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## Learning to teach grammatics: A multimodal ensemble performance

### Abstract

The paper will briefly discuss the recent Australian curriculum reform with respect to the explicit teaching about language and some of the challenges inherent in the processes of implementing a grammatics. It then describes recent work with teachers as they engage with the functionally oriented English curriculum, in particular one teacher's work as she redesigns her pedagogy to accommodate the new curriculum in the early years of school. The paper argues the importance of teacher's pedagogic knowledge in the successful implementation of a grammatics curriculum but suggests that we do not fully understand the nature of such knowledge, how it interfaces with other forms of knowledge (about language and about curriculum) in the production of teaching "expertise" and how such expertise is enacted for different age groups of learners.

### Keywords

multimodal, ensemble, performance, learning, grammatics, teach

### Disciplines

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# Learning to Teach Grammatics: A Multimodal Ensemble Performance

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## 1. Introduction

*Attention should be given to grammar across K-12, as part of the “toolkit” that helps all students access the resources necessary to meet the demands of schooling and of their lives outside of school. It should include knowledge about the structures and functions of word- and sentence-level grammar, and textual patterns; it should include an emphasis on the connections between these levels so that this knowledge is useful. (NCB 2008: 6)*

The paper will briefly discuss the recent Australian curriculum reform with respect to the explicit teaching about language and some of the challenges inherent in the processes of implementing a grammatics such as that envisaged above. It then describes recent work with teachers as they engage with the functionally oriented English curriculum, in particular one teacher’s work as she redesigns her pedagogy to accommodate the new curriculum in the early years of school. The paper argues the importance of teacher’s pedagogic knowledge in the successful implementation of a grammatics curriculum but suggests that we do not fully understand the nature of such knowledge, how it interfaces with other forms of knowledge (about language and about curriculum) in the production of teaching “expertise” and how such expertise is enacted for different age groups of learners.

## 2. The curriculum context

A national English curriculum is a recent phenomenon in Australia where the different states and territories have jurisdiction over what is taught in schools is the result of broad consensus between the 7 Australian states and territories. After wide consultation and negotiation, the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA 2014) (hereafter AC:E) emerged organised around three inter-related strands:

- Language: knowing about the English language
- Literature: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating

literature

- Literacy: expanding the repertoire of English usage.

Of the above, it is the functionally oriented Language or KAL strand that is of particular interest here. The KAL strand includes sub-strands of Language for interaction, Text structure and organisation and Language for expressing and developing ideas, reflecting the metafunctional organisation of the SFL model. The aim of this strand of the curriculum is to support students to develop a cumulative body of knowledge about language that they can use to enhance their literacy skills and practices. Students learn about the relationship between language and its contexts of use and about patterns of language choice from text level to clause level and to word level. For example, students’ development of knowledge about the clause is described in the curriculum as follows:

In **early primary**, students learn to recognise the clause or simple sentence as a unit of meaning, identify parts of the clause using functionally oriented probes (*What’s happening? Who or what is involved? Are there any extra details?*) and understand that ideas (clauses) can be connected with coordinating conjunctions to form compound sentences.

In **later primary**, children learn that clauses can be enriched by manipulating noun groups, verb groups and prepositional phrases; the different uses for direct and indirect speech; the differences between main and subordinate clauses and the role of complex sentences in expanding ideas.

In **early secondary**, students learn that subordinate clauses embedded in noun groups increase the density of information in “academic” texts. Much emphasis in secondary school is placed on analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of author’s choices with respect to different clause patterns (ACARA 2014).

Thus students’ knowledge across the years of schooling with respect to the clause shifts from working with simple structures to those more complex and from recognising and identifying clauses and clause elements to explaining and critiquing these as choices with rhetorical impacts. Such cumulative knowledge is also evident in content descriptions about language choices at whole text, group or phrase and word levels. Central to this developmental process is the notion of a functionally oriented metalanguage; that is, a shared language for examining how meanings are realised as text, for rendering language choices visible and thus able to be examined, critiqued, appropriated, adapted and even transformed in the service of curriculum goals <sup>[1]</sup>. Thus, the Australian experience is a first in English speaking countries, an ambitious

curriculum project that is of considerable interest to educational linguists around the world.

Several researchers (e.g. Derewianka 2012, Jones & Chen 2012) have identified major unresolved issues surrounding the KAL strand of the curriculum; these include teacher knowledge about language, student outcomes, terminology and pedagogy. Of all these issues, pedagogy is particularly important because curriculum content is, as Luke has argued:

remade through the lenses and practices of teachers' substantive world, field and disciplinary knowledge, then brought to life in classrooms in relations to teachers' pedagogic content knowledge and students' cultural scripts and background schemata which include a host of other available messages of media, institutions and community cultures (2010: 2).

Luke's proposition highlights the important role of teacher expertise — with its varying dimensions of substantive and propositional knowledge — in curriculum implementation. Because many Australian teachers have not been exposed to explicit teaching about language, most have little experience of any models of grammar teaching, particularly of the kind that is envisaged by the new curriculum. Harper and Rennie's study of preservice teachers found that participants' knowledge about language was coupled with a lack of understanding of how to use metalinguistic concepts in ways that support students' language and literacy development (2009: 32). Similarly in the UK, Hislam and Cajker (2005) found that student teachers were daunted by the task of turning their own grammatical knowledge into productive classroom activities that supported their students' learning. Inservice teachers are often forced to draw on commercially available materials that do not necessarily support a semantically oriented grammar curriculum (Harper & Rennie, 2009; Jones, McIntosh & Kervin, 2011). It is against this backdrop that a number of educational linguists working with Australian schools to address needs with respect to professional learning, resources and pedagogy. In a research program undertaken with colleagues Beverly Derewianka, Honglin Chen and Helen Lewis over the last three years, we have come to understand that "know how" with respect to implementing the KAL strand of the new curriculum comprises three factors: knowledge about language, knowledge about curriculum and knowledge about pedagogy. Knowledge about language, of course, refers to what teachers know about language and how their knowledge aligns with that in the new curriculum. Knowledge about curriculum refers to teachers' subject area or disciplinary knowledge, whether English or one of the other curriculum fields. My own particular interest lies in how teachers draw on their pedagogic knowledge to turn the grammatics of the new curriculum into engaging teaching and learning events with productive consequences

for their students.

### 3. Background to the study

Our research has involved 35 teachers in 10 schools (7 primary and 3 secondary) and we have observed more than 30 lessons related to different aspects of students' metalinguistic understandings. This paper draws on data from one primary school in inner city Sydney in which we spent a good deal of time during 2012 and 2013. The school approached us concerned that their grammar teaching practices relied upon commercial teaching resources that focused on parts of speech and traditional class labels:

*We had been teaching grammar but this often occurred in isolated situations and involved students completing worksheets to identify categories such as nouns and verbs in an "add-on" decontextualised manner, drawing on a traditional approach to teaching grammar. We wanted a more contextualised approach: one that would enable us to work with the texts, activities and routines of our existing literacy programs (Cochrane, Rees, Ahearn & Jones 2013).*

Our work with the school proceeded in three stages: professional learning workshops, planning meetings and classroom observations. The workshops initially introduced teachers to the KAL content of the new curriculum and later provided opportunities for the teachers to present work from their classrooms to each other. The planning meetings, another important feature of the project, involved groups of teachers from the same grade level and research team members. In these meetings, teachers and researchers collaborated to analyse classroom texts and identify the language features most relevant to the teachers' goals.

Collaboration was central to the project in several ways. The teachers wanted our expertise as educational linguists to assist them navigate the new curriculum requirements, to ensure the explanations they provided to their students were accurate and to support them to embed the grammatical concepts in their learning programs. In turn, we recognised the teachers' expertise with respect to pedagogy and their knowledge of students' needs, interests and capabilities. We were interested how the cumulative knowledge about language of the AC:E would come to life in their classrooms, the metalanguage they would find most useful with their students and the nature of the resources they would use.

### 4. The classroom data

The data collected from the project includes video recordings of lessons, audio recording of planning sessions and teacher interviews together with samples of planning

documents and student work. In total, more than 15 hours of grammar-focused lessons were recorded across the school grades. As the analysis proceeds, differences are emerging in the approaches taken to grammar teaching for different age groups; that is, the practices of the early years differ from those observed in the middle years that seem to differ again from those evident in the upper primary classrooms. Winch (2004) points out the lack of theorising around successful pedagogy and what constitutes specialised pedagogic knowledge, arguing for an empirical theory of pedagogy involving teachers through contributions to the research agenda, collaborations between academics and evaluations of such research in practice. He envisages a theory of pedagogy as “a series of cautious but context sensitive generalisations built on a very broad empirical base, whose application is always a matter of situationally aware judgements by practitioners” (2004: 18). Recognising the opportunities offered by the implementation phase of the new curriculum to contribute to an emerging theory of pedagogy for grammatics, this paper focuses on the pedagogic practices observed in two early years classrooms as their teachers worked to weave the new concepts about language into their existing English programs (see Cochrane, Reece, Ahearn & Jones, 2013).

Much teaching of English in primary schools across Australia takes place in the daily morning literacy session, usually of approximately two hours in duration. During this time, students engage in a range of activities to develop skills and understandings in talking and listening, reading and writing. The degree of prescription with respect to the actual composition, content and timing of the activities varies from state to state (shaped by the various syllabuses). However, in our state of NSW this common pedagogic practice can be described as a curriculum genre comprising three stages (Christie 2002; Jones, McIntosh & Kervin 2011) as follows: Lesson Orientation ^ Task Collaborations ^ Lesson Closure. We observed this pattern evident in Figure 1 in all of the 9 lessons observed in the 3 early years classrooms in the school.

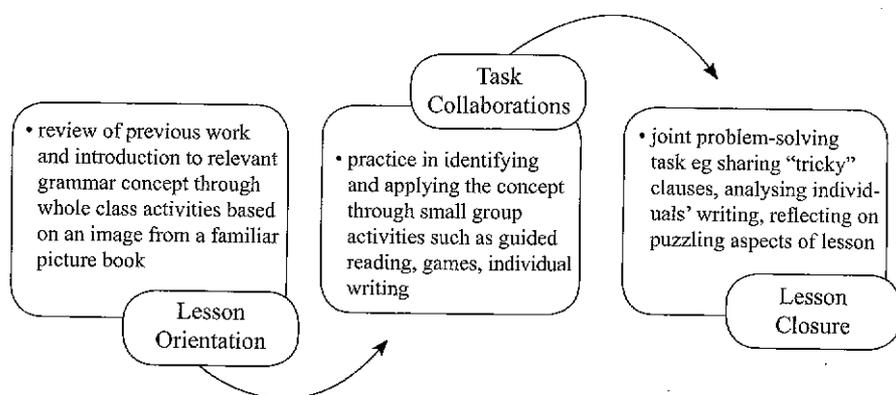


Figure 1 The lesson context

In the lessons, the Orientation was an opportunity for the teachers to engage the students, to review previous work and to introduce new grammatical content with reference to a familiar literary text. During the Task Collaboration stage, the children undertook a range of group activities including reading with their teacher and practising applying their new understandings through carefully selected and often especially designed games, worksheets and computer activities. During the Closure stage, the teacher and children reconvened as a whole group to review the new concepts, often with an application to a new or problematic text.

During the initial classroom observations, two factors stood out: the readiness with which these young children took to learning grammar and the carefully planned nature of the learning environment. We witnessed the children’s intense engagement in the study of language, evident in the ease with which they identified grammatical concepts, the gusto with which they approached the task of analysis as well as their readiness to apply their embryonic skills to new examples. This engagement was fostered by the teachers’ management of the learning contexts to render the new metalinguistic understandings explicit to the children, to support their practice in identifying the features and to enable their application to new texts. Core to this work was the use of multiple semiotic resources (picture books, language, action, colour, gesture, 3D objects) in varying combinations through a range of different participation structures including large group, small group, pair and individual events. This deliberate engineering is evidence of teachers’ pedagogic knowledge and its application to the teaching of grammatics that are the concerns of this paper.

## 5. The “modal ensemble”

Such orchestration resonates with Kress’s notion of the *modal ensemble*. To Kress, the modal ensemble is the result of careful orchestration of different modes or semiotic resources (speech, still image, colour, gesture, action) into a coherent whole (2010: 162). Arguing that several modes are always used together in communication, the modal ensemble is designed so that the mode selected has a specific purpose, apt for the task. For example, in the classroom shown in Figure 2 below, the children have, under the guidance of their teacher, constructed a simple sentence or single clause in response to an image from a familiar children’s picture book. The image depicts a quintessential Australian day at the beach — children are jumping and running in the water, catching waves, watched from a beach umbrella by a couple of adults. The teacher has elicited the following sentence from one of the children and written it onto the interactive whiteboard so that all can see: THE KIDS ARE SPLASHING IN THE WAVES.

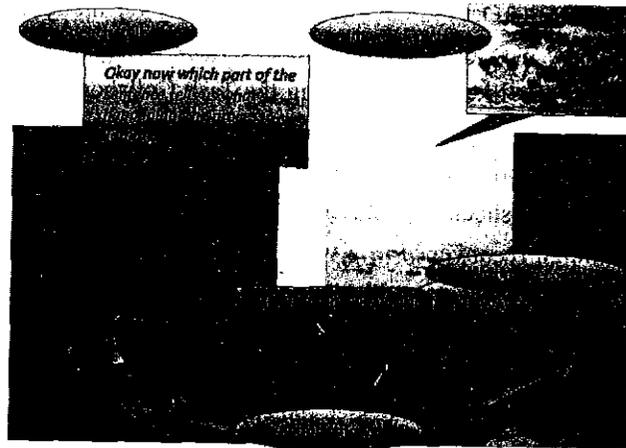


Figure 2 Different modes: different semiotic work

The children are identifying the clause elements with reference to such questions from the teacher as *What's happening?* (for the process), *Who or what is involved?* (for participant/s) and *Is there any extra detail?* (for the circumstance). In this situation like most classroom events, speech is the dominant mode, bearing responsibility for the telling or explaining of key content — the identification and labelling of clause constituents. Image is also important, depicting the field or activity under focus for this activity; that is, contributions about a day at the beach are what is relevant. Action does two jobs; it functions to demonstrate one's willingness to be involved (a hand in the air) as well as to embody the particular material process (one child acts out "splashing"). Writing, records the clause so that everyone has access to it in a graphic form so that it can be analysed according to the conventions of green for process, red for participants and blue for the circumstance. In this respect, colour can be said to frame the relevant constituent, constraining the students' attention to either the process or the participant or the circumstance. To sum up, in the lesson episode depicted in Figure 2, different semiotic resources perform different functions; for example, speech tells, image depicts, action shows, writing records and colour frames. The result is a coherent ensemble that supports the students' early encounters with the grammatical system of Transitivity.

6. Early grammatics as multimodal performance

While such understandings undoubtedly represent abstract and specialised meanings often associated with the later years of schooling, they have been shown to be within the grasp of young learners with teachers' pedagogy key to their acquisition (French 2012, Williams 2005). Indeed the new curriculum describes a cumulative apprenticeship into

ways of thinking about language and meaning with students developing knowledge of grammatical concepts in order to bring the processes of becoming "school literate" under greater control. Butt (2004) also uses the term ensemble to describe the importance of teachers' multimodal design work in supporting students' acquisition of the kinds of meaning making associated with school success. The multimodal ensemble then provides a useful way of understanding teacher's pedagogic expertise in action as they implement the new curriculum. In the following section, I describe several ensembles observed in one of the early years classrooms during the project in order to demonstrate how one teacher used her pedagogic knowledge to bring the knowledge about language of the new curriculum to life in her classroom. The curriculum outcomes relevant to the extracts described are:

Identify the parts of a simple sentence that represent "What's happening?" "Who or what is involved?" and the surrounding circumstances (Yr 1) and Understand that simple connections can be made between ideas by using a compound sentence with two or more clauses usually linked by a coordinating conjunction (Yr 2) (ACARA 2014).

Because speech is the dominant semiotic resource available to the teacher and students, the interactions are initially analysed with reference to the pedagogic exchange (Rose & Martin 2012: 262), a functionally oriented framework for describing the negotiation of information during literacy lessons. Lessons stages shown in Figure 1 may be thought of as comprising a series of pedagogic exchanges closely related to the system of Negotiation (Martin 1992). The nucleus of a pedagogic exchange is an obligatory Task (for example, to identify a clause element, to proffer a simple clause, to demonstrate a material process), a Focus move from the teacher (directing children's attention, demanding information) and an Evaluative move usually from the teacher (affirming a correct response, rejecting an unsuccessful). Optional moves include an initial Prepare move in which the children as a group are set up for success and a final Elaboration move which extends or explains the successful response, often linking it to other contexts or texts. These moves are illustrated in Figure 3.

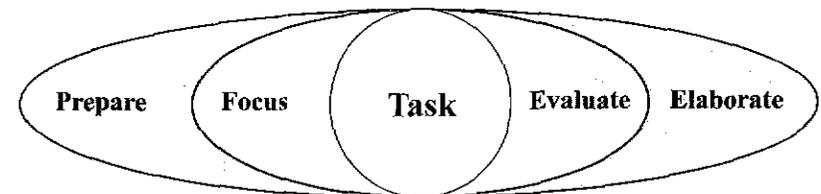


Figure 3 The pedagogic exchange (Rose & Martin 2012)

The pedagogic exchange, because of its semantic orientation, enables analysis to consider the contribution of semiotic resources other than speech to the ensemble. The following extract shows the talk that occurred as the teacher and students parse the clause provided by one of the students in response to the image from the picture book: THE KIDS ARE SPLASHING IN THE WAVES (as we have seen Figure 2). Here the teacher steps through the analysis of the clause from process to participant to circumstance — an exercise which is still quite new to the children.

**Table 1** Extract from parsing “The kids are splashing in the waves”

| Ex   | Phase     | Spk   | Speech   | Other modes   |
|--|-----------|-------|--|---|
| (Ex = exchange, Spk = speaker, tchr = teacher) |           |       |  |   |
| 1  | focus     | tchr: | <i>Okay now which part of the sentence tells us what's happening, the process? Tommy</i>         | tchr uses rounded gesture with both hands and splayed fingers |
|  | identify  | T:    | <i>“are splashing”</i>   |   |
|  | affirm    | tchr: | <i>Excellent.</i>  |   |
| 2  | direct    |       | <i>Can you show me “are splashing”? Stand up and show me “splashing” ... or someone else?...</i> |   |
|  |           |       | <i>Sam, show me splashing.</i>   | Sam acts out splashing  |
|  | comply    | S:    | <i>NV (muc laughing)</i>   |   |
|  | affirm    | tchr: | <i>Allright. Fabulous. Go and sit down.</i>  |   |
|  | elaborate |       | <i>So I'm going to make that green</i>   | tchr changes “are splashing” to green on IWB                  |
| 3  | focus     |       | <i>Okay who or what? Frankie</i>   | tchr uses open hands with palms up gesture                    |
|  | identify  | F:    | <i>The kids</i>  |   |
|  | affirm    | tchr: | <i>Excellent</i>   |   |
|  | elaborate |       | <i>So I'm going to make that red for the participant</i>   | tchr changes “the kids” to red on IWB                         |
| 4  | focus     |       | <i>and is there any other information? Where, when or how? Alex</i>                              | tchr uses open hands, palms up gesture again                  |
|  | identify  | A:    | <i>In the waves</i>  |   |
|  | elaborate | tchr: | <i>So, what colour are we going to make that one?</i>  |   |
|  | propose   | A:    | <i>Blue</i>  | tchr changes “in the waves” to blue on the IWB                |
|  | fantastic | tchr: | <i>Fantastic</i>   |   |

The students successfully identify the clause elements, supported by the teacher in a number of scaffolding moves. Firstly, she uses the question probes introduced in the previous lesson and referred to in the curriculum content: *What's happening? Who or*

*what is involved? Is there any extra information?* She is careful to provide the functional labels of process and participant so students see the technical term and the question probe as synonymous, thus she links everyday understandings with more abstract technically oriented language. At the same time, other semiotic resources such as action, gesture and colour are used to co-ordinate the children's attention with the teacher's instructional goals.

For example, Sam's demonstration of the process as a physical action (exchange 2) emphasises the concrete, physical activity at the heart of the idea realised in the clause. The children were frequently asked to act out the process in the lessons observed, made possible by the use of texts featuring heavy use of material processes. Usually individual children would be asked to demonstrate a particular instance after it had been identified verbally (as we see above), but at other times the identification phase required children to respond physically as their teacher read a passage from the book — an activity they took to with much pleasure.

The teacher's gestures also play an important role in the multimodal ensemble described here and in others observed. The request to identify “what's happening” or the process was often accompanied by holding both hands in a rounded gesture with splayed fingers. A request to identify “who or what” or the participant was usually accompanied by open hands with palms up while the “*any extra information?*” or circumstance probe was marked by a similar gesture with hands held a little more widely. Importantly, these gestures are used in the focus phase of the exchange to emphasise what is conceptually salient to the exchange, narrowing the choice by indicating that only part of the clause is relevant. Such scaffolding by “limitation” resonates with Feez's description of redundancy and constraint in Montessori pedagogy (2008).

Colour is an integral mode in this ensemble, serving in the elaboration phase to highlight and record the instance so that it may be retrieved later. Responsibility for colour coding is handed over to Alex in the extended elaboration phase of exchange 4, her confident accomplishment of the task enabled by participating in earlier cycles of interaction with consistent, patterned use of question probes and colour.

Thus, the ensemble described above is a careful and purposeful orchestration of meaning-making resources of which speech emerges as most dominant but in concert with other resources according to their “fit”. Kress points out that modal ensembles offer a choice of routes of meaning-making in interpretation which the students can take up according to their interests (2010: 165). In the exchange above, children are offered a number of routes into the task of parsing the clause; that is, they may choose to identify an instance by its probe (*What's happening?*), its colour (green) or its functional label (the process). This choice is important when coming to terms with a concept initially. Later in the lesson sequence after some encounters with processes realised as phrasal verbs, one child Tilly

draws on the probe and the colour label to identify the process and circumstances in the following clause: LUIS AND ANNA ARE LOOKING THROUGH THE CHEST.

Tilly: *Well I think the green bit is "are looking" and the blue is "through the chest" because where are they looking? They're looking through the chest.*

The probe questions are returned to again and again with different texts and new situations, colour is kept consistent and functional labels are used in close quarters with both of these. They appeared on playing boards for dice games, dice faces, spinner games, jumbled sentence strips, worksheets and blog tasks. In one such example, the modal ensemble is reconfigured in a game that required the children to roll a dice and land on squares that were colour-coded and featured the question probes as well as the functional labels<sup>[2]</sup>. Here the modal ensemble must be quite extravagant to compensate for the absence of teacher in the activity. It comprises speech, writing in the form of colour coded sentences on "chance cards", 3D objects such as the dice featuring colour coding, probes and functional labels on each face. The playing board squares offer similar redundancy with squares distinguished by colour, probe and functional label interspersed with "miss a turn" or "have another turn" squares.

Table 2 Extract from "The Dice Game"

| Ex | Phase       | Spk  | Speech   | Other modes  |
|----|-------------|------|--|--|
| 1  | identify    | Sam: | <i>Five NV</i>   | Sam rolls dice, and moves 5 places to land on green square on the playing board                                    |
| 2  | prepare     | Kai: | <i>What's happening ...</i>                                      | Kai reads from square on the playing board, picks up a sentence card holding it so that Sam can't see the sentence |
|    | focus       |      | <i>THE BOY WITH THE SHORT BROWN HAIR IS LOOKING IN THE CHEST</i> | Kai reads sentence   |
|    | propose     | Sam: | <i>is looking in the chest?</i>                                  |  |
|    | reject      | Kai: | <i>Sorry, is looking</i>   | Kai shows card with colour coding on it  |
|    | elaboration |      | <i>see where is he looking? in the chest</i>                     | Sam looks at sentence card<br>Kai points to circumstance   |
|    | react       | Sam: | <i>Oh</i>  |  |

In the extract, Sam, Kai and two other children are playing the game in which the pedagogic exchange takes on a different complexion. Not surprisingly, the modal resources are distributed a little differently in the game than in the lesson extract already described. The "direct" phase occurs rarely as it is taken up by kinaesthetic

features of the game; that is, the dice roll and subsequent movement and the turn-taking conventions. While speech is still a dominant mode, action is co-occurs more frequently with speech, particularly in the "prepare" and "reject/accept" phases. Here Sam is required to identify "What's happening?" in the following clause selected and read by Kai: THE BOY WITH THE SHORT BROWN HAIR IS LOOKING THROUGH THE CHEST. Unfortunately, Sam's response (*is looking through the chest*) fails to isolate the process but the carefully designed ensemble enables Kai to gently and productively correct the response with an elaboration (usually the task of the teacher) using a probe for a circumstance of place (*See, where is he looking?*) together with the colour coding of the sentence of the chance card.

Games such as these were a key feature of the grammatics pedagogy in the early years classrooms at this school. The teachers collaborated to design several games that made increasingly challenging demands on the children yet enable them to practice identifying and using the language features under focus. The supportive and dialogic nature of these activities together with the cognitive challenge were a major factor in the students' engagement and success with the grammatics curriculum (Cochrane, Reece, Ahearn & Jones 2013).

### 7. Critical abstraction in early grammatics

The multimodal ensembles observed across the series of lessons were made and remade around a relatively limited set of semiotic resources in order to maximise their pedagogic impact. Presenting (and "re-presenting") concepts as described above is associated with what Butt has termed "a critical abstraction":

Any concept which bring out the options in ways of envisaging and encoding a phenomenon, with the emphasis here on the consequences of semiotics strategies more broadly (e.g. whether to use iconic, verbal, numeric, algebraic, musical or even ostensive modes of setting out results and relations). (2004: 224)

A critical abstraction often takes the form of a definition and frequently involves a deliberate selection and integration of semiotic resources to engage students and to focus their attention on the relevant, thus strengthening the conceptual work at hand. Importantly, the critical abstraction serves to bridge the known and the new for the learners. In this case, the modes of speech, writing, colour, and action into series of defining and exemplifying relations that circulated through the pedagogic exchanges and supported the students into grammatics as they were ready; for example:

续表

|                            |                         |                 |  |            |                            |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--|------------|----------------------------|
| <i>I</i>                   | <i>'m going to make</i> | <i>that</i>     | <i>(be)</i>                            | <i>red</i> | <i>for the participant</i> |
| Assigner                   | Pro:                    | Token           | identifying                            | Value      | Cir: cause: reason         |
| <i>ON THE FLOOR — that</i> |                         | <i>would be</i> | <i>our blue part, our circumstance</i> |            |                            |
| Token                      | Pro: identifying        |                 | Value                                  |            |                            |

And in an explanation of how to play the dice game described above, the symbolic nature of the relations came to the fore:

|                              |                  |                                      |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>All the green squares</i> | <i>match</i>     | <i>our process, what's happening</i> |
| Token (symbol)               | Pro: identifying | Value (symbolised)                   |

The patterned co-deployment of talk, the written instances, functional labels, question probes and colour conventions across several lessons is akin to a critical abstraction, albeit a sprawling and diffuse version of that described by Butt (2004: 224).

A more contained example of a critical abstraction emerged in a different modal ensemble as the teacher explains the concepts of the clause and clause complex. She and a small group of children are seated around a cluster of tables, each with a small book in front of them, open at a page with the following text: HE SWAM UNTIL HE FOUND A QUIET SPOT, CLIMBED UPON A LILY PAD AND BEGAN TO CROAK.

Table 3 Introducing the clause complex

| Ex | Phase   | Spk   | Speech   | Other modes  |
|----|---------|-------|--|--|
| 1  | prepare | tchr: | <i>That first sentence, there's a... there's a few things happening in that first sentence</i> |  |
|    | focus   |       | <i>I want you to see how many processes you can find in the first sentence ... (13 secs)</i>   | tchr uses hand gesture for process, rounded with splayed fingers chn read the text, placing fingers on processes, one holds his fingers up |
|    |         | Ss:   | <i>NV</i>  |  |
| 2  | direct  | tchr: | <i>Hold your hands ... fingers up to show me how many processes you found</i>                  |  |
|    | comply  | Ss:   | <i>NV</i>  | chn hold up 3 or 4 fingers   |
| 3  | focus   | tchr: | <i>Right, Sam tell me one that you've found</i>  |  |
|    | identif | S:    | <i>Ah where he croaked</i>   |  |
|    | affirm  | tchr: | <i>croak, yep, began to croak, good</i>  |  |

|   |           |       |   |  |
|---|-----------|-------|---|--|
| 4 | focus     |       | <i>Tilly?</i>   |  |
|   | identify  | T:    | <i>climbed upon</i>   |  |
|   | affirm    | tchr: | <i>climbed good</i>   |  |
| 5 | focus     |       | <i>croaked, climbed, Bess?</i>  | tchr counts off on her fingers   |
|   | identify  | B:    | <i>I've got swam</i>  |  |
|   | affirm    | tchr: | <i>And swam</i>   |  |
|   | elaborate |       | <i>Can you see how in one sentence we can have more than one thing happening?</i>   | tchr uses open hands, palms up; process gesture × 3                            |
| 6 | focus     |       | <i>Does anyone know what each part of that sentence is called when there's a different process</i>                                | tchr uses process gesture × 3  |
|   |           | Ss:   | <i>NV</i>   |  |
|   | elaborate | tchr: | <i>That's ... that's called our clause —that part of meaning — what's happening and we can have more than one in one sentence</i> | tchr process gesture × 1; spherical gesture with hands and process gesture × 3 |
|   | react     | Ss:   | <i>Ohhh!</i>  |  |

This episode took place immediately after event illustrated in the extract above. It is one of the collaborative tasks and a moment at which, as she explained later, the teacher realised that the children needed to understand a clause complex in order to apply their newfound knowledge to this instance.

Once more, speech dominates the ensemble and written text in the book serves to anchor the activity. However these come into play without either the colour afforded by the IWB or the space for physical action available in the preceding activity. In such absence, gesture — of teacher and the children — is foregrounded. Each time the teacher used the word “process” (exchanges 1, 5 & 6) it was accompanied by rounding gesture with both hands and splayed fingers. Early in the dialogue, the children are called upon to locate and count the processes in the focus clause by using their fingers (*swam, found, climbed, began to croak*). When one child holds up the fingers to indicate how many he has found, the teacher asks the others to do the same. In this way, we are reminded that the ensemble is jointly performed, with teacher and children taking their cues from each other. Then as these processes are identified, the teacher counts off on her own fingers. Exchanges 5 and 6 contain what can be considered the critical abstraction here, “*That [each part of the sentence where there's a different process] is called a clause ... and we can have more than one in one sentence*”. In the final exchanges she accompanied the term “clause” with the same gesture repeated three times (exchange 6), emphasising the close relationship between the clause and process and in turn the clause and clause complex. The children’s relieved reaction (*Ohhhh!*) at the conclusion of the exchange indicates they readily understood this concept. This is an

example of her pedagogic knowledge coming to the fore as she draws on the resources immediately available to scaffold her explanation to the children.

And so in a relatively short space of time, the teacher takes her young charges along a fairly sophisticated conceptual trail; from recognising the action in a material clause to identifying it as a process in a configuration with other clause elements, to understanding that some sentences have more than one process and finally to recognising the clause complex. From here, they proceed to consider the conjunctive relations between clauses. These are concepts that challenge many undergraduate education students yet are within the grasp of these 7- and 8-year-old children. Such conceptual growth is made possible by the teacher's use of available semiotic resources, her recognition of what modes are available, the aptness of each for aspects of semiotic work and how these might be orchestrated minute by minute in successive pedagogic exchanges in order to support concept acquisition.

## 8. Conclusion

To conclude, such pedagogic expertise is remarkable yet there is much to learn about its nature, acquisition and development as well as its relationship to other aspects of teachers' expertise. As Butt points out, it is unfortunate that "more linguists have not turned their analysis onto the semantic complexity of such activity, and then onto the cultural and evolutionary significance of such virtuosity in human interaction" (2004: 236). The modal ensemble offers a starting point for such work, recognising as it does the stretch of pedagogy in terms of semiotic resources and its collaborative performance. The construct of the critical abstraction adds an ideational dimension to Kress's work, ensuring that the pedagogic purpose of the modal ensemble is kept in place. However, we need access to many classrooms where teachers are bringing their pedagogic knowledge to bear on their developing linguistic knowledge. These are sites where our analytical tools can go to work to produce descriptions of pedagogic expertise for research, policy and practice fields with a view to developing "the series of cautious but context-sensitive generalizations" (Winch 2004) about pedagogic expertise for grammatics in different settings and across the years of schooling.

## Notes

[ 1 ] Because various Australian states retained responsibility for recontextualising the curriculum as state syllabuses, the curriculum has taken on different complexions according to each state's policy decisions. As a result, the knowledge about language described in the original national documents is not always immediately

recognisable in the state documents. The research took place in the state of NSW but our focus was on the outcomes of the AC:E.

[ 2 ] Templates for this game and others designed by the teachers in the project can be found at <http://educationalsemiotics.wordpress.com/>.

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## Expressions of Modality in the Clause Complex of Chinese: "Marked" Markers of the Logico-semantic Relation of Expansion

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### 1. Introduction

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), expressions of modality are often treated as interpersonal resources that indicate the speaker's assessment of the proposition in terms of probability or obligation (Halliday 1994). They serve in the interpersonal structure of the clause either as modal adjuncts or as the finite element expressing the speaker's modal judgment. This paper argues that, expressions of modality, apart from functioning as interpersonal expressions, also serve in the clause complex of Chinese as conjunctive markers. They can indicate the logico-semantic relation of expansion, expressing modal meanings and simultaneously constructing clauses into a clause complex.

The role that expressions of modality play in the clause complex has received very little attention in the literature. Thompson and Zhou (2001) briefly mention that modal adjuncts such as "perhaps" and "maybe", as a subcategory of disjuncts, can signal the alternative relation in text. However, their main focus is on the cohesive function of disjuncts in text.

Expressions of modality functioning as conjunctive markers in the clause complex of Chinese are also largely unaccounted for. Xing (2001) touches upon this topic by listing a few sentence patterns in which expressions of modality function as conjunctions. However, the reasons that modals can function in this way are not discussed in his work.

The present paper aims to fill in this gap and examines the role that expressions of modality play in the logical metafunction. It will first briefly introduce the system of the clause complex in Modern Chinese, concentrating particularly on its subsystem of expansion, and then will deal with the logico-semantic relations that expressions of modality convey in the clause complex of Chinese.