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Aportes de la Lingüística Sistémico-Funcional a la equidad educativa: prácticas y debates

Contributions of Systemic Functional Linguistics to Educational Equity: Practices and Debates

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Abstract

It is widely known that language plays an essential role in communication in all aspects of life, and in the educational realm, it serves as a crucial means of conveying ideas, experiences, and knowledge. SFL is a linguistic theory that can enhance pedagogical practices and promote equity in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. This theoretical article aims to reflect on how SFL can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of language as a resource for meaning making. In this regard, two main dimensions will be addressed: firstly, SFL will be presented as a theoretical tool which regards language as a whole; secondly, a specific analysis of SFL and its applicability in the educational context will be conducted. This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the importance of SFL in teacher training, highlighting its potential to enhance teaching and foster equity in diverse educational settings. This article examine the principles and educational applications of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) using the context of teacher training at the university level as an example.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Linguistics, university context, pedagogy, educational equity

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Introduction

Communication and language play a fundamental role in all aspects of life and, within the educational context, they become crucial means for transmitting ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Teacher education is a fundamental space in which the future of education is shaped; therefore, teachers' ability to understand and use language effectively is decisive in ensuring quality teaching. This purpose becomes increasingly challenging in educational environments that are becoming ever more diverse.

Regarding teachers and their preparation, recent literature has identified many factors that prevent students from diverse backgrounds from gaining access to equitable academic learning opportunities. These factors include: (a) teachers' lack of understanding of broader contextual issues that influence the unequal distribution of and access to cultural and linguistic resources (Author and Colleagues, 2023; Paul Gorski, 2009; Lenski et al., 2005; Valdés & Castellón, 2011); (b) the low demographic representation of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the teaching workforce (Geneva Gay, 2011; Lucas & Villegas, 2011; Sleeter, 2001); and (c) the mistaken belief that student diversity is not the norm, but rather a circumstantial situation that only certain specialized teachers should be prepared to address in their pedagogical practices (de Jong & Harper, 2011; Gort et al., 2010; Lucas & Villegas, 2011). Considering that teachers have a major impact on student learning (Lee et al., 2007), it becomes clear that their understanding of the role of language in school is extremely important.

This article explores the fundamental role that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) plays in addressing cultural diversity and enriching pedagogical practices. The central focus of the article lies in how SFL contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of language as a resource for meaning-making. By bringing these purposes together, the importance of SFL in enriching teaching and fostering equity in diverse educational contexts is emphasized. Likewise, related aspects are addressed, such as language comprehension, cultural diversity, the enrichment of pedagogical practices, and teacher education.

SFL has been studied and applied in diverse educational and linguistic contexts, and its value in understanding language and communication is widely recognized. Undoubtedly, within the context of teacher education and language teaching in culturally diverse environments, there is room for a new perspective that addresses specific issues and challenges not yet explored in depth within the Latin American context. Therefore, this article has two purposes. On the one hand, it proposes an approach to the application of SFL in teacher education and language teaching, highlighting its capacity to address cultural and linguistic diversity. On the other hand, it seeks to explore how SFL can help understand the complexity of language as a situated meaning-making resource within the classroom. Thus, the ideas developed in the following pages may be interpreted in two distinct yet complementary ways: as a theoretical positioning tool that readers may consider regarding language, and as a specific conceptual mapping of SFL that makes its educational applicability visible.

Language in SFL

Within the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), researchers have already established that language production is tied to a purpose (Eggins, 1994). For some theorists, language is a complex tool that serves social cohesion and shapes the distribution of the meaning-making potential of linguistic resources. Perspectives on its role in the construction of reality and its ability to facilitate communication about that reality have been enriched, in part, through the work of scholars such as M. A. K. Halliday (1978, 1996, 2004), J. R. Firth (1957), and Benjamin Lee Whorf et al. (2012). These authors have argued for the fundamental influence of language on how individuals perceive and express reality.

In the formation of this reality, language is understood to play a decisive role by operating as one of the most subtle and implicit mechanisms within the system of symbolic coercion. This mechanism perpetuates the unequal distribution of linguistic and semiotic resources for meaning-making. However, language may also be conceived as a transformative tool capable of contributing to a more equitable distribution of these resources (Martin & Rose, 2004). But how does this unequal distribution of linguistic resources originate? Primarily, it occurs because of invisible approaches to teaching and learning embedded within the formal educational system at all levels. Such approaches, which do not promote the directly explicit learning of communicative functions, assume that students of all ages develop their linguistic competencies and metalinguistic knowledge implicitly rather than explicitly. This overlooks the fact that the language students acquire in their homes, and through which they learn at school, significantly influences their academic progress (Nieto, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004). Consequently, there exists a genuine and concrete opportunity, although not a simple one, to redistribute linguistic resources through education and, fundamentally, through the preparation of future teachers who will be working in classrooms.

In this sense, teacher education becomes a decisive space in which students may reflect, think, and act toward the construction of a more equitable society (Adams et al., 2000; Cochran-Smith, 2004). Yet the possibility of doing so is, for the most part, reduced to a matter of opportunities; therefore, one of the principal tasks of education is to guide students in making these decisions (Christie, 1989). SFL, then, has the potential to provide students with linguistic meaning-making resources that allow them to access, challenge, critique, and question social practices as they interact with language, text, and context (Donohue, 2012).

Consequently, a real and tangible opportunity emerges, although not without complexity. Within this broader context, a theory such as SFL and its subsequent pedagogical application are appropriate for addressing the understanding of language from two distinct yet complementary perspectives: from within, by examining how linguistic features materialize through grammatical structures, and from a broader perspective, by exploring how language is intertwined with and shaped by cultural and situational contexts. According to Martin and Rose (2004), ultimately one of the most valuable contributions of SFL has been to provide a new way of rethinking pedagogical practices and questioning why linguistic resources are distributed unequally, thereby promoting a deeper engagement with language, text, and context (Donohue, 2012). Based on the foregoing, the following sections address the central principles of this theory.

Toward an Understanding of SFL

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory aimed at analyzing human interactions not as isolated products of communication, but as contextualized outcomes (M. A. K. Halliday, 1978, 1996; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Within this approach, SFL is presented as a descriptive theory of language devoted to the study of real patterns of human communication, rather than as a prescriptive theory dictating how people should use language to create meaning (Eggins, 1994).

For Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), SFL focuses on the study of language as a semiotic system, meaning that it cannot be defined solely as a material system. Although language manifests through material forms such as speech and writing, what truly defines the meanings it conveys cannot be reduced to or defined in purely material terms, but rather consists of semiotic elements. In other words, language is not limited to the phonemes or graphemes that compose it; instead, it resides in the meanings generated from these components.

For a better understanding of SFL, it is important to compare it with other linguistic theories that remain influential in both linguistic and educational contexts. SFL views language as a symbolic system through which individuals create meaning and in which function and form are intertwined. In contrast, cognitive approaches such as those proposed by Noam Chomsky (1986) might analyze the grammatical structure of a sentence without necessarily considering its communicative purpose, whereas SFL adopts a different perspective. If one considers the sentence “Juan bought a book” from the perspective of SFL, not only is the grammatical structure examined, but attention is also paid to how that structure contributes to the communicative function. In this case, the speaker selects the declarative linguistic option and organizes the grammatical elements according to specific purposes. Thus, SFL analyzes how lexical choices and grammar serve to express Juan’s act of purchasing in a particular way, considering the intrinsic relationship between linguistic form and function (Painter, 1996).

In this regard, one of the distinguishing features of SFL is its aim to understand language both as a social process and as an analytical methodology that enables a detailed and systematic description of language patterns (Eggins, 1994). This characteristic differentiates SFL from other linguistic theories in that it seeks to understand the relationships between linguistic structures and functions (Halliday, 1978). From this perspective, the process of language development is inherently social and mediated by context; that is, human beings develop language as a semiotic system shaped by the context in which it occurs (Halliday, 1978).

A simple way to understand the ideas mentioned above is to recognize that speakers do not use language merely for the sake of language itself, nor because of the sounds produced or the graphemes written, but rather to construct meaning, which may be described as an ecological process. Put differently, although human beings possess the biological capacity to learn language, it is the specific environmental and contextual conditions surrounding each individual that shape and determine the cultural and linguistic choices they will adopt. This

phenomenon is not limited to superficial features of discourse such as accent or dialect, but is instead organized around what are known as the “metafunctions” of language, which are defined by each situation (Bernstein, 1990; Halliday, 1978).

The logical question that emerges from this statement is the following: What exactly are these “metafunctions” of language, and how are they structured? According to Halliday (1978), despite environmental and cultural differences, all languages should be capable of expressing the following three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational and interpersonal metafunctions are related to meaning-making at the individual level and within interpersonal relationships, while the textual metafunction focuses on how what an individual seeks to communicate is discursively represented. Language shapes these metafunctions through two stages: first, a stage in which experience and interpersonal relations are transformed into meaning; and second, a stage in which the meaning an individual seeks to communicate is realized as text, whether in written or spoken form.

Theoretical Aspects of SFL

The previous section introduced several relevant terms necessary for understanding Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The following section further explores some of the theoretical aspects of SFL. Those who adopt a functional and systemic approach to language focus on two fundamental aspects: how language is used in real situations and how language is structured for use.

To understand how language is employed in practice, scholars and practitioners who use SFL as a theoretical framework examine authentic spoken or written linguistic interactions that occur within specific social contexts, evaluating these contexts from two perspectives: register and genre. This allows them to understand how language adapts and varies across different communicative situations. Regarding the second aspect, SFL focuses on the lexicogrammatical dimension by studying language at the grammatical and lexical levels, as well as how it is hierarchically and dynamically organized to convey meanings through particular choices. This involves considering how linguistic elements, such as words and grammatical structures, are selected to communicate effectively. Every text is framed within a particular cultural context, which we refer to as genre. This cultural context is embedded within a situational context known as register. The variables of language register are field, which describes the nature of the situation; tenor, which involves the participants and their multiple roles; and mode, which refers to the way language is used in interaction (Eggins, 1994; M. A. K. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Combined, these elements operate as sets of interconnected variables, each with a range of contrasting values. Through their interrelationship, they define a multidimensional space of meaning in which language, together with other semiotic systems and social contexts, interact (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Likewise, SFL studies language both as a system and as text. This means that although the primary focus of SFL is language as a functional system, such systems can only be fully understood when applied within a real communicative context. As explained by Halliday and

Matthiessen (2004), the language system possesses the fundamental potential to create meaning, and this meaning materializes through texts.

In summary, the richness of the theoretical aspects of SFL is manifested in three key ways. First, it extends the analysis of language beyond words by considering it within the context of sociocultural construction. Second, it explores how speakers create meaning through the linguistic resources available to them. Third, it seeks to understand the relationship between linguistic form and function, recognizing that linguistic structure is shaped in response to the real needs of speakers rather than as an ideal abstraction (Eggins, 1994).

In the following section, we will explore how cultural and situational forces influence speakers' linguistic choices, using university pedagogy as an example.

The Role of Contexts in University Pedagogy

A teaching and learning approach within university pedagogy contexts must recognize the dynamic nature of the interaction between context and text, which is actualized through a diversity of dynamic variables present in contexts of production (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). This context may manifest at two distinct levels. To understand these two levels in depth, this section will begin by expanding on the theoretical notions of genre (context of culture) and register (context of situation), while also explaining how members of a community can navigate and modify their discursive practices through their choices. It is important to emphasize that both elements are closely interconnected. In this sense, genre may be considered a more abstract level than register. What is communicated through language cannot be understood without considering the context in which it is used.

The context of culture (genre) relates to the general meanings shared by a community and, likewise, to what those meanings may imply in cultural terms. Although this article focuses on language, it is important to note that cultural context is also expressed through semiotic or multimodal systems such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice (M. A. K. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Thus, genre may be defined as the broader framework that gives purpose to interactions of specific types and that adapts to the numerous situational contexts in which it is employed (Eggins, 1994). This contextual adaptation, or context of situation, is achieved through register (Schleppegrell, 2004), which is defined as the configuration of meanings generally associated with a specific situational configuration of field, tenor, and mode (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). More specifically, SFL examines how language adjusts to different contexts while also demonstrating how the same genre may adopt different registers depending on the communicative situation, thereby evidencing the close interrelationship between communicative function, linguistic structure, and environment.

To better understand the connections among contextual variables, metafunctions, and language, it is essential to return to the object of study of SFL. As previously mentioned, SFL focuses on the linguistic choices made by individuals, not as isolated and abstract linguistic acts, but as choices mediated by context. According to this perspective, each of the three metafunctions corresponds to different registers, which are expressed through a set of available linguistic resources. In other words, the function a speaker seeks to achieve—

whether ideational, interpersonal, or textual—is represented through a series of available linguistic options.

Within university education, the influence of cultural and situational forces on linguistic choices is fundamental to the effectiveness of any communicative event in the classroom (Trojan et al., 2020). Linguistic norms, institutional communicative traditions, different academic genres, and cultural perceptions all impact the decisions made by university students, who interact with other educational actors within a diverse cultural framework where linguistic practices vary according to the prevailing academic culture. Situational forces, such as the classroom context, also shape linguistic choices, particularly through the adaptation of language according to the formality of the environment. Consequently, possessing the necessary tools to understand the role of these influences constitutes a key element in designing effective teaching strategies within university settings.

If we consider, for example, the academic context in which essays and research articles are frequently used to assess learning, professors may employ the theoretical principles of SFL as a tool for explicit linguistic description from both a pedagogical and discipline-specific instructional perspective. In this way, they can guide students through writing prompts or through the scaffolding processes commonly developed within the classroom (Ndoricimpa, 2019). On the other hand, instructors may simulate different writing situations in which the same discursive genre adopts distinct registers depending on the communicative context, with the aim of demonstrating how the situation of enunciation influences discourse construction. Through such representations, students may reflect on how language is situated within the social environment, adopting different forms according to communicative intention and the relationships established between participants (enunciator–addressee).

Up to this point, this article has established what SFL theory is and which aspects it studies. It has also explored the role that SFL may play within the context of university pedagogy. The following sections will highlight the relevance of this theory when applied to educational contexts aimed at cultivating linguistically and culturally sustainable classroom practices within university teacher education.

Contributions and Educational Practices: From Theory to Classroom Reality

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can have a clear impact on university teacher education by transforming some of its principles into a series of training practices. Some examples are developed below.

Promoting effective communication in the classroom: SFL can help future teachers understand how language fosters effective communication in the classroom. This is essential, as they must develop the ability to communicate knowledge with verbal mastery that facilitates and promotes learning among their students.

Facilitating the development of reading and writing skills: Future teachers can use SFL to support the teaching of reading and writing through the analysis and production of written

texts, paying attention to the connections between the text itself and the situation in which it is produced (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). By understanding how linguistic structures operate across different writing genres, teachers will be better equipped to help their students improve their reading and writing skills.

Supporting the analysis of educational discourses: SFL can equip future educators with tools to analyze the discourses, texts, books, and other teaching materials used in classrooms. These tools include, but are not limited to, register analysis, which examines how language adapts to different educational contexts; they also encompass the metafunctions of language, which explain ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions in educational discourse; transitivity, which analyzes how actions and processes are represented in language; thematic and rhematic analysis, which addresses the organization of themes and rhemes in discourse; and genre analysis, which allows for the breakdown of linguistic patterns across various types of educational texts.

Fostering inclusion and diversity within and beyond the university setting: SFL can help teachers address issues related to linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom by providing insights into how to recognize, value, and incorporate the diverse forms of linguistic expression used by all students. These practices may include, for example, conducting surveys to identify linguistic diversity within the classroom; implementing portfolios for individual forms of expression, both linguistic and multimodal (Harman et al., 2022); adapting teaching materials to reflect linguistic variation; designing collaborative multilingual projects; offering workshops on effective communication in diverse environments within and beyond the university community (Cardozo-Gaibisso, 2020); establishing intercultural mentoring programs; and organizing events that celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity.

In summary, SFL can play a key role in teacher education by providing tools for understanding language effectively, as well as for addressing and cultivating linguistically and culturally sustainable classroom practices, a topic that is further developed in the following section.

Challenges and Possibilities of the SFL Approach for Cultivating Linguistically and Culturally Sustainable Classroom Practices

Today, given migration patterns and constant social changes, it is essential to rethink teacher education within a conceptual framework that cultivates linguistically and culturally sustainable classroom practices (Cardozo-Gaibisso et al., 2018). This section presents the concept of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012), which become powerful tools for helping students connect their metalinguistic awareness with the new language and disciplinary knowledge taught in schools (Harman et al., 2021). In fact, incorporating all students' linguistic repertoires can help them make sense of academic knowledge and develop a stronger understanding of different content areas (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Furthermore, through a culturally supportive approach, students can engage meaningfully with their own knowledge (González et al., 2005). For this to be possible, all resources—everyday language, mother tongue, academic language, and multimodal practices—must be present in the classroom, not simply as a form of scaffolding, but as a way of constructing

meaning horizontally.

As previously mentioned in this article, language is represented within context, meaning that students need to learn which register is appropriate for each situation. This does not imply that linguistic variation according to context is presented hierarchically in terms of being less or more valued; rather, it is defined in terms of being more or less effective depending on the purpose the student seeks to achieve (Schleppegrell, 2004). As discussed, it is vital for future teachers to be aware that students' everyday language can become a powerful resource in the classroom.

Discursive practices—that is, the way a student expresses themselves in writing or orally—are rooted in a broader context which, according to Halliday's theory, is the context of culture. Therefore, an educational approach centered on social equity must address how these two levels, language and culture, mutually influence one another (Williams & Hasan, 1996). In this regard, the more teachers understand the role that students' linguistic and cultural resources play in their academic development, the more likely they are to view students' diverse linguistic repertoires as valuable resources to build upon, rather than as deficient versions of the "correct language" that need to be corrected (Achugar et al., 2007).

To better understand this idea, it is important to mention that this linguistic and cultural development is linked to a broader goal that Hasan and Williams (1996) call reflective literacy. This concept refers to the ability to understand how systems of values and patterns of power and prestige are constructed and maintained through the understanding of language, with the purpose of achieving social change (M. A. K. Halliday, 1996). In a certain sense, knowledge of language and about language for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is not simply a process of linguistic socialization and literacy, but also represents a transformative possibility. For educators working with these students, it is essential to adopt an approach that goes beyond deficiencies and instead focuses on the strengths these students bring to the educational environment (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

So, what are the possibilities and advantages of an SFL-based approach for the teaching and learning of linguistically and culturally diverse students? As mentioned at the beginning of the article, an SFL-based approach can become a powerful tool for educational transformation. Teachers face the daily challenge of making decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. These decisions have the potential to influence students' academic learning processes and literacy development (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Therefore, it is essential that teachers in teacher education programs become familiar not only with the academic content related to their respective disciplines, but also with the specific linguistic complexities of those areas of knowledge. Educators can achieve this goal by helping students expand their linguistic repertoires through direct instruction and by meaningfully incorporating students' linguistic and literacy resources into classroom practices (Achugar et al., 2007).

Within the framework described above, SFL-based approaches have emerged as valuable pedagogical tools for learning through language and learning about language (Halliday, 1996). This latter aspect—learning about language—deserves particular attention within such an

approach, since it is often overlooked in classroom teaching. The argument that teachers should explicitly guide students in learning language is based on two fundamental premises: first, the idea that content knowledge and skills cannot be separated from the linguistic resources through which such knowledge and skills are expressed; and second, from a perspective of social justice and accessibility, the recognition that by understanding how to use and comprehend academic language, students can actively participate in discursive interactions (Schleppegrell, 2004).

It is important to understand that, both in society and in schools, language cannot be approached solely from a linguistic perspective. Language does not exist in isolation or independently; rather, it is intertwined with other sociocultural and sociopolitical factors such as ethnicity, social class, employment, and migration status. This becomes even more evident in the case of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which is why teachers who work with these students must be prepared to understand their discourses from a broader perspective than language alone. Consequently, it is fundamental for educators to recognize that this diversity is intrinsically embedded within broader and more complex contexts.

Academic Language and Everyday Language: A Contested Space

In educational settings, students are often expected to understand and represent the complexities of each content area. Reading or writing about history and science, for example, involves using unique ways of communicating meaning (Gibbons, 2002, 2009). Different contexts and purposes require different linguistic structures, based on knowledge of when and how to employ different linguistic choices, which is not intuitive. For this reason, universities must help students understand the power of different linguistic options to construct diverse meanings and to understand different types of contexts. Experience and exploration are crucial for student learning, as is the ability to read, write, and speak about those experiences. Explicit instruction on how contextual variables, such as field, tenor, and mode, are manifested through ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions provides students with a clear understanding of the linguistic choices they can employ (Schleppegrell, 2004).

One aspect of particular importance is the evidence showing that students from underserved contexts are more likely to experience difficulties expressing their ideas in academic language due to lack of experience rather than intrinsic cognitive challenges related to the content itself (Schleppegrell, 2004). In other words, the fact that students do not arrive with a linguistic repertoire aligned with school expectations does not mean they lack ways of expressing their knowledge and ideas. Students enter school with a type of language commonly referred to as everyday language, acquired and developed through interactions with their families and communities. However, within the current school environment, characterized by the density of academic language, this linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient for students to access the academic content presented by teachers.

Consequently, teachers who focus on the development of disciplinary literacy must work explicitly to address students' linguistic characteristics as they move across different domains (Droga & Humphrey, 2003). Although this does not imply that one linguistic domain is superior to another, it is important to recognize the value of registers as arbitrary, so that academic and everyday language become a contested terrain. This raises the following question: How can teachers navigate the complexities of validating students' linguistic repertoires while also teaching them the lexical and functional characteristics of academic discourse? This question becomes an essential issue that requires understanding which research-based pedagogical practices are most effective for teaching students. This is particularly relevant considering that language is often perceived as an almost transparent medium within the overall learning process and, consequently, is used carelessly within genres and grammar (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

The value of academic discourse is, of course, subjective and supported by a social discursive practice that privileges this language over others, such as the language students use within their family environments. Nevertheless, if students do not possess the necessary metalinguistic tools to understand academic language, they will be limited in their ability to access this domain of academic and technical knowledge.

As previously discussed, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) demonstrates that context influences language. In this sense, it is essential for students to learn to identify the contextual variations that explain different linguistic choices and, in this way, navigate everyday and academic language as possibilities rather than as restricted categories of expression. As an alternative approach to understanding diverse genres and registers, a shift is proposed in the way we conceive the task of facilitating the use of varied linguistic registers, such as everyday and academic registers. Teachers may, for example, reconsider these textual practices as part of a "linguistic continuum," thereby avoiding the imposition of hierarchies between linguistic registers and genres. However, further research is needed to understand teachers' perceptions of what constitutes quality academic writing in classrooms and how their beliefs influence the forms of communication valued in educational settings (Uccelli et al., 2015). Furthermore, research should address issues related to equity and educational access, focusing on the debate surrounding the learning of academic language from a perspective of social justice and culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy.

In summary, if the relationship between academic language and everyday language is understood as a dispute, resolving it will require finding a balance between validating students' linguistic repertoires while simultaneously teaching them the specific characteristics of academic discourse. Such complexity, derived from this artificial division between types of language, may be addressed through flexible pedagogical approaches that recognize and respect students' linguistic diversity. Ultimately, the successful resolution of this tension will involve recognizing the richness of students' individual linguistic repertoires while also equipping them with the tools necessary to participate effectively in academic discourse. For all these reasons, a key step in the preparation of future teachers should involve adopting a perspective that values linguistic competence as a dynamic, creative, and natural process.

Within this framework, the theoretical foundations of SFL and its contextualized pedagogical applications may become valuable tools for achieving this objective.

Conclusions

This article, theoretical and conceptual in approach, sought to address a perspective focused on the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in teacher education and language teaching, based on its capacity to address cultural and linguistic diversity. Above all, it highlighted its potential to enrich teaching and promote equity in diverse educational contexts both within and beyond the university setting. As Geoff Thompson (1996) suggests, schools, broadly conceived, can become spaces where students acquire a deeper understanding of academic language. The more transparent and accessible linguistic complexities become for students, the greater the possibilities for education to increase in both quality and reach.

This article has also addressed the fundamental role of teachers and teacher education in the construction of an equitable educational future. It has pointed out that, in increasingly diverse educational environments, the challenges are significant, and factors that may hinder access to academic opportunities have been identified. Likewise, the reviewed literature has emphasized the need to address broader contextual issues and has highlighted the crucial impact teachers have on student learning, stressing the importance of understanding the role of language in schools. Furthermore, it has shown how SFL, as a descriptive theory of language, can offer tools for understanding and transforming pedagogical practices in order to redistribute linguistic resources more equitably. The relevance of considering SFL within university pedagogy has also been discussed.

Within today's school environment, which increasingly emphasizes literacy and language development for all students, teachers play a central role by explicitly presenting and guiding students in the analysis of a wide variety of discourses. SFL can contribute to this objective because it conceives language as a social process framed within real situations. This perspective not only considers linguistic norms but also encompasses the diversity of existing registers without stigmatizing them according to their social prestige. The integration of different modalities—from mother tongue to everyday and academic language—can help make teaching more sustainable, which is especially relevant in linguistically and culturally diverse settings. For this reason, the article suggests that these communicative practices should be understood as part of a linguistic continuum, thereby avoiding the imposition of hierarchies among linguistic registers and genres, in alignment with the culturally relevant pedagogy approach (Paris, 2012).

However, there is still a gap in explaining how both pre-service and in-service teachers can improve their understanding of linguistic practices within their professional roles. The inclusion of an explicit language component that goes beyond conventional linguistic awareness in teacher education programs may shed light on the dynamic relationship between students' developing knowledge and disciplinary literacy. Such inclusion can deepen understanding of the fundamental connection between language and literacy within disciplines and, by adopting this perspective, recognize that language is essential for knowledge construction

in every field. This enriched perspective may better prepare teachers to guide their students both in disciplinary content and in the essential linguistic skills that foster academic success.

There is still a long way to go, but this direction appears promising in advancing the need to explore and explain how future educators can develop an understanding of this connection and adapt their practices in order to cultivate more effective classroom practices related to linguistic purposes.

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