

A 'Multimodal Turn' to Teaching Systemic Functional Grammar in an Undergraduate Classroom

Systemic Functional Grammar can be a tool for better understanding how meaning is created and how language works. Undergraduate students find it difficult to communicate effectively in academic writing (Chanock, 2002) and an understanding of linguistic features from a SFG perspective seems to improve their writing skills as they understand their choices for meaning making (Chanock, 2002; Campbell, 2016). Moreover, being aware of how the grammar of a target language works and how it creates its meaning makes the learning of that language easier (Winarsih, 2013) as they gradually master “the meaning potential of the new language” (Arús-Hita et al., 2024). Therefore, SFG seems to be a solution to many issues regarding improving students' knowledge on how language functions.

However, teaching systemic functional grammar in the undergraduate classroom is quite challenging, since students often find it difficult to grasp complex concepts and terminologies as they can be “too technical” (Bourke, 2005). Although some scholars point to the teaching of SFG without addressing theoretical concepts (e.g., Chanock, 2002), a theoretical and practical understanding of how concepts such as system networks work would further improve understanding “how to mean” (Arús-Hita et al., 2024). Considering that we learn and experience language multimodally (e.g., combined with visual meanings), this paper proposes a multimodal approach to the teaching and learning of systemic functional grammar for students to facilitate their understanding of concepts that are difficult for them, such as projection or embedding among others.

This proposal stems from an undergraduate course in systemic functional grammar at the University of Salamanca (Spain) which relies on Thompson's *Introducing Functional Grammar* (2014) as a widespread method to SFG for freshers. Since the combination of multiple modes to process meaning are more “powerful than learning through any single mode” (Dressman, 2019), students are exposed to multimodal resources through which SFG system networks and other concepts are presented.

The materials developed so far include conceptual maps for explaining system networks, songs with SFG lyrics, or even memes in which the verbal and visual representations combine to provide more elaborate opportunities for understanding and assimilating new concepts. Further practice includes a *prosumer* approach, with students also producing some multimodal artefacts to reflect actively on their comprehension in a visible way.

References

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