

# Department of English Seminar

## Systemic Functional Grammar in Hong Kong ESL classrooms. Why Bother?

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Second language educators well acquainted with Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) would probably all be able to come up with lots of good reasons why it is worth bothering to introduce SFG in a TESL context. As a grammar concerned with interpreting patterns of wordings as configurations of meanings embedded in contexts, SFG, more than any other brand of grammar in the ESL marketplace, should be compatible with second language teaching that aims to be in any sense communicative.

However, for the potential benefits of SFG to be realised, it must, of course, be introduced in ways that take account of the local teaching and learning contexts. In Hong Kong, these include:

- teachers who already have a considerable knowledge of English grammar and often some rather fixed ideas of what it is and how it should be learned;
- many students who often make quite basic mistakes in clause and even group rank lexicogrammar;
- teaching that is largely driven by two factors - the coursebook and the examinations;
- a tendency towards a teacher-talk dominated, information transmission mode of teaching.

I will argue that to effectively introduce elements of SFG we need to:

- be prepared to engage in a process of 'creolisation', as the foreign SFG metalanguage comes into contact with 'indigenous' metalanguages;
- focus only on areas not adequately dealt with in existing ESL grammars;
- work with teachers in developing teaching and learning activities that draw on TESL methods rather than on experience in L1 language development;
- more systematically integrate a focus on lexicogrammar into genre-based teaching.

I will finish by suggesting some 'ways in' for SFG, reviewing some activity types, and presenting some sample lesson plans.

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