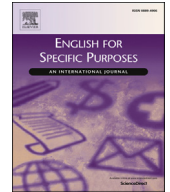


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

# English for Specific Purposes

journal homepage: <http://ees.elsevier.com/esp/default.asp>

From the Editors

## Scaffolding the argument genre in a multilingual university history classroom: Tracking the writing development of novice and experienced writers

Silvia Pessoa<sup>a,\*</sup>, Thomas D. Mitchell<sup>a</sup>, Ryan T. Miller<sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, P.O. Box 24866, Doha, Qatar<sup>b</sup> Kent State University, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*

*Keywords:*

Writing development  
Argument genre  
History  
Systemic functional linguistics

### ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an SFL-based writing intervention in a university global histories course and examines differences in developmental trajectories among students after the intervention. Based on our previous research on writing in this course, we developed three Systemic Functional Linguistics-based workshops to explicitly teach valued linguistic resources necessary for meeting the expectations of writing historical arguments. We examine how student writing developed among nine focal students both quantitatively and qualitatively using an SFL-based rubric that we developed for the purposes of this study. We focus closely on two students, a novice and an experienced writer of academic English, by providing a detailed analysis of how they progressed differently towards incorporating the targeted linguistic resources. Our analysis suggests that explicit disciplinary writing instruction can help close the gap between novice and experienced academic writers; however, experienced writers also showed gains. Given the limited research on how intervention studies affect writing, particularly at the university level, this study can help teachers and researchers respond to the needs of the increasingly linguistically diverse students in higher education.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

In history classes, students are expected to show their knowledge and understanding by writing arguments, particularly at the secondary and post-secondary levels (de Oliveira, 2011). The social purpose of the school history Argument genre is to argue “the case ‘for’ or ‘against’ a particular interpretation of the past and foreground the debatable nature of historical knowledge” (Coffin, 2006a, p.77). Research on the disciplinary expectations of school history arguments shows that to write effective arguments in history, students must evaluate information and perspectives, select and interpret evidence to support their claims, and show the tentativeness of historical information (Coffin, 2006a; Monte-Sano, 2010, 2008; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2012). This requires students to control a range of linguistic resources. Particularly important to historical arguments are interpersonal resources that allow writers to incorporate outside perspectives as evidence for

\* Corresponding author. Qatar Office SMC 1070, 5032 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15289, USA

E-mail addresses: [spessoa@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:spessoa@andrew.cmu.edu) (S. Pessoa), [tmitchel@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:tmitchel@andrew.cmu.edu) (T.D. Mitchell), [rmill129@kent.edu](mailto:rmill129@kent.edu) (R.T. Miller).

their own position, acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives, and position the reader consistently (Coffin, 2006a; Schleppegrell, 2006).

However, many students, especially novice writers of academic English, face challenges controlling the linguistic resources of the argument genre (De La Paz, Ferreti, Wissinger, Yee, & MacArthur, 2012; Miller, Mitchell, & Pessoa, 2014, 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2016; Mitchell, Miller, & Pessoa, 2016; Mitchell & Pessoa, 2017; Monte-Sano, 2008; Pessoa, Mitchell, & Miller, 2017; Schleppegrell, 2005, 2006). As a result, students may write non-argument genres, inconsistent arguments, or arguments that meet some but not all genre expectations (Miller et al., 2016, 2014; Mitchell, et al., 2016; Mitchell & Pessoa, 2017; Monte-Sano, 2008; Pessoa, et al., 2017; Schleppegrell, 2006).

A growing body of research has attempted to address these challenges by highlighting the importance of explicit disciplinary writing instruction (De La Paz, 2005; De La Paz & Felton, 2010; De La Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano, & Montano, 2011; Monte-Sano, 2008, 2010; 2011). These studies show that with instruction in discipline-specific argument writing students can construct more accurate and better organized arguments that are effectively grounded in source-based evidence. This research also emphasizes differences in student writing development. For instance, it has been reported that initial differences in skills significantly impact how students develop (De La Paz et al., 2011), with stronger student writers using and evaluating text-based evidence more often and effectively than novice writers (De La Paz et al., 2012). While these studies have generated positive outcomes, they have had a limited focus on the linguistic resources needed to write effective arguments and have not provided detailed descriptions of writing development.

On the other hand, studies using an SFL framework have focused on describing the linguistic features of argumentative writing and students' challenges with this genre (Coffin, 2006a; Miller, et al., 2016; Miller & Pessoa, 2016; Mitchell, et al., 2016; Mitchell & Pessoa, 2017; de Oliveira, 2011; Pessoa, et al., 2017; Schleppegrell, 2006). Based on her seminal work on school history genres, Coffin (2006b) briefly reports on improvement in student writing over time, particularly in text structure and organization, with limited improvement in grammatical accuracy. Coffin calls for more studies that focus on collaborations between language experts and disciplinary teachers to make explicit the linguistic resources of the genres of history to help students develop their academic writing. Furthermore, overall, few SFL-based studies have focused on documenting student outcomes after literacy interventions.

### 1.1. Systemic functional linguistics for analyzing and scaffolding the history argument genre

In this paper, we report on an SFL-based collaborative intervention between faculty in English with expertise in SFL and a history professor to scaffold the writing of the argument genre, and examine differences in developmental trajectories after the intervention. Our approach to scaffolding writing in the history classroom is grounded in SFL because previous SFL research provides rich descriptions of school history genres and their disciplinary expectations with an explicit focus on language (e.g., Christie, 2012; Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Coffin, 2006a; de Oliveira, 2011; Schleppegrell, 2014, 2006). SFL defines genre as a “staged, goal-oriented, social process” (Martin, 1992, p. 505) and provides tools to investigate how language is used to make meaning to achieve the goals of a genre. SFL-based genre instruction aims to make language choices explicit to students and scaffold production of increasingly complex genres. Such instruction has been found to be effective for improving academic writing, but has mostly focused on primary and secondary school (e.g., Brisk, 2014) with limited work at the university level (however, see Dreyfus, Humphrey, Mahboob, & Martin, 2016).

SFL has also been used for the study of student writing development. From an SFL perspective, writing development may be understood as “a shift from commonsense ways of knowing to new forms of knowledge that are distinct and distinctive for educational knowledge” (Byrnes, 2006, p. 4). This development can be tracked by documenting the lexico-grammatical and discourse semantic features (of either general academic writing or specific disciplinary genres) that learners produce over time (e.g. Christie & Derewianka, 2008). Using this conceptualization of writing development, Achugar and Carpenter (2014) found that linguistically diverse students in a history course made progress toward using ways of reasoning and arguing typical of history. However, students developed in different ways based on their available linguistic resources, backgrounds, and experiences. Thus, the authors argue that “it is important to document academic language development in qualitative ways that capture the complexity of development considering constellations of linguistic features and how they function to serve discipline specific ways of making meaning” (p. 60). In this study, we build on this work by using both *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods based on an SFL framework – the  $3 \times 3$  toolkit – which allows for the detailed examination of the complexity of student writing development.

### 1.2. The $3 \times 3$ toolkit for the conceptualization and analysis of history argument

In the intervention and our analysis of student writing, we conceptualize the Argument genre in history using the SFL-based  $3 \times 3$  toolkit. The  $3 \times 3$  toolkit was created to assist instructors in describing key linguistic features of particular academic genres (Humphrey, Martin, Dreyfus, & Mahboob, 2010). Based on Humphrey et al.'s  $3 \times 3$ , prior SFL research on argumentative writing in history (e.g., Coffin, 2006a), and our own previous research on writing in the history course under study (Miller, et al., 2016, 2014; Miller & Pessoa, 2016; Mitchell, et al., 2016; Mitchell & Pessoa, 2017; Pessoa, et al., 2017), we

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6841027>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6841027>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)