile as a dramatic interview script with speakers and quotes but no
verbal Processes, and one child’s piece of writing consisted entirely of quotes and
seemed to be wholly enclosed within quote marks (a clear double quote mark was
used at the beginning, a single raised oblique mark was used at the end).

The children’s work samples provided a number of other insights into their
learning about the writing of quoted speech. When asked to identify the saying verbs
in their writing, 19 of the 20 children who had used verbal Processes did so, and of
these 17 identified their verbal Processes completely accurately (remembering that
this only involved locating one or two Processes in most cases). A very small
number of children demonstrated some confusion about verbal Processes: one child confused the Sayer symbol with the Process symbol (in one instance out of two verbal projecting clauses), and one child drew a verb symbol around ‘I’ as well as around ‘says’. It should be noted that the children’s reports were not created under examination conditions and that the children were permitted to help each other or ask a teacher for help. Therefore the extent to which the children independently controlled all the aspects of writing a report incorporating quotes cannot be stated categorically. However the writing samples suggest that for those children who did incorporate quotes into a stretch of prose using projecting verbal clause/s, their overall understanding of verbal Processes was quite sound.

There was slightly more confusion in the identification of Sayers. 13 of the 19 children who attempted to mark up their work using red boxes for Sayers did so without error. Of the remaining 6, the main confusion was whether to identify as a Sayer the same character when she/he appeared in another clause but in a different participant role. For example, Pablo wrote “Priya Cooper dives into the pool” and initially boxed ‘Priya Cooper’ in red but then later crossed this out (this work sample is item C.7 in Appendix C). Similarly, Matthew initially and incorrectly identified ‘Priya Cooper’ as Sayer in “Priya Cooper has cerebral palsy”.

One other area of difficulty for just two children was the correct use and placement of quote marks. However 18 of the 20 writing samples using verbal clauses to project quotes were punctuated with accurately placed marks. The directionality of these marks was not always quite right, but they were in the right place.

This writing was the only task instigated by the research project in which the Class 2B children were explicitly expected to include and correctly punctuate quotes.
They may have gone on to use quoted speech in other classroom work which was not made available to the researcher, but if so the class teacher made no mention of further explicit work along these lines (and she would normally have communicated this kind of thing to the researcher). The fact that the children did only one piece of independent writing in which they had to punctuate quotes is especially interesting given the improvement in punctuation of quoted speech reported in section 6.5. Their improvements were clearly not the product of intensive practice in writing quoted speech. Furthermore, the children were not given any worksheets in which they were asked to punctuate unpunctuated speech along the lines of the ‘punctuation test’. It is safe to conclude that the class’s overall improvement in punctuating speech was not the product of lots of mechanistic drill. Rather, instruction in grammatics would appear to have changed the ways in which the children addressed the problem of punctuating quoted speech by structuring their attention towards a grasp of the functional elements of verbal clauses and their relationship to the projected, quoted speech. That is, the grammatics helped raise and reshape their understanding of quoted speech. The formation of understanding through instruction in grammatics is discussed in the following section, in which the teaching–learning activities and results thus far described are interpreted in terms of the Vygotskyan theory introduced in Chapter 3 and here elaborated further.

### 6.8 Interpretation of findings

The main findings of the slice of the Class 2B case study which is the subject of this chapter are that teaching children about the grammar of verbal Processes:

i. improved children’s punctuation of quoted speech, and

ii. expanded the repertoire of strategies children consciously brought to expressive oral reading.
These results were achieved in the context of a teaching–learning program in which grammatics was carefully integrated with other aspects of English/literacy studies in the case study class. In the following discussion, the findings of the study will be interpreted in terms of Vygotskyan theory and children’s development of conscious control (6.8.1), their implications for pedagogy (6.8.2), and what they reveal about the kinds of language description which are accessible to children (6.8.3).

6.8.1 Development of conscious control of quoted speech

Findings (i) and (ii) above can both be summarised as examples of children developing conscious control of aspects of literacy. Conscious control is one of the features of ‘scientific’ knowledge in a Vygotskyan view of education and development. As outlined in Chapter 3 sub-section 3.4.3, Vygotsky (for example, 1987, ch. 6) theorised a distinction between ‘everyday’ concepts and ‘scientific’ or ‘scholarly’ concepts.

Features of scholarly knowledge include the fact that it is learned through, and by its nature demands, voluntary attention (see discussion, Chapter 5, 5.5.2). Scholarly concepts are not typically acquired in everyday activity, and so it is almost axiomatic that 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, the attainment of a level of mastery of scholarly/scientific knowledge. Conscious control implies that students have confident knowledge of a system of concepts and they can deliberately bring this knowledge to bear on solving both 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. They also developed a conscious awareness of the ways in which verbal Processes can be used to indicate features of oral expression, indicating that they were making connections between the meaning-oriented functional grammatics and the task of ‘reading for meaning’ which expressive oral reading implies. That is, the children 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.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Vygotsky himself was interested in the teaching of grammar as a kind of knowledge which fosters in children conscious awareness of language – a conscious awareness which can then be directed towards deliberate and purposeful use of language:

[T]hanks to instruction in grammar and writing, [the child] does become aware of what he is doing and learns to use his skills consciously. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 184, emphasis added)

To use a metaphor which draws inspiration from Bernstein’s formulation of ‘vertical discourses’ (Bernstein, 1999, introduced in Chapter 3, 3.4.3), grammatical description permits a higher vantage point from which to understand language and therefore manipulate it. Ultimately ‘scholarly’ learning should lead students towards the freedom of having a grasp of forms of knowledge and their possibilities. The present chapter provides evidence that learning about the relevant grammar did indeed provide these young children with a way to reach ‘higher ground’ in their understanding of quoted speech.

### 6.8.2 Implications for pedagogy

If follows from the Vygotskyan view of ‘scientific’ knowledge that some level of deliberate instructional design is required to help children develop scholarly concepts: either by explicitly teaching scholarly concepts, or at least by arranging for
their rediscovery. In the present study the children were explicitly taught some simple grammatical descriptions. Significantly, however, these were not taught 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. The teaching of these somewhat abstract grammatical concepts was integrated closely with the literature and literacy priorities of the wider English curriculum. This helped the children to see the relevance of grammatics and avoided the often strong and always unfortunate demarcation which can exist between knowing grammatical concepts and knowing how to apply those concepts to text. The chapter demonstrates the positive possibilities for grammatics taught explicitly but also, importantly, in a meaningful and integrated way which introduces children to the uses of grammatics from an early stage.

A number of further practical implications for pedagogy also follow from the present study. One of these is the choice of metalanguage to use with children, which is addressed below at 6.8.3. The remainder of the present section makes the following observations regarding the teaching of quoted speech: the value of beginning with actual quotes; the potential to extend knowledge about quoting to addressing the problem of plagiarism; and the incidental teaching of related aspects of grammar in context.

* The value of introducing knowledge about ‘direct’ speech using the most ‘direct’ form that it can take: actual quotes. The use of actual quotes from real people such as Olympic athletes allowed the children to begin learning about quoted speech by reflecting on a form of it which was close to their
concrete experience. The children knew about many of the Sayers of the quotes from their avid watching of Olympic events and interviews with sportspeople on television, and they had heard these athletes speak. They knew the quotes which appeared in the texts we read in class were actually spoken by someone. This can be contrasted with the ‘direct speech’ of story book narrative, which is more removed in that the speaking is imagined rather than real. Narrative examples of direct speech were introduced to the children later, at which point they were already quite confident in identifying Sayers, saying verbs, ‘what was said’ and quote marks.

* The potential to apply the grammatics of quoting to the problem of plagiarism. Prior to their work on grammatics, some of the children in Class 2B were aware of the need to follow acceptable practices when using the words of others, such as in school ‘projects’. This awareness probably stemmed at least in part from their school’s explicit teaching of ‘information skills’ in the context of school assignments. Even though they were only in Year 2, some of the children knew that they were not supposed to just copy out another person’s words and hand them in as their own. The issue of plagiarism was specifically and without teacher or researcher prompting raised by some children in the context of the work on verbal Processes (see the following references in Appendix C: item C.5, section on page 484, and item C.8). This observation suggests that an extension of the grammatics of quoting to the acknowledgement of quotes in written assignments would be a reasonable and useful move, even for primary school children.

* The opportunity to teach other language features incidentally. The audio recorded lessons on the grammatics of quoted speech provide examples of
the teaching of some language features which were incidental to the main focus of the lessons but were nonetheless valuable. One of these was a brief discussion of the need to consider context when deciding what kind of Process a verb is (such as ‘sniffed’, which may be a material or verbal Process – see footnote 103 and Appendix C, item C.9). Another example was the role of pronouns, such as personal pronouns acting in the role of Sayer when a character had been introduced already and does not need to be named again in the projecting clause. One example of this can be found in the lesson transcript documented as item C.5 in Appendix C (see page 485). There is good cause to speculate that these teaching opportunities arise at least partly from the use of whole and authentic texts (as opposed to textbook exercises which tend to avoid ‘tricky’ examples of language in use). The recognition of such teaching opportunities and the capacity to make something of them is of course a factor of teacher expertise (a matter to which we will return in Chapter 9 of the thesis).

6.8.3 A pedagogical grammatics for quoted speech

A final observation from the findings described in this chapter is that a language description based on Halliday’s functional grammar can be very accessible and useful to junior primary children learning about quoted speech. The Year 2 children in this study benefited from being able to distinguish ‘saying verbs’ (the New South Wales syllabus term for Halliday’s ‘verbal Process’) 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 verbal
clauses have a Sayer. This is not to suggest that children should never be taught about Subjects, but rather a question of accessible and useful points of entry into grammatical description.

Some other aspects of the systemic functional description of Processes of projection are also likely to be helpful to young learners and are therefore mentioned here. The following points do not arise directly from the present study but rather the study affords the opportunity to consider in more comprehensive terms the potential of SFG-based descriptions for classroom application. Two main points are made: a preference for the terminology of ‘quoting’ and ‘reporting’ over ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ speech (or thought); and the value of describing a range of modes of projection between these two poles.

It was noted above in section 6.4 that Halliday prefers the terms ‘quoted speech’ for ‘direct speech’, and ‘reported’ for ‘indirect’ speech. There a number of reasons for preferring this systemic functional description over a traditional description in proposing a pedagogical grammatics. Firstly, ‘direct’ speech is not in fact directed at the reader, but is rather imagined as direct talk, such as between characters in a story. That is, as far as young readers are concerned, it is still indirect; it is not talk directly to them. Secondly, ‘quoted’ speech is a more inclusive term, applying equally well to quotes in non-fiction writing (such as newspaper articles) as to dialogue in narrative writing. It is also the case that the terminology of ‘quoting’ is more readily applied to the other Processes of projection – mental Processes of cognition. That is, both speech and thoughts can be quoted, but ‘direct speech’ applies comfortably only to the former. ‘Direct thought’ is a term used in stylistics, but it is likely to be even more remote for children than ‘direct speech’. ‘Quoting’ is therefore the more inclusive way to describe these logical-semantic relationships
between clauses in more than one respect. A third pedagogical advantage of Halliday’s description is that it offers the potential to make more cohesive links for children between related terms: ‘quoted speech’ and ‘quote marks’ are clearly related terms by virtue of lexical similarity, whereas ‘direct speech’ and ‘inverted commas’ are not. And finally on this point, it is probable that ‘quoting’ is a metalinguistic concept already familiar to some children from their everyday experience. Young children can display a great capacity to quote (for example, sections of dialogue from their favourite movies, often watched repeatedly on home video) and may therefore enter school with a good idea of what a quote is, possibly even being accustomed to use of the term in family conversation. This means that using Halliday’s term ‘quoted speech’ in the classroom has the potential to capitalise on and extend children’s existing metalinguistic knowledge. From both a Hallidayan and Vygotskyan perspective this represents a sound pedagogical approach, and one which accords with the principle established in Chapter 3: ‘recognition of the importance of beginning with students’ existing understandings’.

An additional aspect of projection not always pointed out to students is that ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ speech or thought are not the only modes of projection. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) point out that there are also ‘intermediate types’ between quoting and reporting, such as when a reported clause incorporates some quoting, as in:

His manager, Dave Flaskas, says [that] Thorpe “doesn’t waste energy trying to fake a persona.” (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81)

Another mode of projection which is “a blend: it has some of the features of each of the other two types [quoting and reporting]” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 465), occurs when a near-quote is projected (a common device in literary works):

Was she dreaming, Jill wondered. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 465)
This kind of projection is identified by Halliday and Matthiessen as ‘free indirect speech’ following traditional terminology. The term is somewhat problematic in that it does not highlight any sense of the continuum between ‘quoting’ and ‘reporting’, and also because both speech and thought can be rendered in a ‘free indirect’ manner (in fact the example given would be better described as ‘free indirect thought’). Students might be better served with an explanation which guides attention to the valuable notion of ‘blending quoting and reporting’ before being introduced to the term ‘free indirect speech/thought’.

The identification of the various possible ways in which projections are made possible by verbal and mental Processes is a helpful one for pedagogical applications. Wilkinson and Janks (1998), for example, employ a systemic functional description to demonstrate how using select blends of quoting and reporting can manipulate meaning in media texts. They discuss the usefulness of such insights for older high school students learning to adopt critical orientations to text. Their work indicates that learning the grammatics of verbal Processes has wide potential. The grammatics can be applied to children learning about punctuation and oral reading, as described in this chapter, but also to more ‘critically literate’ practices. The next chapter explores just such possibilities.

**6.9 The grammatics of verbal Processes: practical and prospective**

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. The study described in this chapter has provided some evidence that young school children can use the grammatics of verbal
Processes to improve their conscious control of both these practices. The study has also provided evidence of the accessibility and value of a functionally-oriented grammatics taught explicitly and in the context of an integrated English/literacy program. 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.
CHAPTER 7
Critical literacy and grammatics: Reading a picture book

7.1 Grammatics for ‘critical literacy’
We have seen in the previous chapter that a knowledge of grammar can extend across domains of the English curriculum not traditionally associated with grammatics. Historically, and even in recent reviews of research (Andrews et al., 2004a), the question most commonly posed about ‘teaching grammar’ has been whether it helps students to write more effectively. Yet current policy and practice in English curricula around the Western world address more or less evenly the areas of reading (sometimes including ‘viewing’ or the ‘reading’ of visual texts), talking and listening, as well as writing. In this environment, the focus on grammar for improving writing seems increasingly and unnecessarily narrow: a form of tunnel vision which has perhaps unwittingly excluded from study other potential applications of grammar in the classroom.

This chapter analyses a dimension of the work undertaken with the Class 2B children that explores the application of grammatical knowledge to yet another aspect of literacy: the reading and interpretation of a literary text. The study is an excursion into the potential of grammatics as a tool for what might be termed ‘positive critical literacy’. The chapter first explains what is meant by ‘critical literacy’ and provides some reasons for developing a ‘positive critical literacy’ (section 7.2). Pedagogical considerations informing the work are then outlined, followed by a description of the actual classroom activity in which groups of students discussed a narrative picture book (sections 7.3 and 7.4). The children’s talk
about grammatics in relation to this story is offered as evidence of an emergent
critical orientation to the ‘constructedness’ of narrative. In interpreting the data
(section 7.5), a Vygotskian approach to the development of higher order thinking is
invoked, including discussion of the relevance of the concepts of voluntary attention
and semiotic mediation which have been a recurring theme in the thesis.

7.2 Critical literacy – and why ‘positive’?

The development of students’ ability to reflect critically on what they read and view
has been an area of inquiry and interest in education since the 1990s, and is what has
come to be known as ‘critical literacy’ (Fairclough, 1992; Lankshear & McLaren,
1993). A critical literacy approach argues that students should learn that texts act
upon their readers / viewers / listeners, and in particular that texts represent the world
and experience in different ways and that these representations will always be
infused in some way, sometimes quite subtly, with values. Students who have
developed a ‘critical literacy’ will be competent to identify those values, and
scrutinise and challenge them, taking appropriate social action in response where
they believe it is warranted. It is therefore argued that children should be taught not
merely how to read and write in terms of mastery of skills, but that they should also
be taught about how language choices function to achieve certain effects, and how
language is used to include or exclude certain groups of people or points of view.

In Australia this critical dimension to literacy teaching is familiar to many
teachers as one of the ‘four roles of the reader’ (Freebody, 1992; Freebody & Luke,
argue that it is not sufficient for students to decode text well, understand text, and be
able to write a successful letter or report, in order for them to be regarded as
effective, literate communicators for today’s world. These skills (which fall
respectively into the roles of ‘code breaker’, ‘meaning maker’ and ‘text user’) may indeed be necessary, but they are not enough. To these more well-known aspects of literacy, Freebody and Luke add the role of ‘text critic’ – that is, competence in thinking critically about texts.

[L]earners … critically analyze and transform texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral – that they represent particular points of views while silencing others and influence people’s ideas – and that their designs and discourses can be critiqued and redesigned in novel and hybrid ways. (Luke & Freebody, 1999, ‘Mapping the dimensions’, para. 3)

A persuasive case is therefore made for critical literacy – for teaching students to read thoughtfully and even resistantly. Logically this would seem to open up the usual possibilities of criticism, that is, of evaluating a text as either successful or not. But in practice the analyses typically offered by advocates of critical literacy have concerned texts which misrepresent or marginalise minority groups and positions, which bolster the status quo and which perpetuate discriminatory views. That is, texts which are ultimately viewed negatively by their ‘fair-minded’ critics.106 In critical discourse analysis, comparatively scant attention has been paid to texts which offer positive ethical and humanitarian values.

Writing from within the critical discourse analysis community itself, Martin (2004) has argued for more attention to be paid to positive discourses, in part to assist (in his case, university-) students to recognise and write inclusive, fair and in other ways laudable texts. In fact, in order to redress the imbalanced focus on mainly negatively evaluated texts, Martin goes so far as to suggest that for a time at least there should be a preference for critical study of worthy, beneficial and fair texts, in his terms: ‘positive discourse analysis’. There is by implication, therefore, space to include more ‘positive’ texts within the scope of critical literacy in the primary

106 What constitutes a fair treatment is of course contentious, and the present argument does not assume that the advocates of critical literacy necessarily occupy any moral high ground.
school. It is into this space that the following ‘slice’ of the thesis project may be placed.

The text with which the children worked is a quality narrative picture book: *Pumpkin soup* by Helen Cooper (1998). This is an entertaining and wittily illustrated story. Its three characters – a cat, squirrel and duck – are good friends who share the jobs in the home cooperatively, but along strongly demarcated lines. One day the little duck (the smallest and apparently youngest character) decides it’s “my turn to stir the soup” and trouble ensues, with the disregarded duck eventually leaving home. The cat and squirrel soon rue their unaccommodating ways and desperately want their friend Duck to return, which he finally does. The resolution involves redrawing the lines so that the duck’s culinary enthusiasms are incorporated, and calm is restored in the cabin (well, a temporary calm anyway, as the last page humorously reveals).

*Pumpkin soup* is a text which offers positive values about friendship and cooperation, communicated warmly and in language which is beautifully crafted and at times even poetic. It is not the kind of book which the advocates of critical literacy have typically brought to our attention. It is nonetheless a text worthy of critical exploration, and for this reason was selected for use in the Class 2B case study. The selection of *Pumpkin soup* for the present research was also based on the belief that it would be a suitable and enjoyable text for a class of seven to eight year olds to work with closely in a sustained manner. The quality of the narrative offers much to interest and engage, including from a grammatical point of view, and the story readily bears repeated visits.

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107 *Pumpkin soup* won the Kate Greenaway Medal for children’s book illustration in 1998. The book has since been followed by sequel texts which attest to the popularity of the text and its characters: *A pipkin of pepper* (Cooper, 2004) and *Delicious!* (Cooper, 2006).
7.3 **Pedagogical considerations**

There are many ways in which critical literacy might be incorporated into classroom practice, and for the purposes of the present discussion, classroom applications of critical literacy in the primary classroom were sampled from Australian education databases. Interestingly, while there were many articles which argued for the importance of a place for critical literacy in the classroom, and these often included suggestions for putting it into practice (a notable early example is Comber, 1993), there were comparatively fewer reports in which examples of situated classroom practice were described.\(^{108}\) The present chapter therefore contributes to the documentation of critical literacy as practised in actual classroom settings.

7.3.1 **Critical literacy in the classroom: negative and content-focused**

The surveyed literature revealed two dimensions of the classroom application of critical literacy which are particularly relevant to the concerns of this chapter. Firstly, most classroom studies reported on critical literacy of the negative kind, that is, the texts studied were viewed more negatively by the students as they became more critical readers and viewers, and indeed this was usually the stated hope or aim of the teacher. Secondly, in most studies the children’s attention was directed to aspects of the content of texts, such as characterisation, and less attention, if any, was given to the form of the texts. Both these facets of critical literacy practice will be considered in turn.

By far the larger proportion of studies describing classroom explorations in critical literacy have focused on negative critique. That is, the texts which students

\(^{108}\) For example, a widely distributed volume (in Australia) was the PETA publication *Critical literacies in the primary classroom* (Knobel & Healy, 1998). Of a total of nine chapters in this book, only four included any reports of actual critical literacy work with school students.
studied in class are viewed more negatively at the conclusion of a unit of work than they were initially, and typically the texts were in fact chosen by the teacher in order to encourage a more negative and resistant reading or viewing position in the students. It is in fact extremely difficult to find any Australian reports of classes working positively and critically with texts, at least under the descriptor of ‘critical literacy’. Typically, students have been asked to examine and learn to resist questionable messages in the media, popular culture and sometimes in books for children. For example, students have been led to regard more negatively: advertising material (Comber, 1993); TV soap opera (Lacey & Pitt, 2000); merchandising aimed at children (Longfellow, 2002); and stories which are deemed to have stereotypically gendered characters (Comber, 1993; O’Brien, 1994). Texts in these classrooms were also problematised in terms of what they don’t say, such as what kinds of gifts are not likely to appear in the Mother’s Day junk mail (Comber, 1993). One of the salient aspects of these various studies is their shared concern to help children see that texts are constructed objects – that texts are shaped to create certain effects or ways of seeing the world:

… instead of treating fictional narratives, for example, as slices of life, [students can] see them as deliberately constructed pieces of writing.’ (O’Brien, 1994, p. 40)

This concern with ‘constructedness’ coincides with the classroom work described in the present case study. Where the present work differs, however, is in its focus on a positive criticism.

The present study also differs from much of the extant classroom work on critical literacy because it is concerned with textual form and not merely content. The form–content binary is not without problems in that it attempts to separate elements that are inevitably all part of the meaning of a text: you can’t really have one without the other. However, the distinction between form and content can be
useful as an analytical tool,\textsuperscript{109} including as a means of characterising different classroom practices used in the study of texts. In the Australian examples of critical literacy practice surveyed for this chapter, almost all the attention of teachers and students was directed to content features: usually type of character, sometimes aspects of plot. It was rarely reported that students had been given the opportunity to consider not only what a text portrayed, but also how it did so. When this did occur, it was more often to do with the form of visual elements in texts (for example, Green & Cochrane, 2003) rather than the form of the language.

\subsection*{7.3.2 Towards a language-focused critical literacy}

While content-focused activities are useful to a degree in helping students see that they can be critical, there is a limit to the usefulness of approaches which rely solely on content analysis. To be critical of texts implies having a range of tools of criticism, and basic content analysis as practised in the above examples is only one such tool. A focus on content typically involves students in activities such as counting and classifying the characters in a book according to gender or race or other kinds of difference, or considering which types of characters bring about the resolution of the plot. Such investigations can be valid and informative, although decreasingly so as texts become less overtly biased – we don’t see many storybooks with bad black golliwogs anymore!\textsuperscript{110} An examination of the language of texts is important if critical literacy is going to be taken seriously.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{109} In literary criticism, for example. Seymour Chatman, drawing on French structuralist theory, uses the terms ‘story’ and ‘discourse’: “Story is the content of the narrative expression, while discourse is the form of that expression” (Chatman, 1978, p. 28).
\item \textsuperscript{110} The critiques by Dixon (1977a, 1977b), for example, were influential in raising awareness of these kinds of overt stereotyping. In his Introduction to Critical language awareness, Fairclough (1992) makes the point that as society moves towards treating people more equally, or at least creating the semblance of doing so, differences in status tend to be played out more subtly in text.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
It is here that the teaching–learning of a systemic functional grammatics has a valuable contribution to make to critical literacy. SFG can provide both tools of analysis and a shared metalanguage for teachers and students to talk about how texts mean what they do, this meaning-orientation of SFG being the driving motivation for its use throughout the thesis project (Chapter 3). The potential use of systemic functional grammar in the literature classroom is advanced by Unsworth, for example, who suggests that “children could readily learn basic elements of the metalanguage to productively and pleasurably explore literary texts” (Unsworth, 2002b, p. 138). In adopting systemic functional grammar as a tool for critical literacy, the present study takes a similar approach to a small number of other Australian studies which have also reported using grammatical knowledge for critical literacy with primary school children. Emmitt and Wilson (2005) describe work with upper primary school students who studied newspaper reports and other media texts on a theme of pop idols and the representation of body image. Functional and traditional school grammar terms were used with the students, and with quite simple terms (noun phrase and verb phrase) the students were able to identify values represented in the texts they studied. An earlier and more expansive use of grammatics for critical literacy is described by Williams (1996, 2000). In this research, Year 6 children used grammatics to illuminate how domestic work was distributed unevenly across characters in a children’s picture book, Piggybook by Anthony Browne (1986), and how the roles of characters were altered as the narrative was resolved. Williams (1998) additionally reports that Year 1 children who also studied Piggybook demonstrated emergent critical dispositions, noticing the ways in which verbal Processes in the story evoked the ‘piggyness’ of the lazy male characters. McDonald (1999) examines the use of grammatical knowledge as one of
a range of critical perspectives on reading into which Year 5 children were apprenticed. There exists then some evidence for the usefulness of grammatics as a tool for critical literacy with students in the primary school, although it might be noted that in the studies summarised above the children were almost all in the upper primary school, the exception being the Year 1 students in Williams’ study (1998).

The study described in this chapter focused on introducing Year 2 students to aspects of the construction of narrative, using the picture book *Pumpkin soup*. The research explored whether young children could recognise ways in which choices and patterns in the lexicogrammar shaped the story, that is, whether they could connect their emerging grammatical knowledge with the organisation of a whole text. More broadly, the study aimed to explore how students might use metalinguistic knowledge such as descriptions of grammar and ‘text type’ (or ‘genre’) as cognitive ‘tools’ for the development of critical understandings.

### 7.3.3 Planning a critical journey: ‘The Framework’ as a way in

An important pedagogical consideration for this ‘slice’ of the Class 2B case study was how to help the Year 2 children to begin thinking critically about texts, as this was a practice quite new to them, especially at the level of thinking about language and form. For a ‘way in’ to thinking critically with children, the researcher adapted a series of questions called ‘The Framework’, developed by British author and critic of children’s literature Aidan Chambers (1985, 1994). The Framework was devised for facilitating classroom talk around the meanings of literary texts, including picture books. The Framework questions firstly engage students in ‘booktalk’ about a text in quite accessible ways, such as asking children to talk about what they liked or didn’t like about a book. They then move on to ask children: “Did you notice any patterns / links?” (Chambers, 1985, p. 160). Chambers argues that in many respects it is the
patterning of language and also illustration (in the case of literary picture books) that creates the form and meaning of the text, and he offers evidence of the productiveness of The Framework with excerpts of transcribed classroom talk and with anecdotal recollections from a number of teachers. The potential of this approach as a productive way into critical attention to text form has also been demonstrated in some of the work with upper primary school students canvassed above (G. Williams, 2000). As the Year 2 children in the current case study already knew about patterns in mathematics and art, it was decided that Chambers’ Framework questions would be used as the entry point for bringing the children towards the idea of patterns in language.

### 7.3.4 Planning with the ZPD in mind

The pedagogy informing this particular dimension of the Class 2B case study again drew explicitly on Vygotskian theory. The teaching sequence was planned in order to ascertain and work within the children’s ‘zone of proximal development’. Classroom activities were therefore planned to allow the children to demonstrate what they knew and noticed at the outset, and then gradually to introduce the metalanguage of grammatical and whole text features in order to see how these might shape and extend the children’s thinking.

### 7.4 Teaching and learning experiences

Prior to the work on the picture book *Pumpkin soup*, the Class 2B children had learnt about ‘action verbs’ (Chapter 5) and ‘saying verbs’ and Sayers (Chapter 6). In this next phase of work with the class, the aim was to explore whether the children could use their knowledge about saying verbs to inform a ‘critical reading’ of a picture book (research question 1.3, from Chapter 4). Specifically, the researcher would
observe which features of the text students noticed after an initial reading, and then revisit the text to look for grammatical patterns and see if these provided students with more insight into the shaping of the story.

The class teacher read the children the story *Pumpkin soup* and we learned from the children that they enjoyed the story and illustrations. In particular they responded to the emotion involved in the running away from home of the precocious duck and the humour of the book’s ending. The children were consistently attentive and engaged in all the lessons associated with the book, including throughout the work with grammatics. These positive attitudes are evident in the transcript data, both from their active involvement in the lessons and also from the absence of complaints or periods of disengagement with the tasks to do with rereading and discussing *Pumpkin soup*. This is in itself a significant finding, according with observations across the other grammatics lessons of the entire Class 2B case study (and contrary to the findings of negative attitude reported by Elley and colleagues, 1976): that the children enjoyed learning grammatics.

The children were next asked to identify the ‘saying verbs’ in *Pumpkin soup* while the book was read to the whole class, and the class teacher scribed the ‘saying verbs’ onto a chart as the children identified each one. This task was completed with considerable ease by the children even though they had only learned about ‘saying verbs’ for the first time eight days earlier. They were able to use a number of cues to identify verbal Processes, such as looking for some quoted speech and then looking for the relevant attendant saying verb. For example:

Researcher: How will we know when we’ve come to a saying verb? [Pause 5 seconds.] Amelia?
Amelia: There, it’ll be something somebody said and it’ll have inverted commas around it.
Researcher: That will be a very big hint. OK, let’s keep our eyes peeled. [Begins to read *Pumpkin soup.*]

(Class 2B, whole class lesson, October 18)

In the next phase, the children worked with the researcher in small groups. These were the existing small groups in which they usually worked during literacy lessons. There were four groups: three groups of seven or eight children, each group roughly parallel in ability to the others, and one smaller group of four students who were deemed the most in need of extra support in literacy. For the discussion of grammatics in *Pumpkin soup*, the small group of least able students joined with one of the other groups. This was a common practice in Class 2B, and it allowed for interaction with potentially more able and insightful peers for the benefit of the less able students.

As preparation for these group lessons, the verbal Processes which the children had previously found in *Pumpkin soup* were scribed onto green (‘verb’-coloured) cards by the class teacher. Each card featured a stylised mouth shape to indicate that it represented a ‘saying verb’ (for an example, see Figure 7.1), and all of the verbal Processes from the book were presented, including repeated words.

![Figure 7.1 A ‘saying verb’ card](image)

In each group the researcher and children then reread the book and sorted the cards, arranging them in the order they occurred in the story and putting verbal
Processes which were on the same page underneath each other. The result of this activity looked something like Table 7.1:

**Table 7.1** Verbal processes from *Pumpkin soup*, presented in story order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>murmured</th>
<th>said</th>
<th>squeaked</th>
<th>snapped</th>
<th>stormed</th>
<th>muttered</th>
<th>snorted</th>
<th>wept</th>
<th>wailed</th>
<th>squeaked</th>
<th>whispered</th>
<th>yelped</th>
<th>shrieked</th>
<th>didn’t say</th>
<th>said</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The next move in this lesson was to ask the children if they could ‘find any patterns’ in the ‘saying verbs’. The children in 2B had no previous experience of this ‘booktalk’ (Chambers’ ‘Framework’) in their class work with literary texts. As a result, their first responses to the question: ‘Did you notice any patterns [in the saying verbs]?’ focused on the kinds of patterns with which they were already familiar, such as spelling and mathematical patterns. For example, they noticed partial numerical patterns and alphabetical order (see Appendix D, excerpt D.1.1), simple repetition of whole words and word endings (D.1.2), and repetition of initial and final letters (D.1.3). The children were clearly unused to thinking about the meaning-making possibilities of word patterns.

The following step in the lesson was to ask the children to recall what the parts of a narrative were. They had learned about narrative structure already, some of them in earlier grades but certainly within the first half of their current school year their teacher had taught them the following simple narrative structure:\(^{111}\)

**Orientation ^ Complication ^ Resolution**

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(^111) The generic structure is described in this way for teachers in the New South Wales syllabus support materials (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, pp. 37, 113, 203, 297). The caret symbol (^) indicates sequence.
Each small group of children had members who could fairly confidently recall these stages of a typical simple narrative, and as they recalled them they were written onto cards for all the children to see. Children and researcher then worked together to place the cards above the relevant ‘saying verb’ cards, so that the narrative stages (‘text level’ features) were being mapped onto the grammatical features. This produced an arrangement of cards on the floor like this:

Table 7.2 Narrative stages of *Pumpkin soup* mapped onto verbal processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORIENTATION</th>
<th>COMPLICATION</th>
<th>RESOLUTION</th>
<th>RE-COMPLICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>murmured</td>
<td>said</td>
<td>squeaked</td>
<td>shrieked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snapped</td>
<td>wept</td>
<td>wept</td>
<td>didn’t say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stormed</td>
<td>sniffed</td>
<td>sneezed</td>
<td>say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scoffed</td>
<td>didn’t say</td>
<td>whined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, the question about patterns in the saying verbs was reiterated:

Researcher: OK. Now I’m going to ask my question I asked before, again. Can you see any patterns with the saying verbs now?

Children: Oh!

Researcher: Think about the orientation, complication and resolution of the book.

(Koalas–Bottlebrushes group, November 3)

It was the researcher’s hope that the children would now be able to see a co-patterning of the verbal Processes with the narrative stages of the text. That is, the verbal Processes express increasing upset and trouble in the first part of the complication, leading to sadness and remorse, and this changes to shrieking with delight and a friendly silence about the duck’s imperfections (“didn’t say a word”) in the resolution. When the duck speaks again after the apparent restoration of a negotiated harmony, it is to introduce on the picture book’s penultimate page a
humorous ‘re-complication’ which leaves the reader keen for more. The verbal Processes help to carry the narrative forward. They are not coincidentally related to the progress of the story, nor are they merely interesting variations on the word ‘said’ intended to keep the reader’s attention. They are among the linguistic resources deployed by the author in the integral weaving of lexis and grammar which is the story. In terms of systemic functional theory, the lexicogrammar ‘realises’ the narrative.

Interestingly, some of the children still did not ‘see’ the pattern just described. This same lesson was conducted with three groupings of students over roughly consecutive days and in two of these three instances, the children continued to attend to the kinds of patterns they had observed earlier in the lesson, prior to the application of the narrative stage labels to the display of saying verbs. For example:

Researcher: Now – here’s my big question – have a look at the saying verbs. Orientation – there aren’t any. Complication – starts off with ‘murmured’ and then ‘said’, then ‘squeaked’ and ‘snapped’.

Philip: Two, three, four –

Researcher: No, not counting them, thinking about the words, Philip. We’re not counting them.

(Gum Blossoms group, October 31)

Excerpt D.2 in Appendix D shows that even with some very strong hinting from the researcher, the Koalas–Bottlebrushes group still struggled to look beyond the detail of the spelling of the words or how many were on each page, to consider their role in the text as a whole. The task of identifying a pattern in the saying verbs was clearly not a straightforward one for these young learners. The children were very keen and suggested what patterns they could, but the idea of relating grammatical elements to story structure was a new challenge.

Was this then too demanding a task for 7 and 8 year olds with only a few
weeks’ experience of learning grammatics? The evidence indicates that it was indeed challenging, but not in the end impossible. Some children actually saw the pattern quite quickly, such as the Kookaburras group, the one group of the three in which some children picked up the pattern straight away after the application of the narrative stage labels to the saying verbs. The following snippet is illustrative of this discussion (see item D.3.1 in Appendix D for more of this transcript):

Researcher: You know how I asked before about patterns? Have another look. Here’s the orientation, then here’s the complication. Have a look at the saying verbs and see if you can see a pattern now. Thinking about the orientation, the complication and the resolution.

…

Lauren: It goes, like, it goes from just normal then, like, strong and angry and then sad and then happy again.

(Kookaburras group, November 1)

Eventually the Koalas–Bottlebrushes group also began to notice that there was a co-patterning of grammatical elements with generic stages in the text and that the verbal Processes had emotional import. The following snippet from Appendix D item D.3.2 is illustrative:

Matthew: Yeah, and there’s ‘sniffed’, like crying, so sad and stuff like that and that, because there’s, because there’s no um saying verbs at the start, um, because it’s telling, ’cause it’s telling you the orientation, ’cause it–. Say if it said, ‘The duck said, “In the morning” ’ you wouldn’t know where it is and stuff. So, and then it starts as complication – the saying verbs – and they’re sad words ’cause it’s the complication. And it’s, then it goes up to the resolution and they’re happy ’cause they see the duck again.

(Koalas–Bottlebrushes group, November 3)

And in a discussion (initiated by one of the children) about whether the verbal Processes were varied only for decorative purposes (Appendix D item D.3.3), Karin was clear:
Chapter 7: Critical literacy and grammatics

Researcher: Do you think that Helen Cooper, when she wrote the book, just put words like ‘wailed’ and ‘stormed’ and ‘muttered’ and ‘sniffed’ and whatever in the complication just to make it more interesting?

Children: Yeah.
Child: No.
Child: Maybe it’s –
Researcher: Was there another reason as well?

(Gum Blossoms group, October 31)

7.5 Interpretation

The transcript data of the Pumpkin soup lessons clearly show that by the end, the children were operating at a level beyond what they could initially achieve on their own. The children had brought to the lessons their existing knowledge of verbal Processes and also of the stages of a narrative, but they did not bring these two kinds of knowledge about language together of their own accord. They seemed initially to be enmeshed in the more concrete patterns that were visibly evident in the verbal Processes: consistent ‘-ed’ endings, for example, and a move to seeing how the wording contributed to the shaping of the story was not possible for these children when they had the verbs alone laid out before them. It was the inclusion and relevant placement of the narrative stage labels which mediated their move to a more abstract level of thinking about the language of this picture book.

Vygotskyan theory offers a number of insights by which the significance of this series of classroom interactions may be interpreted. Of particular relevance are Vygotsky’s formulation of voluntary attention and his distinctive contribution on the role of semiotic mediation in learning.

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112 Although even at this level the children understood that some abstraction was needed in that they were searching for common features across different items. They were looking for generalisations, and generalisation is a step towards abstraction – it involves moving from thinking about various elements as discrete to thinking about their shared features.
7.5.1 Role of voluntary attention

The significance of voluntary attention in Vygotskyan theory was explored at some length in Chapter 5, sub-section 5.5.2. There it was pointed out that individual consciousness is not simply a matter of responding to the world in a direct, naïve manner, but rather that we learn to see the world and to focus on what is ‘important’ through a process of sociocultural development. In this process, voluntary attention is both demanded by certain tasks (deliberate attention is needed to solve a problem) and in turn it is also shaped by those tasks and the tools available to do them (the nature of the problem limits the number and kind of solutions; the tools at hand to achieve the solutions also determine how attention will be focused). Thus context both calls forth voluntary attention and simultaneously shapes it.

In terms of Class 2B’s ‘critical reading’ work, the notion of voluntary attention is both relevant and explanatory. It is useful in understanding the demands of the task which the children were given, and it is helpful in interpreting how the nature of the task shaped the children’s thoughts.

The task of looking for patterns in the story book language was one which demanded voluntary attention. It asked children to organise their thinking and discussion in order to focus on a particular problem or challenge: that of identifying relationships or commonalities between a set of apparently diverse items – the lists of verbal Processes from the story. This was not a task which could be completed without some higher order thinking: looking for generalisations, testing hypotheses against the data (the words arranged on the carpet), recalling types of patterns already known (such as alphabetical order and numerical patterns) and trying to apply these to a new problem. Voluntary attention can be seen here as Vygotsky characterised it: as the product of the task and not merely the result of the children’s
volition. The context of the task demanded voluntary attention.

Voluntary attention is also a helpful concept in understanding how the learning context shaped the children’s thinking. The task itself determined the paths along which voluntary attention would be likely to travel. For example, the way materials were used and arranged served to draw attention to certain features of the language of Pumpkin soup and to exclude others. In general terms, the children were being asked to do something quite challenging – to look for patterns in the language of a narrative text. Such a task could be overwhelming for children with no previous experience of critical discussion of literary language, and with few tools at their disposal to even begin to address the question. So the task was first simplified by separating the verbal Processes from the continuous prose of the narrative and listing them on discrete cards, thus helping the children to attend in a focused way to these grammatical elements. Furthermore, the verbal Process cards were placed before the children in a configuration which replicated their sequencing in the original prose, retaining the integrity of the patterning of the picture book text while keeping the task as clear and uncluttered as possible. Finally, the use of labels for the stages of the narrative (the ‘Orientation’, ‘Complication’, ‘Resolution’ labels) served to further focus the children’s attention, both opening up the possibility of attending to patterns which they had hitherto not noticed, and at the same time constraining the kinds of patterns which would now be recognised as legitimate answers to the question. The following transcript snippet (from Appendix D, item D.2) indicates how the researcher refocused the children’s attention after the narrative stage labels were added to the display:

Matthew: Well it starts with ‘m’ then ‘s’ then ‘s’ then ‘s’ then ‘m’-
Child: And ‘s’ and ‘m’.
Voluntary attention was thus required of the children by the task, and at the same time the children’s voluntary attention was formed and fashioned by the task, including the selection and arrangement of the learning materials, and the researcher’s guiding of the children’s attention to these.

### 7.5.2 Significance of forms of semiotic mediation

The role of available forms of semiotic mediation is also relevant in interpreting the *Pumpkin soup* teaching–learning experiences.

In the lesson sequence described above, a number of forms of semiotic mediation were employed in making the language of the picture book more accessible as an object of study. These were:

- coloured cards upon which verbal Processes from the story were written;
- the metalanguage of grammatical description (specifically in this case the term ‘saying verb’);
- the metalanguage of genre description (specifically here the narrative stages of ‘orientation’, ‘complication’, ‘resolution’); and
- the language used by the researcher, including the ‘patterns’ question from Chambers’ ‘Framework’ (1985, 1994).

The significance of these forms of semiotic mediation lies in their meaningful and purposeful deployment in the teaching–learning process – their combined ‘orchestration’ – rather than residing entirely within their separate qualities.
However each of the forms of semiotic mediation listed above does have its own logic, by which the harmonic orchestration of instruction was made possible.

The coloured cards used to represent ‘saying verbs’ had important non-linguistic dimensions to their semiosis, as outlined in Chapter 5 (5.5.4). The colour green provided an evocative way of mediating the children’s learning about Processes / verbs. In addition, the use of shape in combination with colour allowed for a single symbol to mediate knowledge about the different kinds of Processes, with the stylised mouth shape suggesting ‘saying verb’ in a way which was meaningful for the children. The ‘lips’ symbol therefore mediated the abstract concept of ‘saying verb’ by making use of an appropriate concrete allusion.

The concept of ‘saying verb’ has its own internal logic and merit in language description, as outlined in Chapter 6, section 6.4 (following Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). It is also a concept with versatile practical applications, such as those described in this thesis in Chapter 6 and the present chapter. In the context of the Pumpkin soup lessons, however, the semiotic mediation of ‘saying verb’ was insufficient on its own to facilitate the children’s move to a more abstract understanding of patterning in language. Rather, it was only in combination with the additional mediating support of the narrative stage labels that the potential of the grammatics of ‘saying verbs’ became available for the children’s critical use. In each of the small group lessons, it was the introduction of the Orientation / Complication / Resolution cards which assisted the children to make insights not previously possible. The semiotic mediation of the narrative stage labels therefore provided an infrastructure for the children’s subsequent critical reflections on the contribution of grammatics to meaning. Tools from both systemic functional grammar and SFL-based genre theory contributed to the children’s entry into a language-focused
critical literacy.

The researcher’s use of language also contributed to mediating the children’s critical orientation to text. Of particular note is the pivotal role played by the ‘patterns’ question inspired by Chambers’ ‘Framework’. When used early in the teaching–learning sequence, this question provided the children with a fairly open opportunity to share their observations of the text and simultaneously allowed the researcher to ascertain the children’s initial understandings and therefore their beginning point in terms of Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’. When the question was reiterated following the application of the narrative stage labels to the display of verbal Processes, it invited the children to integrate observations about the ‘saying verbs’ with the shape of the whole text. The ‘patterns’ question also consistently implied to the children the assumption that language is indeed patterned – an assumption which is both sound and likely to be of longer term use to students in reading and interpreting texts.

7.6 Conclusion

The ‘critical reading’ lessons featured in this chapter demonstrate how a functional grammatics mediated in collaborative talk and by the use of carefully selected learning materials can lead children toward more abstract, reflective understandings about text form. The pedagogic moves made in the Pumpkin soup lessons can be elucidated using aspects of Vygotskyan theory, including the ‘zone of proximal development’. Before entering the ZPD, that is, at their initial independent level of mastery, the children attended only to graphological and morphological features patterned across some of the verbal Processes. The subsequent introduction of the narrative stage labels provided an additional intellectual tool, restructuring the children’s voluntary attention and facilitating their higher order thinking about the
significance of (some aspects of –) text form in relation to meaning. The children were thus supported in a ‘zone of proximal development’ to achieve through mediated activity (mediated both by the lesson artefacts and by the language and interactions of the questioning researcher) what they could not achieve alone: a more abstract understanding of the language and form of a narrative text.

The children in Class 2B were new to the challenge of being critical readers, and almost new to an understanding of grammatics. Yet the evidence of this chapter is that, in interaction with each other, the researcher and the carefully presented lesson materials, they were able to begin to articulate a relationship between aspects of lexicogrammar and the shaping of a whole text: the picture book *Pumpkin soup*. Here is evidence in the actual words of the children and their interactions with the researcher for the beginnings of a language-focused (and not necessarily negative) critical orientation to the ‘constructedness’ of narrative. It is also an entirely different way of using grammar in the classroom from what most people, including educational researchers, have thought grammar was for.
CHAPTER 8
Teaching and learning about Theme

8.1 Introduction

Thus far the thesis has demonstrated that potential benefits flowing from the teaching of grammatics need not be confined to the improvement of written composition; aspects of functional grammatics can contribute to expressive oral reading, the reasoned punctuation of projected speech, and to critical reading and interpretation of the ‘constructedness’ of literature. In these senses, Chapters 6 and 7 offer some counterweight to the fascination with ‘grammar for writing’ found in the historical research and in all the systematic reviews undertaken to this time. Systemic functional grammar is also, however, well-suited to applications in written composition, and in the present chapter one particular aspect of SFG is explored for its utility in literacy (especially writing): the notion of ‘Theme’. The chapter addresses potential benefits of a knowledge of Theme, including for writing, in section 8.2; and also some of the challenges for teaching Theme which were identified in the Class 2F case study (section 8.3). Firstly however the remainder of section 8.1 provides some background for understanding Theme and its potential in the curriculum.

8.1.1 Systemic functional grammar as a grammatics for writing

Systemic functional grammar has a wide range of potential applications to the teaching of writing, made possible to a large extent by the fact that it articulates a relationship between lexicogrammar and whole texts (Chapter 3, sub-section 3.2.3). This relationship is one of mutual realisation and construal: lexicogrammar construes
texts and texts are realised by the lexicogrammar. For teaching writing, this means that SFG can help students understand how they can deploy lexicogrammatical patterns across sentences to build meaning and hence construe different types of written texts.

The ambit of the present chapter (more particularly, section 8.2) is confined, however, to one facet of SFG – the grammatics of ‘Theme’. This focus is necessary not only for reasons of space (this is the final chapter of the thesis to deal directly with the project’s data), but also because it would have been neither productive nor responsible to overload the Year 2 case study children with more grammatics than they could usefully apply to their often short and simple written texts. Thesis research question 1.4 (introduced in Chapter 4) was in fact written with this focus in mind, specifically addressing how children might “apply the notion of Theme in writing when redrafting a ‘procedure’ text”. The discussion considers this question using data from Class 2F, since this was the case study cohort who participated in lessons about Theme, and also by drawing upon other published data about the value of learning to understand and manage Theme. Given that Chapters 6 and 7 drew their data from Class 2B, one of this chapter’s contributions is also an opportunity to revisit Class 2F from whom we have not heard since Chapter 5.

8.1.2 An introduction to ‘Theme’

‘Theme’ as a grammatical description is a distinctive offering of SFG, and one not available in traditional school grammars. The notion of Theme was developed by Michael Halliday from its origins in the Prague school of linguists. ‘Theme’ is defined as “the point of departure of the message” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 64) and is located in English as the element which occurs first in each independent or ‘free’ clause. For example, in the clause ‘a speech is going to be made by him’, the
Theme is ‘a speech’ (the rest of the clause is called the ‘Rheme’). Theme may consist of multiple elements (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 79–87): the generally obligatory *topical* Theme (the experiential component – a Process, Participant or Circumstance); possibly preceded by a *textual* Theme (such as a conjunction); and potentially also incorporating an *interpersonal* Theme (such as expressions of attitude like ‘unfortunately’).

In systemic functional linguistics, Theme is said to operate within the ‘textual metafunction’ (introduced in Chapter 3, sub-section 3.4.2), which refers to the ways in which the lexicogrammar works to develop stretches of language which hang together effectively. Themes orient the reader/listener to what to expect as a text unfolds, and patterns of Theme contribute to a sense of coherence, organisation and ‘flow’ in texts (Halliday, 1993a; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, especially ch. 3).

Theme therefore provides a way of describing what is wrong with the following stretch of invented text (now almost iconic within SFL), which is entirely ‘grammatically correct’ in traditional grammar terms:

Now comes the President here. It’s the window he’s stepping through to wave to the crowd. On his victory his opponent congratulates him. What they are shaking now is hands. A speech is going to be made by him. ‘Gentlemen and ladies. That you are confident in me honours me. I shall, hereby pledge I, turn this country into a place, in which what people do safely will be live, and the ones who grow up happily will be able to be their children.’ (Halliday, 1978, p. 134)

The Themes in this text, which are disorganised for the deliberate purpose of making the point, constantly shift the reader’s focus and thus prevent a smooth reading. This is not just a matter of style; it is a question of *choices in wording*, or in systemic linguistic terms, choices in the lexicogrammar. Thus while all necessary references

113 ‘Style’ is certainly one way of talking about choices in language, although SFG provides a precise description of the grammatical features of texts by which ‘style’ may be recognised and managed by writers. Writing on ‘style’, Butler (2011) for example identifies the following as important: the cohesive possibilities of the Given–New notion in managing information flow; the use of effective sentence introductions; and the judicious use of the passive in ‘shifting emphasis’. All of these aspects of ‘style’ are able to be articulated in systematically related terms within the grammatics of ‘Theme’.
to ‘what is happening’ are present (the experiential metafunction), and while the verbs and subjects all agree (one aspect of the interpersonal metafunction), the choices made in the textual metafunction render the piece very hard to follow. Here, as Halliday intends, is a text which demonstrates the importance of well-organised wordings. In terms of educational applications of grammatics, the passage is suggestive of the potential value of Theme as a tool for teaching about how to order and organise effective writing.

8.1.3 ‘Theme’ in school curricula: NSW and the new Australian curriculum

Some Australian curriculum documents have afforded a place for the teaching of Theme, thus indicating a level of confidence about its anticipated usefulness to students. Of particular relevance to the thesis is the New South Wales state syllabus under which the project was conducted. As mentioned in Chapter 3 (sub-section 3.2.3), ‘Theme’ was the only term from SFG which was directly and unapologetically taken up in the syllabus, with no attempt to rebadge it or make it fit with an existing word class from traditional grammar. The syllabus’ ‘Scope and Sequence’ suggested that Theme be introduced in ‘Stage 2’ (Years 3 and 4) and it defined Theme for teachers as the “beginning focus of [the] clause” (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 75).

In more recent developments, ‘Theme’ has been included among the grammatical concepts in the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2012b), the newly developed national curriculum. Here the concept has been labelled ‘grammatical theme’ in order to differentiate it from the ‘theme of the novel’ notion of (particularly secondary school) subject English. And while ‘grammatical theme’ features sparsely in the specific content descriptions of the new national
It is possible to locate areas of literacy learning where Theme might prove useful even if not specified at that point in the curriculum. For example, students are expected to learn to: “Reread and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure” (ACARA, 2012b, Year 4 content descriptions, code ACELY1695). The grammatics of Theme offers an explicit way of talking with students about textual organisation and how to make conscious, informed choices in “moving words or word groups” to improve text.

8.2 Potential benefits of a knowledge of Theme for learners

Potential benefits of teaching the grammatics of Theme have been described in some existing research (sub-section 8.2.1 below). To this research, the present project contributes further evidence of the utility of Theme through an examination of the Class 2F children’s early attempts to apply Theme in one writing activity (8.2.2). It will be argued that the young children’s emergent understanding and management of Theme represents a beginning point on a trajectory of learning, and a developmental line is drawn from the Year 2 children’s early conceptions of Theme to some better articulated applications of Theme in independent writing by Year 6 students, documented in a separate research project (8.2.3).

8.2.1 Research on teaching and learning about Theme

The concept of Theme has been the focus of considerable research interest in some respects but comparatively less so in terms of classroom applications. In the field of

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114 The only explicit mention in Version 3.0 was in the Year 8 content descriptions. The entry reads: “Understand how coherence is created in complex texts through devices like lexical cohesion, ellipsis, grammatical theme and text connectives” (ACARA, 2012b, Year 8 content descriptions, code ACELA1809). ‘Grammatical theme’ is also however presumably implied in the following Year 5 content descriptor: “Understand that the starting point of a sentence gives prominence to the message in the text and allows for prediction of how the text will unfold” (ACARA, 2012, Year 5 content descriptions, code ACELA1505).
linguistics, Theme has been the object of extensive research aimed at better understanding and specifying the concept within and across languages and across different types of texts (for example: Ghadessy, 1995; Hasan & Fries, 1995; Thompson, 2007). In the field of education, Theme has regularly featured in research as a tool of analysis in the SFL ‘toolkit’. A second but much smaller body of work has investigated the teaching–learning of Theme in empirical research. This literature, while not extensive, provides evidence that Theme can be accessible and useful to learners in their literacy work.

The educational applications of Theme featured in the research can be broadly grouped into the two areas of reading and writing, and while both are important and indeed not unrelated, the discussion will deal briefly with the former before concentrating on the latter.

**Using Theme in reading**

There is some evidence that knowledge about Theme can contribute to improved reading comprehension, in particular by raising students’ awareness of the organisation of information in texts and by helping them predict how texts will develop.

Practical applications of Theme in reading instruction have been reported in the field of literacy for secondary school subject areas. Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) describe students learning about Theme and Rheme in a science class. When reading a text about asthma, students were taught to understand the flow of information by charting the connections between Themes and Rhemes, including learning about how the Rheme in science writing often provides “a technical term or nominalization that

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115 Theme does of course also have a role to play in spoken texts, although it is its role in the shaping of texts which students are required to read and (re-)produce in writing that has been the focus of educational research. This focus would seem entirely appropriate given the rhetorical demands of written text, which must ‘stand alone’ and make sense in the absence of the material context of its production and in the absence of its producer / author (unlike speech) and hence needs to be much more carefully and consciously crafted than does casual conversation.
then serves as the theme of the following clause” (Fang and Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 595). Fang recommends various reading activities which make use of the grammatics of Theme: ‘sentence completion’ tasks which promote “insights to the development of cohesive texts ... facilitat[ing] text comprehension” (Fang, 2008, p. 484); teaching about ‘textual signposts’ (like ‘therefore’ and ‘as a result of’ – typically found in Theme position) which can “increase students’ understanding of scientific reasoning” (Fang, Lamme & Pringle, 2010, p. 71); and attention to ‘topic sentences’ (or ‘hyper-Themes’ – see below, p. 357), which students can use to predict the kinds of meanings likely to be developed in a text (Fang et al., 2010, p. 93).

Measurable positive benefits have been show to follow from reading programs which have incorporated explicit teaching about Theme. Fang and Wei (2010) report on a quasi-experimental study in which inquiry-based science teaching was infused with an integrated reading program. The reading program included explicit teaching about features of scientific language, instruction in reading strategies like predicting, and also wide reading of science trade books. The reading-infused program produced better outcomes for reading comprehension of science than a program based on inquiry methods alone. While knowledge of Theme was but one component of the reading-infused science program, these results suggest Theme’s potential value as part of a repertoire of language-based reading strategies.

Teaching about Theme has also been shown to improve the reading comprehension of college students learning English as a foreign language, according to Chen, Song and Wang (2011). In a study where the teaching of Theme–Rheme was the only stated difference between the experimental and control groups, researchers found that knowledge of Theme improved students’ comprehension of texts in terms of both global meanings and detail, with significantly better reading results for the experimental
group over students who had not learned about Theme.

While the discussion now turns to applying knowledge about Theme in writing, from the above examples it is important to note that teaching about Theme has a range of potential uses in the English/literacy program that are not confined to improving writing; that it is a concept with valuable and versatile applications.

Using Theme in writing
The notion of ‘Theme’ has been used in the teaching of writing in a number of contexts and found to be beneficial for writers, including: tertiary students producing academic writing (for example, Stuart-Smith, 2003); secondary school students writing assignments (Christie, 2004; Marshall, 2000); museum staff writing text for display in museums (Ravelli, 1996); and also senior primary school students writing factual texts (Quinn, 2004; G. Williams, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2006).

‘Theme’ has been found to be of use to tertiary students as one component of courses designed to help them improve their ‘writing for academic purposes’. In Australia, aspects of functional grammatics (including Theme) are used in a number of academic skills courses for undergraduates,116 providing indirect evidence of Theme’s perceived utility to students, and in case study evidence reported by Stuart-Smith (2003), the teaching of Theme was found to contribute to “increased fluency and coherence” in writing, such that the student was able to make “the thematic progression ... more effective ... specifically the foregrounding of the argument” (Stuart-Smith, 2003, p. 79).

Similar results in terms of improved writing are reported by Christie (2004) from her research with secondary school students who learned about Theme within a program where functional grammatics was integrated with teaching about the

116 The precise extent of the teaching of Theme in such courses is not easily ascertained because the content is usually only accessible to enrolled students. For an example available in the public domain, see the extensive treatment of Theme on the University of Sydney’s web pages called the ‘WriteSite’ (University of Sydney – Humanities & Social Sciences, 2006).
structure of different text types. Christie reports that students’ writing improved such that “[t]he texts generally: had a clearer overall sense of direction and structure than in the past; showed greatly enhanced paragraph organization and structure; had an appropriate sense of completion; and showed a good developing sense of thematic organisation relevant to different types of genres” (Christie, 2004, p. 160).

The potential value of teaching Theme to help writers communicate more clearly has also been investigated in a text production project undertaken at the Australian Museum, Sydney (Ravelli, 1996). Here the control of Theme and thematic development were found to be among the most significant language resources for determining the accessibility (or difficulty, if not well-managed) of texts on display in exhibitions. As part of a text production project, museum staff benefited from being taught “not ... linguistics as such, but ... tools which [would] be most effective for their editing needs” (p. 382), of which knowledge about Theme was a chief resource. Texts for exhibits were not usually produced by sole authors but in a collaborative process, and so it is not possible to attribute improvements in writing which ensued from learning about Theme to individuals. It is possible however to demonstrate that rewritten texts represented a considerable improvement on original texts by means of their effect on their intended readership: museum visitors. Visitors were found to have better comprehension and more accurate factual recall, and also more pleasure in reading, when exhibit texts were well-organised in terms of Theme.

The teaching–learning of Theme with upper primary school children has also been found to be useful for improving writing, according to Quinn (2004) and Williams (1995, 1999, 2004, 2006). Quinn reports that a Year 6 student regarded as a struggling writer was able to use the notions of ‘Given–New’ and ‘Theme–Rheme’ (taught in terms of sentence beginnings and endings) to improve her writing of
explanations. Williams provides evidence from a wider ranging project of the utility of Theme in writing across a number of factual genres. Further discussion of Williams’ research is incorporated into the present chapter’s argument for a ‘trajectory of learning’ in section 8.2.3 below.

In summary, existing research on the teaching–learning of Theme indicates its value for students across literate practices of both reading and writing, and in different social contexts and discipline areas.

8.2.2 Year 2 using Theme in writing – early steps on a learning trajectory

The following discussion takes as its data a ‘slice’ of the Class 2F case study in which the children learned about Theme. While the children’s learning about Theme took in three different genres (procedure, recount and narrative), the discussion in the following section focuses in particular on a task where a badly organised procedure was redrafted and improved by the Year 2 students – a first move in children learning to apply Theme in writing.

Rationale for teaching Theme in Year 2

The decision to teach Theme in Class 2F was motivated by two sets of reasons, one research-focused and the other child-focused. Firstly, it was intended that the work would contribute to the limited amount of similar research. In introducing Theme to children in only their third year of school, the present study set out to explore previously uncharted territory. Indeed one question which the present study asks is whether or not this is an achievable exercise: can young school children actually learn what Theme is in any meaningful way? In section 8.1.3 above it was mentioned that the New South Wales English K–6 syllabus recommended introducing Theme in Year 3. The decision in the present study to introduce Theme roughly halfway
through Year 2 seemed therefore not overly ambitious. It must be borne in mind however that the ‘Scope and Sequence of Grammar’ in *English K–6* (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998], pp. 74–75) should not be taken as definitive on the question of sequencing grammatical content. When it was devised, the ‘Scope and Sequence’ represented in many respects a ‘best guess’ as to what grammatical descriptions might be accessible to children at different stages of primary schooling. There is in fact an absence of published evidence on Year 3 and 4 children learning about ‘Theme’ and it is therefore fair to surmise that *English K–6*’s placement of the concept in ‘Stage 2’ (Years 3 and 4) was provisional. The present exploration of the teaching of Theme in Year 2 thus offers an opportunity to address a gap in the research and also some insight into the appropriate placement of concepts for the purposes of planning sequences of learning grammatics.

Secondly, it was also anticipated that learning about Theme might be profitable for the children’s writing. ‘Theme’ was introduced in order to extend the children’s grammatical knowledge ‘across the metafunctions’, so that they could begin to see the role of language choices in building coherent, organised texts. It was hoped that such understanding might then become available as a resource for redrafting and improving written text.\(^{117}\) While it will be seen that this aspiration was only partially realised, it will be argued that the Year 2 children’s learning about Theme laid the groundwork for future development along a productive path.

**Overview of classroom work on Theme**

In keeping with the project’s general aim of ‘teaching grammatics in ways meaningful to students’ (one of the principles established in Chapter 3), the

\(^{117}\) It was hoped in the planning stages that the children might also learn to use Theme for a further purpose – to inform critical reading of a narrative. Unfortunately this avenue of investigation was not able to be pursued to its end due to constraints of time. The utility of Theme as a tool for ‘critical literacy’ is an area which future classroom research might usefully explore.
grammars of Theme was introduced to Class 2F in the context of whole texts which were of relevance to the children’s academic and beyond-school interests. The Class 2F children learned about Theme across different text types and usually in the context of more than one example of these text types. They began by learning about Theme in *procedure* texts, including Theme in ‘craft’ procedures and also in two different recipes (the earliest moves in this learning were described in Chapter 5). They next learned about Theme in *recounts*, and observed patterns of Theme in two recount texts. At the teacher’s request, the next and final set of lessons on Theme focused on Theme in a *narrative* text.

In terms of prior knowledge required in order to be taught about Theme, the children in Class 2F had learned only about ‘action verbs’ (Chapter 5).

As mentioned, the ‘procedure’ text type provided the vehicle for the initial lessons on Theme. By way of preparation, the specific procedural texts to be used with the children were carefully selected and crafted. They were selected because of their relevance and usefulness to the children in terms of facilitating their own authentic activities, such as making a string telephone in ‘Science and Technology’ lessons or making themselves a chocolate milkshake. The language of the texts was then deliberately crafted so that the procedures would be effective as ‘how to’ texts and also so that they would be amenable to simple analysis and productive reflection by young learners. The procedural steps were therefore written using fairly straightforward clause structures. In keeping with the textual pattern typical of procedural texts, most of the instructional steps were worded with a material Process in Theme position (for example, ‘Tie the string tightly’), but not all. In what was a conscious pedagogic move, some instructional steps were deliberately written so as *not* to have a material Processes in Theme position. For example, in the instruction
‘Carefully make a small hole in the bottom of each cup’, the Theme ‘carefully’ is not a material Process but a Circumstance indicating the manner in which the activity should be performed. Such decisions were motivated by a concern to orient children to the notion of choice in the wording of texts, and to subvert (quite deliberately) any potential impression that patterns of Theme in procedures are somehow just another kind of rule to be followed.118

**Teaching Theme: the first lesson**

Theme was introduced to Class 2F on May 14 and an edited transcript of this lesson is provided in Appendix B (item B.5). One interesting aspect of this lesson relevant to the concerns of the present chapter is the way in which the notion of Theme was defined by the teacher – this topic is discussed separately in sub-section 8.3.1. Other pedagogical reflections on the lesson (previously noted in Chapter 5) include: the teaching–learning of the grammatics of Theme in the context of an authentic, meaningful text; and the creation of a ‘zone of proximal development’ by building upon the children’s existing knowledge about ‘action verbs’ and their prior activity in making a string telephone. The lesson furthermore represents a step towards a systematic understanding of grammatics (‘scientific’ or ‘scholarly’ knowledge in the terms introduced in Chapter 3) in that it relates a feature from the experiential metafunction of grammatics, ‘action verb’, to the main resource in the textual

118 The ‘genre writing’ movement begun in the 1980s in Sydney has sometimes drawn criticism for what are characterised as fixed notions of different kinds of texts (as opposed to genre theorists’ view of text types as relatively stable but open to evolution, innovation and recreation). On the whole this is not how Australian educators have interpreted genres, at least at the level of official syllabus design. Curriculum writers taking up descriptions of genres have in fact resisted giving reductive advice implying fixed rules of composition to students (such as, in the case of the procedure text type, ‘start each step with a verb’). For example, the following advice was given to teachers in the support materials for the syllabus in New South Wales: “Point out different clause structures used to give commands in a procedure (i.e. *usually* the action verb or adverb is in the first position) ... Explain how changing the clause structure of a command assists the reader to focus on the important part of the instruction” (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, p. 220, emphasis added). This is not to say, however, that reductive, rule-type reinterpretations are never presented in the classroom.
metafunction, ‘Theme’. The making of connections between different grammatical categories and their meanings is here argued to be an important step in building systematic knowledge. No collection of bits of information would be interpreted as a system unless there were relationships between components, and in this first lesson on Theme a link was made from which a sense of system could begin to be developed.

**Designing a redrafting task**

Having established a sense of the meaning of Theme, albeit a nascent one, it became possible to consider ways in which children might be encouraged to use what they had learned about ‘Theme in procedures’ to improve writing. Here the project took careful stock of the challenges such a task would pose for junior primary learners. The Year 2 children in the case study were still at a stage where the act of written composition demanded that quite a lot of their conscious attention be given over to content (such as the stating and sequencing of events in a recount) and orthography. With quite a high level of conscious effort required simply to get words onto the page, it was important to be reasonable about the kinds of applications of grammatics to writing which these children could be expected to take on. Two decisions were made in order to design a writing task in which these 7–8 year olds might be able to show that they could draw on their learning about ‘Theme in procedures’ to improve written text. Firstly, the students would not be expected to use the grammatics while writing a first draft, but rather during a redrafting119 task where the basic content and spelling were provided. Secondly, they would be asked to redraft a single step of a procedure rather than a lengthy stretch of text where their stamina and interest might

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119 The use of the verb ‘redraft’ rather than ‘edit’ was also deliberate. This decision followed the practice adopted in the first case study group of Williams’ KAL project, where the choice of ‘redraft’ over ‘edit’ was designed to orient students to the possibility of reworking and rewording text, thus challenging the students’ prevailing perceptions of editing, which were that it essentially involved proofreading (1995).
be too sorely tested. The teaching–learning activity was therefore planned in order to make the task a manageable one for young learners with varying levels of confidence in writing.

A deliberately poorly structured procedural text was prepared by the researcher for the students to redraft (Appendix E item E.1). The provision of material to be redrafted was also a considered move. Since the text had not been produced by any individual child in the class, it would not be undermining of anyone’s self-esteem to say that it needed to be improved and no child’s ‘ownership’ of the text would be threatened. Also, by crafting this muddled procedure with pedagogic intent, the researcher could manage the kinds of features to which the children would be invited by the text itself to attend. The deliberate provision of specially crafted muddled texts was previously used in Williams’ KAL project as a way to introduce the notion of Theme and the practice of redrafting to Year 6 students, where it was deemed to be a productive pedagogic move (G. Williams, 1999, pp. 97–98; 2004, p. 254). In the present study it was again found to be a strategic and sound way for students to move into learning about how knowledge of grammar can help improve writing. It is important to note that while the text was ‘inauthentic’ in that it was not an ecologically occurring text but one specially crafted in order to teach something, it was nonetheless lent meaning and comprehensibility by the fact that the children had already experienced the activity for which the procedure was written (making a paper flower using paper tissues and a pipe cleaner). This meant that they were able to see the text not as a meaningless jumble, but as a puzzle for which they had some awareness of the solution, like a jigsaw for which the picture was known but had been lost.

In terms of applications for pedagogy, an important point to make at this
juncture relates to the use of ‘crafted’ texts. It is becoming more common to see calls for grammatics to be taught ‘in context’ and through ‘authentic’ texts, for example: “The texts used when teaching grammar should be authentic, not artificial and contrived simply to teach a grammatical point” (Derewianka, 2011, p. 8). There is however a case for distinguishing between different kinds of specially-prepared texts for grammatics lessons. On the one hand, it would indeed seem desirable to recommend the consistent use of ‘authentic’ texts of genuine interest, meaning and relevance to students and what they are learning, but on the other hand it is possible that at times specially crafted texts or modified ‘authentic’ texts can better serve certain pedagogical purposes (recall Halliday’s ‘Now comes the President’ passage from earlier in this chapter; Hasan and Perrett (1994/2011, p. 305) use a reworked version of the nursery rhyme ‘Jack and Jill’ to similar ends). There might therefore be a category of ‘inauthentic’ texts which are nevertheless valuable inclusions in a program of grammatics. These texts might in fact retain some authenticity, as did the jumbled procedure for the activity which the Class 2F students had actually experienced, but might also display artifice or craftsmanship in that they have been contrived not only for authentic social purposes but also for pedagogic purposes. This crafting could involve the playful reorganisation of a text in order to invite careful redrafting (and humour), and would ideally involve the management of complexity so that students are not presented with texts which raise more questions than can be readily accommodated given their existing level of knowledge. Understood in these terms, the judicious use of ‘artificial’ or ‘crafty’\textsuperscript{120} and even

\textsuperscript{120} While it is difficult to find a term in English for texts of this character, the use of ‘artificial’ is here intended in terms of its original meaning of ‘relating to art’ or ‘crafted’ (cf. ‘artifice’ and ‘artisan’) rather than the more common contemporary meaning which has come to be associated negatively with ‘falsehood’. ‘Crafty’ is an appealing alternative term, but one beset with the same baggage, unfortunately.
playful texts can be both legitimate and desirable for teaching grammatics.

Summary of teaching–learning sequence for redrafting task

The transcripts for the lessons in which the children redrafted the muddled craft procedure are provided in Appendix E (items E.2 and E.3). There were two main lessons over which the learning sequence progressed, one week apart from each other, with an additional short reflective discussion held on the day after the second lesson (item E.4 in Appendix E). The main stages\textsuperscript{121} through which the learning sequence developed were:

Redrafting Lesson One

i. The children read the muddled procedure, projected on a screen for the whole class to see, and reflected on its organisation to themselves.

ii. The teacher and children jointly sequenced the muddled procedure into its logical order, based on the children’s experience of having made the paper flower one month before. This process began with ordering the macro features of the text such as putting the heading at the top, then the list of materials and then the method or steps. Finally the steps themselves were put in correct sequence.

iii. Joint redrafting – preliminary ideas. The teacher asked the children how the steps of the procedure could be improved and some children suggested ideas such as numbering them and including more detail.

iv. Joint redrafting – focus on rewording a single step. This phase of the lesson was actually embedded within the previous phase as part of the joint redrafting exercise, with its significance being that at this point the children’s

\textsuperscript{121} The complete learning sequence was somewhat more involved. For example, both Lessons One and Two began with a ‘Review’ phase in which the children’s prior learning was called to mind so that it could be invoked at a later stage for the purposes of the lesson in progress. The transcripts in Appendix E (items E.2 and E.3) indicate the lesson phases at this greater level of detail.
attention was focused towards carefully redrafting one step. One child suggested changes in the wording of the step and the teacher scribed these, while the whole class observed their modelling of the redrafting process. In the jointly redrafted step, the material Process was moved by the child into Theme position.

**Redrafting Lesson Two**

i. The teacher read out the redrafted step from the conclusion of the previous lesson and led the class in **discussing what had been changed in the wording** to make the step more effective (that is, moving the verb into Theme position).

ii. **Writing (redrafting) task**: Children worked mainly in pairs, each pair redrafting a step of the muddled procedure to make it clearer.

iii. **Joint construction of writing**. The whole class reassembled to share their suggested rewordings of the steps, which the teacher scribed to create a complete and improved procedural text.

**Reflection on learning**

On the day after Lesson 2, the teacher led a **discussion** reviewing the previous day’s redrafting activity and asking the children to reflect on what they had done to redraft the steps, drawing attention to which **language features** had been foregrounded in the improved writing.

**Results of redrafting task**

The results of the redrafting task were that most children in Class 2F were able to reword the steps of the muddled procedure in order to make them more effective, although they did not necessarily articulate clearly how they had done this. The children’s redrafted procedure steps are reproduced and each is briefly evaluated in
Appendix E, item E.5. A work sample was obtained from 19 children (out of the case study cohort of, by this stage of the school year, 20 children). It should be noted that since some children worked together, the work samples cannot all be regarded as the product of independent effort, although sometimes children redrafting the same step did produce individual versions.

In terms of their control of Theme, most children redrafted the steps to foreground the material Processes by which the procedure is enacted. Almost all the work samples (n=16) included at least one instance of the placement of a material Process in imperative form in Theme position – a language choice which is very effective for developing the text in terms of the sequence of unfolding activity and hence is the typical or ‘unmarked’ pattern to be found in written instructions. The following are examples of effective texts in which the children chose to move material Processes into Theme position (all examples are from children who were known to be personally responsible for the choice of wording; Themes are underlined):

From: The ends of the paper fan are cut at an angle.
To: Cut the ends of the paper fan at angle. (Jeong Bin)

From: The petals are made when you pull apart the layers of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.
To: Make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers. (Beatrice)

From: On the finished flower some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.
To: Spray some perfume on the finished flower. (Simon)

Apart from the fact that Beatrice has left out mentioning the suggestion to do her step ‘carefully’, each of these rewordings is successful. The improved texts retain the experiential content (what has to happen, and to what) and at the same time they
foreground the action required of the ‘doer’ of the activity by placing the relevant material Processes (‘cut’, ‘make’, ‘spray’) in Theme position.

A small number of children did not choose to put a material Process in Theme position but still made an effective choice for rewording, such as Chen, who independently redrafted his step as follows:

From: On the finished flower some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.
To: After the flower has been finished you can spray some perfume to make it smell nice.  (Chen)

Chen’s step consists of three clauses and has the following structure in terms of the textual metafunction (the logical relationship of the clauses to each other is also shown at left):122

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>β1</th>
<th>After the flower has been finished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>α</th>
<th>you can spray some perfume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>β2</th>
<th>to make it smell nice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rheme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.1 Grammatical analysis of a step in a procedure: textual metafunction and logical relations of clauses

A clause complex as a whole (for present purposes, a sentence) deploys thematic structure just as does an individual clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004,

122 The logical relationships between clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 383–395) can be paratactic (clauses are ‘equal’ in status such as the relationship between two ‘independent’ clauses) or hypotactic (‘unequal’, when one clause is ‘dependent’ upon another). These relationships may become quite complex when several clauses are ‘nested’. The notation used for logical relationships (‘taxis’) is: numbers for parataxis; Greek lower case alphabetical characters for hypotaxis.
Dependent clauses are able to be placed at different points in a sentence in relation to dominant ‘free’ (‘independent’) clauses, and may thereby be purposely foregrounded. For Chen’s step, the textual metafunction of the clause nexus would be analysed thus (where ‘||’ indicates a clause boundary):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After the flower has been finished</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.2** Analysis of textual metafunction of a clause nexus

In his redrafting of this step, Chen has chosen to place in Theme position the clause about completion of the flower, which is a prerequisite condition for the step of spraying the perfume. This thematic choice represents an example of one of the common variations on Theme found in procedural texts. While the usual or ‘unmarked’ pattern by which procedures are construed is that of material Processes as Theme, such a pattern is not obligatory. A different kind of choice in the wording, such as Chen’s in the above example, “signals a break in the procedure and introduces a variation on the basic method ... often distilling some aspect of what has gone before to provide the point of departure for the dominant clause” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 393). Chen seems to know this; his redrafting of the step is at the least suggestive of a good degree of familiarity with procedural texts. In a similar use of dependent clause foregrounding, Kieran and Jack (working together) made a conditional or ‘if’ clause thematic in one sentence of their procedural step: “If you cut too close to the pipe cleaner it will not work”. As well as demonstrating these children’s considerable control of the procedure genre, the examples of redrafting without use of material Process as Theme also show that the children were not labouring under any misunderstanding that Theme selection is a kind of rule, that
they had to put a material Process in Theme position in procedural texts.

A small number of children did not make consistently effective choices when rewriting the steps of the procedure. Three children’s rewordings were somewhat effective – in each of these partially effective attempts, one sentence of a two-sentence step used a material Processes as Theme while the other sentence did not make effective use of Theme. There were only two children who did not really engage with the notion of redrafting at all and virtually copied the original text with only very minor amendment.

In summary, 17 of the 19 work samples demonstrated effective use of Theme, with 16 of these using at least one material Process as Theme (the 17th work sample was Chen’s effective rendering of the final step). While not all the children worked independently, there is evidence that many children were developing a good degree of control of the wording of written instructions. Furthermore, all but two children seemed to grasp what was expected in the activity of redrafting, that is, making choices about where to place words and word groups – a new kind of activity for them in their school writing and a valuable expansion of their understanding of the writing process.

A further and important question is the extent to which children were consciously aware of the choices they were making in improving written text. Following the redrafting task, the children were invited to reflect on their learning in a class discussion and subsequently two children were interviewed by the researcher about their choices in rewording specific steps.

The class discussion was initiated thus by the teacher:

Teacher: Yesterday you wrote out the steps for this procedure in a better way in your journals, and I copied them all down in order on this sheet. What did, um, we notice yesterday that a lot of people did when they changed the steps? Stella?
Stella: Um, they mostly had verbs at the beginning.

Teacher: Mostly had verbs at the beginning. In fact I think all of them has, have verbs at the beginning. Why did people do that, do you think? Why did people put verbs at the beginning of each step? Who’s got an idea? You did it. Why did you do it?

(Class 2F, June 25)

The children’s answers to this question were fairly wide-ranging and not confined to their prior learning about Theme. For example, Beatrice was quite interested in whether or not instructional steps should begin with the word ‘you’ (something also evident in her later interview with the researcher), and although she initially struggled to express it, she was aware of a relationship between language choices and social context:

Beatrice: What they really do is like, tell you how to make but don’t, like, tell you personally. Like, don’t actually – the person who wrote it doesn’t come and tell you. They’re trying to tell you like somebody would say, like somebody doesn’t say when um they actually tell you personally.

Teacher: [Equivocally:] Right–

... Teacher: But they’re not [laughs], they’re not actually saying, ‘You put that there.’ Is that what you’re trying to say?

Beatrice: No. They’re not p-. Like, they use the verbs first because, um, giving the instruction first I think is a better way of talking in English, I think.

(Class 2F, June 25)

Notice that Beatrice does not use the metalanguage of Theme in her explanation of “a better way of talking”, nor did many of the children use ‘Theme’ during this discussion. It is interesting however that when ‘Theme’ was first mentioned, it came from a child in the class and not the teacher or researcher:

Poppy: ’Cause the verbs is kind of like a Theme with the partner.

Teacher: Beg your pardon?

Poppy: The verb is kind of like a Theme with the partner. And it make, and sometimes it makes it make more sense.

(Class 2F, June 25)
Poppy is not able to elaborate her thinking on this point (for her full comments see Appendix E item E.3, pp. 526–527), but she certainly sees a relationship between Theme and verbs in procedural texts which she thinks can be characterised as a sort of ‘partnership’. This is an insightful observation, even if its faltering articulation suggests Poppy is at the frontier of her current knowledge.

Two children, Beatrice and Simon, were able to be interviewed in some depth in order to ascertain the strategies they were conscious of using in redrafting the steps of the muddled procedure. Both these children made the redrafting changes to the muddled text independently and they were therefore ideal individuals to interview. The interviews are reproduced in Appendix E (item E.6). In summary, both the children expressed an emergent sense of the role of Theme in procedural texts rather than a fully articulated understanding, yet both were able to explain their choices in writing with a degree of conscious awareness. Beatrice had some control of the metalanguage of Theme (“usually at the beginning of the sentence”, possibly consisting of “more than one word”), and Simon said of steps in procedures that “some, they normally start with a verb” although he could not at first recall the term ‘Theme’. This is evidence of early development in the use of grammatics as a tool for the deliberate crafting of written texts for meaningful social purposes, although with clearly a long way to go towards mastery.

8.2.3 Year 6 using Theme in writing – further along the trajectory

The early steps taken towards using Theme in writing in Year 2 described in the preceding section are, considered on their own, small achievements within the broad spectrum of learning to write. They are not however inconsequential. Rather, they indicate valuable early developmental steps in a bigger process.

At the outset of the present study, exploration of the potential of a functional
grammatics was proposed as a central concern (Chapter 4, General Research Question 1). A logical implication of an interest in ‘potential’ is that data need not be limited to the testing of outcomes at a presumed point of fruition/culmination (in contrast with, for example, the end-of-year essays and tests used as a main source of data in much of the historical research), and might profitably include evidence of growth – and necessarily then of *incomplete development*. A clear challenge with such an approach is the establishment of a connection between observed learning and some kind of developmental pathway; achievements are only construed as evidence of ‘development’ from a vantage point of some fruition. It is therefore important to have a sense of the direction of developmental progression in order for data to be considered evidence of ‘potential’ rather than of merely local or momentary interest.

In the more extensively researched areas of education, where a sense of progression already exists, we are used to interpreting small steps as part of a larger trajectory. For example, in mathematics education the child who counts by rote is interpreted as on a path towards counting with one-to-one correspondence; in literacy education a child who traces along a line of English text from left to right is interpreted as having made a small but important step in learning to read. These achievements may not be large, but we interpret such steps as meaningful parts of a greater and important project.

The argument here is that the Year 2 children’s early moves in learning about Theme and the (re-)writing of instructions represent meaningful and positive steps in a learning process which may be long but may be anticipated to be very fruitful. This is a process about which we know much less, unfortunately, than we do about learning to count or read. There is however some agreement about the importance of control of Theme in mature writing (for example, Christie, 2002b, p. 64; 2012, pp.
There is also evidence of older children applying the grammatics of Theme in similar ways to the Class 2F children but with more conscious control and over longer texts. It is reasonable therefore to interpret the Year 2 children’s learning as being developmentally significant.

A sense of possible developmental progression in using Theme for writing is here advanced by drawing upon existing data from another case study, specifically one conducted with Year 6 students (1995, 1999, 2004, 2006). In Williams’ study, the 11 year olds first learned about Theme in the context of work on procedural texts (in a similar vein to Class 2F’s work); they then explored applications of Theme in recounts including their own independently written texts; and later they used Theme in redrafting information reports of the part/whole or ‘meronymic’ kind. Throughout the case study, the notion of choice was emphasised alongside the teaching of Theme, so that Theme was represented to the children as a way of describing how authors might choose to foreground certain wordings in order to shape texts. The types of texts through which the Year 6 children learned about Theme were therefore of central importance to their understanding of how to apply Theme in writing. These students were not simply advised, for example, to ‘vary your sentence beginnings’ – devoid of any sense of purpose or context – but rather they learned that different text types deploy different thematic patterns and therefore choices about Theme need to be reasoned rather than random.

One result of the teaching–learning sequence about Theme in Williams’ project was that Year 6 students developed in their conscious control of Theme in recount texts. They were able to identify Theme in their own writing (not perfectly but to a useful degree) and to choose to reword some of their Themes for better

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123 For description of these types of texts, see for example: Derewianka (1990, p. 52), Martin (1993, pp. 173–174), Matthiessen (1995) and Wignell, Martin and Eggins (1993, pp. 153, 155–156).
effect in terms of the structure of their whole recount. This was not only evident in Williams’ textual analysis of the children’s independent writing (G. Williams, 1995), but also in interviews with the children, who were able to discuss how they applied knowledge of Theme as part of their conscious control of the redrafting of their writing (G. Williams, 2004, pp. 262–263; G. Williams et al., 1994). The Year 6 children in Williams’ project were able to see and articulate some strategic ways of improving the organisation of their writing because of the teaching–learning of Theme.

In contrast, Year 6 children in a roughly parallel non-grammar class who also wrote recounts about the same school excursion exhibited very little inclination to reword their draft writing due to a lack of awareness of the rhetorical options available, and they were unable to articulate how to improve their drafts except in terms of orthography (G. Williams, 1995). While the comparison between the two classes does not carry the weight of a randomised, controlled experiment, there is nevertheless sufficient triangulation of data (students’ written texts including similar texts from before the teaching of Theme, students’ comments at interview, teacher observations, researcher observations) to indicate that the grammar class’s improvements in recount writing were real and were strongly connected with the teaching–learning of Theme.

Further evidence for a learning trajectory in applying Theme in writing was also found when this same Year 6 class used Theme in the writing of meronymic information reports. Students were able to use Theme in joint and independent redrafting tasks to make somewhat muddled reports much clearer and more effective (G. Williams, 2006).

Considered together, the evidence from the Year 6 children’s work is that
Theme can be a powerful tool in helping learners understand the principled ways in which they can choose to reorder sentences and reword stretches of text in order to make those texts more organised and effective. An important dimension of this learning is understanding the relationship between patterns of Theme and the shaping of whole texts, including how Theme varies across different types of texts.

In a case study of one school year’s duration, the Year 6 children, who began as novices in grammatics, learned about Theme in three text types: procedures, recounts, and information reports. Clearly the control of Theme across all the text types needed for success in school education would involve an even longer timeframe, although if children in Year 2 begin the journey and Theme is revisited throughout the school years, by Year 6 their control of Theme could be expected to be even more developed than it was for the students in Williams’ study.

### 8.3 Challenges for teaching–learning about Theme

Amidst questions of the effectiveness of learning grammatics, the pedagogy by which it is taught has often been ‘taken as read’ (Chapter 3 section 3.3). The latter part of the present chapter addresses the question of pedagogy specifically in relation to teaching Theme, addressing some challenges identified in the Class 2F data. These pedagogical challenges are in major part inherent to the concept of ‘Theme’ itself, and so while they were identified from a single case study, comparable challenges may be anticipated for teaching Theme in other educational contexts. That is, the discussion is likely to have ‘analytical generalisability’. The main challenges for a pedagogy of Theme identified from the case study data are:

- defining Theme for students (sub-section 8.3.1 below);
- achieving a balance between teaching–learning activities which involve on the one hand identifying (finding) individual Themes in texts and on the
other hand activities which promote an understanding of how Themes work collectively across whole texts to build meaning (what I will couch in terms of ‘being able to see the wood as well as the trees’); and developing an understanding of how Themes vary across different types of texts (or multiple ‘woods’) – (sub-section 8.3.2).

It will be argued that addressing this range of challenges is important for any students of Theme if they are to develop a systematic understanding of the concept. Some of the ways in which this was attempted in Class 2F, not always successfully, will be used to illustrate the points made in this section.

8.3.1 Defining Theme for students

There are a number of challenges teachers may face in defining Theme so that it is accessible and meaningful for students while also maintaining integrity to the concept as formulated in SFL. An initial question for teachers is when to introduce a definition of Theme, a point which is addressed briefly below. Further pedagogical challenges for defining Theme are then explored from two perspectives. The first approach begins with linguistic theory about Theme and outlines the potential difficulty of distinguishing between defining Theme and identifying Theme for novices, with the added difficulty of defining what is an inherently abstract concept. Working ‘from the theory, down’, some of the ways in which these challenges were negotiated in the classroom are demonstrated using excerpts from the Class 2F transcript data. A second approach to the pedagogical challenges of defining Theme takes as its origin the empirical data, working ‘from the data, up’ in order to explore how the teacher’s talk defined Theme for students in situated practice. Specifically, this part of the discussion uses some grammatical analysis of the teacher’s wordings for definitions of Theme and evaluates the merits of these.
Introducing a definition of Theme

Very early in teaching students about Theme, it will become necessary to define the concept. This need not necessarily be the very first move in teaching Theme, however, as demonstrated in Class 2F where an actual definition of Theme was deferred until a sense of the patterning of procedural texts was established. It was only after one child’s observation that the ‘action verbs’ were “[almost] all at the start” (May 14 lesson, see transcript in Appendix B, item B.5, p. 456) that the term ‘Theme’ was introduced, with the motivation of giving that pattern a name. There was deliberate pedagogic design in this staging of the children’s learning. By first focusing attention on the verbal patterning of a text, the researcher and teacher intended that the children would develop an awareness of patterns in wording which would then provide a meaningful referential basis for the explicit teaching of a definition of Theme. That is, a definition of Theme may productively follow and make use of teacher-supported observation of Theme in texts rather than necessarily preceding it.

Defining Theme and identifying Theme – exploring pedagogic challenges from a linguistic perspective

Deferred for a time or not, the question will inevitably arise: How to define Theme for students? The description of Theme used in Class 2F is reproduced here:

```
Theme
The THEME is found at the beginning of the sentence. It can be one word or a group of words which belong together.
The job (function) of the THEME is to tell us what the rest of the sentence will be about. The THEME introduces the message of the sentence. It launches the sentence and sets it on its way.
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(from Class 2F case study data, introduced on May 14 and displayed on the classroom wall for the rest of the school year)

This description consists of two parts. The first paragraph provides an indication of how to identify or locate Theme in English and does not in fact define Theme; the
second paragraph is much closer to a definition of Theme, being faithful to
Halliday’s conception of Theme as “point of departure” (Halliday & Matthiessen,
2004, p. 64) while also attempting to frame the concept in a manner hopefully
accessible to young learners (including the references to ‘sentence’ rather than
‘clause’, the latter being a concept the Year 2 children had not yet learned).

Halliday has consistently been at pains to distinguish the definition of Theme
as ‘point of departure’ from the identification of Theme, that is, how we find it
(Halliday, 1984/2002b, pp. 297–298). In English, the word or words making up the
Theme are found in first position in a clause (see also discussion above at sub-
section 8.1.2). Theme in English is therefore identified as the first element in a clause
– specifically it consists of all the words up to and including the first Participant,
Circumstance or Process in each ‘free’ or independent clause. Other languages may
signal Theme differently. An introduction to functional grammar contrasts the
identification of Theme in English with Theme in Japanese, where the ‘-wa’ particle
is added to the end of the word group which constitutes Theme (Halliday &
Matthiessen, 2004, p. 64). Importantly, then, Theme should not be defined as ‘what
comes first’, even though this is where it is found or how it is identified in English.

This distinction presents one of the challenges in teaching Theme. It is easy
to see how in a monolingual English-speaking instructional setting, the definition
and the identification of Theme can be conflated or confused. If Theme is always the
‘point of departure’ and also always found in first position, it could easily become
the case that Theme gets defined as ‘that which comes first’. The temptation for
teachers to adopt such a definition is likely to be strengthened by the fact that ‘point
of departure’ is metaphorical, whereas ‘what comes first’ is both congruent (that is,
not a metaphor) and also more concrete (you can actually observe it in text). These
aspects of ‘point of departure’ were addressed in the Class 2F case study in a number of ways.

The metaphorical nature of ‘point of departure’ makes this a less accessible definition for a grammatical concept than more congruent definitions (such as ‘Participant’, which may be defined as ‘who’ or ‘what’ is participating in a Process). The data from the Class 2F case study indicate that metaphorical definitions were not, however, necessarily difficult for the children, provided they were thoughtfully selected. In fact, an expanded use of metaphor may actually be a useful pedagogic strategy by which children can access a reasonable sense of the meaning of Theme. In Class 2F, the teacher and researcher made use of several metaphors drawn from the children’s own everyday experience of ‘points of departure’ to help them develop an understanding of Theme. For example:

Teacher: [Reading from ‘Theme’ mini-poster:] ‘The Theme introduces the message of the sentence. It launches the sentence’ – like a rocket ship –

Child: Mm!

Teacher: ‘– and sets it on its way.’ So the Theme at the beginning of the sentence helps you know what that sentence is going to be about.

(Class 2F, May 14)

Researcher: Well, you could think about it like this. You know how, when a plane goes on a journey it has to start on the runway? And go really fast and speed up and then it goes off on its journey?

Children: Yeah.

Researcher: Well, the Theme is kind of like the plane going down the runway, getting started.124 Off it goes.

(Class 2F, September 11)

Researcher: [T]he Theme is kind of like the kick-off. The kick-off starts off the football game, and the Theme starts off the sentence. ... Would you kick off in the wrong direction?

Children: No. (Class 2F, September 11)

124 The case study school was under one of the main flight paths for Sydney International Airport, so this metaphor had direct relevance to the children.
The children seemed to respond to these metaphors with at least a degree of understanding. Poppy, for example, indicated that she had some grasp of the meaning of ‘point of departure’ in relation to Theme when she generated her own metaphor:

Poppy: Well, it’s sort of how the Theme starts. It’s just like in football where they have to get in place. It’s like the sentence has to get in place as well. ’Cause if they’re in the wrong place, it muddles up, like the sentence or the game.

(Class 2F, September 11)

The metaphorical definition of Theme as ‘point of departure’ may thus be productively exploited for teaching purposes, with both teachers and students capable of generating comparisons with ‘points of departure’ in everyday life which help to provide a sense of the meaning of the category.

The abstract nature of ‘point of departure’ is a further (and related125) potential challenge for defining Theme. At its heart, this abstraction is unavoidable, since Theme does not provide a general term for a set of referents which have some concrete realisation, as might ‘material Process’, but rather it is metalanguage for a kind of patterning in language. In SFL, the terms which label experiential meanings, such as Process, Actor and Goal, “can, at least in principle, be physically observed by someone somewhere” (Hasan & Fries, 1995, p. xvii). However the kinds of meanings construed by the interpersonal and textual metafunctions, including Theme in the latter, are inherently more abstract. In the case of Theme, its definition as ‘point of departure’ does not correspond to anything materially observable:

The “reality” to which such [interpersonal and textual] meanings relate “exists” itself only by virtue of semiotic activity – the question of correspondence to something in the extra-linguistic world cannot be raised very sensibly. (Hasan & Fries, 1995, p. xviii)

125 The need to use a metaphor (‘point of departure’) to define Theme is partly a function of its abstraction.
It is this absence of any direct, tangible referents which is likely to contribute to the appeal of conceptualising Theme as ‘what comes first’ as if this is a definition rather than a means of identification.

A significant way in which the meaning of Theme may be made less abstract for learners is that of illustration or examples, particularly illustration across whole texts rather than merely at the level of single clauses or sentences. The value of illustration in teaching–learning about grammatics is generally relevant to all grammatical categories, as was shown by the productive use of examples in introducing ‘action verbs’ (Chapter 5). Illustration is perhaps especially important however for teaching–learning about features of the textual and interpersonal metafunctions, given their inherently abstract quality. Hasan and Fries comment:

> What might help in this situation [of dealing with abstract meanings] is to establish somehow, if we can, what actually happens in the language as it gets used. It is this kind of inquiry that might be capable of creating a more tangible sense of what these abstract semantic characterisations mean. In other words, ... it may yet be possible to show what one means through apt illustrations of how the category works in use. (Hasan & Fries, 1995, p. xviii, original emphasis)

And furthermore,

> [T]he semantic description of Theme as the “point of departure” can be understood only in the context of textual organisation, for it is this aspect of language use to which the patterns of thematic selection bear some non-random relation ... [T]he semantic value of categories such as Subject and Theme cannot become available if one’s scope for evidence is limited to single, simple sentences. (Hasan & Fries, 1995, p. xx)

In the Class 2F case study, Theme was indeed studied using complete texts, with procedure and recount texts in particular having a regularity of patterning in Theme which made them “apt illustrations” through which the children were able to begin to develop a tangible sense of the meaning of Theme (see further discussion at 8.3.2 below).
A further aspect of the non-concrete nature of ‘point of departure’ is that it evokes a psychological dimension to Theme. Halliday’s ‘point of departure’ suggests ‘that which is in the speaker’s/writer’s mind’. Indeed Halliday makes reference to the notion of the ‘psychological Subject’ of the clause as one way into understanding Theme (Halliday, 1994, pp. 31–32). But psychological intent is invisible and therefore impossible to show to learners in any immediate form. Here again the school teacher may well prefer a visible explanation of Theme as ‘that which comes first’ (visibly, on the page) to an invisible one in which an author’s state of mind is to be extrapolated (‘this is what I’m going to talk/write about’). It is of course the case when defining Theme that we do not know what the author’s ‘point of departure’ is except via the text. That is, our sense of ‘point of departure’ is construed by Theme. Nevertheless, the psychological dimension of ‘point of departure’ does potentially provide another way of talking about Theme with students. In the Class 2F case study, the teacher made limited use of this sense of Theme as indicated in the following example:

Teacher: That’s why, here, the most important thing that this person that wrote this procedure, the most important thing that the person that wrote this procedure wants you to know, in the first sentence, what do you think the most important thing they want you to know is? Look at the beginning of that sentence. [Pause 3 seconds.] Christopher?

Christopher: ‘Carefully’?

Teacher: You’re right. They want you to look at that word ‘carefully’ and think, ‘Right, I’ve got to do this carefully.’

(Class 2F, May 14)

Here the teacher is providing the children with another way of thinking about Theme: Theme as a product of deliberate authorial foregrounding (particularly in this instance the deployment of a marked Theme, ‘carefully’, rather than the usual or unmarked form for a procedure of imperative material Process). This is a valid way
to represent some of the meaning of ‘Theme’ and expands the notion of Theme from ‘what comes first’ into a discussion of why to place some word/s first. Furthermore, at the same time as developing the children’s understanding of Theme in a text written by someone else, the teacher is also signalling (by implication at this point and overtly in ensuing dialogue) that authoring a text can involve deliberately choosing what to place in Theme position, considering the message and the needs of the reader (“the most important thing they want you to know”). It is from this kind of class discussion that applications of Theme in children’s own writing may be developed.

One final note regarding challenges in defining Theme looking from ‘the theory, down’, is that for monolingual English-speaking learners, there is no point of difference against which they can discriminate between defining and identifying Theme. When students possess no working knowledge of another language in which Theme is not signalled by first position (such as the aforementioned Japanese), there exists an inevitable element of ‘taking the teacher’s word’ for the distinction between the definition of Theme and the identification of Theme. Even if learners do speak more than one language, they may not know how Theme is identified in that language unless a teacher is able to point this out to them. This was not a challenge met in any direct way in the case study in Class 2F, nor is it easily avoided in monolingual settings of any kind (for a monolingual Japanese student the challenge would be essentially the same, presumably, except that instead it would manifest as conflating the ‘-wa’ phrase with a definition of Theme). Rather, this point suggests that in monolingual settings it is reasonable to anticipate that novice learners will tend to equate the identification of Theme with the definition of Theme unless deliberate pedagogic moves are made to erode this misunderstanding. The Class 2F
teacher was aware of the distinction herself and tried to draw students’ attention to the difference. For example:

Teacher: Mhm. And what does Theme mean? Can you tell me that?
Gareth: Um … a Th-, it’s, it’s a, it’s found at the start of the, a sentence.
Teacher: That’s where it’s found. What, what does it mean?
Gareth: Um–
Teacher: Do you know what it means? … What do you think it means?
...
Beatrice: Theme is really what the sentence means–
...
Beatrice: That is what the sentence is about.
Teacher: That’s what Theme is. Theme is what the sentence is about.

(Class 2F, June 24)

The key point here is the teacher’s distinction between “where it’s found” (identification) and “what does it mean?” (definition), and her resolve in not accepting that one is the same as the other. Her formulation of Theme as “what the sentence is about” is also of interest, and the following discussion focuses on the kinds of wordings used by the teacher in explaining ‘Theme’ to the children.

**Defining Theme in situated practice – exploring the wording of teacher talk**

The language used to explain Theme to students is important because of the dominant role of language in mediating educational knowledge (Chapter 3, 3.4.2). In Class 2F, the ways in which language was used to mediate learning about Theme were varied – sometimes in productive ways for novice learners and sometimes less so. This can be demonstrated using some select examples from the transcript data, making particular use of grammatical analysis to show how Theme was defined for students. The grammatical analyses undertaken focused upon the experiential

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126 ‘Theme’ was also mediated by non-linguistic semiotic means, principally the consistent use in this case study class of the colour orange for highlighting relevant sections of text. This form of semiotic mediation was, in comparison with teacher talk, simpler and unproblematic.
metafunction in order to explore ways of representing Theme, with some use also
made of analysis of logical relations. In terms of productive wordings to describe
Theme, the introductory lesson on May 14 provides a number of relevant examples,
while two small and indicative examples of less helpful descriptions of Theme from
lessons on June 24 and August 7 will also be examined in the following discussion.

In the lesson introducing Theme on May 14, there were thirteen explicit
mentions of Theme, each of which was analysed within its immediate context in
classroom discourse (the analysis and explanatory notes are in Appendix E, item
E.7). Several of the references to Theme in this lesson were scripted by the
researcher – they were written out as a small poster which the teacher then displayed
and read aloud (see p.332 above). Overall, the ways in which Theme was represented
in the May 14 lesson were both in keeping with its definition in SFL and also likely
to be accessible to junior primary school children. The various wordings used to
represent Theme demonstrate a similar productive redundancy to some of the
wordings for ‘action verbs’ described in Chapter 5 – that is, there was an attempt to
define Theme in multiple and complementary ways. Several examples are discussed
below.

As noted already (this chapter, p. 332), Theme was initially represented in the
May 14 lesson (and subsequently such as in the lesson of June 24) as a way of
naming an already observed pattern in a text. In the clauses shown in Figure 8.3, the
teacher capitalises on the presence of a procedure text on display, making use of
exophoric reference (the word ‘that’ – pointing out of the discourse to something in
the material setting) to connect ‘Theme’ with a tangible referent. This serves to bring
the potentially abstract ‘Theme’ into the realm of the observable, and also side-steps
any immediate pressure to furnish an abstract definition of Theme (such as ‘Theme
is the point of departure of a clause’) – which could be anticipated to be difficult for young novices if presented without context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process: existential</th>
<th>Existent</th>
<th>Circumstance: cause: purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i)s</td>
<td>a name</td>
<td>for that part of the sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Exophoric reference to text on display</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.3** Analysis of experiential meanings in clauses leading up to introduction of ‘Theme’

Theme was also introduced in terms of its identification, including its location in a sentence. The following description of Theme (Figure 8.4) is not a definition (preceding discussion, this section), but it does serve to show the children how they might begin to recognise Theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Theme</th>
<th>is found</th>
<th>at the beginning of the sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational: circumstantial: attributive</td>
<td>Attribute: circumstantial (location: place)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It</th>
<th>can be</th>
<th>one word or a group of words [which belong together]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: attributive</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.4** Analysis of experiential meanings indicating Theme identification

In the scripted description of Theme provided by the researcher and read aloud by the teacher, Theme was further characterised as a Sayer, a participant in a verbal Process (Figure 8.5):
The job or the function of the Theme is [to tell us what the rest of the sentence will be about]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Theme introduces the message of the sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sayer</th>
<th>Process: verbal</th>
<th>Verbiage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 8.5** Analysis of experiential meanings in clauses defining ‘Theme’

These formulations imbue Theme with the humanised power of speech and emphasise an aspect of the functional capacity of Theme – it can ‘tell us’ something, and by implication therefore Theme has value for the information it can convey.

‘Theme’ was also represented as an Actor in material processes (Figure 8.6):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It (i.e. ‘Theme’) launches the sentence like a rocket ship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor Process: material Goal Circumstance: manner: comparison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and (it) sets it (i.e. ‘the sentence’) on its way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- (Actor) sets it (i.e. ‘the sentence’) on its way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor Process: material Goal Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.6** Analysis of experiential meanings: ‘Theme’ as Actor

In these wordings Theme is again imbued with functional capacity – here, the capacity to act upon text (‘the sentence’ – the Goal in both clauses). In a further move (Figure 8.7), Theme was also represented as a different kind of Actor, not only acting upon text but also engaged in activity for the reader’s benefit. That is, Theme’s activity is for good purpose – to ‘help you’ to know something:
Chapter 8: Teaching and learning about Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>So</th>
<th>the Theme at the beginning of the sentence</th>
<th>helps</th>
<th>you</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(to) know</th>
<th>⟦what that sentence is going to be about⟧</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mental:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.7** Analysis of experiential meanings in further clauses defining ‘Theme’

Following on from these complementary and accessible descriptions of Theme, the teacher returned to discussing the procedural text on display, specifically pointing out the connection between Theme and the patterning of the text (“quite often there’s action verbs the beginning of sentences”). In this part of the lesson, Theme was described as “the most important thing that the person that wrote this procedure wants you to know” (the ‘psychological Subject’ mentioned in preceding discussion) and “the most important thing that you see in that sentence” (Figure 8.8).

Both these wordings use embedded clauses\(^{127}\) to encapsulate in one ‘thing’ a series of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>So</th>
<th>that</th>
<th>(i)s</th>
<th>⟦ why the person ⟦who wrote this procedure, I who's giving you the, these instructions⟧, they put ‘carefully’ first ⟧</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>because</th>
<th>they</th>
<th>want</th>
<th>⟦ that ⟦to be the most important thing ⟦[that you see in that sentence]⟧ ⟧</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Process: mental: desiderative</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.8** Analysis of experiential meanings with embeddings indicated: ‘Theme’ represented as ‘psychological subject’

\(^{127}\) Embedded clauses indicated by double square brackets: ⟦⟧; clause boundaries indicated by double vertical lines: ‖.
connected experiential referents: authors wanting readers to know something important; readers seeing certain things in text as salient. This use of embedded clauses packages up a lot of the preceding information about Theme from the lesson and distils it into one entity. This entity, while somewhat complex in terms of the logical relations between clauses (both the examples above have an embedding within an embedding), nevertheless makes use of everyday language in defining Theme. The teacher thereby recasts Theme in terms accessible for the students and helps them bring together some of the multiple ways Theme has been represented in preceding discussion. Her formulation also, as noted above, interprets Theme for the students in terms of its significance for the reader – that is, choice of Theme as a function of deliberate authorial foregrounding for meaningful social purposes (specifically here the need to act ‘carefully’ as the primary consideration when performing a tricky step in a procedure).

All these various ways of describing Theme served to provide the Year 2 children with accessible and accurate information about this grammatical category, while not at any point using an abstract definition. It is interesting that during this introductory lesson the teacher in fact found it quite difficult to provide the students with a definition for Theme within the typical lexicogrammatical resources for defining, that is, using an identifying-type relational clause (such as ‘Theme [Token] is [Process: relational: intensive; identifying] x [Value]’, parallel in form to ‘Birds are vertebrates with feathers’, for example). While the teacher did attempt to define Theme using an identifying-type relational clause on at least one occasion in the May 14 lesson (item E.7.5 in Appendix E), she broke off her definition part-way through. She said: “So we can see that Theme is what the person who wrote it–”.

It is not known whether she broke off her definition (“Theme is–”) because she was
sure how to finish, or whether she was concerned that the children would not understand what she intended to say. It is reasonable however to infer that a simple ‘Theme is x’ statement which would be accessible to junior primary children did not readily come to mind. This makes the other ways of describing Theme as set out in preceding discussion all the more important, since in the absence of a simple and accessible identifying definition these other ways of describing Theme must collectively carry a sense of what ‘Theme’ represents.

Two brief examples of less productive ways of talking about Theme are next discussed to support the final points to be made in this section about defining Theme, the examples being sufficiently illustrative to make the case given the constraints of space. Firstly, there were occasions when the teacher’s attempts to define Theme using everyday language ‘packaged’ into embedded clauses became so logically complex that the teacher herself seemed to lose her way, and presumably students would also have found such definitions hard to follow. The Figure 8.9 example is from

| That    | (i)s | the grammar word [referring to the start of the sentence. || telling us || that that sentence tells us || that’s the Theme of that sentence, || that’s [what’s going on in that sentence] ] |
|---------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Token   | Process: relational: intensive: identifying | Value |
| referring to the start of the sentence | telling us | that that sentence tells us | that’s the Theme of that sentence | that is what’s going on in that sentence |
| 1 | 2α | 2β1α | 2β1β | 2β2 |

**Figure 8.9** Analysis of single ranking clause defining Theme, with logical relations of embedded clauses shown
a lesson on June 24 (see item E.3 in Appendix E). In this single ‘ranking’ clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 9–10), the Token (‘That’) is quite clear and refers to preceding discussion, in which the teacher has revised prior learning about the pattern “at the start of the sentence” in procedures, which has “a special name ... Theme”. The difficulty arises in her attempt to give a Value to the Token, to complete the definition. The Value in this clause is multi-layered, with the embedded clauses qualifying the main noun group (‘the grammar word’) having up to four levels of ‘nesting’, meaning that some of these clauses are five steps removed or ‘rank-shifted’ from the main clause. This is complexity of such extent that it becomes difficult to follow how the different degrees of embedding relate to one another. To add to the difficulty, the embedding which is attempting to define Theme in fact uses the word ‘Theme’, suggesting that Theme cannot be adequately defined without self-reference. In this example, the teacher’s attempt to repackage Theme for the students is less than satisfactory.

A second kind of unsatisfactory definition of Theme was one which set up expectations of Theme which were likely to cause confusion with other grammatical categories which might be introduced at a later point. One small example must suffice:

Teacher: Who can remember what Theme is?

... 

Teacher: Chen?
Chen: It tells you what the rest of the sentence is about.
Teacher: Yes – it’s the meaning of the sentence, isn’t it?

(Class 2F, August 7)

Chen’s formulation of Theme in this instance is quite a good one, but the teacher’s recasting of what he says is less so. Contrary to the teacher’s assertion, the “meaning of the sentence” does not in fact reside in the Theme, otherwise the rest of the clause
or sentence would be unnecessary. Certainly the Theme orients the reader or listener in meaningful ways to the entire message, but ‘meaning’ and ‘Theme’ are not co-extensive. These children might well go on to learn about the clause as the most basic meaningful unit in grammatical terms (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 10, 58–62), at which point an imprecise definition of Theme (such as ‘Theme=meaning’) in earlier learning could present a barrier to better and cumulative understanding. As with the argument presented in Chapter 5 for avoiding ‘doing words’ as a gloss for ‘verbs’ because of the misunderstandings which predictably follow, so also for definitions of Theme: faithful and accurate definitions or glosses should be used from the earliest points in learning in order to facilitate longer term knowledge building.

An important implication for pedagogy following from the above discussion is that teachers are likely to benefit from being provided with ways of talking about Theme which are both linguistically sound and pedagogically accessible. The provision of suggested wordings for explaining Theme would support teachers and students by offering multiple complementary descriptions and hopefully by avoiding potential confusion at future points in learning grammatics.

**Conclusions about the challenges of ‘defining Theme’**

A significant challenge for teaching Theme is that of defining it for students. This challenge is in large measure a function of the fact that Theme refers not to outwardly observable referents but to features of texts. As such, it is inherently and unavoidably a more abstract notion than, for example, ‘material Process’. Some of the ways in which an understanding of Theme may be developed in the classroom include: introducing a definition of Theme after preceding work on textual patterning; use of metaphorical comparisons with ‘points of departure’ in everyday
life; use of illustrations of Theme across complete texts; distinguishing where appropriate between ‘identifying’ and ‘defining’ Theme; discussing Theme in terms of authorial choices about what to foreground; and talking about Theme using multiple clear and complementary wordings which retain a faithful sense of the academic formulations of Theme while aiming to be accessible to young learners.

8.3.2 Achieving a balance between identifying individual Themes and understanding how patterns of Theme build meaning

The preceding discussion concluded that one productive way to help novices learn what Theme means is to illustrate its relevance through examples in text. This however entails two related challenges – (i) that of helping learners understand how to identify Theme at the level of the sentence (or more accurately, the clause), and (ii) that of helping them understand how patterns of Theme build meaning across stretches of text. A logically consequent challenge is (iii) developing an understanding of how Themes vary across different kinds of texts. In terms of the metaphor of trees and woods, these could be described as the challenges of (i) identifying trees, (ii) perceiving the wood, and (iii) understanding that there are ‘multiple woods’. These challenges and especially the latter two flow logically from any decision to teach Theme, in as much as the point of teaching Theme should not be skill in analysis for its own sake but rather a grasp of the relationship of grammatics to meaning. These logical challenges find their embodiment as practical problems for the classroom. In the discussion below, data from the Class 2F case study furnish examples of the practical challenges of teaching both how to identify Theme and how to understand its significance, and of striking a balance between the two. The discussion also draws a number of implications for teaching these aspects of Theme.
Identifying Theme

The challenge of teaching the identification of Themes in clauses/sentences would seem to be logically prior to the related challenge of considering how patterns of Theme contribute to meaning, and for this reason at least it is discussed here first. Certainly it makes no sense to suggest that one could reflect on the contribution of any grammatical feature to the meaning of text without knowing what that grammatical feature was. There is a pedagogical question, however, about how much emphasis should be given to individual students’ mastery of analytical skills at different points in the learning process. Recalling Vygotsky’s formulation of the ‘zone of proximal development’, the teacher’s provision of strategic assistance can help the learner achieve higher intellectual ground. In terms of teaching the identification of Theme, a flexible approach to the degree of independent expertise expected of students may be adopted. It may, for example, make good pedagogical sense for a teacher to choose to point out the Themes in a text rather than expect students to find them all by themselves, especially in the beginning stages, thus bypassing analysis of Theme by students until they have developed some sense of why Theme is important.

In the Class 2F case study, considerable time and effort was sometimes expended asking children to identify Themes in texts. For example, in a lesson on Themes in the children’s picture book *Drac and the Gremlin* (Baillie, 1988) which ran for 33:52 minutes of audio recorded time,\(^{128}\) 17:38 minutes or just over half of the recorded lesson was spent asking children to identify Themes in each successive sentence of the text of the book. A sense of the classroom talk throughout this

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\(^{128}\) Date of lesson: December 8. During this lesson the audio recorder was paused twice to allow for distribution of materials and for children to catch up to others when underlining the Themes, so the total lesson time was somewhat longer than 34 minutes but not enormously so.
activity is provided in the following excerpt.

Teacher: We’re reading Drac and the Gremlin and we’re underlining the Themes.

Teacher: OK. Where were we up to? ‘More danger.’ Beatrice?
Beatrice: ‘More danger’?
Teacher: Yes. Very good! ‘More danger’ is the Theme.

Teacher: ‘Drac hears the trees of the jungle shake behind her.’ Oliver.
Oliver: ‘Drac’?
Teacher: Yes.

‘The terrible tongued dragon is upon them!’ Heidi.
Heidi: ‘The terrible tongued dragon’?
Teacher: Yes. ...

Teacher: ‘Drac speeds through the jungle but she can feel the fire from the dragon’s mouth.’ Luke.
Teacher: Yes.

[Short pause – children are marking text with orange pencils after each Theme is identified.]
Teacher: ‘She turns to fight.’ Clint.
Clint: ‘She’?
Teacher: Yes.

‘But the dragon is too big, too fierce.’ Chen.
Chen: ‘But the dragon’?
Teacher: Yes. You’re doing really well, 2F.

‘The terrible tongue is poised to destroy her.’ Poppy.
Poppy: ‘The terrible tongue’?
Teacher: Yes.

Children: [Chuckles, chatter.]
Teacher: Turn the page.

Teacher: ‘But all is not lost.’ Elizabeth.
Elizabeth: ‘But’?
Teacher: Pardon?
Elizabeth: ‘But’?
Teacher: Little bit more.
Elizabeth: ‘But all’?
Teacher: Yes. ‘But all is not lost.’
‘The Gremlin mounts his Supersonic Jetbike and roars into attack with micro-blasters blazing.’ Christopher.

Christopher: ‘The Gremlin’?
Teacher: Yes.

(Class 2F, December 8)

This excerpt provides a useful basis upon which to make a number of observations about the teaching of Theme identification.

Firstly, it is clear that many children had developed a good deal of facility in identifying straightforward topical Themes, even when these consisted of several words, such as Heidi’s identification of the entire nominal group comprising the Participant in ‘The terrible tongued dragon is upon them!’ (Theme underlined). In this respect, the excerpt accurately reflects similar data from the same lesson as well as other lessons on Theme – that generally the children were attending to entire meaningful chunks of texts when identifying Theme. This in itself is significant, since it is sometimes commented that it can be difficult for novices in grammatics to ‘see’ chunks of text as belonging together as functional elements in clauses or sentences (for example, Stuart-Smith, 2003, p. 73). In the case study data for this thesis, and across both classes, the children readily attended to ‘chunks’ as meaningful units and did not seem to have difficulty with this.

A second observation qualifies the preceding paragraph somewhat, namely that some kinds of Theme are likely to cause a level of confusion or difficulty for beginners. In the above transcript excerpt, an example of such confusion occurs when Elizabeth tries to identify the Theme in the sentence: ‘But all is not lost.’ She correctly identifies ‘but’, which is obviously thematic given first position in the sentence, although the word ‘but’ is just the ‘textual Theme’ and in fact the entire Theme is ‘but all’. This the teacher hints at by saying, “Little bit more” – a hint used
quite often by this teacher when children were confronted with more complex Themes. Elizabeth is then able to locate the Theme, although it is by no means certain that she understands why it is the Theme and why not more words or fewer. One implication of this observation for pedagogical practice is that teachers should anticipate that complex Themes (consisting of more than a topical Theme, or to put it another way, having textual and/or interpersonal Themes) will be harder for students to identify than simple Themes consisting of a single topical entity (Process, Participant or Circumstance). This might be especially so if the topical Theme seems insubstantial, such as the single and very short word ‘all’, which is technically a noun but really pronominal in this context (meaning ‘everything’) and is also non-specific, in contrast with a pronoun like ‘she’ which more obviously constitutes a Participant (and refers back to a specific, already-named character). So the presence of Themes with multiple components may be a source of difficulty, as may the presence of less obviously salient topical Themes.

Another observation from the data relevant to the teaching-learning of Theme identification is that prior (or concurrent) knowledge of conjunctive elements can be helpful. ‘Conjunctive elements’ is used here to refer both to conjunctions traditionally defined, and also to words which “cover roughly the same semantic space as conjunctions” in that they connect clauses to preceding text, such as ‘then’, ‘later’, and ‘therefore’ (called ‘conjunctive adjuncts’, Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004,

129 Similar difficulties with apparently insubstantial topical Themes from this lesson included ‘I’ in ‘I am being attacked’, and ‘There’ in the existential clause ‘There is still more danger’. Note that both are grammatical rather than lexical items (Halliday, 1985b) and therefore carry little semantic weight. The latter is an especially tricky construction to explain to novices (wisely the teacher in Class 2F didn’t try and just identified the Theme and moved on). ‘There’ in existential clauses fulfils neither a Participant nor Circumstance role but rather “it serves to indicate the feature of existence, and it is needed interpersonally as a Subject” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 257). In terms of Theme, the existential clause is a rare form because it is the only major finite clause type not to have a topical Theme (when in unmarked form, that is, when the word ‘there’ begins the clause). It thus does not conform to the Class 2F teacher’s favoured prompt for types of Theme: ‘verb, Participant or Circumstance?’ It is none of these.
In the lesson from which the above excerpt was taken, the teacher did not refer to conjunctive elements at all, even though these had been explicitly discussed in class at an earlier stage when writing recounts, where the teacher mainly used the terminology of ‘time connectives’. Some children did seem to recall from previous lessons that the Theme did not consist of just a conjunction or ‘connective’ (such as Chen’s accurate identification of ‘But the dragon’ in the transcript above), but for other children this remained unclear. For example:

Teacher: ‘Later, they [teacher emphasis] return to the palace.’ Kate.
Kate: Um, ‘Later’.
Teacher: Little bit more.
Kate: ‘–they’?
Teacher: Yes. ‘Later they’ – that’s what happens in that sentence – ‘return to the palace’.

(Class 2F, December 8)

‘Later’ is performing a conjunctive role here, linking the clause with prior events in the same text. Explicit teaching about conjunctive elements and their role is likely to be useful to students for understanding and identifying Theme. In the lesson from which the excerpt under discussion was taken, and given the class’s prior learning, the teacher could have made explicit mention of conjunctions or ‘connectives’ to help the children develop a clearer idea of how to identify Theme.

A final observation to be noted from the excerpt, and one consistent with audio data from similar activities, is that the children’s attitudes to identifying Theme

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130 The term ‘connectives’ was used by the class teacher following the terminology of the New South Wales syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2006 [1st ed. 1998], pp. 74–75). ‘Connectives’ is a fairly self-explanatory term for students and is intended to include the full range of conjunctive adjuncts. ‘Conjunctions’ also appear in the grammar content of the New South Wales syllabus (p. 74). Both ‘connectives’ and ‘conjunctions’ are recommended for introduction to students in Years 1 and 2 of schooling in New South Wales.

131 Incidentally, here is another of the teacher’s formulations of Theme which is not very helpful. Theme is not ‘what happens in a sentence’, which is a gloss which would better fit the notion of ‘Process’.
were generally positive. The “chuckles” noted in the excerpt were not uncommon, and earlier in the same lesson the children giggled when they noticed the word ‘she’ appearing as Theme several times in close succession. They displayed interest and patience throughout, even though it was a rather repetitive kind of activity. In addition, the teacher rarely needed to speak to the class about unsettled behaviour such as might suggest children were not actively engaged in the lesson, and when behaviour did occasionally draw negative comment from the teacher it was just as likely to be because everyone was excitedly trying to answer a question at once.132

Further to the above discussion, it is important to reflect on whether the lesson time occupied by identifying Themes was well spent. This is not something that can be fully evaluated without due consideration of the place of this kind of activity in the wider frame of learning grammatics, and indeed the even wider frame of the English language and literacy program. On balance, some of the time spent on Theme identification could have been better directed towards developing a greater understanding of the significance of Theme for meaning – less time ‘identifying trees’ and more time ‘comprehending the wood’. However it is also fair to point out that during the Theme lessons the children were in fact doing a lot of reading as well as learning grammatics. They were engaged in ‘shared reading’ – a literacy teaching practice commonly recommended for use in the early school grades.133 In a very real sense, the lessons on Theme identification were at the same time shared reading lessons, but with a teaching focus on grammatics rather than, say, decoding or fluency. In terms of evaluating the value of these lessons on Theme identification, it is important to remember grammar was not taught in an activity-free vacuum; rather,

132 For example: “Teacher: Um, 2F, I’m taping this and it’s very hard to hear on a tape with lots of people calling out.” (Class 2F, December 8, 5 minutes into lesson)
133 The lessons featured in Chapter 5 also made use of this teaching strategy (this thesis, p. 185).
while attending to grammatical features the children were also engaging in reading work. The historical argument about grammar ‘displacing’ other forms of literacy instruction thus tends to oversimplify actual practice, at least in these kinds of lessons where the grammatics is integrated within the wider English program.

**Theme and meanings across a text**

In addition to the above challenges for teaching--learning the identification of Theme, there is the more important challenge of helping students understand how Themes work together to build meanings. It was mentioned above that a strategic pedagogic move during early lessons may be for the teacher to display the Themes in a text rather than expecting students to analyse the Themes for themselves. Such support might help novices to begin to understand the significance of Theme without getting distracted or delayed by detailed analysis and hence possibly losing the bigger picture. But even if Theme identification is done by the teacher, it may still be difficult for students to relate what they notice about individual Themes with the effects these Themes create across a text: seeing the wood as well as the trees.

This tension was one experienced in the Class 2F case study, where the children could recognise patterns of Theme but did not readily express the significance of such patterns for meaning. Evidence for this includes the children’s reflections on learning documented in their ‘learning journals’ (some indicative samples are included as Appendix E item E.8). The following reflection was written after the children had identified the patterns of Theme in two different procedural texts:

I learned about themes and verbs today. Themes are words that go at the start of a sentence and that it is sometimes verbs. I learnt about verbs today too and that they are doing words. That you can do them.

(Luke, Class 2F, June 6)
The further step of articulating a generalisation about the significance of patterns of Theme in procedures (viz. the purpose of a procedure is to tell you what to do, hence the foregrounding of material Processes) remains still to be taken by this child, in company with most of his classmates at that time. The challenge was not too great, however, for at least some children, as indicated by Stella’s learning journal entry a little later in the year:

*Question:* What differences are there between Themes in this recount and Themes in procedures?

The differences are that they tell something different like in a procedure the theme tells you what to do and in the recount they tell you who what when and where.

(Stella, Class 2F, August 22)

It would seem that the challenge of understanding something of the meaning of Theme is not an impossible one, even for eight year olds, although the case study data indicate it is not straightforward unless the teaching strives towards such ends. In this respect, the teaching–learning of Theme across intact whole texts has much to commend it, as does teaching about Theme in different kinds of texts – the topic to which we next turn.

**Developing an understanding of how Themes vary across different types of texts**

A related challenge is that there are many ‘woods’, many different ‘text types’, and one of the systematic ways in which they differ from one another is in their deployment of Theme. Learners with an understanding of how Theme operates across different kinds of texts would be ideally placed to make full and flexible use of the grammatics of Theme, both in reading and in the writing of successful texts for a wide range of social purposes.

The versatility of Theme as an intellectual ‘tool’ is that it provides a common conceptual framework and metalanguage for discussing patterns of language
organisation across texts which might appear on first encounter as entirely distinct. For example, a set of instructions might start most sentences with a verb whereas a geography essay might start each paragraph with a ‘topic sentence’. These typical patterns in very different texts could be pointed out to students in quite disparate terms, specific to each kind of text, such as ‘sentence openers’ and ‘action verbs’ for the former and ‘topic sentences’ for the latter. Students might well learn how to write effective texts following these different sets of terms, but their awareness of choices in wording could well remain bounded within the specific contexts of instruction; little of a more general nature about language and its social purposes is engendered by such an approach. In contrast, ‘Theme’ provides a level of abstraction under which these organisational choices across different texts can be discussed in comparable terms and hopefully applied with flexible understanding. It is in these ways that ‘Theme’ has the potential to operate as a ‘scholarly’ or scientific concept in Vygotskyan terms, permitting a higher vantage point from which to understand how certain messages are foregrounded and information is organised to ‘flow’ in different text types.

Furthermore, ‘Theme’ is a useful abstraction in that it is conceived in SFL not only as a feature of clauses but of discourse more generally considered. Within a clause nexus (in writing, a complete sentence), one clause will function as the ‘point of departure’ and thus act thematically for that combination of clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Texts as a whole might make use of a ‘macrotheme’ (overarching thematic sentence/s introducing the message of the whole text) and ‘hyperthemes’ (‘topic sentences’ which provide a point of departure for a set of clauses or a paragraph) (Martin, 1992). It is therefore possible to apply the grammatics of Theme to understanding diverse and even very long texts with
complex hierarchies of organisation, and logically then also to the conscious reading, writing and redrafting of such texts in reasoned and coherent ways.

In the present study, some progress was made with Class 2F towards understanding how Themes vary across different types of texts. The *procedure* text type was particularly valuable as an entry text type for learning about Theme (see also discussion in Chapter 5 at 5.4.4). The children’s subsequent learning about Theme in the context of *recount* texts was also strategic in that the Theme patterns in recounts are very different from those in procedures, providing a clear contrast with the children’s prior learning about Theme. In fact, the study of Theme in recount texts was deliberately designed to revise and expand some of the children’s early impressions, formed from their study of procedure texts, that Themes are almost always verbs. In addition, in both procedures and recounts the patterns of Theme can be described in terms of the social purposes of the texts in a reasonably straightforward manner, viz.: procedures often have ‘action (doing-type) verbs’ in Theme position because they are telling the reader what to *do* next; recounts often have Participants and also ‘when’ information in Theme because they tell about what people did in the past and when it happened.

Finally in the case study, Class 2F learned something about patterns of Theme in a picture book *narrative*. This move proved less strategic, in part because it took longer than anticipated and was not able to be brought to a point of culmination in which the patterning of Theme was reflected upon for its contribution to the meaning of the text. It is also the case, however, that patterns of Theme are more varied in narrative texts than probably any other text type and therefore much less amenable to simple generalisations about the relationship of Theme patterns to social purposes, unlike the more straightforward procedures and recounts (in fact,
given the mutual interdependence of context of situation and text postulated in SFL, there is an inherent connection between the fact that narratives fulfil complex social purposes and the complexity of their language patterns. The choice of narrative as a vehicle for learning about Theme proved less than ideal for these Year 2 children, and given its complexity, may not be an advisable choice in the early period of instruction in Theme for novice learners (especially those in the junior primary school).

At the end of the case study period, the children were invited to comment in their learning journals on their knowledge of Theme across different text types. Many were able to do this with some facility. For example, responding to an invitation to say what he had learned about Theme, Oliver wrote:

> ['What [I] know about Theme is...']– That there are lots of Participants [as Theme] in Narratives and lots of Verbs in Procedures. Also a few Circumstances are found in Narratives. In *Drac and the Gremlin* there was thirty-eight Participants [in Theme position]. Narratives have some Verbs [in Theme] but Recounts do not have any usually.

(Oliver, Class 2F, December 11)

Similar observations made by other children are to be found in Appendix E (item E.8). These are evidence of emergent awareness of the ways in which one aspect of language varies according to type of text. What is not yet obvious in the children’s formulations is an understanding of why these patterns exist, why they are meaningful. The children’s generalisations about Theme could nevertheless provide a productive basis for both deeper and wider understandings in the future. The children clearly had a long way to go in charting the ‘woods’, but their reflections indicate they had made a promising start.

It is to be anticipated that students will gain most from learning the grammatics of Theme (and indeed other grammatical knowledge) when they are provided with opportunities to revisit the concept across a range of text types over a
long timeframe, thereby expanding the reach of their knowledge and its horizons of utility. In terms of planning for sequences of learning, certain types of texts present more straightforward, accessible patterns of Theme than others. Procedural texts provided a strategic entry point to Theme in the Class 2F case study. The subsequent teaching of Theme via recount texts was also a suitable choice, recounts being an accessible genre in which to observe the role of Theme and also providing a useful contrast to Theme in procedures, thereby expanding considerably students’ early understandings. A further productive step in teaching about Theme may be to introduce meronymic information reports (as in G. Williams, 2006) or another type of text in which a strong and fairly straightforward patterning of Theme can be identified and its significance readily appreciated (such as the explanation text type where a Theme–Rheme / Given–New pattern is often readily identifiable and can be useful to students; see for example, Quinn, 2004).

In summing up the empirical findings discussed in this sub-section, it is fair to say that a greater effort in Class 2F went into identifying Themes at the level of the sentence (‘identifying trees’) than discussing their meaning-making contribution to whole texts (‘seeing the woods’). The effect of this was that the children were reasonably confident in identifying topical Themes in sentences, at least during joint activity, but were not so confident of the significance of patterns of Themes across texts. This was a less than satisfactory outcome, although one which reflects the emphases of the teaching, where a greater stress on Theme and meaning would have been preferable.
8.4 Conclusions and implications

The evidence from the Class 2F case study is that a reasonable basic knowledge of Theme is achievable even for junior primary school students. While the children in the study were certainly stretched intellectually by their learning about Theme, the concept was not beyond their grasp. The children developed some sound understandings upon which to build future learning and they were able to apply some of this knowledge in conscious redrafting of writing, although they were not necessarily articulate in using the metalanguage of Theme to explain their writing choices. In developing a case for the teaching of Theme across the primary school years, it was argued that the Class 2F children’s achievements are best understood as beginning moves upon a trajectory of learning which extends towards more eloquent applications of Theme such as those reported in Williams’ ‘KAL Project’.

If knowledge about ‘Theme’ is conceived as a tool (in the sense of ‘cognitive tool’ following Vygotskian theory), it is a tool which can be turned to a variety of uses and therefore one which should be seen as a desirable inclusion in a toolkit of knowledge about language. In education it is necessary to make principled and practical decisions about what to teach and for how long. Given its versatility and practicality, teaching students about Theme has much to recommend it.

Two important implications may be drawn from the chapter as a whole. Firstly, there is a need for good planning and design not only at the level of teaching individual grammatical concepts across one or several lessons, but also for good design of curriculum for the teaching of grammatics more generally. Over time, teaching the grammatics of Theme would ideally embrace a comprehensive range of text types in order for Theme to become a truly versatile intellectual tool for learners. This is not to say that learning about Theme in one or a small number of text types
will not have benefit, but rather that as students see Theme operating in ever wider meaningful contexts, they will be better placed to exploit its potential in choosing how to word and reword their own texts to achieve desired effects and communicate their ideas with clarity. For these reasons, it would be valuable to plan for the teaching–learning of Theme across a range of text types in each year of schooling from when the notion is introduced (perhaps from Year 2 or 3), with the intent of revisiting and expanding upon prior knowledge in a ‘spiral’ of learning. In Australia, systemic functional linguists in collaboration with educators have already done much of the work required for such a plan, having developed descriptions of a range of genres or text types which have made their ways into school syllabi and are recommended for recursive development over the school years. To this existing curricular ‘infrastructure’ of text types taught throughout school could be added the revisiting of aspects of grammatics as they relate to these text types. Given the scope of its power to illuminate how choices in wording help or hinder the flow of logical, organised text, ‘Theme’ deserves inclusion in such a program.

Secondly, the chapter provides further endorsement of the argument of the thesis that teaching and learning are inextricably connected, with the accompanying challenge for teachers of grammatics to strike a balance between developing in students facility in recognising grammatical categories and also developing an understanding of their significance. Ultimately, it should be considered neither sufficient nor satisfactory that students can identify the Theme in individual sentences or clauses. The overarching goal of being able to identify grammatical elements should be to relate features of wording to how texts mean what they do, to be able to see how the grammatics contributes to meaning-making. On this point systemic functional grammar has much to recommend it over traditional and
transformational grammars since it is designed to take account of meaning, as outlined in Chapter 3. However any kind of grammatical description can be taught in such a way that students do not *necessarily* move from being able to identify grammatical features to seeing the significance of those features. Certainly it helps if the language description they use is semantically oriented, as is the case with SFG, but good teaching will still need to exploit the potential of SFG in ways which make its meaningful applications apparent. This is as much the case with teaching Theme as it is with any aspect of grammatics. Just because you can identify various different trees does not mean you comprehend the woods!
CHAPTER 9

Summary of findings and generalisations for design of curriculum and pedagogy

9.1 Introduction

Throughout the thesis, two main lines of investigation have been pursued under the overarching aim of exploring innovative ways of ‘teaching grammar’ in the junior primary school: the possibilities of a pedagogical grammatics based on systemic functional grammar; and the possibilities presented by a pedagogy for grammatics inspired by Vygotskyan theory. In Chapters 5 through 8, the affordances of a semantically-oriented grammatics based on SFG have been demonstrated to hold considerable promise for meaningful applications of grammatical knowledge in classroom literacy work, while at the same time it has also been shown that integral to any such outcomes are the teaching–learning practices through which knowledge of grammar is mediated with students.

In this final chapter, the findings of the thesis are revisited (section 9.2) and some of their implications for ‘analytical generalisability’ are spelled out – in part by engaging some useful constructs from Basil Bernstein’s sociological theory of education, and also by returning to Vygotsky’s views on the development of ‘scholarly’ knowledge (sections 9.3 and 9.4). Some suggestions for future research follow (9.5).

9.2 Summary of empirical findings

9.2.1 Accessibility and utility of select functional grammatical descriptions

The thesis has shown that junior primary school children are capable of understanding and making productive use of some functional grammatical...
descriptions in their literacy work. Specifically, Year 2 children found the following functional grammatical descriptions accessible: material Process (denoted by the term ‘action verb’), verbal Process (‘saying verb’), Sayer, Theme, Participant and Circumstance. These concepts were shown to be useful to the children in their punctuating of quoted speech and expressive oral reading (Chapter 6), critical interpretation of narrative (Chapter 7) and in the development of a degree of conscious control in the redrafting of writing (Chapter 8).

These findings of accessibility and utility run counter to a widespread belief that young school children are capable of only concrete thought, and that therefore they can make little meaningful use of grammatical knowledge. Under such a view (sometimes bolstered by invoking Piagetian theory, but with a longer heritage – Chapter 3, sub-section 3.2.2), children’s reported ‘failure’ to apply their grammar studies in expected ways has generally been attributed to cognitive immaturity. In contrast, the productive moves towards abstraction made by the Year 2 children in the present thesis provide a measure of endorsement of Vygotsky’s theory of development, where higher mental functions are seen as developing through interactive processes of teaching and learning and not merely arising from biological maturation. According to a Vygotskian view, teaching–learning leads and charts new paths for development. In describing the ontogenetic moves made by Year 2 children learning grammatics, the thesis has demonstrated that teaching towards an abstract grasp of knowledge about language can begin in the junior primary school years, with the proviso that such teaching is carefully and purposefully designed.
9.2.2 Affordances of SFG as a pedagogical grammar

The choice of a functional, semantically-oriented language description based upon systemic functional grammar has been endorsed in the case studies. For example, in Chapters 6 and 7 the functional descriptions of verbal Process and Sayer were shown to help children attend in meaningful and productive ways to quoted speech, both at sentence and whole text levels. In Chapter 8, the functional grammatical concept of Theme was shown to be useful in orienting children to some of the possible choices writers can make when organising texts for different purposes. The descriptions mentioned in each of these examples are not available in traditional school grammars.

In interpreting the case studies, it has been argued that the type of grammatics adopted will always play a pivotal role in determining the kinds of outcomes which will proceed from ‘learning grammar’. This is principally because, following Vygotsky, intellectual tools shape consciousness. The mechanism for this is that the design of a tool predicts the uses to which it will be amenable – its affordances – hence forming and focusing the voluntary attention of users of that tool. A functional grammatics is an intellectual tool which orients learners towards understanding language as a meaning-making resource by virtue of its design – particularly so when the grammatics is taught in relation to the language patterns of whole texts.

A further and compatible explanation for preferring a functional grammatics to other pedagogical grammars has also been advanced. Following the systemic functional view of language as ‘construing’ reality, it has been argued that language both reflects and shapes our conceptions of reality. By extension, therefore, the metalanguage by which we introduce grammatical knowledge to children will likewise influence how they construe what grammatics is and what it is for.
9.2.3 Importance of teacher talk in mediating grammatical knowledge

Analysis of teacher talk from the case studies has shown that the ways in which teachers define grammatical categories for students can indeed be formative, such as the persistence of the notion of verbs as ‘doing words’ in Class 2F (described in Chapter 5). A significant finding of the thesis, therefore, is that teacher talk about grammatics is of central importance to what students learn.

Implications following from this finding include a need for future research in the field critically to appraise teacher talk, and a recommendation that models of best practice for grammatics teaching should develop and foster productive ways for teachers to talk about grammatics with learners. The metalanguage used by teachers is also relevant to enabling longer term, cumulative learning – a point to which we return in sub-section 9.4.3 below.

9.2.4 Quality of pedagogy

Across the case studies it has been shown that the quality of pedagogy by which the study of grammatics is advanced in the classroom is integral to the kinds of outcomes which are possible or at least probable for students. In the case studies, pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan theory (including teaching by guiding students in a dynamic, collaboratively developed ‘zone of proximal development’) was shown to be a productive approach. There is good argument, supported in the thesis by positive classroom evidence, that this kind of pedagogical approach is to be preferred over the ‘transmission’ mode of teaching grammatics which characterised historical practice (Chapter 3, at 3.3.1). Related to quality of pedagogy is a further issue – the position grammatics occupies in the curriculum: whether its study is ‘integrated’ or ‘discrete’. The case study vignettes described in the thesis have all
shown that the ‘problem of application’ may be eroded by contextualising grammatics as a meaningful and integrated component of the wider English/literacy program – a finding increasingly being endorsed in research including some studies using quantitative measures (Fearn & Farnan, 2007; Myhill et al., 2012).

9.2.5 Towards greater generalisability

The empirical findings from the case studies presented in the thesis therefore demonstrate some of the practical possibilities of a well-theorised teaching–learning of functional grammatics. The findings endorse an approach which weaves together a functional grammatics with a Vygotsky-inspired pedagogy, with the complementarity of these evident in positive, practical classroom outcomes and in the capacity of the theories for interpreting such outcomes.

The case studies’ potential interactions with theory have not yet been exhausted, however, and the following section reviews their contribution from a further theoretical perspective. In particular, the related concerns of a pedagogy for grammatics and the place of grammatics in the curriculum may be explicated at a more general level in order to extend the theoretical contributions of the thesis – to build greater ‘analytical generalisability’, to recall Yin’s term introduced in Chapter 4 (2009, pp. 15, 43, for example). Specifically, the following discussion engages with sociological theory of education and then revisits Vygotskyan theory in order to point out the challenges inherent in developing a pedagogic grammatics which is simultaneously ‘integrated’ in the curriculum and yet retains the systematicity necessary for ‘scholarly’ knowledge.
Chapter 9: Summary of findings and generalisations

9.3 Challenges in ‘recontextualising’ grammatics for the classroom

The sociological theory used as the lens through which the case studies are here interpreted for wider significance derives from the work of Basil Bernstein (1990, 1999, 2000). Aspects of Bernstein’s work have already informed parts of the thesis, such as his distinction between ‘regulative’ and ‘instructional’ discourse (Chapter 4), and his notion of the ‘recontextualisation’ of knowledge for the classroom (given brief introduction in Chapter 5). It is the latter of these ideas which is revisited in this section of the chapter. The following discussion provides a more thorough treatment of the theory than has been afforded thus far although one which is necessarily focused on those aspects most relevant to the present argument.

9.3.1 A model of the structuring of pedagogic discourse

Bernstein’s theory of ‘pedagogic practice’ takes a wide interpretation of its subject. For Bernstein, pedagogic practice is “a fundamental social context through which cultural reproduction–production takes place” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 3) and thus is not confined to institutional forms of education. For the present argument however Bernstein’s theory will be applied to that most obvious institution of cultural reproduction–production: schooling. Bernstein (1990, for example pp. 191–192) proposes a model of the structuring of pedagogic discourse which can be used to interpret some of the challenges for designing optimal teaching–learning of grammatics. The model is summarised in Figure 9.1.

Bernstein suggests that there are two very obvious domains in the structuring of pedagogic discourse: the ‘field of the production of knowledge’ and the ‘field of the reproduction of knowledge’. These are depicted on the left and right hand sides respectively of Figure 9.1.
The ‘field of the production of knowledge’ is the domain in which new knowledge is developed, and where established knowledge is tested for its ongoing validity as well as forming the basis upon which new knowledge is often built. This domain may be considered to be the repository of what is known by society. In the contemporary world, examples of material sites which fall within the field of production of knowledge include universities and research institutes. In terms of this thesis, ideas from the disciplines of linguistics and educational research within the ‘field of the production of knowledge’ informed the design of the teaching–learning interactions in the case studies.

The ‘field of the reproduction of knowledge’ refers to contexts where society arranges for the passing on of established and new knowledge to subsequent generations. Given the pervasiveness of pedagogic discourse as a human activity, this theoretical domain incorporates a potentially unlimited range of material settings. However in terms of institutional forms of pedagogic discourse, the most recognisable example of the field of reproduction of knowledge, and the most relevant to the present study, is the classroom.
Both the field of the production and the field of the reproduction of knowledge are reasonably uncomplicated elements in Bernstein’s model of the structuring of pedagogic discourse. They are certainly the most visible elements of pedagogic discourse, which in simple terms implies the existence of knowledge and the passing on of that knowledge to learners. But this passing on of knowledge does not happen in a naïve, straightforward manner. Grammatical knowledge, for example, is not directly transmitted from university linguistics departments to primary school classrooms. Bernstein helpfully advances a further domain which occupies the space between the fields of the production and reproduction of knowledge: the ‘recontextualising field’, depicted in the centre of Figure 9.1. It is the role of the recontextualising field to filter, select and organise which knowledge is passed on, and when. The recontextualising field helps to explain how knowledge is prepared for the classroom (or other learning contexts) from the ‘raw materials’ maintained and developed in the field of the production of knowledge. We can therefore use Bernstein’s model to characterise the issue of school instruction in grammatics as one of recontextualisation.

In seeking to unpack the complex processes of recontextualisation, Bernstein divides the recontextualising field into two related sub-fields: an ‘official recontextualising field’ (or ‘ORF’) and a ‘pedagogic recontextualising field’ (‘PRF’). The ORF is particularly relevant in institutional forms of education. Its roles include the formulation and approval of syllabi or courses of study, and the setting and regulating of examinations or other forms of externally recognised evaluation of student learning. In terms of the case studies presented in this thesis, relevant players in the ORF included the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (who permitted research access to the case study site) and the New South Wales
Board of Studies (which furnished the syllabus with which the study was required by the Department of Education to comply). In terms of future directions to be taken in English teaching in Australia, the national curriculum developed by ACARA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) will play a dominant role in the ORF.

The PRF operates to take the requirements of the ORF into specific pedagogic contexts and ‘make them happen’; its function is to turn official syllabi into actual plans and eventually into actual teaching–learning activities. Bernstein (1990, p. 192) places in this field such forces of influence as university departments of education, professional organisations and their journals, and the publishers of textbooks (where, as is usually the case in democratic societies, textbooks are not published by the ORF). While Bernstein would appear not to include local school decision-making as a factor in the PRF (by its absence in his list – 1990, p.192), instead perhaps by implication locating this in the ‘field of the reproduction of knowledge’, I would prefer to add local school planning to the PRF – a not incompatible position given that Bernstein’s model is about the functions of different elements rather than the material setting in which they occur. That is, schools (in Australia at least) are material settings both for pedagogic recontextualising activity and for the reproduction of knowledge – perhaps especially so since the devolving of much curriculum planning to schools under ‘progressive education’ policies in the latter decades of the twentieth century. In school education, therefore, activities which express membership of the PRF may be argued to include all the aspects of local school decision-making which seek to bring syllabi and official policies into reality in classrooms, including decisions about which excursions to plan and which library books to buy as well as what programs will be given priority in terms of
timetabling, professional development opportunities for staff and so forth. Examples of factors in the PRF relevant to the thesis project included whole-school planning of the broad curriculum (such as cross-curricular ‘units of work’ to be taught in certain grades), individual case study teachers’ plans and the timetabling of visits from the researcher. Also of relevance to the PRF of the case studies was the researcher’s role as participant–observer, co-planner and sometimes team-teacher of the lessons on grammatics. That is, the researcher was an additional and active member of the local PRF for the case study classes.

This Bernsteinian model of the structuring of pedagogic discourse provides a useful lens through which to interpret and further generalise the findings of the thesis. From an individual reader’s point of view, it can be used as a means of identifying at a more abstract level areas of commonality or difference with the case study sites, such as what influences are exerted in different ‘recontextualising fields’ and the limits or freedoms on classroom practice these imply. Furthermore, the model may be used to explicate the following issues arising from situated practice in the case studies:

- the position of grammatics in the curriculum (‘integrated’ or ‘discrete’?);
- the (logically related) issue of teachers’ knowledge for teaching grammatics; and
- a more generalised description of a pedagogy for grammatics.

Each of these issues is examined in turn in the following discussion (sub-sections 9.3.2 to 9.3.4), which then extends the analysis by revisiting its implications for

- the design of programs in grammatics instruction in light of Vygotsky’s theory of the development of ‘scholarly’ knowledge (section 9.4).
9.3.2 Grammatics in the curriculum

Historically, ‘grammar’ was often a subject strongly bounded from other aspects of the curriculum, including being strongly bounded within subject English (Chapter 3, sub-section 3.3.1). Grammar tended to be taught in a discrete lesson perhaps once a week, from a textbook usually unconnected with other English studies. Grammar would not usually be taught in any school subjects apart from English (except – for some students – foreign or classical language classes), nor would it be common for what had been studied in the weekly English grammar lesson to be referred to or used in other English lessons over the week. This ‘discrete’ approach had the effect of making the application of grammatics in reading and writing the task of the rugged individual student, as little to no overt connection was generally made between ‘grammar’ and anything else in the curriculum.

The ‘discrete’ approach to teaching grammatics has been contrasted in the thesis with an ‘integrated’ or ‘embedded’ approach,134 where knowledge about grammar is learned within and brought to bear upon language in context in the curriculum; that is, a grammatics which is not strongly bounded. Calls for an

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134 The terms represent the same notion in general terms but from somewhat different perspectives. An ‘integrated’ grammatics implies connections branching out to other studies, whereas ‘embedded’ implies grammatics included within and becoming a part of other studies. The former suggests a point of view originating from grammatics and looking out, whereas the latter adopts the point of view of the subject specialist teacher seeking to bring grammatics ‘in’ – the latter in particular is probably more reflective of the perspective of the secondary school teacher. Both terms connote a study of grammatics woven into the fabric of other kinds of learning, and both contrast with a discrete or ‘tacked on’ approach. My preference is to use the term ‘integrated’ for three main reasons: (i) following the argument at 9.4.1 below, knowledge which remains ‘embedded’ in its context of acquisition is (by definition) resistant to ‘transfer’, in which case ‘embedded’ has a negative connotation in terms of longer-term knowledge building that is at odds with the positive connotations intended in recent research (Myhill et al., 2012); (ii) the term ‘embedded’ is used in specific ways in systemic functional grammar to described ‘down-ranking’ in status of grammatical elements, such as the embedding of clauses within other clauses, and therefore ‘embedding’ carries expectations in systemic functional linguistics which are not necessarily compatible with use of the same terminology in respect of curriculum planning; and (iii) the term ‘integrated’ is applicable to both primary and secondary educational contexts, whereas ‘embedded’ seems more descriptive of the perspective of the secondary school specialist teacher.
integrated approach are not entirely new, although they have been mainly associated with teaching of second and foreign language learners (Mohan, 1979, 1986) and are only relatively recent in the history of grammar teaching research outside the Australian functional linguistics context (Clark, 2010a; Myhill, 2005). In the case studies documented in the thesis, the Year 2 children learned about grammatics within the context of their class’s reading and writing program, and some of the texts through which they were introduced to grammatics were from their studies in subjects other than English – ‘Science and Technology’, for example. Such an approach has been suggested as likely to be of more benefit to students in applying grammatics than a ‘discrete’ approach because knowledge about language is developed in contexts of application.

This issue of the relative strength of boundaries between pedagogic categories (in schools, ‘subjects’ or courses of study) constitutes a major influence in the ‘recontextualising field’ for the study of grammatics. It is potentially enacted by both the ORF and the PRF. For example, in some jurisdictions the ORF may impose a strongly bounded approach to the teaching of grammatics, perhaps by imposing a compulsory textbook. The PRF may also ‘bind’ the study of grammatics, such as when teachers elect to confine it as a segregated entity in their timetables or programs. Alternatively, the ORF may encourage the study of grammatics across boundaries, as in the new Australian Curriculum: English, which asks teachers to “balance and integrate the three strands” of Language (which includes ‘grammar’), Literature and Literacy (ACARA, 2012a, at http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Relationships-between-the-strands).

See for example the New South Wales syllabus’ advice on ‘Teaching grammar’ (a mere 162 words), which includes: “When the grammar is being examined in terms of meaning, it is preferable that this be done within the context of the different types of texts that children are reading and writing” (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, p. 73).
The extent to which pedagogic categories are bounded from one another has been described by Bernstein as ‘classification’. ‘Classification’ is theorised as a function of power relations since boundaries between categories are established, preserved or changed by those with power (Bernstein, 1990, for example ch. 1). ‘Strong classification’ refers to bounded categories, which in the case of schools implies a “closed curriculum” (Hasan, 2008/2011b, p. 65), whereas ‘weak classification’ implies boundaries between categories that are permeable – in schools, this implies an ‘integrated’ or “open curriculum” in which “points of contact between categories are recognized” (Hasan, 2008/2011b, p. 65). We can thus characterise the functional grammatics of the case studies in this thesis in Bernstein’s terms as relatively weakly classified, both within subject English and across the curriculum. This weaker classification of grammatics was facilitated in the case studies by the existing organisation of New South Wales primary schools and the primary curriculum, where one teacher typically teaches all or most subjects and can therefore identify synergies between, for example, the demands of the English curriculum and that of ‘social studies’. In this sense, the primary school is in many ways an ideal environment for researching the ‘integrated’ teaching of grammatics. A similarly integrated approach is also possible however in the secondary school – at least to a degree – as demonstrated for example by the embedded teaching of knowledge about language in UC-Davis’s ‘History Project’ (Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Schleppegrell et al., 2008). So the decision to relax boundaries between ‘grammar’ and other parts of the curriculum, to find “points of contact between categories”, to use Hasan’s phrase,

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136 Strictly speaking, the discussion here is in terms of ‘internal classification’, that is, the boundaries between categories within educational institutions. Classification also operates externally, that is, at the interface between “education and production” (Bernstein, 1990, p. 195), such as between the schooling system and industry. ‘External classification’ is of little direct relevance to the present argument and is not addressed here.
need not necessarily be constrained by the fact that school subjects are themselves strongly classified from one another.

We return therefore to the thesis finding about the value of ‘contextualising grammatics as ... [an] integrated component’ (sub-section 9.2.4 above) with a more abstract and generalisable sense of the implications of the thesis for curriculum: the deliberate ‘weak classification’ of grammatics is likely to provide the optimal curricular design for a grammatics which school students will find useful and transferable. The principal reason for this is that the work of application is not all left to the student; the curricular design works towards making the value of the grammatics evident.

It is worthwhile noting at this point that benefits for students likely to flow from an integrated program for grammatics may be anticipated to be more widely distributed than those from a ‘discrete’ program. That is, the design of curriculum for teaching grammatics has equity implications. Where the study of grammatics is ‘discrete’ or strongly classified, instruction will privilege those students whose personal resources are best suited to help them apply their learning (the ‘rugged individuals’ mentioned above). These students we might feasibly anticipate to be mother tongue speakers of the language of instruction, and probably also ‘middle class’ students whose experiences and expectations of language in use already align to the greater degree with those of their teachers. It is predictable therefore that ‘grammar’ strongly classified will be of least benefit to those students whose teachers often think they are most in need of it: English language learners and students of ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds.

The aim of here revisiting the case studies in light of Bernstein’s ‘classification’ has not merely been to demonstrate that the analysis is possible,
however, nor is it the case that greater generality in expressing the thesis’s findings is inherently worthy. Rather, the analysis helps us to identify the challenges of recontextualising grammatics in the classroom with greater explanatory power. In terms of translating the recommendations of the thesis into diverse classrooms, an important question follows from the preceding discussion of classification and the curriculum: ‘Why, historically, has grammatics not been more closely associated with other forms of knowledge taught in school?’ – or, in Bernsteinian terms – ‘Why so strongly classified?’ In probing this question, Bernstein has questions of his own which provide some help. He recommends that we ask: “in whose interest is the apartness of things, and in whose interest is the new togetherness and the new integration?” (2000, p. 11). In answer to the latter, the present thesis and similarly-motivated research (Chapter 2, sub-sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2) provide evidence for its being in the interests of students to see the ‘togetherness’ of grammatics with language across the curriculum. It is also presumably in teachers’ interests for their students to be more capable and conscious users and creators of text, even if these benefits are not what teachers have been told to expect in reviews of the historical research (Chapter 2).

In answer to the first of Bernstein’s questions, ‘in whose interest is the apartness of things?’, it can be confidently proposed that students’ best interests are not served by the teaching of grammar as a discrete subject. The inevitable conclusion therefore is that it must in some way be the interests of ‘pedagogic transmitters’ which are served by keeping grammar strongly bounded. Recalling that Bernstein describes ‘classification’ as a function of relations of ‘power’, the challenge of recontextualisation becomes one of greater complexity than merely recommending that teachers ‘relax boundaries’ between categories in order to take
on board a more integrated study of grammatics. Weaker classification requires that teachers relinquish certain aspects of ‘border protection’, such as history teachers deciding to ‘allow in’ the study of grammatics (Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteíza, 2004) – typically not a part of their specialist domain. Weaker classification also implies that teachers are ‘empowered’ with the necessary expertise to manage cross-border negotiations – to operate beyond previously existing lines of demarcation. What is at issue is therefore not just educational best practice, but professional identity and expertise.

To summarise thus far, the place a study of grammatics occupies in the curriculum will be fashioned not only by what might work best for students, but by factors in the ‘recontextualising field’ which operate to determine which school subjects are kept separate and which are afforded ‘points of contact’ with other subjects. At this stage it is reasonable to speculate that an important constraint on the uptake of an ‘integrated’ grammatics will be the degree of confidence teachers have in their capacity to manage such integration, to negotiate border-crossings – a speculation to which the next section is addressed.

9.3.3 Teachers’ knowledge for teaching grammatics

Two kinds of teacher knowledge are likely to contribute to effective instruction in grammatics: ‘linguistic subject knowledge’ or ‘LSK’, and knowledge of pedagogy for recontextualising that LSK for the classroom, that is, pedagogic knowledge for grammatics.

That teachers are not necessarily confident in their own knowledge of grammatics has been widely observed and documented (Borg, 2003; Cajkler & Hislam, 2002; Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 2001; Myhill, 2000; Myhill et al., 2012, p. 16). Recent empirical research confirms the importance of teachers’
‘linguistic subject knowledge’ in securing positive effects when teaching grammar: “[i]n terms of LSK, those students in intervention classes with teachers with higher subject knowledge benefited more [from ‘contextualised grammar teaching’] than those with teachers who had lower subject knowledge” (Myhill et al., 2012, p. 14).

Furthermore, even if teachers do ‘know their grammar’, they do not necessarily feel equipped to translate that knowledge into meaningful and integrated teaching programs. As an indication of this, during the recent development process for the *Australian Curriculum: English*, a chief concern of teachers was that the draft curriculum provided insufficient support for implementing an integrated approach to grammar teaching.137

In the face of insecure content knowledge (LSK) and/or uncertainty about how best to teach grammatics, teachers may not feel equipped to adopt the weakly classified grammatics advocated above, where they would be required to use their own expertise to identify ‘points of contact’ between grammatics and language in the rest of the curriculum. In fact, it is probable that a strong relationship exists between ‘discrete’ teaching of grammatics and teacher knowledge insecurity, with at least

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137 For example, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (the umbrella body for Australian secondary English teaching professional organisations) made the following request in its submission on the draft English curriculum: “We recommend sample units of work to illustrate how grammar, as it is currently specified, can be taught in conjunction with the Literature and Literacy strands, in context and in a way that will engage the interest of all students” (Australian Association for the Teaching of English, 2010, p. 3). The equivalent professional body for primary school teachers, PETA (known as e:lit from 2008–2011 and formerly PETA), similarly noted the need to “address the inter-relatedness of the 3 strands”, including “showing ... how to teach literature and, at the same time, [address] language and literacy concepts such as grammar” (e:lit – the Primary English Teaching Association, 2010, pp. 5–6). These comments suggest a profession broadly supportive of an ‘integrated grammatics’, if insufficiently resourced for its implementation.

It is important to note, however, that professional support for the national curriculum’s approach to teaching knowledge about language has not been universal. A discernible hesitation to endorse the draft curriculum is evident in the following response to the official survey: “The insistence on grammar in the document needs to be supported by clear articulation of the ends for which grammatical structures can be used” (English Teachers’ Association [ETA] NSW, 2010, p. 13, emphasis added). Key personnel in the ETA are not convinced that the systematic teaching of grammatics is justifiable and instead recommend a minimalist, ‘shaping at the point of utterance’ approach (for example, Sawyer, 2009, following Andrews, 2005, pp. 74–75, who takes the expression from Britton, 1983).
some teachers who are faced with a mandate to teach grammatics needing the support of a textbook, with the resulting use of the discrete exercises these have historically entailed. Thus, more by perceived necessity than choice, a strongly classified (and predictably under-successful) grammatics program will be perpetuated.

For the present thesis, the researcher supported the classroom teachers in designing an integrated program for the study of grammatics. In collaborating in this way – a purposeful choice for a study of innovation – the ‘LSK’ of the teachers was complemented by the LSK of the researcher, and neither teacher was faced with integrating grammatics across the curriculum or working out how to teach it using her personal resources alone. The researcher’s support of teacher LSK and pedagogic knowledge may represent for some readers of the thesis a point of disjuncture in terms of transferring the findings of the thesis to novel contexts, since similar support for teacher knowledge is not commonly available. Two responses may be advanced.

Firstly, the project set out to ‘explore the possible’ – a focus on potential rather than naturalistic observation of existing practice. Such studies are badly needed in the teaching of functional grammatics, particularly so in the junior primary school years where so little previous work exists. Indeed, there remains much of further interest to be explored beyond the contributions of the present thesis (see section 9.5 below).

Secondly, the thesis is unapologetic about the need to develop teachers’ LSK and pedagogic knowledge for teaching grammatics. Given their role as ‘recontextualisers’, teachers will certainly need some secure knowledge of both these kinds to teach grammatics well, although the case studies show that quite a lot can be
achieved using only a relatively small range of grammatical descriptions. An Australian study currently underway is in fact investigating the kinds and extent of LSK which teachers can learn well and use effectively in classrooms – what the researchers refer to as a ‘good-enough grammatics’ (Macken-Horarik, Love, & Unsworth, 2011).

A logical recommendation of the thesis, therefore, is that studies in both content (linguistic) knowledge of grammatics and ‘how-to’ (pedagogic) knowledge of teaching grammatics should be provided in teachers’ pre- and in-service training. Such professional studies may well draw upon the data and implications for teaching from this thesis and similarly motivated research. The latter kind of knowledge in particular – about how to teach grammatics – has been a central concern of this thesis. Some wider contributions of the thesis to a pedagogy for grammatics, considered in a Bernsteinian light, are the subject of the next section.

9.3.4 A pedagogy for grammatics

The pedagogy of the thesis’s case studies has thus far been characterised in terms of Vygotskyan theory, and this has been contrasted with a ‘transmission’ approach to teaching grammatics (Chapter 3, sub-section 3.3.1). A further contribution to this theme of pedagogies for grammatics is made possible by another aspect of Bernstein’s theory: the notion of ‘framing’. ‘Framing’ refers to “the controls on communication in local, interactional pedagogic relations: between parents/children, teacher/pupil, social worker/client, etc.” (2000, p. 12). ‘Framing’ is a useful construct by which to understand aspects of pedagogy; it is “a good tool for analysing how teacher–student communications are negotiated – how it is decided and by whom what is to be discussed, what comes first, what next, how is the discourse paced and who prevails in deciding such issues” (Hasan, 2008/2011b, p. 66).
The following facets of pedagogy are included within the parameters of ‘framing’ (Bernstein, 2000, pp. 12–13):138

- selection of content,
- sequencing of instruction,
- pacing of instruction,
- degree of control over these pedagogic decisions exercised by teachers and students.

In Bernstein’s analysis, ‘framing’ and ‘classification’ together form overriding concepts with which to interpret pedagogic activity, such that “micro interactions” and “macro relations” (2000, p. 4) can be understood in association with one another. And, as with classification, framing may be ‘strong’ (the teacher or ‘pedagogic transmitter’ retains strong control) or ‘weak’ (“the acquirer [e.g. the student] has more apparent control”, 2000, p. 13). Thus in broad terms, pedagogy which is strongly framed in every respect may be aligned with a traditional authoritarian pedagogy, while weaker framing describes the “relatively greater discretion [given] to pupils” (Hasan, 2008/2011b, p. 66) under progressive pedagogies.

Universally strong framing therefore invokes the ‘transmission’ model of teaching. This is the pedagogic approach which, as argued in Chapter 3 (3.3.1),

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138 Bernstein adds a fifth facet: ‘evaluation’, referring to how learners and their learning are judged. The facet of ‘evaluation’ has particular influence on pedagogy in contexts where school learning is examined by external, high-stakes testing. In such contexts, the selection of pedagogical content is likely to be driven by the demands of external tests, often irrespective of notions of best practice. While the current project was not impacted by such demands, it is recognised that where high stakes testing has a strong influence on framing, the teaching of grammatics may be qualitatively impacted in not necessarily productive ways. ‘Evaluation’ operated very weakly in the present study (children were not formally assessed for their grammatical knowledge and no consequences in terms of rewards or disincentives followed from their successes or struggles) and this was in fact important in having research freedom to investigate innovation. There may however be contexts where ‘evaluation’ exerts such a strong influence that all the other facets of framing are affected, in which case teacher decisions about the best kinds of pedagogy for teaching grammatics may be constrained.
characterised much of the grammar teaching of the historical research, and which may be criticised for neglecting the existing knowledge and needs of learners, as well as being dismissive of learners’ different capacities to ‘keep up’ with the delivery of pre-planned and inflexible content. Under such conditions, only the most capable students and those with support from the home to help them keep pace will be able to benefit properly from the teaching. So a pedagogy for teaching grammatics which is strongly framed in every respect is unlikely to be of the greatest benefit to the majority of students.

However it is not the case that an ‘opposite’ pedagogy, one which is weakly framed in every respect, is likely to be optimal for learning grammatics either. A ‘laissez faire’ approach, as entirely weak framing might be characterised, would lack the kind of direction and guidance which was evident in the thesis’s case studies and which is an important part of Vygotskyan pedagogy.

Bernstein’s ‘framing’ actually allows for a much more nuanced analysis of pedagogy than these simple binary oppositions, and ‘strong framing’ of one facet of pedagogy need not necessarily imply anything about the strength or weakness of framing of other facets.¹³⁹ For example, a teacher may decide on which grammatical categories to introduce while also accommodating learners’ interests (such as choosing to teach about ‘action verbs’ and procedures using a recipe the children will enjoy cooking and eating), thus exercising relatively strong control of the framing of content without disregarding the need to build enthusiasm and demonstrate relevance. Similarly, a teacher may continue to exercise relatively

¹³⁹ “Note that it is possible for framing values – be they strong or weak – to vary with respect to the elements of practice, so that, for example, you could have weak framing over pacing but strong framing over other aspects of the discourse” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 13). It is informative that Bernstein selects weaker framing of pacing as his example. For reasons of equity, Bernstein cautions against a pedagogy which is too ‘fast’ for all students to succeed unless they have substantial support in the home (for example, see Bernstein, 1990, pp. 76–79).
strong control over the sequencing of instruction (such as deciding to teach ‘action verbs’ before ‘saying verbs’ for principled reasons) but may allow students to ‘control’ the pacing of instruction by being highly responsive to the rate at which they are learning, not rushing ahead of what students are able to understand. Of particular note in this thesis regarding matters of sequence and pacing has been the degrees of abstraction represented by different grammatical categories. Thus ‘action verbs’, for example, make sense as an entry concept in a functional grammatics by virtue of their proximity to the tangible (Chapter 5); and more inherently abstract categories like ‘Theme’ may be lent tangibility through the observation of examples (Chapter 8). The nuancing of framing values in the ways observed in the case studies in this thesis may be argued to constitute a sociological expression of Vygotsky’s ZPD, which we may characterise in Bernstein’s terms as having relatively strongly framed content and sequencing (the teacher or caregiver has a definite view about what is to be learned, and the likely steps by which that learning may be progressed), but also comparatively weakly framed pacing (pacing is flexible to learners’ needs).

Broadly considered, this is the approach to pedagogy which was adopted in the case studies of the thesis: content and sequencing were relatively strongly framed by the teacher (working in collaboration with the researcher) while pacing was relatively weakly framed. In practice, such “micro interactions” (to use Bernstein’s term) are not static in their framing but rather they vary as the dynamic processes of teaching–learning unfold over different stages of a lesson and over longer cycles of lessons, although in general terms the above is a fair characterisation of pedagogy in the case studies. These framing values enabled a pedagogy informed by Vygotskyan theory to be implemented, such that teaching was planned and purposeful, and learning was (in general) genuine and not rushed or superficial. Certainly, as we
have seen in the case study data, not all teaching was well-formulated and not all learning progressed without confusion, but these were the aims and to the greater extent the achievements of the pedagogy adopted in the case studies.

We might then use Bernstein’s theory to expand our sense of Vygotskyan pedagogy as outlined above at 9.2.4 in more analytically general terms: a productive pedagogy for grammatics in school instruction will express relatively strong framing values regarding the selection and sequencing of meaningful content, but relatively weak framing of pacing such that learners’ needs control the speed of instruction. For educators seeking to translate some of the suggestions from this thesis into different institutional settings, these generalisations informed by Bernstein’s theory provide guidance of a higher level of abstraction than mere imitation of the case studies’ situated practices.

9.4 Designing programs of instruction in grammatics

An ideal program of instruction in grammatics should, according to the argument of the preceding discussion, simultaneously involve: integrating grammatics with other subjects in the curriculum in meaningful ways (relatively weak classification); and selecting and sequencing grammatical content so that it builds understanding in a coherent and cumulative fashion. The challenge here is no small one, and some of the tensions and possibilities for achieving a program so imagined are identified in the following and penultimate section.

9.4.1 Systematicity ‘at risk’: The tension between integration and disciplinarity

In outlining the classification and framing values best suited to effective instruction in grammatics, one important point has thus far been elided: there exists an undeniable tension between making grammatics meaningful by teaching it ‘in
context’ across the curriculum (weakly classified), and maintaining the integrity of grammatics as a discipline (content relatively strongly framed: coherent, logical, sequentially organised). Once a ‘discrete’ grammatics program is abandoned, the risk is that a piecemeal and *ad hoc* approach takes its place, such that bits of grammatical knowledge are taught in the context of a specific need or opportunity – perhaps to good immediate effect – but ultimately little sense of language as a system is developed. Under such an approach, the long-term promise of a functional grammatics for students would be imperilled, since *systematicity* of knowledge is a defining criterion for the ‘higher mental processes’ postulated by Vygotsky.

Recalling discussion elsewhere in the thesis (Chapter 3 sub-section 3.4.3; Chapter 6, 6.8.1; Chapter 8, 8.3.2), it has been argued that Vygotsky’s notion of ‘scholarly’ or ‘scientific’ concepts provides insight into the potential offered by a conscious knowledge of grammar. The Vygotskyan explanation holds that it is the very abstraction and systematicity of certain kinds of knowledge which make that knowledge amenable to novel applications: in abstraction “[t]hinking ... is gradually emancipated” (Luria, 1992, p. 138). That is, knowledge becomes more open to ‘transfer’ and innovative use the less it remains enmeshed (or ‘embedded’ – see discussion at footnote 134, this chapter) in the immediate context of its acquisition.

Another way of expressing this idea has been proposed in sociological theory which builds upon later work of Bernstein (1999). Bernstein characterised certain kinds of knowledge as ‘vertical discourses’ (introduced in Chapter 3 of the thesis, pp. 118–119), these being the discourses to which Vygotsky’s ‘scientific’ or scholarly forms of knowledge belong, and which contrast with the ‘horizontal discourses’ of everyday or commonsense knowledge. Vertical discourses build towards systematic knowledge and often subsume earlier concepts into more
abstract, ‘higher’ concepts. The discipline area of physics provides the archetypal case for Bernstein, although disciplinariness in the humanities may also be characterised by cumulative knowledge, abstraction and systematicity even if there is not the same sense of hierarchies of concepts as pertains in the sciences. Horizontal discourses, in contrast, are determined and constrained by the nature of everyday activity\textsuperscript{140} and consist of kinds of knowledge which are not related to one another according to a hierarchy or system.

The development of capacity to handle vertical discourses, to build ‘vertical’ knowledge, is central to success in schooling – whether this is made visible to students or whether, as is often the case in subject English for example, the verticality expected of students remains un(-der)articulated (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2007). In the context of contemporary discussions about building ‘verticality’ in schooling, the term ‘semantic gravity’ is gaining traction. This term was introduced by Maton (2009) in his development of Bernstein’s ideas about knowledge discourses. ‘Semantic gravity’ refers to degrees of abstraction of knowledge or, considered another way, to degrees of context dependence. Using Maton’s terminology, Bernstein’s ‘horizontal discourses’ are characterised by generally high semantic gravity because of their attachment to specific concrete contexts, while his ‘vertical discourses’ are characterised by their propensity towards higher degrees of abstraction and therefore lower semantic gravity.

Using this terminology, the study of grammatics ‘in context’ but \textit{without systematicity} may be described as a grammatics with comparatively high semantic gravity. This kind of learning, like other kinds of learning which remain at a level of high semantic gravity, will likely remain closely tied to its context of acquisition.

\textsuperscript{140} Note that horizontal discourses are highly efficacious for their purposes and that horizontal discourse is therefore of a different order from vertical discourse rather than being of lesser value in some moral or social sense.
This does not mean that the grammatics is not seen by students as useful, but rather that it is only seen as useful for a very particular kind of context. In contrast, a study of grammatics which systematically revisits known concepts in different contexts of application will lighten semantic gravity, and build ‘verticality’ in students’ understanding of language – which is the key, according to Vygotskyan theory, to flexible thinking and applications.

Throughout the case study vignettes described in Chapters 5 to 8, a recurrent finding has been that a functional grammatics does indeed have potential to raise children’s understandings about language to ‘higher ground’. The Year 2 children in the study were shown to be capable of making productive steps along a trajectory towards ‘scholarly knowledge’, exhibiting what Vygotsky’s colleague Luria would have called “incipient abstraction” (Luria, 1992, p. 134). It has also been pointed out, however, that the development of abstraction is a slow, recursive process – a point no less applicable to the study of grammatics than to other kinds of ‘scholarly’ knowledge. In this context, the notion of a ‘spiral’ of learning, introduced at the end of Chapter 8, is worth explicating further.

9.4.2 Systematicity via the (twin-) spiral curriculum

The theory of curriculum design as a ‘spiral’ was proposed by Bruner (1960). The ‘spiral curriculum’ recommends the revisiting of concepts over time, with learning building upon prior learning in a cumulative fashion so that concepts are revisited and developed – “return with a difference” (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2011, p. 187). The image of the ascending spiral is compatible with Bernstein’s notion of ‘vertical discourses’, suggesting by its design that over time the ‘semantic gravity’ of school knowledge trends towards being weaker, or in other words that there is a trend towards the more abstract. The spiral’s return on an ascending scale also
reflects Vygotsky’s description of cognitive development as outlined in Chapter 3, in that the spiral implies both: (a) learning about previously encountered concepts in new and wider spheres of operation, and (b) learning at higher levels of abstraction.

Examples of both these kinds have been discussed in the thesis. Examples of the former include: the ‘return with difference’ of Chapter 7, where Class 2B learned about ‘saying verbs’ in a narrative whereas their original encounters with this grammatical category had been through media reports about Olympians (Chapter 6); and the revisiting of knowledge of Theme across different text types as described in Chapter 8. An example of the latter is the sequenced teaching of Process types according to degree of abstraction, that is, by beginning with concrete material Processes with the intention of building towards later introduction of more abstract Process types (Chapter 5). These examples indicate some of the ways in which the spiral is a helpful construct for reflecting upon and designing effective programs for teaching functional grammatistics. The spiral curriculum also provides a sense of purpose and directionality which extends beyond the teaching of individual grammatical categories; it envisages knowledge about grammar building cumulatively towards systematicity.

Furthermore, the image of the spiral may be expanded to accommodate the ‘integrated’ teaching of grammatics by including a second spiral, which we might call ‘knowledge of text types’ or ‘knowledge of whole texts’. An integrated language curriculum for grammatics may thus be envisaged as two strands of knowledge in tandem – a twin spiral or double helix (Figure 9.2). This metaphor is intended to convey a curriculum in which connections are made from knowledge of text types to knowledge of grammar and vice versa, with the grammatics taught primarily as a tool for engaging with the meanings of whole texts. Thus knowledge about grammar
and knowledge about text types are regarded as mutually informing. This ‘twin spiral’ design for language curriculum furthermore reflects SFL theory, where text–grammar relations are described in terms of mutual realisation and construal: texts are realised by the lexicogrammar; lexicogrammatical patterns construe texts.

![Twin spiral or double helix as a metaphor for an ‘integrated’ grammatics](image_url)

**Figure 9.2** Twin spiral or double helix as a metaphor for an ‘integrated’ grammatics\(^{141}\)

In summary, if grammatical knowledge is taught ‘in context’ but without also aiming towards systematicity, the grammatics is likely to remain underutilised by students; their uses of it will tend to be limited to applications closely allied with original contexts of acquisition. It is therefore necessary to emphasise that a strong sense of long-term goals needs to reach across and infuse both ‘classification’ and ‘framing’ in order for grammatics instruction to be optimally designed for the development of ‘scholarly’ understandings of language.

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\(^{141}\) Image credit: ©iStockphoto.com/Lazarev. Used with permission.
9.4.3 Towards systematicity in practice

In practical terms, there are several implications following from the case studies in the thesis which may inform teaching towards systematicity in grammatics.

Primacy of the designated curriculum

Within the ‘PRF’ of the case study classes, the degree of primacy ascribed to the designated curriculum was foremost in shaping the possibilities for the teaching–learning of grammatics to be integrated and yet systematic. For example, in the Class 2B case study, a prior decision made by the teacher to study ‘The Olympics’ took primacy over all other curriculum planning at that time (understandably since the Olympics were indeed being held). Thus in the teacher’s view, the introduction of ‘action verbs’ in that class (Chapter 5) had to be integrated with ‘The Olympics’ if it was to be integrated at all. The grammatical knowledge developed in these early lessons was not, despite its relative success, particularly suggestive of immediately subsequent work in grammatics which would build on that knowledge cumulatively.

In the Class 2F case study, there was in general a greater degree of flexibility on the part of the teacher in accommodating a systematic approach to introducing grammatics, with the wider designated curriculum still taught but certain texts deliberately selected for focused attention because of their affordances for the development of cumulative grammatical knowledge (such as the paper flower procedure described in Chapter 8, which followed from a Mother’s Day craft activity and which permitted the development of cumulative knowledge about Theme).

Optimal curricular design for grammatics will, in a similar vein to the Class 2F study in particular, take account of both the wider designated curriculum and the building of knowledge about language which is coherent in terms of sequence and cumulative over time.
‘Valency’ in programming

The teaching–learning of some grammatical categories leads logically and smoothly towards related subsequent learning. One example of this was Class 2F’s work on action verbs, from which learning about Theme in procedures was a sensible and straightforward progression (as described in Chapter 5). This capacity for certain content to anticipate and contribute towards later learning may be termed ‘valency’. Instruction with high valency will help learners to recognise that they are revisiting known concepts in new ways, that they are ‘building upon’ and not merely ‘adding to’. Planning for high valency instruction implies the conscious selection of content so that, as far as possible, links are made from current learning back to prior learning, while also establishing bases for future learning.

The importance of metalanguage

Throughout Chapters 5 to 8, a unifying thread has been the importance of the ways in which teachers define and explain grammatical categories. The grammatical terms themselves, and the ways in which they are mediated via language, shape how students learn to attend to texts. In terms of building cumulative knowledge, consideration should therefore be given to using metalanguage which will be optimally helpful to students.

The use of consistent metalanguage within and across grades of schooling is one way in which instruction can support learners in building grammatical knowledge cumulatively. It will obviously be difficult for students to recognise subsequent learning as related to earlier knowledge if teachers use different terms from year to year or class to class. In Chapter 6 (6.8.3), for example, some of the different terminology around quoted speech was pointed out and the merits of different terms considered. While over time it might be desirable for students to
recognise a range of terms related to similar phenomena, early learning in grammatics is likely to be impeded by inconsistent use of metalanguage.

Furthermore, metalanguage should seek to represent grammatical knowledge accurately, in particular avoiding false delineations of categories which may prove difficult for students to overcome. For example, describing verbs as ‘doing words’ (Chapter 5) creates a false impression of the range of meanings covered by this grammatical category, making it necessary for students to redraw their boundaries for the category at some later stage. A preferable metalanguage would be one which holds its integrity when revisited over time. For example, the term ‘action verb’ implies a family in which the ‘action’-type is but one member; the term accurately suggests the existence of other types of verbs. Or the term ‘Process’ might be used and then the category populated over time as different types of Processes are introduced. A further example from the thesis has been the metalanguage of Theme (Chapter 8). An accurate explanation of Theme will ideally avoid creating the potential for future confusions (sub-section 8.3.1). Furthermore, a simplified explanation (such as describing Theme as a feature of the sentence, as was done in Class 2F), should be capable of elaboration at a more technical level without dismantling prior learning (Theme operates at the level of the clause, but since sentences are made of clauses the simplified explanation has not misdirected learners’ attention).

Metalinguistic terminology may smooth the way for cumulative learning in grammatics or impede it. The use of metalanguage which is both consistent and accurate is likely to be optimally helpful to students.
‘Review’ as a strategic pedagogic move

In the case study classes, the teachers often signalled the building of cumulative knowledge to students by beginning lessons with a phase in which children were invited to review their previous learning. For example:

Teacher: I was just going to get someone to put their hand up, or more than one person, to tell Ms French what we’ve, what you’ve learned so far about Theme in narrative. And the narrative we’ve been looking at is what, Beatrice?

Beatrice: Drac and the Gremlin.

Teacher: OK. What have you learned so far?

Class 2F, December 10

This kind of stage in a lesson might be described in Christie’s terms (2002a) as an example of ‘Task Orientation’ in that it provides a platform from which to introduce and focus the ensuing learning task, but it also has the important function of modelling reflection on prior learning, with the expectation that students will draw upon that learning as they build new knowledge. This kind of lesson stage has also been identified as significant for the teaching of grammatics by Chen and Jones (2012), who refer to it as ‘Review’. The functional role of this stage in signalling the building of cumulative knowledge makes it a very strategic pedagogic move and one which may be recommended for the design of productive lessons – and stretches of lessons (or “curriculum macro-genres” in Christie’s terms) – for the teaching of grammatics.

9.5 Looking forward

The thesis has demonstrated the considerable promise of a functional grammatics taught well. There remains, however, much more of interest to be explored in this field of research.

In particular, there continues to be a need for longitudinal studies which
document cumulative learning of functional grammatics over several years of schooling and which show the possibilities afforded by a more expansive grasp of the grammatics than that achieved by novices. The ontogenetic developments in grammatics made by novices are extremely important for understanding how foundations are laid for future learning, and indeed further research with novice learners is also needed (particularly looking at the teaching of grammatical categories not already well-documented, including aspects of Halliday’s ‘interpersonal metafunction’ of language, which was not addressed with the Year 2 children in the present study), but there are limitations to such research. The theoretical power of ‘scholarly’ knowledge – effective because of its abstraction and therefore ‘portability’ – can only be hinted towards when research is limited to studying novice learners, and its more comprehensive realisation is yet to be demonstrated in longitudinal research.

The forms of semiotic mediation by which grammatical knowledge is made accessible to learners are also worthy of further exploration. Teachers in particular will benefit from research identifying ways of explaining grammatical categories which are not only accessible but also helpful for cumulative knowledge building. These forms of semiotic mediation include teacher talk, particularly metalanguage and its explication, but also include the deployment of non-linguistic semiotic modes such as colour and shape, as well as an articulation of all of these in terms of whole texts and their meanings. To these ends, the documentation of exemplary practice and identification of less optimal forms of mediation of functional grammar will be an important area for expansion of the contributions of this thesis.

Finally, there is little doubt that sceptics operating under certain paradigms will be unwilling to recommend the approach to the teaching of grammatics
advocated in the thesis without classical experimental evidence of its efficacy. Certainly there already exists some quantitative-type evidence for approaches along somewhat similar lines (see studies mentioned in Chapter 2, section 2.4), but long-held beliefs about the historical research have in the past proved very resistant to revision. For future experimental research in the field, several recommendations flow from the thesis. Foremost of these is that the issue of quality of pedagogy is ignored at great peril to validity. Projects which seek to provide quantitative evaluations of the ‘effectiveness’ of ‘teaching grammar’ will almost certainly need to incorporate a qualitative dimension evaluating pedagogy. In addition, the merit of comparative studies testing the relative worth of different ‘treatments’ (one kind of ‘grammar’ versus another, or ‘no-grammar’) needs to be determined with sound theoretical reasoning about the affordances of different grammars, and with due attention to the ethical imperative of avoiding predictable disadvantage to students. The recent study by Myhill and colleagues (2012) constitutes an example of the kind of care and complexity (and, not insignificantly, expense) required for well-designed experimental-type projects which seek to recognise the ‘teaching of grammar’ as the multi-faceted educational endeavour it in fact is.

9.6 Final word

The field of research into the teaching of knowledge about grammar was for the last decades of the twentieth century left almost entirely fallow, assumed by most to be infertile. Contemporary research is however ploughing the field afresh, and in the process reimagining the teaching of grammatics as a purposeful tool for drawing learners’ attention to how meanings are made in language. This is a creative endeavour involving innovation in practice and better articulation of theories informing that practice. It is also an endeavour with implications for social justice.
Given that language is the dominant semiotic mode by which people learn and interact, helping students understand and consciously control language in its many valued forms is a way of expanding not just their potential for success in school but in life. The study of grammatics, especially a meaning-oriented grammatics taught in relation to whole texts, can contribute to the development of this conscious mastery of forms of language. It can even, as shown in the case studies in this thesis, be interesting and enjoyable.

The utility of any pedagogical grammar to learners will always be a function of the affordances of the grammatical description itself and of the pedagogy by which it is taught, and never of individual learners’ intellectual capacities in imagined isolation from the effects of quality of instruction. A functional grammatics woven into the fabric of curriculum, and yet retaining the systematicity that disciplinarity implies, offers a pathway to higher intellectual ground in understanding and using language. The thesis has shown that junior primary school children, guided by thoughtful and purposeful teachers, can make productive steps along this pathway. It is with interest and anticipation that we await stories of the further adventures of children learning about grammar in similarly innovative and informed ways.
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References

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Blackwell.


Daniels, M. (2010). Word-painting: The colouring of grammar. Practically Primary,


Martin, J. R., & Rothery, J. (1986). Writing project report no. 4. Sydney, Australia: Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney.


Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology (pp. 251–267). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.


References


APPENDICES
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Appendix A

The contents of Appendix A are relevant to discussion in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

Contents

A.1 Table: Empirical studies of the effects of teaching knowledge about grammar ........................................... 430
A.2 Bibliographical list of works appearing in the table ‘A.1’ ......................... 437
### Table: Empirical studies of the effects of teaching knowledge about grammar

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Segal and Barr</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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## Empirical studies

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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and 1937b</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frogner</td>
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<td>Robinson</td>
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<td>Bateman and Zidonis</td>
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* Asterisks indicate that the cited work is a dissertation / thesis and that the citation in that particular review has a different date from the one listed in the table above. Citations in some reviews are for the abstract entry in Dissertation Abstracts, which is generally the year following submission of the dissertation (e.g. Thibodeau, A.E., 1964). For the present thesis, unpublished dissertations have consistently been referenced according to their year of submission, generally the year preceding the publication of the abstract (thus: ‘Thibodeau, A.E., 1963’, for example). The decision to cite theses according to their date of submission (and not the date of publication of the abstract) avoids confusion over whether two different works are being cited, and also provides more precise dating of studies.
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<td>Weaver 1996</td>
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<td>UK Grammar Papers - Paper 6 1998</td>
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<td>Andrews et al. 2004</td>
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<td>Elley, Barham, Lamb and Wylie</td>
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<td>McQuade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock</td>
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† This review gives only a single author: Calkins. The paper is however the same as that referred to by Hillocks (1986).
‡ Andrews and colleagues cite Calkins (1979), which was a conference paper released as an ERIC document. Documenting the same study was a shorter paper published the following year (Calkins & Graves, 1980), which is the work cited in the two earlier reviews.
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<td>Satterfield and Powers</td>
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§ This work is incorrectly cited as being “unpublished” in *The grammar papers* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [UK], 1998, p. 58).
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<td>Fearn and Farnan</td>
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<td>Saddler and Graham</td>
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** Fearn and Farnan (2005) is a conference presentation and to the best of the researcher’s knowledge it is not publicly available (it is not, for example, catalogued in the ERIC database). The same empirical study was evidently later published as Fearn and Farnan (2007) – this version appears not to have been available to Graham and Perin (2007) when they were preparing their meta-analysis. While nowhere explicitly stated, Fearn and Farnan (2007) almost certainly reports upon the same empirical study as the 2005 conference paper because, amongst other indications, the number of participants in the study (n=57) is uniform (see Fearn & Farnan, 2007, p. 73; Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 454). In discussion in Chapter 2 of the thesis, it is the 2007 citation which is used because it is accessible to readers.
A.2 Bibliographical list of works appearing in the table ‘A.1’

The following list provides a complete bibliography of the works cited in Appendix A, item A.1. Only a selection of these is discussed in the body of the thesis.


Benefer, M. C. (1935). *Sentence sense in relation to subject and predicate*. (Unpublished M.A. thesis), University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.


Butterfield, C. J. (1945). *The effect of a knowledge of certain grammatical elements on the acquisition and retention of punctuation skills.* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA.


Catherwood, C. (1932). *A study of relationships between a knowledge of rules and ability to correct grammatical errors, and between identification of sentences and knowledge of subject and predicate.* (Unpublished M.A. thesis), University of Minnesota, MN.


Mulcahy, G. J. (1973). *A comparison of the traditional methods approach and the linguistic methods approach to the teaching of English grammar and composition to college freshmen.* (Ed.D dissertation), University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.


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Appendix B

The contents of Appendix B are relevant to discussion in Chapter 5 of the thesis. In addition, the table at item B.1 provides a summary of transcription conventions relevant to all transcripts in the appendices.

Contents

B.1 Table of transcription conventions used in appendices ...................................... 446
B.2 An example of a ‘What is language?’ mind map ............................................... 447
B.3 Words used in word sort activity ..................................................................... 448
B.4 Lesson summary: Class 2B introductory lesson on action verbs (October 4) ......................................................................................................................... 449
B.5 Lesson summary: Class 2F introductory lesson on ‘action verbs’ and Theme (May 14) .................................................................................................................. 453
B.6 Procedure text used with Class 2F ................................................................. 460
B.7 Sample text by Class 2B child: picture description of an Olympic sport ... 461
B.8 Sample texts by Class 2F children: reflections in learning journals after learning about ‘action verbs’ and ‘Theme’ ................................................................. 462
B.9 Lexicogrammatical analysis of a sample of the references to ‘action verbs’ in Class 2B lesson, October 4
   B.9.1 Introducing the term ‘action verb’ .............................................................. 463
   B.9.2 Focus on word function – when ‘diving’ is not a Process ....................... 465
   B.9.3 Identifying examples of ‘action verbs’ in text ........................................... 466
   B.9.4 Focus on entire verbal group as single functional element ................. 467
B.10 Lexicogrammatical analysis of a sample of the references to ‘action verbs’ in Class 2F lesson, May 14
   B.10.1 Introducing the term ‘action verb’ ........................................................... 468
   B.10.2 ‘Action word’ and ‘doing word’ as substitute terms for ‘verb’ ............ 469
## B.1 Table of transcription conventions used in appendices
(reproduced and augmented from Table 4.2 in Chapter 4 of the thesis)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Symbol or convention</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>Name in left-hand column, followed by a colon</td>
<td>Speaker, identified by name where possible</td>
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<tr>
<td>⋮</td>
<td>In left-hand column, indicates some of the text has not been transcribed (often a reason for this or a summary of the talk is provided in the right-hand column)</td>
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<tr>
<td>⋮</td>
<td>In the body of the transcript – indicates a pause of up to 3 seconds. Pauses of longer than 3 seconds were timed and noted as such in square brackets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Talk is unclear – the words in parentheses are the researcher’s best guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Additional information which may not have been part of the audio recording itself but helps to explicate it in some way. May include a note about accompanying activity or a short summary of an ellipsed section of talk. Also used to indicate an indecipherable section of text, to note the length of pauses greater than 3 seconds, and to note tone of address where this might be relevant to a fair reading of the transcript.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Γ L</td>
<td>Used to indicate simultaneous talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italicised stretches of prose</td>
<td>Used to summarise classroom activity and talk in lesson transcripts which have been condensed rather than reproduced in full.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Embedded element. Used in some transcripts to indicate that a stage of a lesson is embedded within another stage (usually when a teacher conducts an ‘excursus’ onto a related topic and then returns to the main topic of the lesson).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B.2 An example of a ‘What is language?’ mind map
### B.3 Words used in word sort activity

These words used in both Class 2B and Class 2F:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jump</th>
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<th>cat</th>
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<tr>
<td>has</td>
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<tr>
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<td>go</td>
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<td>king</td>
<td>biscuit</td>
<td>shout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>is</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>smell</td>
<td>in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>rope</td>
<td>build</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These additional words used in Class 2F only:

| peach | hat | his |
| she | school | day |
B.4 Lesson summary: Class 2B introductory lesson on action verbs (October 4)

Task specification:

Researcher: I want you to have a look at that [indicates display of pictures cut from the newspaper], and I want you to be thinking about what’s going on. What are the actions that are happening in these pictures? … And then what I’m going to do is to write some sentences up here that are using the words telling us what’s going on, what’s happening.

Joint task:

Looking at pictures of Olympic activities and joint construction of writing describing the activity in the pictures. (Example shown at right, Figure 5.1)

Task orientation:

Researcher: I’m going to put some green text in a box around some of these words.

Researcher draws green boxes around the verbal groups in the jointly constructed writing. No comment is made about what the green boxes mean. The researcher and children read the text again, with the researcher reading the bulk of the text and the children just reading the contents of the green boxes (‘shared reading’).

(Task specification:

This step in the lesson is ellipsed. The children anticipate the researcher’s intended question about what the words in the green boxes have in common, and therefore the researcher does not need to ask.)

Task:

Children look for commonalities between the words in the green boxes and suggest what these might be.

Researcher: What comment would you like to make … Hilary?

Hilary: The, um, words in the green boxes are all, um, describing words.

Researcher: They are the same sort of words. Who else would like to make a comment? They do kind of all go together, don’t they? Um … Victor.

Victor: The w-, the words with the green boxes are all verbs?

Researcher: What do you mean by that?

†† Photo: Rade Lukovic, ©iStockphoto.com/RadeLukovic. Used with permission.
Victor: Like, um, doing things, like jumping, controlling, leaning, steering and riding.

Researcher: OK. What about somebody else that has a comment to make?

Child: [Softly:] And adjectives.

Researcher: Leah.

Leah: The words in the green boxes are some adjectives.

Researcher: Mm. What do you mean by adjective?

Leah: Like …

Child (not Leah): [Whispering:] They describe words.

Researcher: Not really sure, but you think they’re adjectives?

Leah: Yeah.

Researcher: OK. … Amelia.

Amelia: The words in the green boxes all have ‘ing’ on it.

Researcher: Oh! Look at that. You’re right.

... 

Instruction in the new:

Researcher: Well … they’re actually all verbs.

... 

Researcher: They’re the action verbs; the words that are telling us what’s going on, what action is happening.

Joint task:

Children work with researcher to put green boxes around the material Processes in another similar text. This includes dealing with an ‘anti-example’ where a child suggests that ‘diving’ in ‘a diving board’ is an action verb.

Researcher: What about … we have some people come out and use the texta?

Lauren – you start us off. What are you going to put?

Lauren: I’m going to put them around –

Researcher: Just do one of them.

Lauren: OK.

Researcher: Which one?

Lauren: Diving.

Researcher: Oop – just stop. Very good thinking. Let’s just have a look at that one, though. That one’s a bit tricky. ‘They are jumping off the diving board.’ In that sentence, ‘diving’s’ not being a verb. Oh – that’s such a tricky one. I’m glad you noticed that.

Karin: [Very very quietly:] It’s an object.

Researcher: Because it’s being … an – What did you say, Karin?

Child: [Barely audible:] A noun.
Karin: An object.
Researcher: Yeah. It’s a diving board; it’s a thing.

... 

Researcher: Can you see another verb, an action verb there, Lauren, instead of the ‘diving’ that’s in ‘diving board’, ’cause that’s a thing? What’s the action?
Lauren: There. [Points to word on displayed text.]
Researcher: Ah. Down there. That one says ‘They are diving’. That’s right.

[ Instruction in the new:]

The role of auxiliary verbs is addressed:

Researcher: Would you put the box around ‘are’ and ‘diving’? ’Cause ‘are’ is a little bit like the ‘is’ before that Rosemary was pointing out. There’s a little word that’s part of the verb that’s telling us that the action verb’s coming up. They ‘are diving’ – that’s all the action. Those two words have to go together for the action. Well done.

...

Researcher: What are you going to put your box around?
Deborah: ‘Jumping’.
Researcher: ‘Jumping’ in the first sentence?
Deborah: Yep.
Researcher: I think that’s a pretty good one.
Child: [Quietly:] Should be ‘are j–’
Researcher: Could you put it round ‘are jumping’? Yep. ’Cause we’re putting all the words that belong together to tell us what the action is.

...

Jane: Copying?
Researcher: Yes! Put ‘are copying’, because ‘are’ is a bit like ‘is’ – it’s helping us to make the verb. Sometimes verbs aren’t just one word; they can be in a group, that all belongs together.

Task specification:

Children are asked to do their own independent version of the writing and verb identification activity already completed jointly by the whole class and researcher.

Task specification:

The researcher offers an optional extra activity for children who finish the first independent task quickly: thinking of a favourite activity and listing action verbs that the activity involves.
Excursus:

Discussion initiated by a student who asks whether ‘sleeping’ can be used as a favourite activity in completing the task just specified. This excursus involves the brief introduction of the notion of other types of verbs additional to action verbs.

Tasks:

Children work independently on the tasks specified above.

Re-orientation and Closure:

Researcher initiates a game in which the children try to think of action verbs which would apply in an Olympic sport named by the researcher. If they can think of a suitable verb they can line up with their morning tea snack ready for recess.
B.5  Lesson summary: Class 2F introductory lesson on ‘action verbs’ and Theme (May 14)

Task orientation 1:

(‘Warm-up’) Miming game – children take turns acting out an action and the class guesses what the action is.

Task orientation 2:

Review of previous work on the main elements of the text type ‘procedure’. The procedure being discussed throughout this lesson can be found as Appendix B item B.6.

Teacher: What’s this that I’ve put up here? Stella?

Stella: How to make a polystyrene cup telephone.

Teacher: Did we make one of those?

Children: Yes.

Teacher: What type of writing is it called? Kieran?

Kieran: A procedure?

Teacher: Yes. A procedure.

We’re going to look today at this word: Theme.

Researcher: Um, Mrs Finch, I was going to see if the children could find all the action verbs first –

Teacher: Oh, we’re going to fi–, see that first.

Researcher: – and then see if we can find a pattern.

Teacher: Oh, all right. We’ll find, we’ll find the action verbs first. I forgot what I was doing.

Teacher continues to revise with the children what they already know about procedures as a text type, such as that they have the parts ‘materials or equipment’ and ‘instructions’, which are written ‘in order’.

Task specification (includes term specification of ‘action verbs’):

Teacher: So we’re going to just have a look at the verbs first of all. The action words, the words that tell you how to do something – or what to do, really; they tell you what to do. Can you see the word that tells you what to do in the first step? It says – listen to what it says, if you can’t see real well – ‘Carefully make a small hole in the bottom of each cup using the pointy end of the pencil.’ If I’m going to highlight the verbs, the action words in that sentence, what would I highlight? ‘Carefully

‡‡ This short section represents a ‘false start’ upon a stage planned for later in the lesson. Given that the teacher promptly returns to the intended lesson plan, the section may be regarded as a kind of interruption to ‘task orientation 2’. The angled bracket symbols enclosing the section follow the convention used in systemic functional grammar to indicate an element included within and essentially ‘interrupting’ another element: 《 》.
make a small hole in the bottom of each cup using the pointy end of the pencil.’

**Joint task** (with teacher):

Locating ‘action verbs’ on a shared procedural text.

Teacher: Chen?
Chen: Carefully make a small hole?
Teacher: Would I highlight the whole lot of that?
Chen: Mm, no.
Teacher: What would I highlight?
Chen: Make?
Teacher: Make? OK. Just ‘make’?
Chen: Um, um, carefully?
Teacher: ‘Carefully’ too?

... 

**Excursus:**

The teacher initiates discussion around the idea that the word ‘carefully’ is not a verb.

Teacher: Think about what you can do. ‘Carefully make a small hole in the bottom of each cup, using the pointy end of the pencil.’
The three words that I’ve highlighted are ‘carefully’, ‘make’ and ‘using’.
Child: ‘And ‘using’.
Teacher: Which one do you think’s not really a verb?
Christopher: ‘Carefully’?
Teacher: Very good Christopher. What do you think ‘carefully’ is?

... 

Teacher: What’s the word ‘carefully’ doing?
Christopher: Gentle. Being gentle.
Teacher: Telling you to be gentle?
Christopher: Mm.

... 

Gareth: Um, it [inaudible] you like, like when you’re sticking the nail through the bottom of the cup that you do it slowly.
Teacher: Yes. That’s right. It’s telling you to do it carefully.

... 

Researcher: So it’s telling you *how* to do it?
Gareth: Yep.
Joint task, continued:

Teacher: Who can tell me what the action word or the doing word is in Step 2? Can you read it from there? Can you read it from there, Adrian?

Adrian: [Inaudible.]

Teacher: Can you t–, read Step 2?

Adrian: ‘Break the toothpick into two, into two even halves.’

Teacher: What’s the doing word in that sentence, the action word?

Adrian: Um, ‘break’?

Teacher: That’s right.

[Pause 5 seconds for teacher to mark ‘break’ on the displayed text.]

Child: Break. [Whispering – reading aloud as teacher highlights text.]

... 

Teacher: And I’m going to ask you, Poppy, to tell me, what’s the first thing it tells you to do? You need to pay attention and come and sit here where you can see. What’s the first thing it tells you to do?

Researcher: Take the tape recorder, Poppy. Take the tape recorder and say it clearly on the tape.

Poppy: ‘Thread’?

Teacher: That’s right. That’s the first thing. Can you see other-

Poppy: ‘Through’?

Teacher: Beg your pardon?

Poppy: ‘Through’?

Teacher: Is that a doing word?

Poppy: [Negative – possibly shaking head:] Mm mm.

Teacher: I want the doing words, the action words, the verbs.

Child: [Inaudible.]

Researcher: Think of another action you could act out, Poppy.

... 

Teacher: What’s the next doing word, Luke?


Teacher: Good. Can you pass that to Luke, please, Clint?

Clint: I said ‘pull’ before ‘im.

Teacher: Did you say ‘pull’ before?


Teacher: Just before ‘im, did you?

Clint: Yeah.

Teacher: OK very good. You’re right. It is ‘pull’. Keep going. What do you have to do next, what’s the next doing word after ‘pull’?
Luke: Um –
[Pause 9 seconds.]
Teacher: Can you see from there?
Luke: ‘Tie’?

... 

Task specification:

The researcher introduces the idea of looking for patterns in the ‘action verbs’, all now identified using the colour green.

Researcher: Have a look at all those action verbs.

... 

Researcher: Put your finger on your nose when you think you’ve spotted the pattern that you can see.

... 

Task:

Identifying patterns in the ‘action verbs’. Children share the patterns they notice with the class. These patterns include repeated words and numbers of letters. The following excerpts exemplify the discussion:

Teacher: What pattern could you see, Poppy?
Poppy: I could see that when it’s like, I could like that’s it’s kind of big, big, small, big, small, big, small, big, and one’s a bit like steps.
Teacher: What do you mean by big and small?
Poppy: Like [indecipherable] is like big, big, and then a small word? And these are a bit –
Teacher: The number of letters? Is that what you’re looking at?
Poppy: No, I mean like, the word is, like, big, and then another big one and then it’s a small –
Teacher: But what makes it big?
Poppy: ’Cause it’s got lots of letters. And this is kind of like steps ’cause it’s kind of up, up, down.

... 

Teacher: Who can see another one [i.e. pattern]? Marc?
[Marc is not in the study; comments not transcribed.]
Teacher: Yes, Marc. Marc said that starting from 2, they’re all at the start and they have a capital letter. Until we get down to here. Very good.

...
**Joint task** (with researcher):

*Underlining the sentence beginnings in orange then reading them aloud together (shared reading).*

Researcher: Now, I thought I might use my orange pencil for you to help me –

Teacher: Simon.

Researcher: – put a box around the way some of the sentences start. Do you remember how Marc said that lots of the action verbs are at the start of the sentence? Hand up if you can see that now. Have a look for yourself.

... 

*Lesson continues with the researcher asking children to assist in identifying the first words in each sentence.*

**Instruction in the new:** Introducing ‘Theme’

*Introduction of the term ‘Theme’ – definition of term and explication of its function in procedural texts.*

Researcher: Now, Marc reckoned that lots of the action verbs were at the beginning of sentences. Put your hand up if you think he was right. [Pause 6 seconds.] Hands down. Now that we’ve looked at the beginning of those sentences I think he *was* right, wasn’t he? Some of them were in other parts of the sentences but lots of them were at the beginning part.

Teacher: Very clever, Marc.

Researcher: Do you know, there’s a name for that?

Child: Um–

Researcher: There’s a name for that part of the sentence, and Mrs Finch is going to tell you about that now. We’ve got an orange poster to explain to us what I’ve just done with our orange pencil.

Teacher: Who can read what the name for that is where the main word is at the beginning of the sentence? Luke?


Teacher: Theme; it’s called ‘Theme’. And this says [reading from a mini-poster prepared by the researcher]: ‘The Theme is found at the beginning of the sentence. It can be one word or a group of words which belong together. The job, or the function of the Theme – that’s the job it does – is to tell us what the rest of the sentence will be about.’ Simon. ‘The Theme introduces the message of the sentence. It launches the sentence’ – like a rocket ship –

Child: Mm!

Teacher: ‘- and sets it on its way.’ So the Theme at the beginning of the sentence helps you know what that sentence is going to be about.

... 

Teacher: That’s why, here, the most important thing that this person that wrote this procedure, the most important thing that the person that wrote this procedure wants you to know, in the first sentence, what do you think
the most important thing they want you to know is? Look at the beginning of that sentence. [Pause 3 seconds.] Christopher?

Christopher: Carefully?

Teacher: You’re right. They want you to look at that word ‘carefully’ and think, ‘Right, I’ve got to do this carefully.’ Why would you have to be careful making a small hole in the bottom of a cup using the pointy end of the pencil? Why do they want you to be careful? Marc?

[Marc is not in the study; comments not transcribed.]

Teacher: [Repeating Marc’s answer:] You might stab yourself with the pencil! There could be another reason too why you have to be careful. Kieran?

Kieran: If you put, if you put it in the wrong place it might, it might make it, like it won’t work.

Teacher: That’s right. Any other reasons – very good – why you might have to be careful? [Pause 3 seconds.] Um, Heidi?

Heidi: Because you could, like, you could, when it comes, ’cause you could’ve, you could’ve make a big hole and when you stick the toothpick in, um, the hole could be too big and it could just, um, come out.

Teacher: And did that happen to some people? That happen to anyone in our class?

Child: I didn’t know.

Teacher: Did that happen to anyone in our class when we made it? Did anybody’s matchstick pull through the bottom of the cup?

Children: Mm. Hmm.

Teacher: No?

Simon: I think Hannah’s.

Teacher: Yes. I knew it happened to somebody. Their matchstick fell.

Researcher: That’s right. [Laughs.]

Teacher: So that’s why the person who wrote this procedure, who’s giving you the, these instructions, they put ‘carefully’ first because they want that to be the most important thing that you see in that sentence.

...  

Teacher: So we can see that Theme is what the person who wrote it –

**Excursus:**

*Teacher breaks off defining ‘Theme’ and leads a short discussion about ‘authors’.*

Teacher: – What’s the name for a person who writes something? – What are you when you write something?

...

Jacques: Author.

Teacher: Author, that’s right. So the author – I’m waiting for you to sit on your bottom, Marc … – the author.
**Instruction in the new**, continued:

Teacher: – And when you’re an author writing a procedure, whatever words you put at the beginning are the meaning that you want to give the sentence, what you want the person reading it to do.

...  
Researcher: But you will, if you have a look at a procedure, I bet you will notice that quite often there’s action verbs at the beginning of the sentences, and that means the action verbs [slowly:] are the Th–

Child: Doing thing.

Teacher: Ah ah ah! Are the –? [Points to chart.]

Child: [Quietly:] Theme!

Children: [In chorus:] Theme.

Researcher: Yeah.

Teacher: Yes. We’re going to put this [i.e. chart] up on our wall. …

Researcher: [Inaudible] our chart.

---

**Task reflection:**

*Children write in their learning journals about what they learnt and how they felt about it.*
B.6 Procedure text used with Class 2F

Material Processes are indicated by boxes. In the lesson with the children, these boxes were coloured green.

How to make a polystyrene cup telephone

You will need:
- Two polystyrene cups
- A pencil
- One toothpick
- String – about 4 m
- A friend

Instructions:
1. Carefully **make** a small hole in the bottom of each cup **using** the pointy end of the pencil.
2. **Break** the toothpick into two even halves.
3. **Thread** the string through the bottom of one cup.
   - **Pull** it out through the top.
   - **Tie** the string tightly to one of the halves of the toothpick.
4. **Thread** the other end of the string through the bottom of the other cup.
   - **Pull** it out and **tie** it tightly to the other half toothpick.
5. **Take** one cup and **give** the other cup to your friend.
   - **Move** apart so that the string **is stretched** tight.
6. Clearly **talk** into one cup while your friend **listens**.
B.7 Sample text by Class 2B child: picture description of an Olympic sport

BOXING
By Rachel

The men are punching each other.

They are wearing special boxing gloves so if they hit each other very hard they will not hurt their hands badly and they are wearing special head gear to protect their heads.

They are trying to knock each other out.

Notes: The boxed words in this text are those that Rachel identified as the ‘action verbs’. This sample is indicative of the class’s work, and demonstrates both the partial successes and often understandable errors typical of early, as-yet-insecure concept development. Rachel has found most of the material Processes in her text, although on one occasion she has included more than the Process (‘they’ in ‘they hit’). She has failed to identify as ‘action verbs’ the somewhat more abstract infinitives (‘to protect’, ‘to knock’) and she did not realise that a negative Process was still a Process (‘will not hurt’).
Appendix B

B.8 Sample texts by Class 2F children: reflections in learning journals after learning about ‘action verbs’ and ‘Theme’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Today I learned about verbs, Themes and sentence[s]. The Themes meant the first word in a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Today I learned about verbs are doing word[s] like hop, run and break. We had to look for doing words on a piece of paper. We found a how word on the last step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieran</td>
<td>I learned about verbs. First we highlighted all the verbs. Next Ms French asked us if we saw any patterns and Marc said that most verbs started sentences and we learned that themes are important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>I learned today that verbs are doing words that you can do. And I learned that themes are words that go at the start of the sentence. In a procedure themes are mostly at the start of the sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Today I learned that themes are the beginning of sentences. Themes tell people to do something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Today I learned about verbs and Themes. Doing words come at the beginning of some sentences. Verbs are doing words like ‘Run’. Theme words are like ‘Carefully’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>I learned today that there can be two verbs in a sentence and in a procedure at the start of a sentence that word is the main word of a whole sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacques</td>
<td>Today I [learned] about theme and verbs and most action verbs are at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeoung Bin</td>
<td>I learned today what are verbs. Verbs are doing words and I learned careful is a how word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Today I learned at the starting of a procedure sometimes has doing words sentence on nearly every line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Today we learnt about verbs. First we played a game and then we did a verb hunt. We looked at the beginnings of sentences. Today we will write on green cards. They will be verbs. The words at the beginning of sentences are usually verbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>I learned that verbs are doing words. I also learned that most verbs start at the beginning of sentences in a Procedure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B.9 Lexicogrammatical analysis of a sample of the references to ‘action verbs’ in Class 2B lesson, October 4

Clauses referring to and defining ‘action verbs’ were analysed for their experiential meanings, that is, for the representational functions of the elements. Select transcript excerpts have been reproduced in order to provide meaningful context, with the relevant clauses underlined.

B.9.1 Introducing the term ‘action verb’

Researcher: Well … they’re actually all verbs.

…

Researcher: They’re the action verbs; the words that are telling us what’s going on, what action is happening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Token</th>
<th>(a)-re</th>
<th>actually</th>
<th>all verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>(modal adjunct)</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Token here (‘They’) refers to words enclosed in green boxes on a text displayed for all the children to see (for example: ‘is jumping’, ‘leaning’, ‘is riding’). The Token thus points the children to outwardly observable referents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Token</th>
<th>(a)-re</th>
<th>the action verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of the Classifier in this nominal group implies that other kinds of verbs must exist. This creates a space into which children might reasonably expect other types of verbs to be introduced in subsequent learning (see Chapter 5, p. 187).

Analysis of experiential meanings of nominal group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>the</th>
<th>action</th>
<th>verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deictic (specific)</td>
<td>Classifier</td>
<td>Thing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some discussion of these clauses may be found in Chapter 5, p. 188. Note in the embedded clauses the use of very general Participants (‘what’, ‘what action’) and also general material Processes (‘going on’, ‘happening’). These choices contribute to establishing a definition of ‘action verbs’ which is not too abstract but which nevertheless represents a step beyond merely listing actual examples of verbs.
**B.9.2 Focus on word function – when ‘diving’ is not a Process**

Researcher: Oop – just stop. Very good thinking. Let’s just have a look at that one, though. That one’s a bit tricky. ‘They are jumping off the diving board.’ In that sentence, ‘diving’ s not being a verb. Oh – that’s such a tricky one. I’m glad you noticed that.

Karin: [Very very quietly:] It’s an object.

Researcher: Because it’s being -an – What did you say, Karin?

Child: [Barely audible:] A noun.

Karin: An object.

Researcher: Yeah. It’s a diving board; it’s a thing.

These clauses relate to a discussion of the word ‘diving’ in the sentence ‘They are jumping off the diving board.’ An understanding of Process is being developed here by use of contrast – what a Process is not. See discussion in Chapter 5, p. 188.
B.9.3 Identifying examples of ‘action verbs’ in text

Researcher: Can you see another verb, an action verb there, Lauren, instead of the ‘diving’ that’s in ‘diving board’, ’cause that’s a thing? What’s the action?

Lauren: There. [Points to word on displayed text.]

Researcher: Ah. Down there. That one says ‘They are diving’. That’s right.

Here ‘action verbs’ are represented as visible, observable phenomena, specifically the actual examples which the children are looking for in the text on display. See Chapter 5, p.188.
B.9.4 Focus on entire verbal group as a single functional element

Researcher: What are you going to put your box around?
Deborah: ‘Jumping’.
Researcher: ‘Jumping’ in the first sentence?
Deborah: Yep.
Researcher: I think that’s a pretty good one.
Child: [Quietly:] Should be ‘are j–’
Researcher: Could you put it round ‘are jumping’? Yep. ’Cause we’re putting all the words that belong together to tell us what the action is.

This single ranking clause uses a complex nominal group to indicate to the students that ‘action verb’ encompasses the entire verbal group and not merely the lexical verb (see mention in Chapter 5, p. 221. The Goal makes use of embedded clauses to elaborate which words the children should be ‘putting in green boxes’.

The first of the embedded clauses represents the relationship of ’all the words’ to each other as being one of possession; they ‘belong together’, that is, they form a collective unit. Embedded clauses (ii) and (iii) are very similar to those in the analysis at B.9.1 (see above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>we</th>
<th>(a-)re putting</th>
<th>all the words [[that belong together]] to tell us [[what the action is]]</th>
<th>(in green boxes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>(Circumstance-assumed from context)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) α

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(all the words)</th>
<th>that belong</th>
<th>together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(ii) β

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(all the words)</th>
<th>to tell</th>
<th>us</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Sayer – inferred from previous mention)</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iii) γ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>what</th>
<th>the action</th>
<th>is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### B.10 Lexicogrammatical analysis of a sample of the references to ‘action verbs’ in Class 2F lesson, May 14

#### B.10.1 Introducing the term ‘action verb’

**Teacher:** So we’re going to just have a look at the verbs first of all. The action words, the words that tell you how to do something – or what to do, really; they tell you what to do. Can you see the word that tells you what to do in the first step? It says — listen to what it says, if you can’t see real well — ‘Carefully make a small hole in the bottom of each cup using the pointy end of the pencil.’ If I’m going to highlight the verbs, the action words in that sentence, what would I highlight? ‘Carefully make a small hole in the bottom of each cup using the pointy end of the pencil.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(the verbs)</th>
<th>(are)</th>
<th>The action words, the words [that tell you how to do something I or what to do, really]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of experiential meanings of nominal groups:

(i) the action words
    - Deictic Classifier Thing

(ii) the words [that tell you I what to do]
    - Deictic Thing Qualifier

This ‘identifying’-type relational clause defines verbs thus: verbs = action words. The same equivalence is used again later in the same speech turn (see transcript above: “I’m going to highlight the verbs, the action words”). While this definition is workable for the kinds of verbs in the procedure text type under discussion, which are indeed “words that tell you ... what to do” (see embedded clauses in the analysis at left), it is not a definition which can hold its integrity across different texts and for all kinds of verbs (see discussion, Chapter 5, sub-section 5.5.3). Of further interest is that the term ‘action words’ prefigures the teacher’s later use of the similar nominal group ‘doing words’ as an equivalent term for ‘verb’ (see analysis at B.10.2 below).

The analysis at left does not include the teacher’s formulation of verbs as words that tell you “how to do something” as the comment is essentially retracted, but it is worth noting that this formulation is not particularly accurate (in fact Circumstances of ‘manner’ often achieve this purpose). The teacher herself seemed to be aware of this, hence her rephrasing.
B.10.2 ‘Action word’ and ‘doing word’ as substitute terms for ‘verb’

Teacher: Who can tell me what the action word or the doing word is in Step 2? Can you read it from there? Can you read it from there, Adrian?

Adrian: ‘Break the toothpick into two, into two even halves.’

Teacher: What’s the doing word in that sentence, the action word?

Adrian: ‘Um, ‘break’?

Teacher: That’s right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>what the action word or the doing word is in Step 2?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token Value Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of experiential meanings of nominal groups:

(i) the action word

(ii) the doing word

The teacher is here engaging the students in the activity of reading the procedure text on display in order to identify examples of material Processes in context (“in Step 2”) – a potentially productive activity. The teacher’s use of metalanguage is not however without limitations. In particular, the analysis here provides an example of the use of the terms ‘action verb’ and ‘doing verb’ as interchangeable (there is another example in the teacher’s next speech turn in the excerpt above); and both these terms are being used as substitutes for the term ‘verb’. For discussion of the problematic nature of ‘doing word’ as a gloss for ‘verb’, see Chapter 5, sub-section 5.5.3. Note also that at times, as in this instance, the more technical metalanguage of ‘verb’ is not necessarily used and therefore not consolidated as it might be.
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Appendix C

The contents of Appendix C are relevant to discussion in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

Contents

C.1 Summary of teaching–learning activities and data collection relevant to Class 2B study of the grammatics of quoted speech ........................................... 472
C.2 Punctuation test ........................................................................................................ 473
C.3 Punctuation test results .......................................................................................... 474
C.4 Scores for oral reading expression analysis: comparison of R1 to R2 .......... 475
C.5 Transcript of lesson introducing verbal Processes (Class 2B, October 10) 477
C.6 Examples of cards from ‘the saying verbs game’ .............................................. 492
C.7 Child’s work sample: Newspaper-style report which incorporates quotes 493
C.8 Transcript excerpt in which the issue of plagiarism is raised (Class 2B, October 11) .................................................................................................................. 494
C.9 Transcript excerpt: Functions of the word ‘sniffed’ (Class 2B, October 19) .......................................................... 496
## C.1 Summary of teaching–learning activities and data collection relevant to Class 2B study of the grammatics of quoted speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching–learning activities</th>
<th>Main types of data collected</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st reading (R1) of Two monsters</strong> (McKee, 1985) (n=5)</td>
<td>1st reading (R1) of Two monsters (McKee, 1985) (n=5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Punctuation pre-test (n=25)</td>
<td>Punctuation pre-test (n=25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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.</strong></td>
<td>Classroom talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidation through play: Sayer / saying verb game.</strong></td>
<td>Classroom talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidation building towards independence: Reading a print media report, finding saying verbs and quotes at first jointly with teacher then continuing the activity independently or in paired work.</strong></td>
<td>Work samples (reports provided by researcher with text then marked up by children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using new knowledge: Researching and writing a report which incorporates quotes.</strong></td>
<td>Writing samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applying new knowledge in a different context: Saying verbs in a literary text – the picture book Pumpkin soup (Cooper, 1998). 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 this thesis, Chapter 7).</strong></td>
<td>Classroom talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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.</strong></td>
<td>Work samples (labelled pictures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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 Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge (Fox, 1984).</strong></td>
<td>Worksheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revision: While listening to a story being read (Is it true, Grandfather? Lohse, 1993), the teacher invited the children to signal if they heard a saying verb. Some ‘tricky’ ones were inevitably identified and discussed.</strong></td>
<td>Researcher journal notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>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.</strong></td>
<td>Work samples (mini-posters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Punctuation post-tests (n=26; pre-test ∩ post-test = 24)</strong></td>
<td>Punctuation post-tests (n=26; pre-test ∩ post-test = 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd reading (R2) of Two monsters</strong> (n=4)</td>
<td>2nd reading (R2) of Two monsters (n=4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C.2 Punctuation test

Be the teacher – see if you can put in all the missing punctuation in these pieces of writing.

Baby Bear squealed Somebodys been sleeping in my bed and shes still there

Louise Sauvage is a great Australian athlete She won 4 gold medals in Atlanta in the 1996 Paralympics where she competed in wheelchair racing Louise Sauvage will again be representing Australia in the Sydney Paralympics One of her events will be as part of the team for the womens relay Im proud to be representing Australia again she said recently

Help cried Red Riding Hood Theres a big bad wolf wearing my Grannys pyjamas night-cap and best pink nailpolish

The teacher said 2B you are a great class You have worked so hard you can have the rest of the year off
## C.3 Punctuation test results

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Post-test (Dec. 7)</th>
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<td>Rosemary</td>
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C.4 Scores for oral reading expression analysis: comparison of R1 to R2

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<th>David</th>
<th>Karin</th>
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<tr>
<td>19a&quot;</td>
<td>Not scored. R1: many errors.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

* Prosodic sections marked with quotation marks (*) are those that include direct speech.
### Appendix C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page and prosodic section*</th>
<th>Toula</th>
<th>Shani</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Karin</th>
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<td>25b&quot;</td>
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| MODE  | 0       | 0       | 0       | 1       |
| MEDIAN| 0       | 0       | 0       | 1       |

* Prosodic sections marked with quotation marks (") are those that include direct speech.
C.5 Transcript of lesson introducing verbal Processes
(Class 2B, October 10)

Context: This is the lesson in which ‘saying verbs’ were introduced to Class 2B. The lesson has already involved the following (on the audio recording but not in the transcript):

- Review of earlier learning: researcher reading out some of the children’s ‘learning journal’-type writing about action verbs and their definitions.
- Introducing new material to be read in class today: articles from TIME magazine about Olympians. The first article considered is about Ian Thorpe and it includes a quote from Duncan Armstrong which becomes an entry point for introducing saying verbs.
- Shared reading of enlarged text of the first TIME article.

Joint task (whole class): Identifying aspects of language which indicate speech in a shared text

The chief purpose of this task was to establish the children’s existing level of understanding of quoted speech. The transcript opens with the researcher having just read to the class the following excerpt from a magazine article and having clarified some of the use of metaphor:

“He marries grace with power,” says 1988 Olympic 200m champion Duncan Armstrong. “He caresses the water, but when it’s time to be brutal he’s like a raging bull.” (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81)

Researcher: Now, who said all that about Ian Thorpe? It’s quite nice things to say about him. … Were you reading it? Did you spot who said it?

Children: Yes. Yes.

Researcher: Who was it, Lauren?

Lauren: Um, I think it was, um, Duncan Armstrong.

Researcher: Exactly right! I might just put a little bit of a red box around his name so that we can spot who said it. And, um … I’m going to point out something e–, in fact– In this bit of writing, it says that the person who said it was ‘1988 Olympic 200m champion Duncan Armstrong’. All of that is telling us who said it. So we could even put that all together, and say that’s the person who’s saying it. All of that! … But especially it’s Duncan Armstrong, ’cause that’s his name there … [Marks the text, using a red marker to enclose the Sayer.]

Can anybody spot a word there that’s telling us that somebody said it? [7 second pause.] How do we know? … Toula?


Researcher: Good, so ‘he’ tells us that someone is talking about somebody else?

Toula: [Indicates assent.]
Teacher: Excellent!

Researcher: Fantastical.

Great noticing. Anybody spot any other words that give us a hint that someone is talking? … Frank?

Frank: I can’t see it but maybe there’s punctuation there? That makes him say it.

Researcher: Come out and have a look.

Frank: Which means he’s saying it.

Researcher: It is hard to see from where you’re sitting. Can you see any punctuation that says that someone’s saying it?

Frank: Yes.

Researcher: Point it out to me.

Frank: Right there. [Indicates quote marks.]

Researcher: Yeah.

Frank: And right there.

Researcher: Aha. Can you see some more?

Frank: Yes. Right there.

Researcher: Yep.

Frank: And right there.

Researcher: Well done. Do you know what that punctuation’s called?

Frank: Um, I forgot.

Researcher: Um, Ms Baker, what do you call it in your class? Speech marks?

Child: [Whispers:] Yes.

Researcher: Or – ?

Teacher: We actually don’t. What, can anyone remember what we learnt about in Term 1?

Child: Um, inverted commas.


Anything else that tells you that someone’s talking? I think there’s one more, but you might be able to think of others. Hilary? You’ve been waiting very patiently.

Hilary: Um, there’s a ‘says’ after ‘power’ in the punctuation, after the ‘power’ and the punctuation.

Researcher: Fantastic. Good spotting! It’s a little tiny word tucked in there, isn’t it? That says ‘says’.

**Instruction: Introduction of ‘lips’ symbol**

Researcher: I’m going to put a shape around it – I wonder if you can see what this shape is. [7 seconds – draws green ‘lips’ shape around ‘says’.

Do you know what that shape is? … What do you think it is, Matthew?

Matthew: A love heart?
Researcher: Well, it’s like a love heart but it’s not really supposed [laughing] to be a love heart.

Child: [Quietly:] Lips.

Child: Oh!

Researcher: Say that again?

Child: Lips.

Researcher: Yeah. Why do you think I did lips?

Children: Oh, oh. I know! Oh!

Researcher: Amelia?

Amelia: You did lips because it says ‘says’.

Researcher: Explain, explain it a bit more. Or Georgia might like to add something onto the end of what you were going to say.

Georgia: Um, because you’re saying it and you use your mouth to say it.

Researcher: Yeah! Exactly right.

Teacher: (They’re what we use to speak!)

Joint task: Identifying verbal Processes and Sayers in a shared text

Researcher: Now, these next things have got some more things that people are saying about Ian Thorpe and also some things that Ian Thorpe says about himself. And I won’t expect you to read them all with me – I might read them to you – but I want you to look out for any words like ‘says’ that are telling us that someone is talking. They’ll also be some inverted commas. Look at the next paragraph and read it with your eyes while I read it out loud.

Researcher reads:

“I don’t think we’ve seen anything near the best of him over 200m,” says Brian Sutton, coach of nine Australian Olympians. (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81, slightly altered from original)

Researcher: That one wasn’t very hard, was it? [Laughs.] What did you spot … Deborah?

Deborah: Um–

Researcher: Big voice.

Deborah: I spotted the word ‘says’ again.

Researcher: Oh, well done. You can keep the tape recorder for the moment; we’ll pass it to the next person when they’re ready. [Pause 6 seconds.] And, and who did the saying? Who was the Sayer? –of that comment about ‘we haven’t seen the best of him yet’? Can you pass the tape recorder to Jamila, please? … Who said that, Jamila?

Jamila: Um, Brian, um, …

Researcher: Sutton, I think his last name is.

Jamila: S- Sutton?

Researcher: Yep.
Lesson continues with the researcher reading out paragraphs of text and children identify the saying verbs. The next one is:

His manager, Dave Flaksas, says Thorpe "doesn't waste energy trying to fake a persona." (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81)

This is read to the children, and the researcher and teacher explain what it means. The following exchange then occurs:

Researcher: Anybody spot any, any v-, any words there that were telling us that someone’s talking? Azeb? Pass the tape recorder over, Jamila.

Azeb: The lip thing.

Researcher: The lip thing? Where do I have to put it? Which word?

Azeb: Mm … ‘ss- says’.

Child?: [Unclear.]

Teacher: Good girl.

Researcher: Well done. [Draws green lips shape onto ‘says’.] And who said that? Who said that ‘he doesn’t waste energy trying to fake a persona’? … [Children raise hands.] Could you read it with me? [Researcher points to text so that children can all read together.]

Child: ‘Dave–’

Children and researcher: ‘His manager Dave Flaksas’.

Researcher: So Dave Flaksas said that. OK. [Indicates Sayer with red marker.]

Now the next bit has some information and some talking, so you have to listen to it to see which bits have got the talking in them.

... Researcher reads the following passage to the children, pausing to clarify comprehension at a couple of points, such as “Do you know what modest means?” and “Have you heard of Shane Gould?”

He's modest. A few months ago he was in a television-studio waiting room with Shane Gould, Australia’s princess of the pool at Munich in 1972. She was showing him her Olympic medals and, noting his gaze, told him, “You’ll have a bunch of your own soon.” Thorpe replied, “I’d be happy with one.” (D. Williams, 2000, p. 81)

Researcher: Anybody spot anybody talking in that bit?

[Pause 10 seconds.]

Researcher: Azeb, do you have the tape recorder still? Would you like to pass it over to Gino? Gino, would you like to tell us one of the people who was talking in there?

Gino: Um–

[Pause 5 seconds.]

Researcher: Remember, he was at the TV studio and Shane Gould [reading:] ‘was showing him her gold medals and, noting his gaze, told him, “You’ll have a bunch of your own soon.” Thorpe replied, “I’d be happy with one.”’ Can you see somebody talking there?

Gino: Yep.
[Pause 5 seconds.]

Researcher: Have a bit of a think, Gino. … David.

David: Ian Thorpe.

Researcher: Whereabouts is Ian Thorpe speaking?

David: Down the bottom.

Researcher: Yep. Very near the bottom. And it just says ‘Thorpe’, doesn’t it?

David: Yep.

Researcher: Sometimes they say that in, in um newspaper reports and magazines. David, would you like to pick someone to tell me what the word is that’s telling us that Ian Thorpe was speaking?

David: Oh, um, Matthew.

[Audio recorder is passed.]

Researcher: Down here where we said ‘Ian Thorpe’ – he was speaking – where’s the word that he was, he was actually talking? It’s not ‘says’ this time; it’s something else.

Matthew: ‘I’d’?

Researcher: That’s what he said. He said, “I’d be happy with one.” But that’s not the word that tells us he’s talking. There are inverted commas around the words that he said, so we know that’s what he said. Where’s the word that tells us he was talking? Let’s have someone else have a turn.

Matthew: ‘I’d’?

Researcher: Well done. [Marks text with green lips shape.] [Unclear] another word. There are just, I think there’s maybe, is there just one more?

Child: Yes.

Researcher: Karin?

Karin: ‘Told him’?


Karin: I thought.

Researcher: And who, and who told Ian Thorpe something?

Child: [Quietly:] Shane.

Researcher: Georgia?

Georgia: Shane Gould.

Researcher: Yeah. And it’s – In fact, up here it says, ‘she’, ‘she’ told him.

[Excursus: Role of pronouns]

Researcher: In that sentence it doesn’t say ‘Shane Gould’, but we know that it’s Shane Gould ‘cause the ‘she’ goes back to up here to tell us that it is the same person.

... Researcher briefly reiterates this point about use of ‘she’ to refer back to Shane Gould.
Instruction in the new: Term specification (‘saying verbs’ introduced)

Researcher: Well, let’s have a look at those words. We’ve got ‘says’ and ‘told’ and ‘replied’. Last week we were thinking about action verbs. They’re things you can do. Actions you can make with your body. These are all verbs, but they’re –

Child: – not –

Researcher: – saying verbs. They’re the words that we use when we say someone said something, or told something, or replied.

Task: Consolidation of new learning

Researcher: Can you think of any others? … [Suggesting examples:] ‘Ms Baker said’, um, ‘I replied’ – I bet you could think of quite a few more. … Deborah, can you think of one?

Deborah: ‘Tell’?
Researcher: Yes.
Teacher: Well done.
Researcher: [Scribing a list:] I’ve got ‘reply’ here … and ‘say’. What else? Frank’s got an idea.

Frank: ‘Ask’?
Teacher: Oh! Excellent!
Researcher: Fantastic. [Scribes suggestion.] Pass it to Leah, please [unclear].

Leah: They ‘sayed’?
Researcher: ‘Said’? So that goes with ‘say’, doesn’t it?
Leah: Yeah.
Researcher: Yeah. That’s right. [Scribes.] Those two belong to the same word family. They [unclear] the same. Matthew?

Matthew: ‘Apologise’?
Teacher: Oh! Brilliant!
Researcher: What a good one! I wish more people thought of that w-, word in the whole world, actually: ‘apologise’.

Matthew?: Uh-huh.
Researcher: Good to say sorry, isn’t it? Gino?

Gino: ‘Communicate’?
Teacher: Wow!
Researcher: Wow! I’m going to run out of room to write these, I think!

... Lesson continues with children suggesting the following additional saying verbs which the researcher scribes onto the list: whisper, thank, count, speak, shout, yell, scream.
The class next breaks into small groups, and the researcher works with the ‘Gumblossoms’ group while the other groups go on with English/literacy work set by their teacher (not on grammatics).

The Gumblossoms group sit in a small circle on the mat. The researcher has prepared another text for this group: excerpts from ‘The stuff of heroes’, a news magazine article (Dusevic, 2000). The text has been copied out and enlarged so that all the children can see the words, and the researcher reads it to them. Together they discuss what the text means and then jointly identify the saying verbs and Sayers.

Joint task (small group): Shared reading and identifying elements of verbal clauses

Researcher: Can you see the word, anybody, that tells us that someone was talking? Isabel.
Isabel: Um, ‘said’?
Researcher: Yes. [Scribes lips shape onto text around the word ‘said’.] OK. And, can you see the inverted commas around what he said?
Child: Yep.
Researcher: There’s some here –
Children: Yep. And some there!
Researcher: There. And I might just put a, a jagged line. This is what he actually said, isn’t it? [Reading:] ‘He was born to swim.’ And are there some more, Skye?
Skye: There.
Researcher: OK. Here and here.
Skye: Yeah.
Researcher: And this is all the stuff that Massimiliano Rosolino said.
Child: Oh!
Researcher: So in this article in TIME magazine, they’ve actually gone and talked to Massimiliano Rosolino and they’ve put that in exactly the way he said it. And sometimes reporters actually have tape recorders like this one, and that’s how they know exactly what the person said.
Child: So they can write it down?
Researcher: Yep. OK. So now we’ve spotted, we got who s-, the saying verb, here’s who said it, and we’ve the orange to show–
Child: What they said.
Researcher: –what they actually said. And it’s everything, can you see it’s everything between the inverted commas?
Children: Yes. Yeah.
Appendix C

Researcher: That’s what they actually said.

**Excursus: Discussion of plagiarism**

Karin: And I think it’s a law to not do it.

Researcher: It’s—? What do you mean?

Karin: A law. Not, not to do the inverted commas if you’ve copied something. Like, on a quote.

Researcher: If you’re, if you’re saying something that somebody else has said and using their exact words you should put inverted commas round it? Yeah.

Researcher: That’s right, Karin. Well done. Did you learn that from Ms Baker, too?


Researcher: Oh, she teaches you such wonderful things!

Victor: Or you’ll get sued.

Researcher: Mm?

Victor: Well, um, Ms Baker told us this girl, um, wrote a book. And this other girl copied her. And—

Child: Oh yeah.

Victor: —and, a person read the book and found out um—

Child: [Unclear.]

Victor: —found out it was the wrong person so she, um, so they sued the other person who copied them.

Researcher: Yeah, that’s right. You’re not allowed to do it. That’s right. And when, um a reporter interviews someone, if they put down words that person didn’t say, and the person can prove that they didn’t say them, then that reporter could get sued as well.

… *Researcher explains about use of audio recorders and shorthand symbols by reporters to record actual words of interviewees. 50 seconds.*

**Joint task continued...**

… *The group looks at the next paragraph of the article. The researcher reads it aloud while the children look on. They comment on the content of the paragraph e.g. ‘He’s so so lucky.’ Duration: 1 minute.*

Philip: [Unclear] —put lips around it.

Researcher: Oh, Philip! A word I can put lips around! Here it is. [Draws lips shape around ‘said’.] OK. And who was saying it?

Children: Um-

Child: Ian Thorpe.

Researcher: That’s right. And in the writing here, does it say ‘Ian Thorpe said’?

Children: No. No.
Researcher: What does it say?
Children: Thorpe. Thorpe.

Researcher: Have a look carefully. Near the word ‘said’. It doesn’t say ‘Ian Thorpe said’. What does it say?
Children: It’s ‘he’.
Victor: ‘He’.
Child: ‘He said’.

Researcher: Yeah – ‘he’. [Marks ‘he’ as Sayer.]
‘He said’. So that’s who’s saying it.

Toula: There’s inverted commas.

Researcher: And we know who it is, ’cause earlier it mentioned Ian Thorpe, didn’t it?

Karin: It’s like we’re doing symbols too.
Child: There’s some inverted commas there.
Child: Yeah.

Researcher: Inverted commas?
Child: Yep.

… Lesson continues with children and researcher working to mark the text, looking for what was said and using inverted commas to identify quoted words. 1 minute.

Researcher: And, do you think we should put the little zigzag line under ‘best minute, best hour, best day, best week’?

Child: Yeah.

Karin: I’ll tell you why it should be ‘best second’. Because he does it so fast (in a) second.
Child: Yeah.

Researcher: Yes. Yeah.
Child: I’d like to see him move [unclear] second.

Researcher: And why do I need to put the jagged line under ‘best minute, best hour, best day, best week’?
Karin: Cause he said it.

Researcher: OK.
Karin: He said it.

Researcher: He, he did say it, even though it isn’t actually saying ‘Ian Thorpe said’, but we know that from the inverted commas, don’t we?

Children: Yeah. Yeah.
Continuing to identify quotes and Sayers (‘who said it’). Children use inverted commas to help identify that someone’s speech is being quoted. 1½ minutes.

Researcher: There’s quite a lot of talking in these, um, information articles in TIME magazine, isn’t there?

Children: Yeah!

Researcher: Telling people’s opinions. I’m showing you the bits that have most of the, um, talking in it.

Karin: Um, I think this is only the second time we’ve had the Olympics in Australia, isn’t it?

Researcher: Exactly.

Child: Yeah! Melbourne.


Child: Last time we had it in Melbourne. §§

Joint task continued...

Researcher: OK. Let’s read from here on to here, and just, it’s a short one this time. But be watching out for those saying verbs and who’s saying it.

Shared reading. Researcher and children jointly read the following text:

“Until tonight I hadn’t got the Olympic buzz, the true spirit,” said Thorpe. “But it was as if the gladiators had walked into the Colosseum. When I walked out I was ready to race and race well. Hearing the crowd gave me an even bigger buzz.” (Dusevic, 2000, p. 65)

Researcher: Found one, Leah? Yeah?

Leah: Yeah.

Researcher: Give Leah the tape recorder.

Leah: Um, it said, ‘Ian Thorpe said’.

Researcher: Oh, good. OK. And who, who is saying it? Who’s the Sayer?

Child: [Unclear.]

Researcher: Exactly. [Marks text.]

Children: [Murmuring – something about water.]

Researcher: And, have a look at where the inverted commas are: there and there.

Child: And here.

Child: There.

Child: There.

Researcher circles ‘inverted commas’ on displayed text.

 §§ This section of talk essentially interrupts the lesson focus on grammatics, and hence is shown using symbols from SFL for an element included within another. This is different from ‘embedded’ elements, which continue to contribute to the main text such as by qualifying or specifying something.
Appendix C  487

The Gumblossoms group continues for a short while to mark the inverted commas and underline the quoted speech in the text, in joint activity with the researcher.

Task orientation

Researcher: Now, we’ve done all those together. I’ve got a stencil here--

…  

Researcher holds up a worksheet which will be given out, and asks the children to mark their own copies to indicate the elements of verbal clauses.

Researcher: Which, which symbol do we use for the saying verb?

Child: Lips.

Researcher: Lips. That’s right. And what’s the red box for? The--?

Child: The people who said it.

Researcher: Yeah, and do you know, a short way is just ‘The Sayer’.

Child: Yeah. The talker.


…  

Researcher completes giving instructions to children to mark the text for elements of verbal clauses.

Researcher: What I want you to do when you’ve finished is I want go to have a go at making up something.

Child: Making up what?

Researcher: Making up something that someone said, and seeing if you can put the Sayer in a red box, and the lips in green  r[unclear.]

Child:  

r become your own reporter.

Researcher:  

r Make up your own one.

r Yeah!

Child:  

r Can we do it in the textas***?

Researcher: And you have to pretend you’re a reporter.

Child: No, we’ve got to use the pencils there.

Researcher: Yeah, I got coloured pencils for you.

…  

Task (Gumblossoms group, students in pairs): Identifying aspects of the grammatics of verbal clauses in a news report

Toula and Leah are working together to identify the elements of verbal clauses in a paragraph of text. They have just reread the paragraph and are now about to mark their copy of the text. The children are talking about this stretch of text:

"He was born to swim," said Italian Massimiliano Rosolino, who finished second to Thorpe in Saturday’s 400 m freestyle final. "I think he can still

*** ’Texta’ is an Australian term for felt pens of the kind children often use for colouring in.
get better. Who knows? I hope for himself that he does. I hope for myself that he doesn’t.” (Dusevic, 2000, p. 65)

Toula: OK. And we found ‘said’, so – lips. Red lips I’m doing.
Leah: [Unclear.] Oh, no, she said green lips.
Toula: Now we’re looking for the ones that we’ve just read. Now we’re looking for–
Leah: Sayer.
Toula: We’re looking for words right now.

... [Children realise they have not identified themselves and Toula tells the audio recorder their names. 10 seconds.]

Leah: OK. Now, was there–? Do the ‘say’.
Toula: And I’ll do my ‘said’ lips. Wow, this is fun!
Leah: Yes it is quite.

... Leah and Toula work together to mark the text for saying verbs, Sayers and ‘what was said’, quietly discussing their work as they go. At one stage they make a mistake and ask the researcher what to do:

Researcher: OK. How are you going?
Toula: She accidentally thought we were going to do the orange thing, and she did it red instead.
Leah: No, you do the red.
Researcher: Oh, that’s all right. The red box goes around the Sayer. So I’ll w-, I’ll draw a red box here, and I’ll write ‘Sayer’ [draws and labels a red box for ‘Sayer’]. That’s the person who’s doing the talking. OK? And you’re right. It was ‘Italian Massimiliano Rosolino, who finished second to Thorpe in Saturday’s 400 m freestyle final’. That’s all saying who said it, isn’t it?
Toula: Yeah. That’s what I was going to do except I forgot if you kept going.
Researcher: Yeah.

... Children read over another section of text with researcher and then begin to mark the text. They continue working on the following section of text:

“I’m very fortunate to have what I have, and really it is a gift,” Thorpe said. “And I’m very thankful for that.” (Dusevic, 2000, p. 66)

Toula: Do we do this one red, because that’s who’s saying it?
Researcher: Oh – which one?
Toula: ‘Thorpe said’.
Researcher: Which word are you going to put the red box around?
Toula: ‘Thorpe’.
Leah: ‘Thorpe’?
The children mark the inverted commas by circling them.

Researcher: Yeah – ’cause that’s who’s saying it. That’s right.

…

Researcher: And, um, can you put a jagged line under the bits that he actually said, the words he actually said?

Leah: Yeah. That bit, in the inverted commas?

Researcher: Yeah!

Leah: [Reading:] ‘I’m very … fortunate’

Researcher: Fortunate.

Leah: ‘I’m very fortunate to have what I have, and really it is a gift.’

Researcher: So you’re going to underline all of that?

Leah: ‘Thorpe said’.

Researcher: Yep. What about ‘Thorpe said’?

Toula: In green?

Researcher: Are you going to put orange underneath ‘Thorpe said’?

Leah: No.

Researcher: Why not?

Leah: Because it has boxes and the lips around it. It doesn’t have inverted commas.

Researcher: Pardon?

Leah: And it doesn’t have inverted commas.

Researcher: Yeah. And why do we, and we’re underlining the bits that he actually said?

Leah: Said. And between the –

Researcher: Did I— did Ian Thorpe say ‘Thorpe said’?

[Children shake heads.]

Researcher: No.

…

Leah: And this – I think he said this, too. [Referring to the sentence: “And I’m very thankful for that.”]

Child: Oh, yeah, I see the inverted commas (too).

Child: What?

Toula(?): Yeah – he did that.

Leah: “And I’m very (thankful for that).”

Toula(?): Yeah.

Researcher: How do you know Ian Thorpe said that bit?

Leah: Because he says ‘And’.

Toula: Because it said ‘Thorpe said’. 
Researcher: But there’s a full stop after ‘Thorpe said’, so how do know he’s still Ian Thorpe?

Leah: It says ‘And’.

Toula: Yeah.

Researcher: Very good. Good thinking.

Leah: So that makes it, so he’s talking.

Leah and Toula go on to examine the next paragraph. They read it aloud together, only stopping for help from the researcher for the word ‘achieved’. The researcher checks that they are confident to continue to work on their own, which they say they are. They continue to work by rereading the paragraph and marking the next, such as with ‘squiggly lines’. 2½ minutes.

Their teacher then approaches to find out what they are doing:

Teacher: This looks interesting, girls. What are you looking for?

Child: Um, the words.

Child: Um, the bits between the inverted commas, and the saying words and … who’s saying it!

Teacher: Wow, that’s pretty heavy stuff. I thought only Year 6 could do that kind of thing!

… The girls laugh very briefly and continue with their work. The teacher moves off.

Toula: [Reading:] ‘Thorpe said’ -

Leah: There’s one that says ‘Thorpe said.’

Toula: Yeah.

Leah: That’s, um, when someone’s speaking.

Toula: So we do the lips around it and the person who’s speaking is ‘Thorpe’, well, the Thorpedo is.

… Toula and Leah continue to work together to correctly identify saying verbs, sayers, inverted commas and quoted speech. 1½ minutes.

The following comment is unsolicited, and is made onto the audio recorder without the researcher present, although it is clearly for the researcher’s benefit (the children know she will later listen to the recording):

Toula: This has been fun work. I like this, Ms French. You put really fun work.

Leah: Yeah. ‘Cause it’s cool.

Leah and Toula continue to work together on the task. 2½ minutes. The researcher then returns and asks them to pack up for morning tea.

Researcher: How was that activity?

Leah & Toula in unison: That was really fun!

Researcher: Was it?
Toula: Yeah. [Laughs.]
Researcher: What was fun?
Leah: We kept saying that on there [i.e. on the audio recorder].
Toula: Ah, we said it was really fun and that, 'cause we liked
　　doing the …
Leah: like doing the …
Toula: boxes, the lips,
Leah: yeah and fin ding all this stuff.
Toula: and the squiggly lines. And it was really fun.
Researcher: Oh, OK. Well that’s good news for me. Pop your names on your work, please.

[Session ends here.]
C.6 Examples of cards from ‘the saying verbs game’
C.7 Child’s work sample: Newspaper-style report which incorporates quotes

Our cerebral palsy swimming champion Priya Cooper dives into the pool like lightning again! the disability she has gives her the ability to do what no-one else can do. She says, "I actually see it as a ability to new life. With 8 gold 3 silvers and 1 bronze people ask how can they do it and I tell them they have to take the steps and let no-one say you can’t do it and then you will get to your special goal she hopes.

by Pablo. 19th October.

Pablo’s work has been reproduced with spelling standardised but capitalisation and punctuation retained as in the child’s original.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sayer" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Saying verb" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="text" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Used to identify quote marks" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indicates child’s correction" /></td>
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C.8 Transcript excerpt in which the issue of plagiarism is raised
(Class 2B, October 11)

Context: The ‘Koalas’ group has been working with the researcher to read a news magazine article (D. Williams, 2000) and identify quotes, Sayers and ‘saying verbs’. The excerpt opens with an indicative example of some of this work. The transcript then continues with a discussion initiated by Matthew about the importance of proper acknowledgement of quotes.

Researcher: Now let’s look at this one–
Child: OK.
Researcher: [Reading:] “I don’t think we’ve seen anything near the best of him over 200m,” says Brian Sutton.

So whi-, oh, there’s a n-, good spotting, Gino, some more inverted commas. And what are the words that Brian Sutton actually said? Did Brian Sutton say, ‘Says Brian Sutton’?

Children: No. No.
Researcher: What did he actually say?
Child: Oh!
Researcher: Amelia?
Amelia: He said, um, ‘I don’t think we’ve seen anything near the best of, um, him two, over two hundred metres.’

Researcher: Exactly. And I’ve put a jagged line under that with orange because that’s all the words that Brian Sutton said. We haven’t done that in all the paragraphs on this page, but we could.

The researcher and Koalas group continue to work together to identify quoted speech in the next section of text. There is an excursus in which the researcher explains that journalists often use a tape recorder in order to be able to quote interviewees exactly. Duration: just under 2 minutes.

Matthew then points out that he has learnt before that writers should not quote without acknowledgement:

Matthew: It would be kind of like writing a quote, like, rewriting it e-, except in exactly the same way, and say you wrote it, but another person did. And that, I forget the name for that.

Researcher: Aha. Yeah.
Matthew: And–. Yeah.
Researcher: We talked about this in yesterday’s group as well. There is a name for it when you copy somebody else’s words–

Child: Yeah.
Researcher: –and you don’t say that you’ve copied them.
Child: Anonymous?
Researcher: It’s, it’s called plagiarism.
Child: Oh yeah.
Researcher: That’s the big word for it.
Child: Oh, we know that!
Researcher: You’ve heard about that, haven’t you?
Child: Miss Baker taught us.
Researcher: Yes.

… Discussion continues about the importance of journalists quoting accurately and the idea that sometimes people take other people to court if they attribute to them in the media words they didn’t actually say. Duration: 1 minute.
Appendix C

C.9 Transcript excerpt: Functions of the word ‘sniffed’
(Class 2B, October 19)

Context: The children are sitting on the floor, listening to a rereading of the book Pumpkin soup (Cooper, 1998) and identifying the ‘saying verbs’.

Skye: ‘Wept the cat.’
Researcher: Yes! ‘Wept’. Sometimes we just talk about weeping just as crying, but here it’s used like a saying verb. [Reading:] ‘He was only trying to help,’ wept the cat.’ Good work. Rosemary?
Rosemary: ‘Sniffed’.
Researcher: ‘Sniffed the squirrel’. Well done. [Reading – using sad voice:] ‘We should have let him stir the soup,” sniffed the squirrel.’ Both those saying verbs are giving you a little hint that they’re very sad, aren’t they?
Children: Yes.
Researcher: If you [sniffs:] sniff and weep.
Teacher: I wonder [inaudible] that some of those could be used as action verbs?
Researcher: Exactly.
Teacher: I can say, “Oh, I just sniffed. I’ve got a cold and I sniffed a lot.” No, no, (don’t get) silly. [Addressed to children who had begun to sniff.]
Only this way it’s used as a saying verb. Tricky Ms French, isn’t it?
Researcher: It is. It is. And we know that it’s a saying verb because you can see that they’re talking, and there’s a Sayer, like ‘sniffed the squirrel’. So we’d have to really look at how those words are being used in a sentence. Some words, like ‘said’, they’re always saying verbs. But these ones – you’re absolutely right, Ms Baker – they could be used as action verbs. It would depend. We’d have to see if someone was talking or not.
Appendix D

The contents of Appendix D are relevant to discussion in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

Contents

D.1  Children’s initial discussions of ‘patterns’ in verbal Processes in *Pumpkin soup* ............................................................... 498

D.2  Discussion immediately following addition of narrative structure labels to display of verbal Processes ......................................................... 500

D.3  Discussions in which children connected narrative structure with patterning of verbal Processes .................................................. 501
D.1 Children’s initial discussions of ‘patterns’ in verbal Processes in Pumpkin soup

D.1.1

Researcher: OK would anybody like to comment on any changes or patterns they can see in the saying verbs when we look at the beginning of the story right through to the end? Remember this is not quite the very beginning because at the very beginning there was no talking at all. Or there was, there might have been talking in the, in real life, but in the story there were no saying verbs. What do you notice, Karin? You can take the tape recorder and comment.

Karin: It’s only, it’s only from ‘murmured’ to ‘wailed’, but it goes 1, 1, 2, 3.

Researcher: OK, so that’s a pattern.

Karin: L1, 2, 3.

Researcher: But then it just changes? OK. Any other patterns? Look at the actual words.

…

Researcher: What do you think, Jamila?

Jamila: Um well, with ‘muttered’, ‘said’, ‘squeaked’ and ‘wailed’, it’s in um alphabetical order.

Researcher: That’s true – that’s another pattern.

(Gum Blossoms group, October 31)

D.1.2

Child: Is it there’s um wailed, and then there’s three other words, and then wailed again? I thought –

Child: – I thought I had.

Researcher: ‘Wailed’ is mentioned two times –

Child: I thought I had the (one) but I didn’t.

Researcher: Any other patterns?

Child: Um – one, two –

Researcher: Yes?

Child: A lot of them have, um, ‘-ed’ on the end.

(Kookaburras group, November 1)
D.1.3

Amelia: I’ve noticed a lot of the words begin with ‘s’.

…

Researcher: What can you see Liz?

Liz: Well, I could see that nearly all of, all-, nearly all of the words um end in ‘d’.

Researcher: Very good observing.

Liz: And some, um, some, I um, saw that most of them are really long.

Child: [Laughs.]

Researcher: Yes. A lot of them are quite long. They do end in ‘d’, and why is that? Most of them end in ‘d’.

…

Amelia: I figured out why a lot of them end in ‘d’.

Researcher: Why do they mostly end in ‘d’, Amelia?

Amelia: Because, a lot of the words end in ‘-ed’ because it’s a kind of a verb, ’cause a verb is a doing word.

(Koalas–Bottlebrushes group, November 3)
**D.2 Discussion immediately following addition of narrative structure labels to display of verbal Processes**

Researcher: Why don’t we let Deborah start us off? If you just put your hand up and wait quietly I’ll pick you, Liz. Don’t wave that.

Deborah: Um, that it starts off like: orientation, complication, resolution, then there’s another complication.

Researcher: Yes, but look at the saying verbs. Is there a pattern with the saying verbs? Amelia?

Amelia: I’ve noticed that some of them, well most of them, have a double ‘p’, a double ‘f’ or a double letter in them.

Child: Double letter in them.

Researcher: Yes. Liz?

Liz: I noticed that in some words at the um, in some words there is um like ‘-ked’ and ‘-ked’ there. [Pointing.]

Researcher: Yes.

Liz: And ‘-ked’ somewhere else.

Child: And ‘-ked’ (in that) over there.

Researcher: Very good.

…

Matthew: Well it starts with ‘m’ then ‘s’ then ‘s’ then ‘s’ then ‘m’-

Child: And ‘s’ and ‘m’.

Researcher: We talked about that. We talked about the starting letters. It’s something else about the orientation, complication and resolution,

Child: I know, I know, I know, I know!

Researcher: and how the saying verbs go with the parts of the story. [Short interruption.] Amelia?

Amelia: Well, I’ve noticed that there’s always um, a particular number in, and sometimes there’s two on a page and there’s always a particular number in every one.

…

Researcher: OK. Rosemary?

Rosemary: I thought about that, but there, isn’t it that, that lots of them have got ‘e’ and ‘i’ and ‘i’ in them?

Child: ‘i’

Researcher: OK. They do.

Child: Well, I noticed that in the book there is, it’s kind of like, like ‘squeaked’ then ‘wailed’, it’s like a pattern because in the book it’s, um, like the next page, it has the same words on the next page? Like –

Researcher: They do repeat sometimes, don’t they?

Child: Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Good comment.

(Koalas–Bottlebrushes group, November 3)
D.3 Discussions in which children connected narrative structure with patterning of verbal Processes

D.3.1

Researcher: You know how I asked before about patterns? Have another look. Here’s the orientation, then here’s the complication. Have a look at the saying verbs and see if you can see a pattern now. Thinking about the orientation, the complication and the resolution.

Child: Jane can.

Researcher: What did you notice, Jane?

Jane: Well, at the beginning of the complication, and the, um, beginning of the resolution, um, there,

Child: They both s–

Jane: – the, they both start in a word, a word that you would say um, like, if you were getting angry with someone. Like ‘shrieked’ and, um, ‘murmured’.

Researcher: We might use ‘murmured’ or ‘shrieked’ if we’re getting angry with someone. What else can we notice? Lauren?

Lauren: That it goes complication – resolution – complication.

Researcher: Yes – that’s a pattern. Have a look at these saying verbs in the complication.

…

Researcher: [Reading ‘saying verbs’ as they appear in order from book:] Murmured, said, squeaked, snapped, wailed, stormed, scoffed, muttered, sniffed, wept. What do you notice?

Child: They’re all, um, sort of sad or um or angry words.

Researcher: Yeah – which ones are sad ones?

Child: Um, ‘sniffed’, ‘wept’, um, er –

Researcher: Yeah – ‘wailed’ is a sad one too, isn’t it?

Child: ‘Wailed.’

…

Researcher: What were you going to comment, Lauren?

…

Lauren: It goes, like, it goes from just normal then, like, strong and angry and then sad and then happy again.

Researcher: Is that right? Which bit’s happy again?

Lauren: Up here – so – ‘shrieked’ is a happy one.

Researcher: Well, ‘shrieked’ can be happy or unhappy. In the book, was it happy?

Lauren: Happy.

Researcher: Yeah, ’cause it, they went, “It’s duck,” they shrieked. Wasn’t it? So it was a happy shriek.
Lauren: Yes.
Researcher: A shriek of delight.
Lauren: Yep.
Researcher: Yes. Which ones were some of the um, angry ones?
Researcher: ‘Wailed’ can be angry, can’t it?
Lauren: And ‘snapped’.
Researcher: Mm.
Lauren: And ‘muttered’.
Researcher: Yes, I, I agree. So they were angry here?
Lauren: (And then it’s) a bit sad.
Researcher: Why do they go from being angry to being sad?
Lauren: Because they were trying to say, “Oh, we don’t need you,” and they were trying to kind of boast about themselves, and then they were, they, they decide they really wanted him back, but, like, and then they started being sad to try and get him back.
Researcher: Yes – they were very sad till he came back, weren’t they?
Lauren: Yeah.
Researcher: Worried about him. Thank you, Lauren, for your comments.

(Kookaburras group, November 1)

**D.3.2**

Deborah: They’re um, like, see there’s a complication? All the saying words are a bit like, like, say if they’re crying or something. Like there’s ‘wept’ and ‘wailed’ and some of them, like -
Researcher: And why would there be words like that in the complication, Deborah?
Deborah: Um because something’s gone wrong. And then in the resolution there’s ‘shrieked’ like they’re excited, or ‘didn’t say’.

...  
Hilary: Well … it’s kind of like, because they’ve like ‘yelled’, ‘squeaked’, ‘wailed’ and ‘stormed’, and um ‘murmured’ and ‘scoffed’ in the complication, it’s kind of like, because it’s in the complication they’re kind of like yelling words and like, screaming and shouting and like crying and like, really, things that you wouldn’t really want to do.
Researcher: So, these are unhappy kinds of –
Hilary: Yeah
Researcher: – saying verbs? Un-, sort of angry or –
Hilary: Yeah, like, you yelled, or you got a red face when you yelled –
Researcher: Would they belong in the resolution?
Hilary: No way.
Matthew: Well, they’re all kind of sad words up to, up till like, the resolution? Under like, yeah, they’re sad words too.

Researcher: And in the book they, when they shrieked, was that a happy shriek or a sad shriek?

Matthew: Like, la-

Children: Happy.
Child: Happy.

Matthew: Yeah, and there’s ‘sniffed’, like crying, so sad and stuff like that and that, because there’s, because there’s no um saying verbs at the start, um, because it’s telling, ’cause it’s telling you the orientation, ’cause it— . Say if it said, ‘The duck said, “In the morning” ’ you wouldn’t know where it is and stuff. So, and then it starts as complication – the saying verbs – and they’re sad words ’cause it’s the complication. And it’s, then it goes up to the resolution and they’re happy ’cause they see the duck again.

Rosemary: Words almost always, um, words speaks feelings. Because, um, like, if you say -

Researcher: Give us an example of words speaking feelings.

Rosemary: Um, um, [putting on an upset voice:] ‘ “Oh I wish I did that,” wailed the cat,’ it’s that the words actually do it, ’cause if you just said, ‘wailed’, you don’t know, actually know what it said, and it also describes what they’re feeling.

Researcher: So these words describe how they’re feeling,
Rosemary: Yes. Yes.
Researcher: as well as saying they said something?

(Koalas–Bottlebrushes group, November 3)

D.3.3

Leah: Um, it’s like, you’re saying someone’s telling the story then it’s getting really boring. Because that, they’re like saying [uses bored voice:] ‘murmured’, ‘said’, yeah and they say blah blah blah when people like are telling a long, long story?

Researcher: So if it just had ‘murmured’ and ‘said’ it would be a bit boring?

Leah: Yeah. But if it had more it would be more, like, good. So if, so if you, so they just [indecipherable] about that and then, then they like it a lot, because it gets like scary and stuff.

Researcher: It does get scarier. What w- what did you just say, Toula?

Toula: I said it gets more interesting.

Researcher: It does. Skye. Could you come and sit over here next to me?
Toula: It get, it gets more interesting.

Researcher: Do you think that the saying verbs are more interesting? ... Than just putting ‘murmured’ and ‘said’ and ‘murmured’ and ‘said’ and ‘murmured’ and ‘said’?

Children: [Nods.]

Researcher: Yeah. I think it is.

... 

Researcher: Do you think that Helen Cooper, when she wrote the book, just put words like ‘wailed’ and ‘stormed’ and ‘muttered’ and ‘sniffed’ and whatever in the complication just to make it more interesting?

Children: Yeah.

Child: No.

Child: Maybe it’s –

Researcher: Was there another reason as well?


Researcher: So they match the complication?

Victor: Ah, well, like if, if they got the same, like same type of words everywhere like, and if you like were only four years old, um, you would say like you know all those, you know just like, so you say like um you (miss, like) the complication ’cause it’s just the same as all the rest.

Skye: I think she wrote it like um she was telling you how the duck and how the squirrel and the cat felt.

Researcher: rAh!

Skye: Like there’s ‘sniffed’, ‘wailed’, ‘stormed’, ‘wept’.

Researcher: So, with one like ‘sniffed’, what sort of feeling goes with that?

Skye: Like ‘sniffed’, because they’re crying and they feel sad.

Researcher: And what about ‘stormed’, what sort of feeling goes with ‘stormed’?

Child: They’re angry because they think he’s going to come back but they don’t know.

(Gum Blossoms group, October 31)
Appendix E

The contents of Appendix E are relevant to discussion in Chapter 8 of the thesis.

Contents

E.1 Muddled paper flower procedure ................................................................. 506
E.2 Lesson transcript: Class 2F ‘Redrafting Lesson One’ (June 17) .............. 507
E.3 Lesson transcript: Class 2F ‘Redrafting Lesson Two’ (June 24) .......... 516
E.4 Discussion transcript: Class 2F – ‘Reflection on Learning’ (June 25) .... 526
E.5 Children’s redrafting of steps of paper flower procedure .................... 529
E.6 Interviews with two children following redrafting task ....................... 531
E.7 Lexicogrammatical analysis of references to ‘Theme’ in Class 2F lesson, May 14
   E.7.1 First mention of ‘Theme’ in Class 2F .............................................. 537
   E.7.2 Introducing ‘Theme’ as a name for an observed textual pattern .... 538
   E.7.3 Introductory descriptions of ‘Theme’: where Theme is found, what functions Theme performs ......................................................... 540
   E.7.4 ‘Theme’ as ‘psychological Subject’ .............................................. 542
   E.7.5 Difficulty in defining Theme using an ‘identifying-type’ relational clause ................................................................. 544
   E.7.6 Specifying how Theme operates in ‘procedure’ texts .................... 545
   E.7.7 Summarising knowledge about Theme (towards end of introductory lesson) ................................................................. 546
E.8 Some examples of children’s learning journal reflections about ‘Theme’  548
### E.1 Muddled paper flower procedure

The following text was put onto an overhead projection transparency, cut up, and then displayed in the format shown below for the Class 2F children to sequence it.

- **On the finished flower some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.**
- **Along the top with the scissors make another cut. Cutting too close to the pipe cleaner should be avoided or it won’t work.**

**STEPS:**

- Hold the pipe cleaner near the top just under the flower. A downwards pull will tighten the petals together.

**YOU WILL NEED:**

- The ends of the paper fan are cut at an angle.
- **paper serviette**

- The paper serviette has to be folded back and forth to make it like a fan.

### How to make a paper dahlia

- **pipe cleaner — 1**

  The petals are made when you pull apart the layers of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.

  if you want it, some perfume

  You get the pipe cleaner and one end of it you twist around the middle of the paper fan.
E.2 Lesson transcript: Class 2F ‘Redrafting Lesson One’ (June 17)

Overview: This lesson involves the children in jointly sequencing and beginning to redraft a muddled procedure for making a paper flower. The children had made this type of paper flower one month earlier and therefore drew upon their direct experience to sequence the muddled procedure.

Task orientation 1 – ‘Review’

The lesson begins with the teacher recapping the genre or text-type of ‘procedure’, and its purpose. The teacher’s very first words were not audio recorded. The transcript picks up less than one minute into the lesson, just after the teacher has asked what kind of writing the ‘Frog in the pond’ text was – this was a jelly (US: ‘jello’) dessert recipe which had been read in class and which the children were about to make two days later.

Jack: A procedure.
Teacher: A procedure. What sort of procedure do you have when you’re making some food? Because ‘Frog in the pond’ is food. Jacques?
Jacques: A recipe.
Teacher: A recipe. Excellent.

Task orientation 2 – ‘Preview’ [deliberately truncated]†††

Teacher: I’ve got another procedure here – … oops, and I just put chalk on it, –of something that we made a while ago, and I’m sure that Simon will recognise this when I put it up here. [Teacher displays ‘How to make a paper dahlia’ procedure on overhead projector.]

Task [specification implied]: Reading displayed procedure

The task of reading is implied by the displaying of the muddled text. The children do not need to be directed to read by the teacher. While the teacher adjusts the old overhead projector, the children quietly read the text to themselves.

Child: I know what it is.
Simon: Know – I know! I remember! I know.
… Teacher comments on problems focusing overhead projector and attempts to adjust it.
Simon: It’s a flower thing.
… More adjusting of overhead projector.
Children: Yeah./ Flower thing.

††† This is not a complete ‘task orientation’ (in which a teacher typically “points overall pedagogic directions … introducing what is to be done”, Christie, 2002, p. 65), in that the teacher does not fully explain what is to be done but simply announces the muddled procedure and displays it. This is a deliberate pedagogic move, designed to allow the children the opportunity to discern for themselves the problems evident in the muddled text, and represents an attempt to establish the children’s entry point in a zone of proximal development.
Child: That’s good, eh?
Teacher: What does it say?
Child: Um, I can’t see at the top.

... 

Child: It says: [Reading:] ‘Make it smell nice’!

... Children begin to read the muddled text aloud. Teacher does her best to make the image clear for all children to read. 50 seconds.

Task re-orientation

Teacher: So, Simon, what is it a procedure for? Do you know?
Simon: Flowers.
Teacher: Yes! What sort of flower?
Simon: A paper flower that I made.
Teacher: That’s exactly what it is. It’s a procedure for a paper flower.

Task specification: improving muddled procedure

The task of improving the muddled procedure is implied by the teacher’s questions rather than being specified in imperatives:

Teacher: Except – Can any s-, anybody see something wrong with it?
Simon: Yeah! It doesn’t fit. [Referring to how the text does not fit well on the overhead projector screen.]
Teacher: Don’t call out, please, Simon. Apart from that it doesn’t fit on the screen, can anybody see something wrong with it?

Task: joint sequencing of muddled procedure text

Teacher: Campbell?
Campbell: Well I didn’t [unclear] except it starts with, it, um [inaudible – 10 seconds].
Teacher: [Repeating and checking what Campbell said:] Down the bottom it says ‘How to make the paper dahlia’? Where should that be?
Child: Oo! I know!
Campbell: At the top.
Teacher: Should be up the top, should it? Well, I might cut it out and we can put it up the top. … Why should that be up the top, Campbell?
Campbell: ’Cause it’s the heading.
Researcher: I wonder if Campbell could say that again into the tape recorder? Would you be able to do that?
Campbell: Um, what, all of it?
Researcher: What, why should it be up the top? What did Mrs Finch ask you?
Campbell: Um, because it’s—
Researcher: Big voice.
Campbell: –the heading.
Researcher: OK.
Teacher: Because it’s the heading.
Researcher: [Comment about passing audio recorder.]
Teacher: Excellent Campbell.
Campbell said this should be right up the top because it’s the heading.

Teacher: This is the same order that we had it in before. [Referring to how even though the heading is now at the top, the rest of the text is unchanged.]

There’s still something wrong with it. What’s wrong with it now? [Pause 5 seconds.] Gareth?

Gareth: Um, ‘You will need’?
Teacher: ‘You will need’. Where should that come? After the heading?
Gareth: Yeah.
Teacher: After the heading we should have ‘You will need’. I’ll cut that out and move it.
Why should that come, why would that come after the heading, Gareth?
Gareth: Um, because if the, if it, if it was at the bottom, um, and it, the steps was there, um, you wouldn’t know um what you need.
Teacher: So ‘You will need’ will come after the heading?

Teacher locates this part of the text and moves it into the correct place in the sequence. There is a short interruption while a technical problem with the overhead projector is discussed. 37 seconds.

Teacher: So Gareth said ‘You will need’ – Adrian, turn around the front, please – ‘You will need’ is what comes next. Who can tell me what you would need to make the paper dahlia? Who can remember?

The children tell the teacher which items should go in the ‘You will need’ list and the teacher locates these and arranges them below the ‘You will need’ sub-heading.

Teacher: We’ve had people suggest now that we start with a heading – that’s a very good idea. And then, we have … ‘What you will need’.
Simon: Mrs Finch what are we going to do, um–?
Teacher: ‘You will need’–

Simon, please don’t call out.
Teacher: –‘a paper serviette’;
Child: [Whispering:] Pipe cleaner.
Teacher: ‘Pipe cleaner – 1’, it says. You can’t–
Child: I can’t see it.
Teacher: You might not read that but that’s what it says.
Child: ‘Pipe cleaner – 1.’
Teacher: ‘Scissors.’
Child: ‘Scissors.’
Teacher: And, ‘If you want it, some perfume.’

... Adjusting overhead projector. 30 secs.
Teacher: What do we need after that? We’ve got ‘what we need’. Boys at the front. Who can tell me what, what we do after that when we’ve got a procedure? We’ve got ‘what we need’.

Researcher: Can you pass that [i.e. the audio recorder] to Elizabeth, please?
Teacher: Elizabeth.
Elizabeth: You need to tell the people what you have to do with the stuff.
Teacher: What, what you have to do. What would be a heading we could use for that?

Elizabeth: Method.
Teacher: Yes, we could use ‘method’. Can anyone think of another heading we could use? Can you pass it [audio recorder] to Christopher please Dimitri?

Christopher: Steps.
Teacher: Oh, well, do you know, Christopher, that I just cut that out? So that will be our next heading: Steps.
Child: [Laughs.]
Child: I thought it [unclear]
Teacher: Simon, do you know what the first step might be? I’m going to put the, some steps up here, but ... once again there’s something a bit wrong with them. Who can tell me what’s wrong with these steps that I’m putting down here?
Child: People are starting to get in the way because they’re too close!
Teacher: Now, what’s wrong with the steps that I’ve put there? Apart from the fact that they’re going down the wall? [Referring to how the text appears because of the uncooperative overhead projector.]

Child: Shall I give this [audio recorder] to Simon?
Teacher: Put your hand up if you want to answer. Heidi?
Heidi: I think it’s what (it is) –
Teacher: I can’t hear you Heidi. What’s wrong with it?
Heidi: I think it’s what it is, but I think it’s in the wrong order.
Teacher: Excellent. They’re in the wrong order. So what should go first? Have a look at them.
Child: In the wrong order.
Teacher: Tell me what you think should go first.

Lesson continues with children sequencing the steps in joint activity with the teacher, who asks questions like: “Who can tell us the step that comes after that?”. Simon plays a strong role in this part of the lesson because he was so adept at making these flowers and had made them again shortly before the lesson to show the researcher how to do it. When the steps are sequenced, the lesson continues as below. Duration: 9:20 mins.

Teacher: I think you’re right. I think they are in the right order.

So, I’ll just make sure you can read them clearly there. [Adjusts display slightly.]

Task specification: redrafting or “writing it better”

Teacher: The only thing is – They’re in the right order now; that’s great. – but, do you think they can be written a bit better than the way that they’re written–?

Children: Yeah./ Yes.

Teacher: – to be a procedure?

Children: Yeah./ Yes.

Teacher: Who thinks they’re written fine the way they are?

Children: [Some raise hands.]

Teacher: I’ve got about four people that think they’re fine. Who thinks they could be fixed up?

Children: [Most raise hands.]

Teachers: OK. How do you think they could be fixed up, Kieran? Can you tell us, give us an idea of how to fix them up?

Task: Joint redrafting of procedure steps

Kieran: Um, they could have number 1 and number 2 and number 3 in front of them.

Teacher: Excellent. They could be numbered. I’ll do that. I’ll write numbers on them now.

Child: [Quietly:] I knew that! I knew that [unclear].

Teacher writes numbers on steps.

Teacher: Can anybody think of another way that they could be improved? – these instructions? [Reading:] ‘The paper serviette has to be folded back and forth to make it like a fan.’ How could you fix that one up?

Simon: We could give a bit more instructions, like: ‘First fold it one way then the other.’

Teacher: You could word it differently?

Simon: Yep.

Researcher: Oh, you mean to explain what ‘like a fan’ means?

Simon: Yeah.
Teacher: Yes, you could too.

… *Teacher scribes Simon’s suggestion.*

Teacher: OK. Can anybody think of another way? – that the instructions—. Think about the procedures that you’ve seen, and that you wrote. That you wrote when you made your model of the, um communication, form of communication, in Science and HS&IE.*** Think about how you wrote your procedures and how we might improve this one.

… *Teacher repeats suggestion for children to think about a procedure they wrote earlier in the year – “for the model of communication (you) made” and to consider how that experience could help improve the writing of this text. 30 seconds.*

Teacher: How else could we make it sound better? Listen to Number 3: ‘You get the pipe cleaner and one end of it you twist around the middle of the paper fan.’

Oliver: Um–

Teacher: Oliver?

Oliver: Um ... well, you could write: ‘And get one end of it then you twist it around the middle of the paper, of the paper fan.’

Teacher: Isn’t that what it says?

Oliver: N-no.

Teacher: Tell me how you’d write number 3.

Oliver: I’d write: ‘You get the pipe cleaner and then get one end of it. Then you twist it around the middle of the paper fan.’

Teacher: Yes, you could say that. That’s sort of adding a lot more words and making it a bit longer, isn’t it? Adding a few ‘thens’ to it.

… *Teacher ask two children who have been distracting each other to sit in different places. 14 seconds.*

*Within the wider task of redrafting the muddled procedure, the teacher next focuses the children’s attention more closely on choices in the wording:*

Teacher: Can anyone else think of how they could make these sentences sound better? Listen to Number 4. ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut. Cutting too close to the pipe cleaner should be avoided or it won’t work,’ ... Does that sound good to you: ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut’?

Children: No. No.

Teacher: Well, what’s a better way of saying it? Gareth?

Gareth: ‘Along the top,’ oh …

Teacher: How can you make that sound better? Everybody think. Instead of saying: ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut’?

Child: Cut.

*** The teacher’s pronunciation of this acronym is ‘hizzy’. In the NSW curriculum, it stands for ‘Human Society and Its Environment’, a subject which was previously known as ‘Social Studies’.
Child: ‘Along the top cut another,’ um … ‘cut,’ um –

Teacher: I think some people have forgotten something about what they did when they wrote procedures. Could you pass that to, um, Elizabeth? What were you going to say, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, they c-, could’ve made it better by saying, ‘Cut it along the top,’ instead of ‘Along the cu-, top.’

Teacher: Excellent. They could’ve made it better by saying ‘Cut along the top.’

[Pause 6 seconds – teacher scribing this suggestion onto overhead.]

Teacher: How would you say it? Cut along the top?

Researcher: rElizabeth, can you say it again?

Teacher: lNow–

Can you say it again? … Can you say it again, please Elizabeth?

rDimitri, look at the board.

Elizabeth: lThey could’ve –

Teacher: Can you say it again please?

Elizabeth: They could’ve made it better by cutting it –

Teacher: No, by saying–.

rI changed it to what you just said and rI’d like to read it.

Elizabeth: lBy saying–

r‘alo-, along, cut along, long, the, the, r…the top with the scissors.’

Child: l‘Cut along–

lthe top’

Task: Reflection on redrafting – discussion

Researcher: Why is that better, Elizabeth?

Teacher: [Directs Kate to sit still.]

Researcher: I, I like it better as well. But why is it better? Do you know? [Pause 6 seconds.] Maybe you know but it’s hard to explain. Do you want to try?

Elizabeth: Yes. It’s a little easier to understand, I think. It’s a li-, it was a little, it seems a little easier to understand with the, when I looked at it.

Researcher: Does anybody else have an idea about why it’s easier to understand?

Teacher: Kieran had his hand up. Would you like to pass it to Kieran, Elizabeth?

[Audio recorder is passed over – some incidental comments.]

Kieran: Because it’s shorter.

Researcher: Mm. Sometimes when things are shorter they’re easier, aren’t they?

Kieran: Yeah.

Researcher: Sometimes. Is there another reason as well? … Simon, would you like to say another reason with respect to that one?

Simon: It’s a lot better because some children, if they’re trying to read it, it, they might not understand it as easi(er [sic] as us. And it still can be a bit hard for us still to understand it.
Researcher: Does anybody else have an idea? That’s right, Simon. Does anybody else have an idea why it might be easier to read, ‘Cut along the top with the scissors,’ instead of, ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut?’ [Pause 5 seconds.] Heidi, were you going to say something?

Heidi: I was going to say the same [inaudible].

Researcher: Nearly the same as Simon’s? OK. Kieran, have you got another idea?

Kieran: Yeah.

Researcher: Oh gee, your brain is really sparking.

Kieran: It makes more sense.

Researcher: Do you know why?

Kieran: Um, because if you say, ‘With the scissors,’ um, ‘Along the top with the scissors,’ you could say ‘along the top’ – mmm –

[Pause 8 seconds.]

Researcher: Is it a bit hard to explain? Mm. I think you’ve got a good idea there. Do you want to say any more or just leave it? We can come back.

Oliver: Um, well, I thought it was a little bit jumbled up because if it’s a little bit hard to understand. But if they put ‘make another cut’ at the beginning of the sentence, you could understand it a bit more.

Closure and preview of future learning

Researcher: Do you know, I think 2F has done a marvellous job today and I think we might do some more work on this tomorrow.

Teacher: So do I.

Thank you, Oliver, for your last comment.

Researcher: And tomorrow, I wonder if we could have another look at these steps, and see if we can write them all just as well as Elizabeth has suggested we write step four. Who thinks they could help do that?

[Children raise hands.]

Teacher: I think we could work on it tomorrow, and – Oh, actually, we can’t work on it tomorrow, we’ve got our, um, excursion tomorrow!

Researcher: Oh, silly me!

Teacher: But on Thursday, we could try and make it sound a lot better.

... Researcher wishes class a good excursion.

Teacher: And I think that after we’ve, um, made our ‘Frog in the pond’ on Thursday using a procedure, we might have some more ideas on how to make this one sound a bit better.

Researcher: Do you know, I might stick some sticky tape down this [sound of sticky tape being taking off roll], just to –. Oh, we don’t need to put sticky tape to keep it in order! [Referring to the strips of transparency with which the procedure has been sequenced on the overhead projector.] Do you know why? ... I forgot.

I can just put this [i.e. sticky tape] in the bin!

Oliver: Cause there’s numbers!
Teacher: Excellent! That’s right, Oliver. ‘Cause I wrote numbers on it!

Researcher: [Laughs.]

Teacher: So we know what order it goes in.

Researcher: [Unclear] I was thinking!

Before, I was thinking that we have to put sticky tape to keep it in order, but of course the numbers help, don’t they?

Child: Yep.

Researcher: You guys are so clever.

Child: (Ms French was) a bit silly.

Researcher: Yeah – I forgot the numbers were there.

Teacher: And I think they were very clever to work out that first we have ‘What you need’ and the headings, headings in place and ‘What you need’–

Researcher: I did have it in a bit of a muddle, didn’t I?

Teacher: Certainly did.

[Addressing children:] So I think you’ve remembered quite a lot about procedure writing. And on Thursday when we make our ‘Frog in the pond’ following a procedure, that should jog your memory even more!

Researcher: You might have time to have another look at this [i.e. the procedure for a paper flower].

Teacher: Yes.

Researcher: Who would like to have a really nice copy of this that they could take home and remind themselves how to make a paper dahlia? For later when they might make it and Mrs Finch or Simon aren’t there to help them?

… Researcher tells anecdote about a student who once taught her how to make paper flowers, but when the student left the school the researcher could no longer remember how to make them, hence the value of having a written procedure. 45 seconds.

Teacher: So if we can make it look really good, then I, I can photocopy it and you can all take one home and make them next Mother’s Day when you’re not in 2F any more. You can make them at home.

… Several children talk about making gifts for their mothers at home and trying to keep it a secret. Researcher departs and recording ceases.
E.3 Lesson transcript: Class 2F ‘Redrafting Lesson Two’ (June 24)

Overview: In this lesson, the children were set the task of redrafting one step of the muddled procedure for making a paper flower. The lesson involves the children in: reflective discussion of the ways in which one step of the procedure was redrafted, this example acting as a model; children redrafting steps for themselves (mostly working in pairs); joint construction of a complete, improved procedure text.

Task orientation / Review

Context: In the preceding week, the class had followed a recipe to make a dessert called ‘Frog in the pond’. They then did a cloze activity in which the teacher left out the material Processes and the children were asked to fill them in. This activity later provided an opportunity to reflect on the patterning of the text and particularly the placement of many of the material Processes in Theme position. The lesson transcript begins with the teacher invoking this prior learning in the ‘Review’ phase:

Teacher: What was the last procedure that we looked at in class? I’m sure everyone will remember.

Child: I remember.

Teacher: We looked at it last week, when we made something. Jacques?

Jacques: ‘How to make a frog in the pond’.

Teacher: What’s a ‘frog in the pond’?

Jacques: Um, a cup with jelly in it, and a chocolate frog.

Teacher: – you made a ‘frog in the pond’. And then you did a cloze – a cloze, which is where you put in words that have been left out – on the procedure for making a ‘frog in the pond’. Some of you noticed a pattern, which was excellent. Most of you who noticed the pattern said “I can see that most verbs are at the start of the sentence.” Or, some of you said, “Most words, action words, are at the start of the sentence.” Can anyone remember: there’s a special name for that, where the action words, what you have to do, the action is at the start of the sentence? There’s a special name for it. Let’s see if anyone can remember. Kieran, you’ve got your hand up.

Kieran: Theme?

Teacher: Yes! Excellent. It’s called Theme. That’s the grammar word referring to the start of the sentence, telling us that that sentence tells us that’s the Theme of that sentence, that’s what’s going on in that sentence. That’s called ‘Theme’.
Task specification

Teacher: So I’m going to hand these back to you to have a look at them. Then I want you to tell your partner, the person sitting next to you, … what you noticed about the procedure. [Pause 9 seconds, during which there are sounds of children talking.] I’m going to wait till it’s quiet. I’m going to hand them back to you. With – that’s not quiet –

... Researcher asks some children to move to make room for overhead projector.

Teacher: – with the person sitting next to you, I want you to talk to them and tell them what pattern you notice, and I want you to use the word ‘Theme’ this time, and then I might choose a couple of people to share with the class what they told their partner.

Task: Discussion: Reflect upon and discuss patterns in procedure text (in pairs then sharing with whole class)

... Children turn to someone beside them and are provided with a couple of minutes of discussion time. Recording is stopped until children have finished their partnered discussion and are ready to report back to the whole class.

Teacher: Who would like to share with us what they talked about with their partner? What they said to their partner? Poppy? You take that [referring to audio recorder].

Poppy: Well, there’s um, like, the verbs –

Teacher: Who’s talking at the back? Excuse me, Poppy. Dimitri, be quiet please.

Poppy: The verbs are kind of, like, at the beginning with the Theme?

Teacher: So what did you say to, what did your partner say to you?

Poppy: Um – [Pause 6 seconds.]

Teacher: Is that what you said to your partner?

Poppy: Yeah.

Teacher: Who was your partner?

Poppy: Joan and Elizabeth.

Teacher: Elizabeth, you take the tape player and, and tell me what you said to Poppy and Joan.

Child: No, Joan was my partner!

Teacher: Heidi, turn around please.

Elizabeth: I said that, that I thought that most of the verbs are usually Theme [Note: child lisps slightly here and pronunciation of ‘Theme’ sounds a bit like ‘seen’].

Teacher: Are usually –?

Elizabeth: Theme.

Teacher: In Theme position?

Elizabeth: Yeah.
Appendix E

Teacher: Good.

... Teacher calls on Christopher, but he does not have anything to add to the discussion.

Teacher: Gareth.

Gareth: Um, that my partner said, um, that the words what was starting at the beginning of the sentence was Themes.

Teacher: Mhm.

**Term specification: ‘What does Theme mean?’ (Review of earlier learning)**

Teacher: And what does Theme mean? Can you tell me that?

Gareth: Um … a Th-, it’s, it’s a, it’s found at the start of the, a sentence.

Teacher: That’s where it’s found. What, what does it mean?

Gareth: Um–

Teacher: Do you know what it means? … What do you think it means?

[Pause 4 seconds.]

Gareth: Um– [Pause 7 seconds.] Don’t know.

Teacher: Who could describe Theme? Beatrice’s got her hand up. Do you want to pass it back to Beatrice? … Beatrice?

Beatrice: Theme is really what the sentence means–

Teacher: Excellent.

Beatrice: That is what the sentence is about.

Teacher: That’s what Theme is. Theme is what the sentence is about.

Researcher: Say that sentence again, Beatrice. ‘The frog–’

Teacher: ‘–is over there.’

Researcher: Yeah! So it would be ‘the frog’. ’Cause it can be two words.

[Unclear.]

Teacher: Very good.

**Task: Reflective discussion of choices in redrafting one step of the muddled procedure (whole class)**

... Teacher and researcher organise the display of the ‘How to make a paper dahlia’ procedure on the overhead projector.

Teacher: OK. So this is from our procedure of ‘How to make a paper dahlia’ that we looked at last week. Was it last week?

Children: Yeah / Yes.

Researcher: Remember this bit? When we had to fix it?
Teacher: We decided we’d change some of it because it didn’t sound really good.

Child: Yes.

Teacher: And at first, at first this instruction, this step said, ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut.’ So, when, when we had it saying that, which doesn’t sound the best, really, doesn’t sound really clear, who can tell me what’s in Theme position where it, when it’s written like that? … Oliver?

Oliver: Um …

Researcher: In this one – [Points to the step which is being discussed.]

Teacher: In the first part, what’s in Theme position the first way it’s written?

Oliver: Um, ‘along the top’?

Teacher: Excellent! ‘Along the top.’

Researcher: How did you know it was ‘along the top?’ Not just ‘along’?

Oliver: Because, um, any sentence could start with ‘along’ and it wouldn’t really give information about the sentence.

Teacher: What a very clever answer. You’re right.

Researcher: Those words belong together, don’t they?

Oliver: Yeah.

Researcher: What are they telling us?

Oliver: Um … um –

Teacher: [Reading:] ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut.’ So what’s ‘along the top’ telling us?

Oliver: Well, it means that cut along the top … of –

Teacher: Mhm. Elizabeth, did you want to say something?

Elizabeth: Well, I, I do know what it means. It means that you’re supposed to do the cutting up the top.

Teacher: So it’s telling us where to cut. With the bottom one, we changed it – I can’t remember whose idea it was to change it like that – was it yours, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Yes.

Teacher: I think it was yours. It was Elizabeth’s idea to change it to this second part. And now it says, ‘Cut along the top with the scissors.’ So when Elizabeth changed it, what sort of words are at the beginning now? Kieran?

Kieran: ‘Cut along’?

Teacher: Yes. I said what sort of word is at the beginning, now that Elizabeth’s changed it? Chen? Do you want to pass it to Chen? … Elizabeth changed it, so now we have at the beginning of the sentence, we have a –?

Chen: Verb.

Teacher: A verb! And a verb is a –?
Chen: Action word.
Teacher: Right. So now we’ve got a verb: ‘Cut along the top’. So what’s in Theme position now? Now that we’ve changed it? Do you want to pass it back down here, Chen? In Theme position now that we’ve changed that sentence is –? Beatrice?
Beatrice: ‘Cut along the top with the scissors,’ and –
Teacher: That’s the whole sentence. What’s in Theme position now?
Beatrice: ‘Cut along the top.’
Teacher: All of it, or just the word ‘cut’?
Beatrice: Just the word ‘cut’.
Teacher: Yes. And what, and ‘cut’s’ telling you what? You can all say it together.
Children: [Low indecipherable murmurs from a few voices.]
Teacher: ‘Cut’s’ telling you what?
Child: [Low indecipherable murmurs from a few voices.]
Teacher: ‘Cut’s’ telling you what?
Child: To –?
Teacher: What –?
Child: To do!
Teacher: Yes. What to do. Telling you what to do.
Who thinks the second way sounds better than the first way? … You’ve all got to have a vote. So, who thinks the first way sounds better? ‘Along the top with the scissors make another cut.’ Who likes that?
Chen: It’s not better but you could use [indecipherable].
Teacher: Which, which isn’t better?
[Audio recorder is passed to child.]
Child: A very rare use of –
Teacher: Can you pass it?
Child: I don’t –
Teacher: It’s not better but it’s a rare use of, what?
Chen: Like, we don’t usually use it. That’s why it doesn’t sound as good. But, I think that’s, like, a very good kind of … speech it. I don’t know what it’s called, well, I forgot. I forgot what it’s …
Teacher: But I think what you’re trying to say is very important.
That we don’t, we don’t usually speak that way, do we? We don’t usually put it that way when we say.
Chen: Yeah.
Teacher: But it is telling us exactly what to do. Is the second one still telling us exactly what to do? Heidi, can you please leave that?
Heidi: Yes.
Teacher: Is the second one telling us exactly what to do?
Children: Yes. Yes.
Teacher: Who thinks the second one sounds better than the first one?

The lesson was paused at this point for the class to attend a timetabled music lesson in another room. The lesson resumes later in the day. The researcher was not able to be present for this continuation of the lesson.

**Task specification: Redrafting task**

Teacher: OK. I’m going to give you each, with um ... a partner or a small group ... part of our procedure –

... Teacher: So what I’m going to ask you to do in a small group of two or three— I’m going to give you the steps of the procedure for ‘How to make a paper dahlia’ and I’d like you to redraft it, which, which means to write it a better way.

Child: Oh.

Teacher: If you think that it would be better with a verb at the beginning, the action word at the beginning, you can write it like that if you think that will make it clearer. But that’s up to you. That’s your choice. If you want to put the verb at the beginning you can, it’s up to you. But I want you to make them clearer, to sound better, the instructions to sound better than they do now. OK?

Children: Yes, Mrs Finch.

... Teacher gives further instructions about pasting the strip of paper into learning journals and where to write the redrafted step.
Teacher: You can discuss it together with your small group, but write it – however you decide to write it to make it sound better – write it in your learning journal under where you’ve glued this.

Instructions are reiterated and materials handed out.

Task: Redrafting a step of a muddled procedure

The children take their learning journals and the strips of paper upon which are written the steps of the muddled procedure. They go to work on the redrafting task at their desks, and the audio recorder is turned off until some children have completed their redrafting. The teacher moves about the classroom and asks some children how they had redrafted their steps.

Teacher: Tell me why you decided to change it that way, or how you, read out how you changed it.

Child: Well, we left out ‘you’ because, um, –

Teacher: Pardon?

Campbell: Because you know –

Oliver: We left out ‘you’ –

Teacher: You need to say it into the tape player, Oliver.

Oliver: We left out ‘you’ because, um,

Campbell: You know that you have to–

Oliver: Yeah.

Campbell: – pick it up.

Teacher: OK. Yeah.

Oliver: Um, and um, and we put ‘twi-’, and we put ‘twist’, and we put, um, ‘twist’ –

Teacher: Mm.

Oliver: – in front of, in front of something else, not [unclear].

Teacher: OK. Do you want to read out what, what you’ve got?

Oliver: OK. ‘Get the pipe cleaner and twist one end of it around the middle of the paper fan.’

Teacher: That sounds good. What was it before?

Children: ‘You get the pipe cleaner and one end of it you twist around the middle of the paper fan.’

Teacher: I think it sounds much better the way you’ve done it. Good work, boys. Good.

Task: Joint construction of complete procedure

… Setting up: children sitting in groups which all worked on redrafting the same step from the procedure.

Teacher: We’re going to write the method, the steps. We’re going to write them in the improved way that you’ve decided to improve them. The first
step I’ve got on here is: ‘The paper serviette has to be folded back and forth to make it like a fan.’ Who had that one? Jacques and Christopher. Jacques, how did you decide to change that to make it better?

... Jacques: ‘Fold the paper serviette back and forth till it looks like a fan.’

... *Teacher scribes this sentence, asking Jacques to repeat it so she gets it all. She then rereads it to the class. He self-corrects his reading to ‘a paper fan’.*

Teacher: [Rereading the children’s suggestion:] ‘Fold the paper serviette back and forth until it looks like a paper fan.’ Gareth. §§§ What sort of word have they started that step with?

Child: Fold.

Teacher: Kieran?

Kieran: Um, a verb.

Teacher: Pardon?

Kieran: A verb.

Teacher: A verb. Yes. Right – the next step. When people are quiet. Elizabeth. ‘You get the pipe cleaner and one end of it you twist around the middle of the paper fan.’

Who had that one? OK, how did you change it? Oliver?

[Soft sound of a child talking.]

Teacher: [Warning tone:] Kate.

Oliver: [Reading from his own work:] ‘Get the pipe cleaner and twist one end of it around the middle of the paper fan.’

Teacher: Can you say that again, please, Oliver?

Oliver: ‘Get the pipe cleaner and twist one end of it around the middle of the paper fan.’

Teacher: [Scribes Oliver’s words.] OK. You can finish writing that one … The next step – . [Teacher breaks off because she realises she has not invited the children to reflect on Oliver’s choices in redrafting.]

What sort of word did Oliver start that with? ‘Get the pipe cleaner and twist one end of it around the middle of the paper fan.’

Child: A verb.

Teacher: Yes. ‘Get’s’ a verb as well. It’s telling you what to do. The next step used to say, ‘The ends of the paper fan are cut at an angle.’ Who had that one? ‘The ends of the paper fan are cut at an angle.’ Who had that one? … Did nobody have that one?

Child: [Inaudible.]

Child: He did.

Teacher: Right. Come here then Jeoung Bin and tell me how you changed it.

[Short aside to student not in study – not transcribed.]

Jeoung Bin, come and tell me how you changed it.

§§§ Teacher is naming child in order to ask him to attend. She is not calling on him to answer.
Jeoung Bin: [Reads slowly his own writing:] ‘Cut the ends of the paper fan at –’
Teacher: ‘An’.
Jeoung Bin: ‘An angle.’
Teacher: Good boy. So Jeoung Bin and Dimitri changed it so it reads: ‘Cut the end of the paper fan, the ends of the paper fan, at an angle.’ So what word have they put first?

Teacher: What word have they put first? What sort of word?
Jack: A verb.
Teacher: Yes, ‘cut’. Can you read that again for me? ‘Cut the end–’ Can you read it out again for me, Jeoung Bin? ‘Cut the–’
Jeoung Bin: ‘Cut the ends of the paper fan at an angle.’
Teacher: Good boy. Thank you, Jeoung Bin.

... Lesson continues with groups reading out their sentences and teacher scribing and asking what kind of words they have put first. The children are consistently able to identify that they have used a verb to start their sentences, until:

Teacher: When it’s quiet, we’re up to the last step. ... On the last step, which used to say: ‘On the finished flower, some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.’ ... Who changed that one? ... OK, can you pass the tape player to Danny, please? Danny, tell us how you changed it. [Pause while audio recorder is passed.] Tell us how you changed it, Danny.
Danny: [Reading:] ‘Spray some perfume on the flower so it smells nice.’
Teacher: [Scribing:] ‘Spray some perfume’ – can you read it out again for me so I can copy it?
Danny: ‘Spray some perfume on the flower–’
Teacher: Right.
Danny: ‘– so it smells nice.’
[Teacher completes scribing.]

Teacher: What sort of word did you start that with? ... Danny? What sort of word is ‘spray’?
Danny: A noun?
Teacher: Not a noun. A noun is a naming word.
Danny: A continents?
Teacher: No, a consonant is a type of letter.
Danny: Oh.
Teacher: Who can help Danny? ... Danny – ‘spray’ – is that something that you do?
Danny: [Indicates assent.]
Teacher: Right, so it’s a doing word, so what sort of word is it? It’s a doing word, which is called a –?
Child: [Whispers:] Verb.
Danny: Verb?
Teacher: Pardon?
Danny: A verb?
Teacher: Good boy.

Closure

... Teacher reads aloud the redrafted method on display, asking the children to think about whether it now ‘sounds better’.
Teacher: So what do you notice about it now? What pattern can you see there now? Beatrice?
Beatrice: There is usually, um, a verb as the first word in a sentence and usually second there is usually a ‘the’.
Teacher: Right. There’s usually a verb as the first word in the sentence, and if we have a verb at the first word in the sentence, we have a verb in what, a ver-, a verb [laughs], a verb in what position? Oliver?
Oliver: Theme?
Teacher: Yes! In Theme position. Very good. Well done, 2F.
E.4 Discussion transcript: Class 2F – ‘Reflection on Learning’ (June 25)

Teacher: Yesterday you wrote out the steps for this procedure in a better way in your journals, and I copied them all down in order on this sheet. What did, um, we notice yesterday that a lot of people did when they changed the steps? Stella?

Stella: Um, they mostly had verbs at the beginning.

Teacher: Mostly had verbs at the beginning. In fact I think all of them has, have verbs at the beginning. Why did people do that, do you think? Why did people put verbs at the beginning of each step? Who’s got an idea? You did it. Why did you do it? Can you pass it [the audio recorder] to Beatrice, please?

Beatrice: Because in most procedures, they tell you what you have to do instead of, like, like, they don’t, ‘Put that there,’ like, they don’t like really, like do it that way. What they really do is like, tell you how to make but don’t, like, tell you personally. Like, don’t actually – the person who wrote it doesn’t come and tell you. They’re trying to tell you like somebody would say, like somebody doesn’t say when um they actually tell you personally.

Teacher: [Equivocally:] Right–

Beatrice: And–

Teacher: They’re giving you instructions but they’re, they’re not saying um– Turn around, Dimitri, with your hands in your lap. They’re not saying that [referring to her words to Dimitri].

Beatrice: [Laughs.] That’s an instruction. Turn around, Dimitri, with your hands in your lap!

Teacher: That’s an instruction. Turn around, Dimitri, with your hands in your lap!

Beatrice: Yeah – it is an instruction.

Child: That started with a verb!

Teacher: But they’re not [laughs], they’re not actually saying, ‘You put that there.’ Is that what you’re trying to say?

Beatrice: No. They’re not p-. Like, they use the verbs first because, um, giving the instruction first I think is a better way of talking in English, I think.

Teacher: Good girl. Anybody else got a-, another um, would like to explain why they did it that way? Why they rewrote it that way? Poppy? Would you pass it to Poppy, please Beatrice?

Poppy: Um–

Teacher: I’d like you all to think about why you wrote them that way. Simon, stand up and move down here please.

Poppy: ’Cause the verbs is kind of like a Theme with the partner.

Teacher: Beg your pardon?

Poppy: The verb is kind of like a Theme with the partner. And it make, and sometimes it makes it make more sense.
Teacher: What, why are you saying the verb is like a Theme? … [Firmly:] Dimitri.

Poppy: 'Cause it can, like, kind of do the same thing as the verb can?

Teacher: What does, what does the same thing?

Poppy: The Theme can kind of do the same thing.

Teacher: Mmm … Yep … Anything else you want to add? … OK. Anybody else tell me why they wrote theirs with a verb at the beginning? [Pause 5 seconds.] Gareth. Would you like to pass it to Gareth?

Gareth: Um, because, like, if I was writing a procedure for somebody, um, like, if, if I was doing a noun at the start, um, they wouldn’t know, like, if you pour it into a glass or get, or get um, um, 500 mils of water.

Teacher: Good. So you think it makes it clearer to put the verb at the beginning?

Gareth: Yep.

Teacher: Good boy.

... Researcher asking for volunteers to be interviewed about how they redrafted their steps for the procedure. Less than 1 min.

Researcher: There was something that, um, I talked about with someone yesterday. You know the ‘Frog in a pond’ procedure?

Children: Yes.

Researcher: Um, one of the steps did not have an action verb in Theme position. One of the steps in that said, ‘Carefully pour in the boiling water.’ Do you remember that step?

Child: Yep!

Researcher: Now, who was I talking to about that yesterday? I don’t think we got that on the tape. … Was it you, Gareth?

Gareth: Yeah – I think so.

Researcher: Yep? [Pause 5 seconds.] Pop over here. It could have been you and, it could have been you and Elizabeth as well. … Do you remember what we talked about? Why do you think it had ‘carefully’ in Theme position, instead of just ‘Pour in the boiling water’ or ‘Pour in the boiling water carefully’? It could have, could’ve had that, but instead it had ‘Carefully pour in the boiling water’.

Gareth: Oh!

Researcher: Do you know?

Gareth: Um–

Researcher: Tell everybody and remind them, because it’s quite important, 'cause it was different. It didn’t have ‘pour’ – the action verb – in Theme position, did it?

Gareth: Because, um, if you were just pouring boiling water you might just spill it, so you be careful it. That’s why it had ‘carefully pour’.

Teacher: What would happen if you spilled boiling water?

Gareth: Um–
Child: [Inaudible.]

Teacher: I’m asking Gareth.

Gareth: Um, you, it probably might not work. Or, you might burn your hand.

Teacher: Yes, you might get burnt.

Researcher: So why do you think they put the word ‘carefully’ in Theme position?

Gareth: Um, so the people don’t, ’cause if it wasn’t there, the people would just pour boiling water and just spill it?

Researcher: They might. Hopefully they wouldn’t, but it’s a reminder, isn’t it?

Gareth: [Affirmative:] Mhm.
## E.5 Children’s redrafting of steps of paper flower procedure

(Steps shown in correct order.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original text to be redrafted</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Children’s redrafted texts</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The paper serviette has to be folded back and forth to make it like a fan.</td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Fold the paper serviette back and forth to make it like a fan.</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You get the pipe cleaner and one end of it you twist around the middle of the paper fan.</td>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Get the pipe cleaner and twist one end of it around the middle of the paper fan.</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ends of the paper fan are cut at an angle.</td>
<td>Jeoung Bin</td>
<td>Cut the ends of the paper fan at an angle.</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along the top with the scissors make another cut. Cutting too close to the pipe cleaner should be avoided or it won’t work.</td>
<td>Kieran</td>
<td>Cut along the top with the scissors. If you cut too close to the pipe cleaner it will not work.</td>
<td>Sentence 1: Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice). Sentence 2: Theme choice effective (‘If’ clause thematised as a warning).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the pipe cleaner near the top just under the flower. A downward pull will tighten the petals together.</td>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Hold the pipe cleaner near the top just under the flower. Pull downwards and it will tighten the petals together.</td>
<td>Sentence 1 has maintained the material Process in Theme (effective choice). Sentence 2 material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Hold the pipe cleaner near the bottom of the flower. A downwards pull the petals together.</td>
<td>Partially successful. Sentence 1 has maintained the material Process in Theme (effective choice). Sentence 2 – could be more effective e.g. ‘Pull downwards...’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gareth</td>
<td>Hold the pipe cleaner near the bottom of the flower. A downward pull will tighten the petals.</td>
<td>Partially successful. Sentence 1 has maintained the material Process in Theme (effective choice). Sentence 2 – could be more effective e.g. ‘Pull downwards...’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Near the top hold the flower. Pull downwards to tighten the petals together.</td>
<td>Partially successful. Sentence 1 has moved the material Process out of Theme (less helpful to reader). Sentence 2 – material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original text to be redrafted</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Children’s redrafted texts</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The petals are made when you pull apart the layers of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.</td>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers. &quot;I did it quite quickly and the rest of my group copied off me because I thought it up.&quot;</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice) BUT ‘carefully’ instruction lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>Make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>The petals are made when you pull all the layers of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.</td>
<td>Little attempt to redraft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>The petals are made when you pull all the petals of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.</td>
<td>Little attempt to redraft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the finished flower some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.</td>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>Spray some perfume on the flower so it smells nice.</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Spray some perfume on the finished flower.</td>
<td>Material Process moved into Theme (effective choice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>After the flower has been finished you can spray some perfume to make it smell nice.</td>
<td>Effective although a different choice. This is a common kind of Theme especially at the conclusion of a procedure. Suggestive of good familiarity with this text type.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E.6 Interviews with two children following redrafting task

Interview 1: Beatrice

Researcher: Can you read out the step that you had to rewrite?
Beatrice: ‘The petals are made when you pull apart the layers of paper from each other. This should be done carefully.’

Researcher: OK. And how did you rewrite it?
Beatrice: ‘Make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers.’

Researcher: I see. Now, did you have to think about that very hard?
Beatrice: Um, a little bit.

Researcher: Mm? What were you thinking about?
Beatrice: Well, I was, we used to have ‘you’ in front, but then Mrs Finch told us that is doesn’t make sense, so we rubbed out ‘you’.

Researcher: Why don’t you need to put ‘you’?
Beatrice: Um … because … it’s good to have the, like, instruction word that tells you what to do, um, first, before the word that tells you what’s in a procedure.

Researcher: Oh, OK, that’s right. If it said, ‘You make the petals by pulling the paper layer, pulling apart the paper layers,’ that actually does make sense, doesn’t it?
Beatrice: Yeah.

Researcher: So why don’t you need to have ‘you’ there, do you think?
Beatrice: Ah, I don’t really know.

Researcher: Do you remember you were talking before in class about whether the person’s there or not? Like whether you’re there to tell them the instructions or not?
Beatrice: Yep.

Researcher: Does that have anything to do with it?
Beatrice: Um, yes, um … If you, they, wouldn’t have to tell somebody, ‘You do that stuff, and you do that stuff’, and if you were far away, you, like if you, like say you were sending a postcard to somebody and you said, ‘You need to go and look in the mailbox,’ you could’ve said, ‘Go and look in the mailbox – there’s a surprise for you there.’ And um that would probably make more sense than saying that they’re, that you have to do something.

Researcher: Mhm. So when it has ‘you’, you think it sounds more like you have to do it?
Beatrice: [Nods.]

Researcher: Oh. OK. Now – this bit here – this sentence: ‘This should be done carefully’ – did you use those words at all?
Beatrice: Um … no.

Researcher: Could you have used them?
Beatrice: Ah, not where I can think of.
Researcher: Let’s have a think about it.

[Pause 8 seconds.]

Researcher: I bet you could. See if you can just do it in your head, you don’t have to write it down. See if you could think of a way of getting ‘This should be done carefully’ part of this sentence. See if you can put it into this sentence here.

Beatrice: ‘Layers’ –

Researcher: ‘You make the petals by pulling apart the paper layers’ –?

Beatrice: ‘Carefully’?

Researcher: You could put ‘carefully’ at the end, couldn’t you?

Beatrice: Mhm.

Researcher: Where else could you put it?

[Pause 9 seconds.]

Beatrice: That’s the only place that I can think of.

Researcher: Try it in a few different spots in your head.

Beatrice: It could go, ‘Make the paper layers’ – No. ‘Make the petals by carefully pulling apart the paper layers.’

Researcher: You could! Couldn’t you?

Beatrice: Yep.

Researcher: And what’s that word ‘carefully’? It’s a, it’s kind of a word that we’ve talked about.

Beatrice: A Theme word?

Researcher: It can be a Theme. What’s the Theme?

Beatrice: The Theme is ‘making the petals’.

Researcher: Oh – in this sentence?

Beatrice: Yep.

Researcher: Yep. Not all of ‘make the petals’. What’s the Theme? Just –?

Beatrice: Make the petals.

Researcher: Just ‘make’. Just ‘make’, yeah. ‘Cause that’s the action verb. The petals are what you’re making, aren’t they?

Beatrice: Yeah.

Researcher: Um, and ‘carefully’ can be a Theme word, can’t it? When would it be a Theme?

Beatrice: Theme – um,

Researcher: Would it be a Theme if it was at the end?

Beatrice: No – a Theme is usually at the beginning of the sentence.


Beatrice: Yep.

Researcher: Not just usually. Always at the beginning of the sentence, that’s right.
Beatrice: Unless it’s more than one word.
Researcher: Ah, it will still be the words at the beginning of the sentence.
Beatrice: Yes.
Researcher: What’s a Theme that had more than one word? Do you remember we saw one yesterday?
Beatrice: Yes. … Ah, I remember one from the desert thing we did a long time ago.
Researcher: Oh, OK. What was that?
Beatrice: ‘Very little rainfall’, ‘little rainfall’.
Researcher: ‘Very little’, yeah, so ‘very’ and ‘little’ go together: ‘Very little rain’. And yesterday – I’ll show you where it is – let me see. I think it’s hiding in here. See this one here? …
Researcher: So that was telling us where. And then we changed it so that we had an action verb in Theme position. That word ‘carefully’ is a how word –
Beatrice: How.
Researcher: – telling us how to do it. And we can put that in Theme position if we want to. Would it work to put it in Theme position?
Beatrice: ‘Carefully make the petal by pulling apart the paper layers.’ I suppose so.
Researcher: Still makes sense, doesn’t it?
Beatrice: Yep.
Researcher: Yeah. Now tell me how you felt about this work.
Beatrice: Mm. OK.
Researcher: Yeah? You liked it, or you didn’t like it, or it was so-so?
Beatrice: So-so.
Researcher: And why do you think it was so-so?
Beatrice: Because I did it really fast.
Researcher: So it was quite easy, was it?
Beatrice: Yeah, I did it quite fast.
Researcher: [Coughs.] Can we write a comment about that at the bottom?
Beatrice: OK.
Researcher: Do you want to go and grab a pencil?
Beatrice: Yeah.
Researcher: That’d be good. I’d like to have a comment about that. [Recording paused while Beatrice gets a pencil]. Just, um, draw a face down here about how you felt about it.

... Pause in talk while Beatrice draws. 19 seconds.

Researcher: Do you want to write next to it why you felt that?
Beatrice: [Murmur.]
Researcher: Do you want me, do you want to tell me and I’ll write it for you?
Beatrice: OK. [Dictating:] I did it quite quickly –
Researcher: Mhm.
Beatrice: And because the rest of my group was copying off me too.
Researcher: The rest of your group copied off you?
Beatrice: Yep. Because I thought it up.

[Pause while Researcher scribes for Beatrice.]
Researcher: There you go. I put it in little talking marks ’cause you said it. Can you read that?
Beatrice: [Reading:] ‘I did it quickly and the rest of my group copied off me because I thought it up.’

Interview 2: Simon

Researcher: Read out the sentence that you had to rewrite.
Simon: ‘On the finished flower, some perfume can be sprayed to make it smell nice.’
Researcher: And can you read the way that you’ve rewritten it?
Researcher: OK. Now, did you decide how to write that a bit differently, or did someone else in your group?
Simon: No. I did.
Researcher: So tell me how you decided to change it. What were you thinking?
Simon: Oh, because um, it can, it can be shorter to read. That’s one thing. And um, I think there’s less harder words for other people to read.
Researcher: So it’s shorter? Um, I don’t know if there’s –
Simon: Is this for the Kindies to make?
Researcher: Um, well, we thought that we’d actually have, have it typed up so that children in the class can remember how to make it, ’cause remember how some of them forgot?
Simon: In this class?
Researcher: Well, we could give it to other classes as well.
Simon: That’s what I kind of mean.
Researcher: Do you think it would be too hard for Kindergarten to do this?
Simon: Mmm …
Researcher: Maybe not.
Simon: Mmm. Probably –
Researcher: The cutting might be a bit tricky.
Simon: Mm.
Researcher: What do you think?
Simon: I don’t know.
Researcher: What were you going to say? You said, ‘Probably’ – something? What were you going to say?
Simon: It’s probably easier for them to read.
Researcher: I think it would be. Much easier.
Simon: Because ‘finished’ and – oh, I’ve got ‘finished’ – ‘perfume,’ ‘smell’. These are really hard words for them, probably.
Researcher: Hmm. Well, you still had to use words like ‘finished’, didn’t you, and ‘perfume’?
Simon: Yeah. (They) just make it sound interesting.
Researcher: Mm. Or to explain what you mean as well. And what else about it have you changed? It’s shorter, but you changed the order of the words, haven’t you? What were you thinking there?
Simon: What do you mean? What was I–?
Researcher: How come you didn’t have ‘On the finished flower’ to start it off?
Simon: Um–
Researcher: How did you start yours?
Simon: I thought ‘spray’ was a verb. That’s why I started it off with.
Researcher: You’re absolutely right. It is. It’s an action verb. And why, why did you use that first? What were you thinking?
Simon: Because I just wanted to, to make it sound a bit more interesting at the starting. And … that’s all.
Researcher: This is a step from a procedure, isn’t it?
Simon: [Confident affirmative:] Mhm!
Researcher: So, what do you know about the way steps in procedures sometimes start?
Simon: Some, they normally start with a verb.
Researcher: They often do, don’t they? Yeah. And what’s that bit at the beginning of a sentence called? The start of the sentence?
Simon: [Clarifying:] The first letter?
Researcher: Not the first letter. The first word or the first little group of words. It’s got a special name. Can you remember?
Simon: [Negative:] Nuh-uh.
Researcher: Theme.
Simon: Theme.
Researcher: Yeah. That’s right. So a procedure usually has action verbs in Theme position. Does it have to?
Simon: No.
Researcher: Can you put something else instead?
Simon: Um … I think so.
Researcher: You’re right. You can. Do you remember the ‘Frog in a pond’ recipes?
Simon: Yep.
Researcher: There was one of those that had something different in Theme position.
Simon: L Mhm.
Researcher: Instead of ‘Pour the boiling water’, what did it say?
Simon: ‘Carefully –
Researcher: Mm.
Simon: –pour’.
Researcher: Is that, and is that an action verb, ‘carefully’?
Simon: L Yep. … ‘Carefully’— No.
Researcher: What kind of a word is it?
Simon: ‘Caref-.’ Doing?
Researcher: It’s not doing, is it? Because it’s not, it’s not the action that you do.
Simon: Oh.
Researcher: It’s h–?
Simon: How.
Simon: L— you do it. L Oh!
Researcher: L How you do it. It’s a how word, isn’t it?
Simon: Mhm.
Researcher: You did a very good job here. How did you feel about this activity?
Simon: Mm, it was fun.
Researcher: Would you like to draw a little face showing how you felt about it?
... Researcher offers own pen and Simon draws a smiley face.
Researcher: You tell me why you did a smiley face and I’ll write it down in talking marks or speech marks. I’ll write down what you say.
Simon: [Dictating:] I liked it because it was interesting and it’s something that you learn about.
E.7 Lexicogrammatical analysis of references to ‘Theme’ in Class 2F lesson, May 14

Clauses referring to and defining ‘Theme’ were analysed for their experiential meanings. Select transcript excerpts have been reproduced in order to provide meaningful context, with the relevant clauses underlined. A more complete sense of the lesson from which the excerpts are taken can be obtained by reading the transcript in Appendix B, item B.5.

E.7.1 First mention of ‘Theme’ in Class 2F

Teacher: We’re going to look today at this word: Theme.
Researcher: Um, Mrs Finch, I was going to see if the children could find all the action verbs first –
Teacher: Oh, we’re going to fi–, see that first.
Researcher: – and then see if we can find a pattern.
Teacher: Oh, all right. We’ll find, we’ll find the action verbs first. I forgot what I was doing.

This is the first reference to Theme in Class 2F. The teacher’s move is essentially a ‘false start’ (see footnote, Appendix B, p. 453) and the researcher reminds the teacher of their plan to “see if we can find a pattern”, for which it is intended that ‘Theme’ will provide a name.

The two alternative analyses here derive from the fact that some kinds of Process ‘shade’ into others. Here, the Process may be interpreted as either ‘mental’ or ‘behavioural’. It is not unusual for teachers to use Processes of this kind, particularly in ‘task orientation’ phases of lessons; both mental and behavioural activity are implied in the act of learning.
E.7.2 Introducing ‘Theme’ as a name for an observed textual pattern

Researcher: Now, Marc reckoned that lots of the action verbs were at the beginning of sentences. Put your hand up if you think he was right. [Pause 6 seconds.] Hands down. Now that we’ve looked at the beginning of those sentences I think he was right, wasn’t he? Some of them were in other parts of the sentences but lots of them were at the beginning part.

Teacher: Very clever, Marc.

... 

Researcher: There’s a name for that part of the sentence, and Mrs Finch is going to tell you about that now. We’ve got an orange poster to explain to us what I’ve just done with our orange pencil.

Teacher: Who can read what the name for that is where the main word is at the beginning of the sentence? Luke?


Teacher: Theme; it’s called ‘Theme’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There</th>
<th>(i)s</th>
<th>a name</th>
<th>for that part of the sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Process: existential</td>
<td>Existent</td>
<td>Circumstance: cause: purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Who | can read | [[what the name for that is (where the main word is at the beginning of the sentence?)]] |

| Senser | Process: mental: cognition | Phenomenon |

The word ‘that’ in these clauses is an ‘exophoric reference’, that is, it points out of the spoken discourse to the procedure text on display, and specifically to the words at the “beginning part” of the sentences, which have been highlighted. Throughout this set of clauses (including those on the next page), the term ‘Theme’ is used as a way of naming an observable textual pattern (see discussion in Chapter 8, pp. 340–341).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(It)</th>
<th>(is)</th>
<th>Theme.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Token)</td>
<td>(Process: relational:</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intensive: identifying)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>it</th>
<th>(i)s called</th>
<th>Theme.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational:</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intensive: identifying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E 539
E.7.3 Introductory descriptions of ‘Theme’: where Theme is found, what functions Theme performs

Teacher: And this says [reading from a mini-poster prepared by the researcher]: ‘The Theme is found at the beginning of the sentence. It can be one word or a group of words which belong together. The job, or the function of the Theme’ — ‘that’s the job it does’ — ‘is to tell us what the rest of the sentence will be about.’ Simon. ‘The Theme introduces the message of the sentence. It launches the sentence’ — like a rocket ship —

Child: Mm!

Teacher: ‘— and sets it on its way.’ So the Theme at the beginning of the sentence helps you know what that sentence is going to be about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Theme is found</th>
<th>at the beginning of the sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational: circumstantial: attributive Attribute: circumstantial (location: place)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>can be one word or a group of words [which belong together]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: attributive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two clauses indicate how to identify or ‘find’ the Theme (see discussion, Chapter 8, pp. 333, 341).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The job or the function of the Theme is</th>
<th>[to tell us what the rest of the sentence will be about]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this and immediately following clauses (see next page), a sense of the functional capacities of Theme is developed (see Chapter 8, pp. 341–343). These clauses move the students beyond merely locating Theme and towards a sense of what ‘Theme’ means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>to tell us</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attribute: circumstantial (matter)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Theme introduces the message of the sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sayer</th>
<th>Process: verbal</th>
<th>Verbiage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

It launches the sentence like a rocket ship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Circumstance: manner: comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

and (it) sets it on its way

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-</th>
<th>(Actor)</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Circumstance: location: place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

So the Theme at the beginning of the sentence helps you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>-</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

(to) know [what that sentence is going to be about]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process: mental: cognition</th>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
E.7.4 ‘Theme’ as ‘psychological Subject’

Teacher: That’s why, here, the most important thing that this person that wrote this procedure, the most important thing that the person that wrote this procedure wants you to know, in the first sentence, what do you think the most important thing they want you to know is? Look at the beginning of that sentence.

In this set of clauses, and those on the following page, Theme is represented as ‘that which the writer has in mind’, or the ‘psychological Subject’ (see Chapter 8, pp. 343–344).
Teacher: So that’s why the person who wrote this procedure, who’s giving you the, these instructions, they put ‘carefully’ first because they want that to be the most important thing that you see in that sentence.

| So | that | (i)s | [ why the person [ who wrote this procedure, l who’s giving you the, these instructions], they put ‘carefully’ first ] |
| - | Token | Process: relational: intensive: identifying | Value |
| the person who wrote this procedure, l who’s giving you the, these instructions], they | put | ‘carefully’ | first |
| Actor | Process: material | Goal | Circumstance: location: place |

The clauses from this next transcript excerpt continue to develop the idea of Theme as psychological Subject. Note that the foregrounding of particular words is represented as being a choice, an act of agency on the part of the writer. In the embedding in this first clause, ‘the person who wrote this’ is agentive in acting upon words (in this example, the word ‘carefully’) and choosing what to ‘put first’.

| because | they | want | that [ to be the most important thing [ that you see in that sentence ] ] |
| - | Senser | Process: mental: desiderative | Phenomenon |

In this clause, the writer’s choices are represented as being motivated ones – the writers ‘wants’ to position words for particular purposes or effects on readers.
E.7.5  Difficulty in defining Theme using an ‘identifying-type’ relational clause

Teacher:  So we can see that Theme is what the person who wrote it – what’s the name for a person who writes something? – What are you when you write something?

... 
Teacher:  Author, that’s right. So the author – I’m waiting for you to sit on your bottom, Marc … – the author.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>So</th>
<th>we</th>
<th>can see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Process: mental: cognition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>that</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>what the person [who wrote it]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value (Incomplete)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For discussion of this clause, see Chapter 8, pp. 344–345. The first clause in the analysis at E.7.4 may also be an aborted attempt to define Theme using an ‘identifying’ clause.
**E.7.6 Specify how Theme operates in ‘procedure’ texts**

Teacher: And when you’re an author writing a procedure, whatever words you put at the beginning are the meaning that you want to give the sentence, what you want the person reading it to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>when</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>(a)re</th>
<th>an author [[writing a procedure]]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The set of clauses at E.7.6 describes for children the operation of Theme in the specific context of the ‘procedure’ text type. There is some use of ‘identifying’ clauses, although these are not used to define Theme *per se* but rather to point out its particular manifestation in procedures (for example: ‘words at the beginning are ... what you want the person reading it to do’).

This set of clauses is interesting for the way it positions children to begin thinking about themselves as managers of Theme (‘when you are an author’; ‘words you put at the beginning’) – see brief discussion in the thesis, p. 338.

Note also in the second clause at left the teacher’s use of a somewhat less than helpful formulation: ‘words at the beginning’ = ‘meaning’. For discussion of a very similar instance on another day, see p. 346 of the thesis.
E.7.7 Summarising knowledge about Theme (towards end of introductory lesson)

Researcher: But you will, if you have a look at a procedure, I bet you will notice that quite often there’s action verbs at the beginning of the sentences, and that means the action verbs [slowly:] are the Th–

Child: Doing thing.

Teacher: Ah ah ah! Are the [points to chart]?

Child: [Quietly:] Theme!

Children: [In chorus:] Theme.

Researcher: Yeah.

Teacher: Yes. We’re going to put this [chart] up on our wall. …

[Inaudible] our chart.

Researcher: But they don’t have to be the Theme and sometimes another word like maybe a ‘how’ word might be the Theme instead in a procedure.

This final set of clauses from the lesson introducing Theme essentially summarises this learning about Theme in the context of ‘procedures’ for the children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis 1</th>
<th>if</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>have a look at</th>
<th>a procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Process: mental: perception</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis 2</th>
<th>if</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>have</th>
<th>a look</th>
<th>at a procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Behaver</td>
<td>Process: behavioural</td>
<td>Scope: process</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| bet         | Senser | Process: mental: cognition (= ‘believe’) |

<p>| will notice | Senser | Process: mental: perception |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>that</th>
<th>quite often</th>
<th>there</th>
<th>(i)s</th>
<th>action verbs</th>
<th>at the beginning of sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Process: existential</td>
<td>Existent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>that</th>
<th>means</th>
<th>[the action verbs are the Th– ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value (incomplete)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(the action verbs)</th>
<th>(are)</th>
<th>(the) Doing thing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(the action verbs)</th>
<th>Are</th>
<th>the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>But</th>
<th>they</th>
<th>don’t have to be</th>
<th>the Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>another word like maybe a ‘how’ word</th>
<th>might be</th>
<th>the Theme</th>
<th>instead</th>
<th>in a procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Token</td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: identifying</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### E.8 Some examples of children’s learning journal reflections about ‘Theme’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date: May 14</th>
<th>Date: June 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following the lesson in which Theme was first introduced, via a procedural text</td>
<td>Following a lesson on ‘action verbs’ and Theme in another procedure (milkshake recipe)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Kieran
- I learned about verbs. First we highlighted all the verbs. Next Mrs French asked us if we saw any patterns and Marc said that most verbs started sentences and we learned that themes are important.

#### Oliver
- Today I learned about verbs and Themes. Doing words come at the beginning of some sentences. Verbs are doing words like ‘Run’. Theme words are like ‘Carefully’.

#### Beatrice
- No work sample.

#### Kieran
- 1. I learnt that themes always are at the beginning of sentences.
- 2. Themes are doing words, like pour.
- 3. Theme tells you what to do.

Verbs you might find in a recipe: mix, pour, carefully, make, get, shake.

#### Oliver
- No work sample.

#### Beatrice
- The Theme is at the beginning of a sentence. The Theme is sometimes a Verb.

Verbs you might find in a recipe: mix, shake
Following a lesson in which Themes in a recount (about a school excursion) were identified, and then the pattern compared with Themes in procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kieran</th>
<th>Date: August 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What patterns did we notice in the Themes in the recount?</td>
<td>All the themes were at the start of the sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What differences are there between Themes in this recount and Themes in procedures?</td>
<td>Themes in procedures are all verbs and in recounts they’re not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did I learn today?</td>
<td>I learnt about theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about this work, and why?</td>
<td>☺️ I liked this work because it was fun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oliver</th>
<th>Date: December 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What patterns did we notice in the Themes in the recount?</td>
<td>That out of Who, What, Where, and When most of the themes had Who and Where.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What differences are there between Themes in this recount and Themes in procedures?</td>
<td>Most Themes in a procedures have verbs in them and some recounts don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did I learn today?</td>
<td>About the differences of recounts and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about this work, and why?</td>
<td>☻ Happy. It was fun and I also like learning about Theme and verbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beatrice</th>
<th>Date: December 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What patterns did we notice in the Themes in the recount?</td>
<td>The Theme is at the beginning of a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What differences are there between Themes in this recount and Themes in procedures?</td>
<td>That in procedures Themes it [is?] a verb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did I learn today?</td>
<td>I learned the differences between a recount and a procedures. Procedures tell you what to do [nd] recounts don’t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about this work, and why?</td>
<td>☻ Good because I enjoyed doing it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the identification of Themes in the children’s picture book *Drac and the Gremlin* (Baillie, 1988). The task was to write on: ‘What we know about themes in a narrative, like *Drac and the Gremlin*’. By this stage, the children knew about Participants and Circumstances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kieran</th>
<th>Date: December 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In <em>Drac and the Gremlin</em> there is lots of Participants [as Theme] and they are mostly who. There is not many Circumstances [as Theme] in Narratives. There is no Verbs [as Theme] in the Recounts. There is mostly Participants [as Theme] in Recounts and Narratives and lots of Verbs in Procedures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Oliver</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That there are lots of Participants [as Theme] in Narratives and lots of Verbs in Procedures. Also a few Circumstances are found in Narratives. In <em>Drac and the Gremlin</em> there was thirty-eight Participants [as Theme]. Narratives have some Verbs but Recounts do not have any usually [verbs as Theme].</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know that there are no Verbs [as Theme] in Recounts and there are in Narrative. There are more Participant [as Theme] than Verbs and Circumstance. There are not many Circumstance [as Theme]. There are most Verbs as Themes in Procedure.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>