| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Assessing Students' Writing via an SFL-Based Functional Language Analysis: Why and How

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| **ABSTRACT**

Writing assessment is a crucial practice in the success of teaching and learning a specific genre. The relevant literature highlights that assessing the written literacy levels of students should be well-designed in order to meet their learning needs and achieve clearly articulated goals. It also points out that there are several unaddressed issues in the existing approaches to writing assessment. Accordingly, this review paper aims to discuss some of those issues, in particular, those around the functional language analysis method, which rests upon Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). One of the concerns in such an approach is what the potential limitations might be when using only purely quantitative analysis, which simply calculates the frequency of a given linguistic resource in a student's writing to investigate his/her development. This review article maintains that quantitative analysis alone will offer limited insights into students' written literacy development. Therefore, it suggests employing a linguistically-observant method based on concrete stylistic evidence that considers both quantitative analyses and qualitative observations for judging written literacy levels. It concludes that this combination will prove effective for offering useful insights into writing assessment and making well-founded conclusions on how to track and gauge written literacy development.

1. Introduction

Writing is a key literacy skill crucial to students' academic achievement in different educational settings. It is a skill that needs not only to be well developed by language learners but also efficiently measured by, for example, language teachers. The literature on writing assessment in higher education indicates that there is widespread discontent among students in regard to the quality of feedback on their texts because it lacks specificity, clarity, usability, and sufficiency (e.g., Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008; Tuck, 2017; Walker, 2009; Yang & Carless, 2013). Therefore, writing assessments should be made more responsive to students' learning needs and wants. Fang and Wang (2011) also point out that writing assessment should assist teachers in determining students' competence levels, as well as offering insights into their strengths for building on and weaknesses for remediation. Hence, employing a method that fulfils students' needs, reliably measures their writing performance, and credibly identifies their trajectories of literacy development is a goal of every ambitious language teacher. This can be achieved by addressing two main issues: (1) how to form consistent and systematic judgements of literacy level; and (2) how to give a detailed description of the linguistic features in written discourse in order to form such judgements. This review essay is, thus, an attempt to provide some answers to these questions. That is, it engages with issues raised by the existing approaches to the assessment of writing.

Accordingly, the overriding purpose of this review paper is to advocate a methodology for effectively assessing students' writing and tracing their trajectories of literacy development. More specifically, it is concerned with discussing how an analysis deriving from Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL), including a wide range of linguistic options, might be usable to identify,

measure, and evaluate progress in the written literacy level of students. Drawing inspiration from previous related research, this review article also questions whether a purely SFL-based quantitative analysis is sufficient to produce useful insights into students' literacy development or whether a qualitative analysis is also required to serve such a purpose.

The relevant literature observes that a number of approaches have been widely used to examine progress in students' writing, such as portfolio-based assessment and rubrics-based assessment. However, I take the position that such approaches do not typically seek to employ detailed and systematic linguistic analyses in order to ground the gradings or assessments by which a student's writing is ranked. They do have a role to play in various educational settings, but they only provide limited insights into the linguistic bases on which a student's writing can be determined to be at a particular stage of development. To exemplify, portfolio-based assessment focuses on collecting materials used by a student over a period of time to produce a text in a given genre and ignores how these materials might be graded or ranked in terms of his/her literacy development. So, with such an approach, grading criteria are difficult to be determined (Wang & He, 2020). Rubrics-based assessment, in contrast, allows teachers to point to students' grammatical errors in the apparent writing aspects such as spelling, tense, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement, but it does not give them solid textual evidence to look at when they assess their students' written texts in terms of content, organisation and language use (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). To a large extent, teachers employing such an approach depend on their intuitions to make judgements about their students' written literacy development (Fang & Wang, 2011). Accordingly, rubrics-based assessment does not offer an objective account of students' writing competence. I, therefore, argue that the functional language analysis method, which is grounded in SFL scholarly tradition (see, for example, Halliday, 1985a; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), is not an impressionistic tool that relies on the discursive knowledge of teachers. It rather gauges students' writing accurately, providing analytical tools that allow teachers to thoroughly examine the linguistic choices made by students in their written texts and assess whether such choices are appropriate for the target genre. It also offers systematic insights into what students are able to do or struggle to do communicatively. As Byrnes (2009) puts it, "an approach to L2 writing development that is informed by SFL can contribute to richer theoretical, empirical, and educational practices in support of learners' literacy development" (p. 50). This approach has been highly influential in the field of literacy development and been employed by many researchers across a range of various educational settings (see, for instance, Alshehri, 2024; Colombi, 2002; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008, 2010; Fang & Wang, 2011; Go, 2003; Nagao, 2018; Shrestha, 2020; Srinon, 2011; Velázquez-Mendoza, 2015; Woodward-Kron, 2002).

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

As previously outlined, functional language analysis is grounded in SFL theory. So, prior to discussing scholarship that has employed such a method to evaluate written literacy development, the major tenets of SFL, specifically those pertaining to metafunctions, register, and genre, will first be reviewed. This is because functional language analysis allows language teachers to judge students' writing based on various features drawn from these SFL fundamental constituents. This will be explained further in the next section.

2.1 Metafunctions

SFL theory deals with language as a functional system that makes meanings that are impacted by the social and cultural contexts where they are used. It holds that language performs three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These are briefly discussed in turn below.

The ideational metafunction covers lexical and grammatical resources that directly represent our experience of the mental (internal) world as well as the social and physical (external) world. It involves experiential and logical meanings. The experiential meaning uses language to offer a description of human experience, while the logical meaning uses language to integrate units of grammar into complexes, thus creating various logical relationships (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The interpersonal metafunction includes lexical and grammatical resources that determine the relationship between participants, taking into account their interactive relationships and social roles. Therefore, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on interaction, offering various resources such as demanding goods and services (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The textual metafunction involves lexical and grammatical resources that present language as an organised message. It turns both experiential and interpersonal meanings into a text, entailing aspects such as thematic structure and cohesion (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

2.2 Register

In the SFL model of language, the above three metafunctions are associated with various facets of the social context. This means that specific linguistic choices or meanings in a text show three variables within the immediate context of the situation (register): 'Field,' 'Tenor,' and 'Mode.' To elaborate, Field is concerned with the social activity being described; Tenor attends to the roles and

interactive relationships between interlocutors; and Mode is the construction of the text in terms of whether the communication is performed by spoken or written forms. These three register variables are realised by ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings, respectively. Accordingly, any given register reflects a particular context of Field, Tenor, and Mode via distinctive lexical and grammatical choices of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 below.
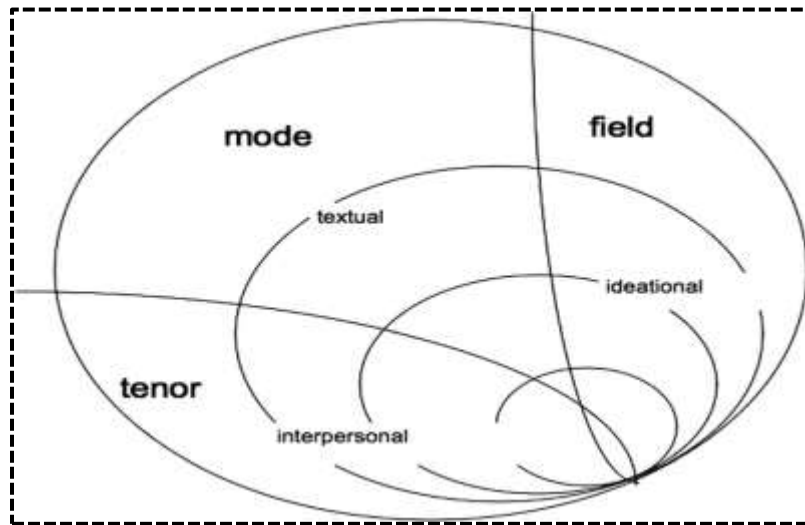

Figure 1. Register in SFL theory (adopted from Martin, 2014, p. 12)

2.3 Genre

The notion of 'genre' in the SFL model of language has been developed mainly by James Martin and other scholars such as Susan Feez, Frances Christie, Mary Macken-Horarik, and Gunter Plum in the late 1980s (Martin and Rose, 2008). In this theory, the genre has been given a number of definitions. For example, Hammond and Derewianka (2001) state that it is the anticipated and recurrent types of texts that occur regularly in a particular culture. More technically, Martin (2009) defines it as "a staged, goal-oriented social process" (p. 13).

- staged: because it usually takes us more than one phase of meaning to work through a genre,

- goal-oriented: because unfolding phases are designed to accomplish something, and we feel a sense of frustration or incompleteness if we are stopped,

- social: because we undertake genres interactively with others.

Genre also "involves a particular configuration of Field, Tenor, and Mode variables" (Martin, 1992, p. 157). Hence, it is not possible to be recognised within these three register variables. Rather, it is modelled beyond register as the stratum of culture, and thus he departed from Halliday's model of social context (see, for instance, Halliday & Hasan, 1985, 1989). This means that each genre is determined by particular linguistic selections from the three variables of register, as presented in Figure 2 below.
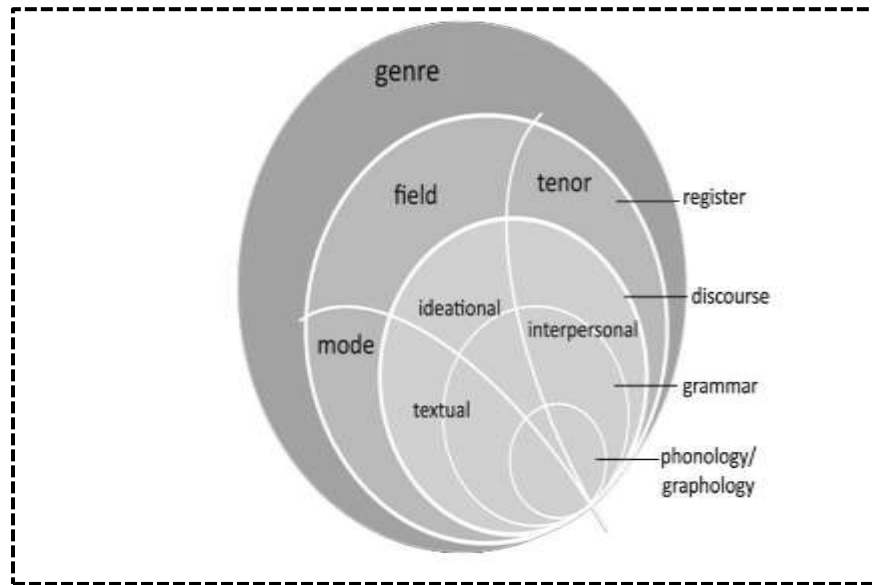
Figure 2. Genre in SFL theory (adopted from Rose, 2013, p. 236)

2.4 SFL-based Studies of Literacy Development

Below is a review of some case studies that are informed by SFL theory. These studies deal with students' use of particular linguistic features in their writing and hence have provided guidance in proposing a methodology to track and assess students' written literacy levels.

A longitudinal study over three years was conducted by Woodward-Kron (2002) to track and examine the academic writing of Australian university students. Data were collected from sixteen students and four tutors through questionnaires, interviews, and written assignments. Accordingly, ethnographic and discourse analytical methods were employed in this study.

Woodward-Kron (2002) assessed students' written texts in terms of multiple features: structural arrangement; the three variables of register – i.e., field, tenor, and mode – and resources of ideational meanings – i.e., experiential and logical meanings. She specifically tacked students' use of clause boundaries, grammatical metaphor, reasoning and explaining, and technicality and abstraction.

Woodward-Kron (2002) observed that students had shown growth in their academic writing since their texts included (1) technical terms; (2) instances of grammatical metaphor to organise arguments; (3) more lexicogrammatical choices; and (4) more reasoning and abstract generic thing types.

Woodward-Kron (2002) employed a qualitative approach to evaluate trajectories of literacy development in students' written texts and identify what progress in these textual qualities implied from a communicative perspective. To exemplify, students' deployment of experiential and interpersonal grammatical metaphors in their texts was scrutinised. Also, students' use of Process types was taken into account to determine clause boundaries by looking at verbs that involve dual properties such as *indicate*, *show*, and *demonstrate*.

Woodward-Kron (2002) also deployed a quantitative method to investigate two linguistic resources in students' written texts: abstraction and technicality. She traced the frequencies of such patterns and observed a rise in their use in students' written texts, which was seen as a sign of 'progress.' This may indicate that a higher frequency in the deployment of these resources can be regarded as a sign of 'improvement' in students' written texts.

Colombi (2002) also carried out a study over nine months to explore the ability of Latino college-level bilingual students to improve their academic language. She precisely tracked changes associated with lexical density and grammatical intricacy in the writing of two students. Colombi (2002) observed that in the written texts of these two students, proportions of lexical density rose, and rates of grammatical intricacy declined. Therefore, such students composed texts in a more advanced style, following Halliday (1985a, 1994), who stated that these two linguistic resources are used to distinguish between spoken and written styles or texts. To be more specific, spoken style texts are less lexically dense and more grammatically intricate than written style texts.

According to the quantitative analysis conducted, Colombi (2002) concluded that there were signs of development in students' writing. Precisely, she observed that the rates of grammatical intricacies in the writing of the two students had decreased from 2.45 and 2.1 to 1.4 and 1.8, respectively, while the proportions of lexical densities had increased from 43.2% and 44.9% to 50.8% and 45.9% respectively. However, qualitative indicators as to what was at stake communicatively in such changes and why and how this transition to the written mode took place were not considered.

Another study over one academic year was carried out by Go (2003) to investigate the writing of Vietnamese and Chinese bilingual students learning English in fifth and sixth grades in the US. Go (2003) gathered data from six newcomer students with limited English proficiency. An SFL-based linguistic analysis approach was adopted in this study to explore patterns of development in students' writing. This involved both quantitative text analysis in inspecting word count, content words, clauses, and lexical density, as well as genre-based text analysis to scrutinise the use of schematic structures, reference chains, and thematic development in different genres. She also investigated factors that might impact students' writing development via qualitative tools, such as home visits, classroom observation, and interviews with family members, students, and classroom teachers, so as to offer a comprehensive account of the contextual learning environment.

Go (2003) observed that students had shown development in their writing with respect to generic structures, lexical density, reference chains, the use of conjunctions, and the use of textual and topical Themes. She argued that students who recorded an increase in their use of these resources had demonstrated some enhancement in their meaning-making potential. Students who included the appropriate structural elements of a particular genre in their texts, for instance, 'orientation, complication, and resolution', are stages of a typical narrative text, thereby demonstrating an understanding of the structural organisation of that particular genre.

Key results of this study were that over time, students' texts: (1) increased in length by the use of more content words and clauses; (2) featured more abstract nominal groups including various prepositional phrases, relative clauses, and pronouns; and (3) showed a wider variety of genres involving more varied marked topical themes and conjunctions. On the basis of these findings, the researcher concluded that signs of literacy growth were observed in students' writing. As with the previous study, 'development' in students' written texts tended to be a matter of increased use of a resource being seen as a sign of literacy development.

Finally, this study reported an important issue arising in connection with the quantitative method in relation to the lexical density of texts. The calculation of lexical density in this study followed Halliday's method in which the total number of content words was divided by the total number of clauses. This study concluded that analysis of lexical density was not a meaningful tool to explore the writing progress of second language learners because simple clause structures might continue to be used despite the growth in content words, thus leading to inaccurate conclusions as to development in students' meaning-making potential.

Kongpetch (2006) also carried out a study over a 15-week semester to discover the influence of genre-based pedagogy on the academic writing of Thai EFL tertiary students. She was mainly concerned with enhancing students' competence in composing the Exposition genre. Kongpetch (2006) gathered data from forty-two students who created texts across the writing course. But, she just analysed students' exposition texts written at the conclusion of the course. More specifically, she qualitatively examined students' texts with respect to the generic structure and deployment of conjunctions, participants, processes, passives, and technical terms.

Kongpetch (2006) observed that students produced texts that conformed to the typical Exposition genre, as identified in Sydney Genre School, with respect to textual organisation and language. She concluded that the genre-based pedagogy was an effective approach that enabled students to achieve the target genre.

Srinon (2011) also carried out a study over twelve weeks to inspect literacy development in academic writing of EFL university students in Thailand. Data were collected from six Thai undergraduate students undertaking a course aimed to enhance their skills in argumentative and persuasive writing.

Srinon (2011) traced and analysed students' pre-and-post-intervention texts to judge their literacy development in regard to structural arrangement and the use of inter-clausal relations. He employed quantitative analyses along with qualitative observations to determine both numerical changes in students' use of the selected resources and what was involved communicatively in these changes.

Srinon (2011) found that students had improved their academic writing by (1) increasing the frequency of inter-clausal relations, paratactic and hypotactic relations; (2) decreasing the proportion of single clause sentences; and (3) using more mechanisms for construing relations of consequentiality and referencing external sources.

These findings were indeed based on both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Nevertheless, the sign of growth in students' writing again seemed to be interpreted as 'more' use of a given linguistic feature means 'improvement.' That is, Srinon (2011) argued that observed 'increases' in students' use of linguistic features can be treated as 'positive' changes in their writing.

Another study was also conducted by Velázquez-Mendoza (2015) to explore the literacy development of two language learner populations in tertiary contexts: (1) students studying Humanities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and (2) students studying Linguistics at the University of California. The first learner population speaks Spanish as a native language, while the second one uses it as a second language. Data consisted of thirty-two texts gathered from sixteen students. This study tracked the use of grammatical metaphor in these two university settings.

Velázquez-Mendoza (2015) reported that both student populations developed their command of Spanish. That is, the students demonstrated growth in their meaning-making potential through increasing their use of grammatical metaphors. This study confirmed what had previously been observed by Halliday (1993), Colombi (2006), and Ignatieva (2008), that "a higher frequency of grammatical metaphors in a text, which is relative to the text's genre, correlates with a more advanced command of the target language" (Velázquez-Mendoza, 2015, p. 1). Thus, the methodology adopted in this study to determine the degree of progress in students' writing was mainly concerned with a basic count of instances of grammatical metaphors without taking into account the communicative implications of such use.

Nagao (2018) also undertook a study over a fifteen-week course to examine signs of improvement in the academic writing of Japanese EFL students. This study investigated students' competence in the Discussion genre – as identified in Sydney Genre School – in terms of textual organisation and some related lexicogrammatical resources, for instance, the deployment of reporting verbs, modal auxiliaries, and modality.

Data were collected from fourteen students who composed discussion essays before and after completing the course, as well as self-reflection written texts. Nagao (2018) deployed thorough quantitative and qualitative examinations to assess students' perceptions and awareness of the Discussion genre. She found that students had (1) improved their understanding of the structural arrangement of the given genre (2) and enhanced their awareness of some lexicogrammatical resources, such as the use of modal verbs.

Shrestha (2020) also carried out a study over nine months to explore the academic writing and conceptual development of university students in a distance education context in the UK. He inspected the ability of six students majoring in Business Studies to produce a case study analysis genre. More precisely, he tracked trajectories of development in the writing of those students who produced texts that applied a business framework to a business situation. Business frameworks, which are widely used in business studies, involve SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) or STEP (Sociological, Technological, Economic, and Political factors).

Shrestha (2020) combined dynamic assessment with SFL-based functional language analysis to assess students' writing development. He qualitatively analysed students' written texts in relation to some resources of ideational and textual meanings: in particular, textual organisation, technicality, hyper themes, and macro themes. He observed that some students had developed their command of the genre of case study analysis by managing the given linguistic features in their texts and maintaining consistency in handling them in their writing.

Finally, Alshehri (2024) conducted a study over fourteen weeks to explore students' competence in journalistic writing within an EFL context at a Saudi university. He specifically investigated students' ability to produce the hard news genre from a textual perspective.

Alshehri (2024) gathered data from twenty-five students who produced hard news reports only after completing a course on news writing. So, as with Kongpetch (2006), he assessed students' writing over one text composed at the conclusion of the course. He also gathered a corpus of professional news reports published in English for comparison with students' written texts.

Alshehri (2024) employed a qualitative SFL-based functional language analysis to judge students' writing. He specifically looked at students' use of generic features and ignored their use of register features. He found that some of the students were successful in creating typical English hard news reports structurally in line with the expert journalistic texts in the corpus.

3. Theoretical Applications and the Proposed Methodology
3.1 Use of Functional Language Analysis to Assess Writing
Based on the literature reviewed above, the SFL-based functional language analysis approach to writing assessment basically entails singling out certain linguistic features for analytical attention and then tracking changes in student's use of these features over time. This tracking involves drawing a comparison between a student's early textualisation with his/her final attempt within the genre under consideration. In several cases of research discussed in the literature (e.g., Colombi, 2002; Go, 2003; Srinon, 2011; Velázquez-Mendoza, 2015; Woodward-Kron, 2002) 'change' was equated with an increase in a student's use of a given resource, and this was deemed to be evidence of literacy development. In the case of resources such as grammatical metaphor, this would seem, at first glance, to be a well-founded conclusion. Extensive research has demonstrated a developmental trajectory by which students in their early years write in a more spoken style, where grammatical metaphor is not so frequent, and then move to a more written, academic style for which grammatical metaphor is a key resource (see, for example, Byrnes, 2009; Velázquez-Mendoza, 2015; Woodward-Kron, 2002). Similar conclusions might be reached for the feature of lexical density on the basis of research which has shown a similar developmental trajectory with younger language learners moving from a more 'spoken' writing style with lower lexical density to a more 'written' writing style featuring higher lexical densities (see, for example, Halliday, 1985b).

3.2 Taking the Functional Language Analysis Approach to Writing Assessment a Step Further
As outlined above, there is a tendency in the previous SFL-based studies of students' writing to quantitatively and/or qualitatively analyse just a few linguistic resources such as textual organisation (Alshehri, 2024), grammatical metaphor (Byrnes, 2009), grammatical intricacy and lexical density (Colombi, 2002; Velázquez-Mendoza, 2015); structural arrangement and inter-clausal relations (Srinon, 2011); generic structure, modality, and reporting verbs (Nagao, 2018). To my knowledge, no study has been carried out to assess and track students' written literacy development based on a wide range of linguistic features across what SFL terms ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. I, therefore, recommend conducting a study with such a focus. Additionally, to date, no SFL-based study has undertaken in-depth quantitative and qualitative analyses involving a range of linguistic features, nor has it sought to systematically explore questions as to the appropriate interplay between quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Accordingly, the present paper advises a mechanism to be considered for addressing this gap: the use of 'typical' genre exemplars against which the students' texts could be compared to assess their writing development. This deployment of 'expert' texts has been observed in only a handful of academic studies (e.g., Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Crosthwaite, Cheung, & Jiang, 2017). It has also, to my knowledge, been adopted in one SFL-based study of literacy development (Alshehri, 2024), which, as previously discussed, attended to students' command of journalistic writing rather than academic writing. Alshehri (2024) showed that the use of expert texts was useful in offering a detailed account and tangible evidence of students' capability to produce the target genre. However, this finding was based on a qualitative analysis of students' writing from a generic perspective only. That is, he did not subject any register resources to an in-depth linguistic analysis. Hence, there is a need for an SFL-based study that quantitatively and qualitatively attends to features from both genre and register so as to examine to what extent the use of expert texts is an effective tool for evaluating students' writing.

Thus, the proposal to be put forward in this review article is to construct a reference corpus of texts of the given genre, subject it to a thorough linguistic-based scrutiny of the same nature as to be applied to students' written texts, and then track changes in students' use of various genre and register resources and compare this with the typical usage patterns of the same resources in the expert genre texts.

To be more precise, two analytical stages need to be undertaken. The first stage involves a quantitative analysis that calculates the frequencies of particular linguistic resources in students' pre-intervention texts and compares them with those in their post-intervention texts. Then, in turn, frequencies in the students' post-intervention texts will be compared with those found in the typical genre model texts.

The second stage is to conduct qualitative observations of students' texts so as to both offer a more complete understanding and concrete evidence of students' literacy development and identify specific linguistic features that could be regarded as reliable indicators of that development. To exemplify, an increase in the rate of any given linguistic feature does not necessarily mean it is 'better' and 'more fluent' or evidence of literacy development. This may be the case where the use of a particular linguistic resource is not compatible with the given register or genre – i.e., a student may conceivably even be 'over-using' that resource in comparison to what is typical of the register in question.

Consequently, literacy development will be treated as a matter of the degree to which a student's writing closely resembles the norms of the typical genre texts. This indicates that the notion of development in students' written literacy will not be a matter of associating 'higher' frequencies of use with 'improvement.' Rather, it will be determined by reference to the lexicogrammatical and

stylistic norms of the expert genre exemplars. Accordingly, this technique will not simply detect changes in the rate of particular linguistic resources in students' writing. Rather, it will demonstrate how any such changes relate to what is typical in the conventional texts of the genre under examination.

This qualitative scrutiny will assist in giving further evidence of students' competence in the target genre – i.e., their ability to produce texts that correspond to the conventional (organisational and linguistic) features of the given genre. However, it might be insufficient to offer insights into students' genre awareness, which refers to their knowledge and understanding of the social purposes, conventions, and language features of the genre under consideration. Hence, it will be useful to employ further qualitative tools, such as gathering and examining students' self-reflection written texts or conducting discourse-based interviews with them before and after instruction to explore their awareness of the genre under consideration (see, for example, Cheng, 2018; Nagao, 2018; Woodward-Kron, 2002).

The above methodological suggestion has been made because the current review essay holds that purely quantitative analysis – i.e., just providing findings as to the frequencies of particular linguistic features – will be unable to provide a comprehensive account of students' literacy levels. It will provide insufficient insights and may lead to misleading conclusions in the measurement and assessment of students' literacy development as well as in determining progress in their meaning-making potential. That is, it will be limited in offering insights into where, how, and with what specific communicative effects a particular linguistic feature is used in a student's text, especially with resources such as grammatical intricacy and lexical density. By way of illustration, it will be unable to take account of significant aspects such as students' written literacy being at an elementary level and their tendency to make errors – i.e., in omitting grammatical items, which play a key role in the measurement of lexical density. Hence, this paper believes that greater insights will be achieved when a qualitative perspective is brought to bear on the quantitative findings. In other words, quantitative measures, along with qualitative observations, will be a more valuable research design for assessing progress in students' writing. However, an exploratory study must be conducted so as to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of such a methodology, and then stronger claims to generalisability can be made.

4. Conclusion

This review article addresses issues around how to trace and calibrate students' written literacy development. It also posits a method by which students' writing can be assessed through systematic linguistic analyses, taking into account the use of both quantitative measures and qualitative reflections. One key aspect of this approach is to determine students' written literacy development by reference to genre and register norms of expert genre exemplars. That is, whether or not students' texts demonstrate a movement towards or away from the typical texts.

This review essay concludes that the proposed SFL-based functional language analysis will be capable of offering a wide range of tools that can provide language analysts (e.g., teachers) with tangible textual evidence for judging growth in written literacy levels of language learners (e.g., students). This approach is not based on language examiners' intuitions, thus not being an impressionistic technique for evaluating writing. Rather, it is a precise method that involves describing the linguistic aspects of language learners' performance. It also considers lexicogrammatical, linguistic, stylistic, and organisational properties of a text, and hence the written skills of language learners can be assessed across several resources within the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Finally, it is hoped that the methodology postulated in this article will be employed in a future experimental study to examine its efficacy. Such a study may contribute to the body of knowledge associated with approaches to literacy development and writing assessment.

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