



## *The Pedagogical Perspective on Using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodality in EFL Classroom.*



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**Abstract.** This study aims to investigate the application of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach and Multimodality in genre-based learning, with a particular emphasis on textual metafunction. The research examined the coherence and cohesion of student learning patterns. Iraqi EFL teachers utilized basic frequency observation to support the use of Multimodality genre. The study point out that the texts exhibited certain aspects of coherence and cohesion and a limited understanding of the instructional genre, which is dependable with the findings of universal and regional studies. In some instances, however, textual metafunction in educational learning was either inappropriate or lacked target language complexity. The learners occasionally demonstrated a need for certain genre-specific elements, excessive reliance on simple, cohesion-promoting devices, and limited use of more complex devices. This paper aims to examine the implications SFL and multimodality to help students produce more proficient and persuasive communication context.

**Keywords:** SFL, EFL learners, EFL teachers, Multimodality.

### Introduction





In the era of globalization, the English language has emerged as the prevailing lingua franca in Iraq and across the globe. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has acknowledged the significant role of English language acquisition and instruction in fostering globalization, innovation, and national cohesion (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Additionally, English is the official language of instruction, syllabi, research, and other critical educational technology aids. Although the English language does not possess official recognition as a second language in Iraq, it has been assigned significant meaning as the predominant foreign language to be both taught and acquired within the Iraqi government's educational framework. It extends to private institutes and universities that utilize English as their primary medium of instruction and communication. Based on the guidance provided by their (EFL) instructor, the approach adopted by Iraqi EFL students in crafting academic written works in the target language is examined. As individuals acquire a sufficient scholarly education, it becomes progressively apparent that specific writing attributes, such as formatting and organization, are dependable and can be readily modified or refined. While acquiring proficiency in various aspects of language skills may require additional time, specific patterns in language usage have become evident. These inclinations frequently suggest that their first language and cultural background influences the user's communication style. If individuals with different levels of expertise can observe and distinguish such patterns, they are often linked to systemic functional linguistics. SFL framework is predicated upon the notion that grammatical structures and word selection construct meaning within a given social context. In this particular situation, individuals who aspire to become educators and seek to acquire knowledge will possess a solid basis for constructing their instructional sessions to prioritize and improve their students' educational achievements effectively. The genre-based model of systemic functional linguistics is particularly pertinent in this context.

### 1. The Problematic view of the study

As an individual engaged in research and instruction in English as a foreign language, I am interested in examining the academic writing ability of students whose native language is Arabic, particularly concerning their composition skills in English, their target language. After investing significant time in teaching students, it becomes increasingly apparent that some aspects of their writing, such as arrangement and organization, reveal consistent patterns that can be promptly rectified or improved. On the other hand, other aspects oblige





an extensive period to address or enhance as visible patterns in language usage within their written work begin to emerge. Generally, these attributes are manifested in their native language and culture. When these patterns are identified and analyzed with varying levels of expertise, they are frequently linked to systemic functional linguistics. The employment of the Halliday SFL framework entails the examination of grammatical structures and lexical selections as means of conveying meaning within a given social context. This scenario will give prospective educators and learners a robust foundation for implementing efficient pedagogy. It will facilitate educators in effectively and proficiently conducting their instructional sessions, thereby improving the educational achievements of their students, particularly in the context of multimodal systemic functional linguistics.

## 2. The relevant literature

Using language learning in context is a comprehensive approach embedded in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), which aims to teach students in the English language effectively. Social semiotic fieldwork is a scientific methodology that establishes a connection between language occurrences and the social environment. The theory of experience in language, as proposed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), requires an understanding of the processes through which learning occurs (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Schleppegrell, 2004). Languages change within social contexts due to the influence of their users, particularly writers, and speakers. Essentially, Systemic Functional Linguistics emphasizes the social aspect of language and its utilization and placement within the social context of the target language. In SFL, the register is employed to determine the organization of lexical and grammatical constituents within a language, aiming to analyze the active relationship between language and context (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). The register comprises three discrete elements: the field, the tenor, and the mode. The primary aim of a field is to provide ideas, alternative ideas, and significance for those concepts. Furthermore, this includes the lexical and grammatical selections made by writers and speakers, incorporating noun phrases, basic syntactic structures, process-oriented verbs, spatial references, stylistic elements, and tools to establish logical connections (Halliday, 1994). According to Halliday's (1994) inquiry, the writer's attitude towards the audience can be inferred from the quality of their work. According to Schleppegrell (2004), the study analyzes written texts' lexical and grammatical components, specifically modality (modal verbs) and mood. This examination



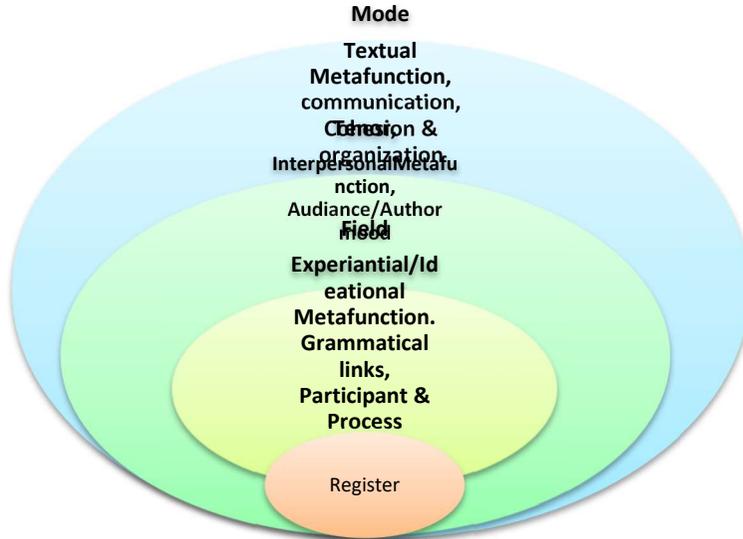


helps in comprehending the choices and implications made by learners when expressing themselves through statements, questions, and demands. The mode refers to the principles that ruling the formation of specific types of texts in relation to textual selection and meaning (Schleppegrell, 2004). Comprehending the significance of a written text requires a logical use of cohesive devices, such as conjunctions and connectors, as well as an understanding of the subject organization. Hence, it is essential to employ target genre texts relevant to students' social practices, as this form of learning requires students engaging in social interactions while constructing meaning from texts. Consequently, this facilitates the development of students' linguistic and communicative abilities, enabling them to effectively participate in social activities involving interpreting and creating meaning (Matthiessen, 2012). Functional Grammar (FG) is a linguistic framework that aims to analyze and describe language in a systematic and organized manner. The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model founds the FG approach to grammar. While it does not serve as a substitute for traditional grammar, it offers an alternative approach that places considerable importance on interpreting meaning and discourse. According to Derewianka and Jones (2010), Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is based on a continuum that ranges from formal (traditional) grammar to functional grammar. The field of study known as SFG focuses on examining and clarifying both form and function, placing particular emphasis on the significance of form in creating meaning within functional contexts. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) covers Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), which centers on the linguistic choices of the subject matter (field), the intended audience (tenor), and the mode of communication (oral, written, visual, graphical, etc.). These factors collectively contribute to the formation of the register. The registers are subject to the dominant metafunctions or objectives that penetrate and correspondence multimodal discourses (Derewianka & Jones, 2010). The three metafunctions, integral components of the broader Systemic Functional Linguistics paradigm, exhibit a strong interconnection with the three register domains. Cooperatively, these metafunctions and register domains play a crucial role in meaning cohort within a text, encompassing all levels of linguistic analysis. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), a text is a collection of interconnected or cohesive sentences. The domain or subject matter corresponds to the author's cognitive function related to their environmental perspective. The choice of communication medium or method is in accordance with the intended purpose of the text and includes elements of cohesion and structural components.





Finally, the correlation between the intended recipients, the writer, and the individuals portrayed within the text conforms to the interpersonal aspect. The three metafunctions described are vital in determining the discourse register within a specific social context. They offer educators and students valuable insights into the fundamental aspects of language, enhancing their comprehension beyond surface-level observations. Each metafunction is associated with different grammatical, lexical, and lexico-grammatical language choices. Each metafunction correlates with distinct grammatical and vocabulary selections, commonly called lexico-grammatical language choices.



The article "From traditional grammar to functional grammar: Bridging the Divide" by B. Derewianka and P. Jones (2010) determines the metafunctions and language choices establishing the register—Jones in 2010

## 2.1. Teaching target language learning skills from a genre perspective

Swales (1990) defined the genre notion for the first time in the 1980s as a series of interactive events whose participants share a standard set of communication goals. Genres are more akin to patterns of action or activity structures than to theme-meaning relationships. Regular action sequences are identified as functional components of the overall activity in speech, written prescription, and action genres. Liu (2014) contextualizes the genre in cultural



terms. It encompasses a register (the context of a situation), which unifies and completes the elements of Halliday's systemic functional theory. Liu (2014) stated in the same explanation that "although the genre is connected to a social process, which is the location of social conflict and change, the register is organized around three contextual parameters: field, tenor, and mode" (Halliday, 1978). The primary focus of the investigation relates to the various functions of interconnection within a communicative matter. At the same time, the method of engagement involves the rhetorical medium employed for interaction, namely spoken, written or a hybrid form. These variables or parameters indicate the extensive range of meanings inherent in language.

Consequently, it exhibits satisfactory performance. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in shaping the semiotic structure of the situation and establishing the relationship between the text and its context (Liu, 2014). Swales (1990) emphasizes examining structural patterns inherent in a particular genre, irrespective of its mode of communication, whether oral or written. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a linguistic framework encompassing situational and cultural contexts. Consequently, this theory accommodates including field, tenor, and mode as integral components—teachers toward applying the target SFL teaching and learning strategy. Similar to the relationship between SFL and traditional linguistics, it is essential to perceive genre-based literacy not as a potential detriment to current literacies but as an additional perspective that enhances understanding and provides additional choices. The genre-based pedagogy movement, which emerged in the 1990s, advocated a more accessible approach to international and intercultural L2 teaching and instruction (Rose, 2008). Genre-based pedagogy offers students ample opportunity to engage with diverse rhetorical styles in writing. Students with limited foreign language learning experience can proficiently employ language patterns and suitable registers within a specific context in their academic endeavors using direct instruction and practical implementation. For further clarification, it is essential to note that within the realm of genre, a specific situational context is referred to as the register. This linguistic variety is transferred through language to establish significance, specifically focusing on its relationship to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). When explaining a process, whether at a primary or more comprehensive rhetorical level, it is necessary to employ a specific range of verb groups, phrases, and transitions that differ from those used when recounting a personal story or employing descriptive nouns and verb groups related to existence or perception (Martin, 1992).





### 3. Discussion

The term genre emerged in the 1980s with the introduction by Swales (1990) of a framework that defines it as a series of interactive occurrences in which participants collectively pursue specific communicative objectives. Genres can be understood as action or activity structures rather than based on thematic meaning. The genres of speech, written prescription, and action all recognize regular action sequences as the functional components of the overall activity. Liu (2014) clarifies the genre within the cultural framework. The concept of register, which encompasses the contextual aspects of a given situation, serves as a unifying element within Halliday's systemic functional theory and fulfills language functions. In the context mentioned above by Liu (2014), he referred to the notion that the genre is intricately linked to a social process, which serves as the arena for societal conflicts and transformations.

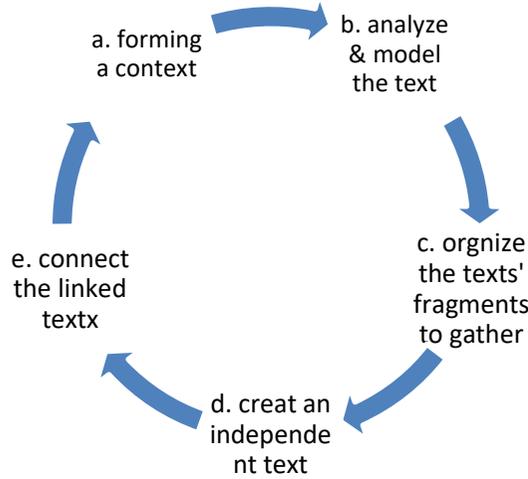
Furthermore, Liu highlighted that the register is organized based on three contextual dimensions, namely field, tenor, and mode, as proposed by Halliday (1978). The focus of the investigation relates entirely to the role(s) of interrelating in the communication process. The mode of interaction examined is the rhetorical passage used for interaction, which can be spoken, written, or a combination of both (multimodal). These variables, also referred to as parameters, reflect the diverse semantics of the language. Hence, it fulfills its intended purpose. They also contribute to shaping the semiotic structure of the situation and establishing the connection between the text and its context (Liu, 2014). Swales (1990) proposed a genre theory that centers on examining the movement patterns within a specific genre, whether oral or written. The theory in question was derived from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, which offers a comprehensive language model encompassing situational and cultural contexts.

Consequently, the components of field, tenor, and mode are all integral to the formulation of this theory. Like the relationship between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and traditional linguistics, the association between genre-based literacy and conventional literacies should not be considered a substitute for current literacies. Instead, it should be perceived as a viewpoint offering additional choices and intricacies to the overall process. The emergence of the genre-based pedagogy movement during the 1990s has provided a valuable perspective that enriches the facilitation of instruction within the realm of international and intercultural second language (L2) teaching and acquisition (Rose, 2008). Genre-based education provides





students with extensive exposure to various rhetorical styles that can effectively employ in writing. Using explicit instruction and subsequent application, it is possible for students with limited learning experience to proficiently integrate language patterns and suitable registers within a given context in their written compositions. Facilitating meaning transmission within a particular genre fundamentally relies upon the situational context and register, accentuating systemic functional linguistics's intricate relationship. In the context of elucidating a procedure at the fundamental or expansive rhetorical stratum, the application of discrete verb clusters, phrases, and transitional elements deviates from that which is employed when recounting an individual's anecdote or employing descriptive nouns and copulative verb clusters (Martin, 1992).



The learning and teaching cycle, as Stated by Feez (2002)

The connection between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom teaching approaches becomes readily apparent as SFL provides valuable insights into English language teaching methods' effectiveness in educational environments. The opportunity at hand relates to the efficacy of language as an organized framework for written, spoken and visual communication. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a mechanism for learners to socialize within the classroom environment. Such efficacy could be attained through collaborative engagement in written, aural, and oral activities within the classroom setting. Through engaging in these activities, students acquire knowledge and skills related to contextual language usage. Learning is a social phenomenon



characterized by collaborative interaction between students and their teachers and among the students.

#### 4. Teachers' views on a particular SFL teaching and learning strategy.

From the perspective of practice, the genre concept can benefit second/foreign language teachers by laying the groundwork for a curriculum focused on socially relevant, meaningful language exercises. In order to effectively engage with socially valuable genres that aim to inform and persuade, students must initially develop a language system that can be flexibly applied to various instances of any given genre. This undertaking is facilitated by the concept of register, which simplifies the process. Each text not only conveys three distinct characteristics of its situational context, but it does so due to the sensitivity of certain sections of the language system to specific context components (Painter, 2001). To clarify, the collaboration between linguistic and cultural systems impacts situational contexts.

Furthermore, the overall system is shaped by the specific elements in discursive occurrences within a given locality. Therefore, the objective of employing a functional methodology in language instruction is to support students in establishing a structured connection between contextual and linguistic patterns during language usage, ultimately enhancing their learning skills within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The various system options (for example, mood options such as declarative, interrogative, or imperative) will affect the lexico-grammatical structure of the text. According to Painter (2001), the utility of genre and register concepts in language education may be enhanced by considering the functional relationships between sociocultural processes and generic structure, as well as the connections between register variables and metafunctional components of the linguistic system. The acquisition and mastery of various genres enable individuals and organizations to impact society significantly. The significance of genre and register in language education is derived from the intricate interaction between sociocultural dynamics and the structural characteristics of genres.

Additionally, it is influenced by the connection between register variables and the metafunctional elements of the linguistic system. Painter (2001) suggests that the concepts of register and genre can be employed as tools to aid students in recognizing the functional and sociocultural attributes of the text





being taught and the linguistic decisions that need to be made during its creation. Additionally, these concepts help teachers concentrate on and incorporate the specific language aspects the learner needs.

## 5. Recommendations for implementing the SFL teaching and learning strategies.

Engaging in collaborative efforts with experts to formulate these strategies is consistently advisable, as it plays a crucial role in attaining the objectives of these procedures. These objectives primarily involve the authentic integrating of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and genre instruction within the classroom, including language skills and supervision. This approach represents an optimal pedagogical strategy for instructing students in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) principles, as it can potentially enhance students' proficiency in written discourse production. This initiative aims to design and implement instructional workshops focused on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and genre-based writing, tailored explicitly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors. Designing a language curriculum that prioritizes instructional techniques for emphasizing, elucidating, and addressing written and verbal communication that aligns with students' respective academic disciplines, alongside incorporating academic language encompassing various metafunctions and genres, would enhance students' proficiency in both reading and writing and establish a solid groundwork for future advancement.

## Conclusion

From a pedagogical perspective, using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Multimodality in the EFL classroom can be incredibly effective. SFL helps students better understand how language functions within different contexts, while multimodality allows for a more interactive and engaging learning experience. These two approaches help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of English and improve their communication ability in various settings. By incorporating SFL and multimodality into EFL instruction, educators can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment that promotes student engagement and success. According to Van Leeuwen (2006) and Liu (2015), the concept of extension refers to the interaction between different modes in which one mode modifies or extends the meaning of another. Extensions occur when textual and visual modalities contribute additional significance corresponding to their respective properties.





One mode can augment another in the dimensions of space, time, and a link between variables.

The functional approach equips students with the necessary skills to effectively and efficiently utilize various writing genres and grammatical structures. The absence of such instructional packages may transform the pedagogical endeavor of teaching writing into a vexing and ineffectual undertaking. How frequently do learners work on a blank sheet of paper due to their needing clarification regarding how to commence their assignment? It is imperative to recognize the need to implement the Systemic Functional approach in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

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