

Thanks very much for that introduction and thanks for the invitation to be here today. The questions that you're thinking about at the conference are really important ones. And when I looked over the list of people attending, I was very impressed with the range of experience and contexts that you're all working in and bringing to this conference. So I look forward to the conversations that will happen today.

I'm going to be talking about history, and learning history, and how we've worked with teachers in a project in California to help them talk about language with students in history classrooms. I'll first talk a little bit about academic language and my view about how students learn academic language in the history classroom and then describe for you some ways we're using a functional grammar analysis, analysis of language, to connect the kinds of texts students read in history with the kind of meaning that we want them to understand as they learn history.

And I just want to say that the English learners I'm concerned with and am talking about today aren't those who are recent arrivals to this country. The students I'm focusing on are those who already control the informal language that they need to interact with their peers and their teachers but who are still really struggling with the reading and writing demands of the grade level curriculum. These are typically students who are in mainstream classrooms where teachers need to incorporate them and enable them to participate in grade level learning. So I'm going to talk about how teachers can support English learners' participation in grade level content classrooms and help them develop academic language at the same time they learn content.

Michael Halliday draws our attention to three kinds of language learning that are always going on in educational contexts. Students are learning language, they're learning through language, and they're learning about language. The first two of these are the ones that are most familiar to us. We all recognize that English learners are learning English and we recognize that they're learning content through English. But I think less in focus for many teachers is the notion that they need to learn something about English in order to better learn through English. So that's the piece of this that I'm going to be talking about in some detail today, how we can prepare teachers and provide them with tools for talking with students about academic language as a way of helping students learn through the kind of academic language they encounter in history classrooms.

The ways I'll be talking about language today come from a theory of language called systemic functional linguistics developed by Michael Halliday over many years, a theory that's influenced education in Australia and many others parts of the world. This functional linguistics gives us grounded ways of linking the form language takes with the meaning that it constructs. And it offers us ways to talk about language in the context of whole texts so that we can talk about the texts students need to read and we can talk about the kinds of texts students need to construct when they write by looking at the language forms they need to be using and comprehending as they engage with learning in school.

Functional linguistics looks at the choices an author has made in writing a text and engages students in talking about how those choices present certain kinds of meaning. And it gives teachers tools then for talking about the language itself as they're teaching content. So I'm going to be talking about that today in the context of meaning in history.

We all know that some English language learners who appear fluent or adequate in English in interactional informal contexts have trouble with the language of history and other content areas. This is because we don't just learn English as a whole; we learn the language that we participate in and engage with. I'm sure any of you who've learned other languages have had experiences where you were quite adequate in doing certain kinds of things in that language and then moved into another context, maybe someone asked you a question about politics or literature, and, suddenly, you were unable to keep talking and engage with them. We learn language in specific contexts that we participate in; that helps us understand that for some English learners, the history classroom may be the only place where they ever engage in talk about history and so there's no other opportunity for them to develop the ways of using language that they need in that context of history learning.

English is a vast resource and each one of us only engages with certain parts of it, so students need opportunities to have their attention more explicitly drawn to the way language works in constructing the texts of history and in preparing them to do the kind of writing that we want them to do in history classrooms. By focusing on how English works in history, teachers engage learners more deeply with history content. We talk about language and content as if they are two separate things but, actually, language and content are not separate. The content is constructed and presented in language and assessment of students' knowledge of history is done in language. So that's why we need to be thinking

about how language constructs history. Each subject draws on the English language in different ways and so analyzing and talking about the language of history can help students see how English works in the history classroom. That's the main idea that I'll be talking about today.

Functional linguistics provides a language for talking about language in a meaning-based way, giving teachers a metalanguage, a language about language, that connects with the meanings they want to engage students with. It's a tool for going beyond just learning words in isolation or general strategies that you might apply in any context, to look at the discipline-specific ways English works, to help teachers support students' history academic language development. This language about language has helped us respond to the history teachers who say, "I'm a history teacher, not an English teacher. This isn't my responsibility" because we're showing them that this is intellectual engagement for them as well. The teacher is learning about the discipline by learning about how language works in the discipline and engaging students in talk about that.

And we've found that both teachers and students get quite enthusiastic about language; it's interesting to learn about language and to think about how language works. This language for talking about language gives them very explicit ways to engage students in talk about history.

A project I've been working with for several years now is the California History Project. The approach was developed in collaboration between linguists—myself and some colleagues—and the teachers in the California History Project, drawing on work that had been done in Australia on history. This language-based approach that I'll be talking about has engaged more than 300 teachers over the past five or six years and external evaluations of the project have now been demonstrating that the students whose teachers used this way of talking about language performed better on standardized tests of history and on tests of writing. I'll come back to that a little bit later in the talk.

But, in addition to that, I also want to say that the teachers themselves have enjoyed this way of talking about language because of the kinds of conversations it stimulates in their classrooms and the way they're able to involve all students and especially English language learners in participating in talk about history text.

History, as Freddy said, is a very challenging discipline because it is constructed in language. It's very dependent on language. It's difficult to do things in history that aren't using language. To learn

history, students have to be able to read difficult texts, engage in discussion about complex issues, and they have to write in ways that present their interpretations and judgments about what they've read. This is academic language. We know academic language is densely packed with meaning, every sentence having many concepts that are presented, and texts that not only present content or ideas but also always built in the interpretation of the author and some kind of perspective on the events that are being presented.

Students are unprepared to be able to understand the ideas in the language, much less to engage critically with the interpretation and perspectives. And so what we want to do is help teachers work intensively with texts, doing close analysis of texts and talking with students about how the text means what it does. That's what I'm going to be demonstrating today.

This functional language analysis lets teachers and students have rich conversations about texts that the teachers feel are important for learning the concepts they want the students to engage with. And the conversation engages them also in thinking about the interpretation the author has built in and helps them recognize different patterns in the way texts are organized to present history. So it comes at it from these three perspectives. Just a little example before I get into the text I'll use throughout the rest of this talk. I want to show you at the level of one sentence the way we're using this meta language I talked about, this vocabulary of functional linguistics, to talk about language and connect it with meaning.

We use the notions of processes, participants, and circumstances in a clause or in a sentence; I'll be using clause and sentence interchangeably today. I'm just able to introduce a little bit of this metalanguage today but I hope enough to give you a sense of what it offers. So we have a sentence like "The Missouri Compromise passed in 1820." We want to ask, "What process is that sentence about or what's going on in that clause? And we can say, "It's about passing; there's some kind of passing that's being talked about." Now, of course, the passing that this sentence is talking about is a different kind of passing than passing on the football field or even in the hallway as the full text, of course, makes clear. I've pulled this out of context, but this is about legislation so we see academic language here.

And then we want to ask, "What participants are involved in this process of passing?" And we can see that in this sentence, there's one participant, "the Missouri Compromise." Now, we're talking about grammatical participants and a grammatical participant is a participant in the history text but isn't always a

person. We use this grammatical metalanguage of processes and participants to unpack the meaning in a clause. So we can ask, “In this process, passed, we have the participant, The Missouri Compromise. But there’s something missing here because what is the relationship between the passing and the Missouri Compromise? Who’s passing what in this sentence?” And when we ask that question, we can see that, in fact, the agent of the passing of the Missouri Compromise isn’t in this sentence, that The Missouri Compromise is the object of the passing. And we can ask questions about why an author might not tell us the agent of a process. Of course, we have to do this in the context of a whole text to engage students in talk about how English works to put meaning together.

Finally, in this sentence, we have the circumstances, the prepositional phrases or adverbs that construct time, place, manner, and other kinds of meanings. So we can deconstruct this sentence, “The Missouri Compromise passed in 1820” into its process, participants, and circumstances. And that’s the basic approach we introduce to teachers and they take in engaging their students in talk about text.

So let’s now look at a whole text together, not just an individual sentence. The text is about the Missouri Compromise. The goals of this text are that we understand the central issues involved in this event, recognize the different points of view and perspectives of the historical participants at that time, and also recognize how the historian has organized the text to develop information about the Missouri Compromise.

Now, functional grammar analysis involves spending a lot of time with one text in the classroom, maybe a whole class period you’d spend just working through a small amount of text. So, obviously, it’s not something that you do with the whole textbook and it’s only one part of a unit of instruction. I’m not saying this is the only thing you would do. But we know that when it comes time to read difficult text, teachers have few tools to use to take students through the text with them. And this way of talking about the way the meaning has been constructed by the author gives teachers tools for working with important text that has key information and helping students see how that information is presented and what it means. We’ll come back to these goals after we’ve looked at this text in detail to see how the language conversation helps bring out these points.

So in looking at a history text, we can ask and answer three questions. What’s going on? What’s the author’s perspective? And how is the text organized? Using the Missouri Compromise example, I’m

going to focus, in turn, on each of these questions and show you the kind of language focus we can use to answer them. So we're going to answer the first question by identifying the events, the participants in them, and their circumstances. We're going to answer the second question by asking, "Who is constructed as having agency in this text? Who has the power to affect the actions of others? And whose ideas and thoughts are represented in the text?" And we'll answer the third question by recognizing how the author has used certain kinds of connectors and circumstances to develop a certain kind of historical text.

Answering the question, "What's going on in the text?" focuses us, first of all, on this notion of processes, typically constructed in the verbs. And we can classify the verbs in a text into four basic categories: those that are about action, those about saying, those about thinking and feeling, and those that are describing or defining. Teachers can think in terms of these different kinds of meanings in a text and start seeing how historians move through patterns of telling about actions, telling about thinking and saying, interspersed with definitions and descriptions that set background.

This is the first of two paragraphs that we'll look at together today. It's from an 8th grade American History textbook used in California and we're going to unpack its meaning by moving sentence by sentence through the text and talking about how it means what it does. So, first, we'll notice that we have a process of action, a process of bringing, and that the participants in the process are "the Missouri settlers" and "enslaved African Americans." The circumstances tell us where the slaves were brought by the settlers. English learners may need help linking that "them" with the "settlers" and recognizing that "had brought" is situating this in a time before the "1819" that the next sentence goes on to introduce, so some conversation about that is needed. The second sentence has a describing process "included." "Included" sometimes could be about action, but here, it's just telling us what the Missouri Territory consisted of at this time, the population of the Missouri Territory. And the participants in the clause then are the people who lived in the Missouri Territory at that time.

Next, we have a series of action processes, "applying for," "allowing," and "permitting." And, in this sentence, with two clauses, the grammatical participants, again, are "Missouri," "Congress," "admission as a state," "its constitution," and "slavery." Discussing this sentence and what it means involves discussion about Congress and how a territory becomes a state, what the role of the Constitution

is in this case. And we can see that in having that conversation, students are going to come to see that “admission as a state,” although it’s constructed here as a grammatical participant in a noun, is actually a process itself, a process of admitting. And we’ve found that students really enjoy engaging with text and identifying these nominalizations that are very common in history. They can recognize that this is something that, actually, needs to be unpacked itself into the notion of how something comes to be admitted as a state in the union.

Now, of course, I’m just telling you about this text. And that’s not the process that the teacher engages in with the students in doing this kind of work. The teachers in California have come up with a whole range of strategies, of pair work, of group work, whole class discussion, all kinds of aids they use, worksheets, and so on, where the students themselves are the ones who are identifying the processes in these sentences and the participants in the sentences and talking about what is the relationship between “admission as a state,” “applying to Congress,” “Missouri,” “the Territory,” and all of these different elements, meaningful elements, in the text. What I’m doing today is just showing you a little bit about how we talk about a text. We have some people from the California Project here in the audience and, maybe later, we can also get them to tell us a little bit more about the classroom processes where teachers engage in this kind of work.

We can see as we move on in the text that information that has been left out has to be recovered by the students to understand this. For example, in “11 did not.” So this sentence, “In 1819, 11 states in the Union permitted slavery and 11 did not.” There’s a lot elided or left out of that sentence that students have to get back in somehow if they’re to understand that it means 11 states permitted slavery and 11 states did not permit slavery. As good readers, we just read right over that and get the meaning very easily but that is not the case for students who are struggling to cope with this densely packed academic language. We can ask students to try to fill in that information that’s missing so they see what has to be understood to understand this passage.

Then we have another describing process with “was” and this is a key sentence here where the issue that led to the need for the compromise is really constructed. And so that idea of this even balance and that that is going to cause some kind of conversation as Missouri wants to come into the union, that’s the kind of conversation that you’d be having with your students at this point in reading the text as you’ve

built up the information they need to understand to grasp what this sentence is saying. And, here again, we see that the only grammatical participant in this process is “the Senate” and the rest of the sentence is telling us what the situation was in the Senate at this time.

And then, finally, again, an action with two very abstract participants, “the admission of a new state” and “that balance.” We see in history texts that they often start with more concrete participants, like “many Missouri settlers,” but by the end, they’re constructing very abstract ideas that can only be understood if you understand the information that has led up to it. So this nominalization, “the admission of a new state,” and “that balance” that has to be understood as referring back to this balance of 11 and 11.

Just quickly now on the second paragraph, the first sentence, which has another action process of “competing” and many concepts, again, “the North and the South,” “different economic systems,” so now economic systems are coming into play here, relate that back to the slavery we’ve read about in the previous paragraph, and “the new lands in Western territories” with Western territories needing to be understood as Missouri, you know, which may not seem so West anymore. So lots of discussion even on this one sentence to really show all the information that’s packed in there. But, more important in this paragraph is that it is presenting different kinds of processes, these processes of thinking and feeling, what the historical participants at that time wanted, felt, disliked, resented, and so on. Being sensitive to this movement from action that we saw in the previous paragraph into thinking and feeling in this paragraph helps teachers and students start thinking about how, now, we’re getting some interpretation here because, of course, the presentation of the thinking and feeling of people is giving us some perspective from the author’s point of view on what the views of the different historical participants were at that time. We can identify who the participants in these thinking and feeling processes are and what they were thinking and feeling. We’ll come back to that in a moment.

The paragraph ends with another action process “grew into” and, here, we see that the words “These differences between the North and the South” are a grammatical participant that is constructed as one thing in this text. “These differences between the North and the South,” has to be related back to the notion of economic systems, different views of slavery. And, here, we see this technical term “sectionalism” which is introduced and defined. So, obviously, “sectionalism” is going to be a very

important concept in discussion about the Civil War, and highlighting for students how it's being defined is important. We can see that it's being defined in a very generalized way as "an exaggerated loyalty to a particular region of the country." That's how we define words. But the definition comes in a context here of the Civil War, the tensions between the North and the South. And it's in that context that students will need to use the word "sectionalism" in their writing and understand it in other texts they read. So we need to understand "sectionalism" here as being really situated in the situation preceding the Civil War.

So we've answered the question, "What is this text about?" by looking very closely at the way the author has constructed processes, introduced participants and circumstances. And now, we're going to use that analysis to look again at the text and think about how the choices the historian made in presenting that also give us a particular perspective on those events. We'll do that by looking at who is represented as having agency in the text, the social power to act on others, and whose words and thoughts are reported by the historian. All history texts have points of view and they're all positioning readers to accept certain perspectives. Helping students start seeing "Where can I look in the language to focus on the perspective that's being developed?" can help them be more critical readers of other texts that they encounter.

This chart breaks up the sentences we've just been looking at into meaningful constituents of actors and the action processes and the receivers of the actions. When we look at who the actors are and who the receivers are, we can see that the "enslaved African Americans" are not presented as having any agency in this text. Of course, this is just a representation from the author's point of view. That doesn't mean that African Americans were not agentive at that moment but that's the way this text is presenting these historical participants and events. The point is to understand how meaning is being constructed and that history is a construction of meaning, and looking at how the author has put this meaning together with this grammar helps us do that.

In looking at this chart, students can also look at the fact that the actors are not individual people. Individual people actually play rather minor roles in the writing of history. So we see groups of people like "Missouri settlers" and we see these governmental entities, like "states," that are represented as actors. "Its constitution" is an actor. We see over and over again in history texts that documents are very

powerful. They do things; they cause things to happen and they create things. And so focusing students on how documents are represented and seeing how documents are referred to can be valuable for them.

Finally, the abstractions that we talked about earlier such as “admission of a new state” or “differences between the North and South” are presented here as actually moving things forward in history, as having power to act on other recipients of actions. Students can look at this, talk about this, engage with this. Teachers tell us that interesting questions arise in the classrooms when students are able to stop and pause and really look deeply at the way meaning is constructed in a text.

We can also look at the thinkers in this text and what their thoughts are, pulling out the thinking and feeling processes and seeing that they construct the two sides of this debate that led to the Missouri Compromise. So we have “the Northerners” and “the Southerners” who then get picked up as “those who dislike slavery” and “they” as we follow that chain of participants. But we can also look at what is thought or felt. And there, we’re going to see the key ideas that were struggled over, as restricting or banning slavery gets reconstructed as “these anti-slavery efforts.” Students have to make that link, that “these anti-slavery efforts” are those efforts to restrict or ban slavery and that this also gets constructed as “interference by outsiders in Southerner’s affairs.” So we have to think about “outsiders,” what does that refer to, and “Southerner’s affairs,” what does that refer to. Of course, as good academic readers, we don’t even pause to think about those questions. But if we think from the point of view of the English learner, how meaning is to be understood in this passage, those links can be explicitly made and explicitly developed to give them strategies when they come to a new text for recognizing how authors introduce ideas, refer to them in new language, and move an argument forward by developing it in this way.

That third question that I asked – we’ve talked about what’s going on in the text, what’s the perspective of the author. Now, we’re coming to the question, “How is the text organized?” And to investigate this, I’ve highlighted the circumstances and connectors in this passage. We typically think of history as a chronicle of events, a set of events over time, and a lot of history text is constructed that way. When we’d look at it, we’d see passage through time. But, in this text, we can see – and I’ve included just a couple of sentences from the third paragraph – we haven’t looked at it in detail – we can see that there’s really only one year of passing time in this text from 1819 to 1820. So this text is not really about movement through time; it’s really stopping, in a way, to construct these different points of view and

construct causes and reasons for the Missouri Compromise. And we can see that in these connectors like “therefore” and “in addition,” “at the same time,” that this text is accumulating ideas about why and what.

History is about time and cause. These are the two major motifs in history discourse. This is what teachers are concerned with. History teachers want to talk about movement in time and reasons for and effects of historical events. Those are the key issues for history teachers. So if they can start helping students see how time and cause are constructed in history texts, they give students resources for looking at new text and asking “Is this a text about movement through time?” or “Is this a text where some kind of causal reasoning is being done?”

In addition, we can help students see the organization of a text by looking at what we call referrers, these words that refer back to the concepts that have been introduced. And we can look at how grammatical participants come into a text and how they get picked up in new language as the text evolves using pronouns, demonstratives, synonyms, and other forms. So, for example, in the Missouri Compromise text, “the Missouri Territory” is introduced. It’s picked up again as “Missouri,” referred to as “a state” in that phrase about being admitted, “it” refers to it and then later, “a new state.” So we can see that over the course of this text, Missouri moves from meaning a territory, to meaning a new state, and the language constructs that. And here we see how the notion of balances developed so we have “the 11” and “11,” the sentence that we talked about already. That gets constructed as “evenly balanced” and referred to then as “that balance.” So we can, again, point out to students how a text evolves meaning as things get referred to and developed through the text.

We’ve looked at this text very quickly and in some detail, asking these questions and looking at the language that helps us answer them. So to answer, “What’s going on?” we looked at the processes, participants, and circumstances. To look at the author’s perspective, we asked, “Who is presented here as having power and whose thoughts and feelings are presented in the text?” And to look at the organization, we looked at how time and cause are constructed and how information is introduced and referred to.

So this functional metalanguage is designed to help history teachers focus on history and talk about what they want to talk about, the central issues and the events, the different historical points of view, and how this has been presented as a text, what kind of text it is. Of course, I’ve used a text out of

context; and I've just talked to you about it in a very brief way. This kind of work is done in the context of a whole unit of instruction where teachers are doing a lot of other things to build students' knowledge. The point is that at that moment when teachers and students are reading together, having a way of working through a text and really pulling apart the meanings, can enrich English learners' participation because it helps them learn language. They're learning academic language, the language of history. They're learning through language because you're talking about history; you're not really talking about grammar even though you're using the analysis of grammar to talk about history. The talk is about Missouri and the Compromise and what was going on at that time. And students are learning about language because they're starting to see how nominalization works, what kinds of connectors are constructing what kind of meaning, how different processes and participants construct different kinds of meaning in history in different texts and content and contexts.

As I mentioned earlier, external evaluation of the California History Project work in school districts with English language learners, high levels of poverty, and low achievers has been demonstrating that when teachers use these strategies for talking with their students about history texts, their students do significantly better in experimental and quasi-experimental studies than the control group whose teachers have not been introduced to these strategies. So we're very enthusiastic about the response we've gotten from teachers and the results that the project is demonstrating in providing teachers with this kind of knowledge about language.

My time is almost up and I just want to say that this framework is offering teachers a way of talking about language that provides opportunities to support English learners by amplifying the kind of instruction we do, going deeply into content, and spending time with important text so that English learners have opportunities to engage in the grade level content that they so much want to be engaged in. They don't want the simple texts that don't get to these important issues; they want to be involved with the kind of grade level peer learning that everyone else is doing in the classroom. Talking about language makes learning possible and makes learning accessible to English learners. Providing teachers with a language for talking about language is a crucial and important step in giving teachers tools for engaging all of the students in their classrooms in academic learning.

Thank you very much.