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FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

Value your students' bilingualism? Nurture them through development of school-based registers!

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1. Introduction

As a language teacher, teacher educator, and researcher over the past 40 years, my interests have been centered in classrooms where students are learning something else while also learning language. In the 1980s, as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher, my students were learning 'English for specific purposes,' where they brought knowledge from their fields, working as economists, in business or tourism, or as drivers and receptionists, and I saw how language teaching needed to focus on the language and discourse patterns that would be most relevant to the ways they would use English in their professional roles. In the 1990s, as a teacher educator and director of a university English as a Second Language (ESL) writing program, I saw how students' academic writing goals needed to be foregrounded. In the last 20 years, as a researcher in elementary and secondary schools, I engaged with, but also saw, shortcomings in 'content-based' language teaching (e.g., Moore & Schleppegrell, 2020; Schleppegrell, 2007, 2016, 2020; Schleppegrell et al., 2004).

At the same time, I have increasingly drawn on Michael Halliday's theory of language, systemic functional linguistics (SFL), as a means of better understanding the challenges of language learning and development in classroom contexts (de Oliveira & Schleppegrell, 2015; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2013, 2017; Schleppegrell & Otéiza, 2023). Twenty years ago, *The language of schooling* (Schleppegrell, 2004) used SFL conceptions of linguistic REGISTER to describe patterns of language that are typical of the written genres learners encounter as they move through schooling from the early grades into university. I believed then – and still do – that understanding register offers teachers and researchers useful ways of understanding language development and new ways of working with students. Many have agreed and found descriptions of linguistic register supportive for thinking about the challenges of teaching and learning language. Understanding register helps teachers and students recognize how different topics, ways of interacting, and learning goals call for drawing on different ways of making meaning that can be taught and learned.

However, terms like ACADEMIC LANGUAGE or THE LANGUAGE OF SCHOOLING have also been the focus of critique. The main objections to these terms are that they valorize ways of speaking and writing that are not familiar to many students, especially those who have been historically marginalized in classrooms, and that expecting students to adopt new registers disrespects the language they bring to the classroom. I take these as serious critiques from scholars who are committed to respecting and supporting all learners to fully participate in classroom learning, especially those who speak languages other than English or varieties of English that are stigmatized. But by not acknowledging that schooling brings with it linguistic expectations that can be made explicit, these critiques in the end leave students without opportunities to participate and thrive in learning contexts that they very much want to succeed in.

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In this article, I show how understanding linguistic register and the ways register variation manifests in the classroom can support teachers and researchers in respecting the language and perspectives learners bring while also supporting them in the multiple ways of meaning-making called for in subject matter learning across disciplines. Before I say more about register, I present some scenarios that illustrate dilemmas that arise when register variation is not well understood. In the different roles I have played in my professional work, scenarios like these have motivated my interest in developing and sharing understanding about register in support of students and teachers:

(1) Elementary and secondary school teachers who speak the same heritage language as their students often use the heritage language to build solidarity and direct students' learning. But those teachers sometimes encounter challenges in talking about subject-area content with students low in English proficiency, not knowing the relevant vocabulary and patterns of reasoning (registers) in the heritage language that they speak fluently in their everyday lives. This leaves students with low English proficiency less supported to understand and participate substantively in learning.
(2) In language teacher education, teachers learning to embed a focus on language in content classrooms may not be prepared to talk with their students about the patterns of language through which knowledge is presented and developed in different subject areas. This makes it difficult for them to apprentice students, or to work with content teachers to apprentice students, into key practices of the different subject areas; for example, analyzing sources in history, developing conjectures and explanations in mathematics, interpreting literature, or theorizing about science.
(3) Students who have grown up speaking a language other than English at home and going to school in English-only contexts with little support for their writing development may write in English using language choices more typical of conversational interaction, or may strive to write in academic ways that instead leave readers confused. As these students move into secondary school and beyond, teachers can misunderstand their meanings and misjudge infelicities in their writing as problems in their thinking.
(4) University-level writing instructors and those preparing teachers for secondary level English teaching are often concerned about linguicism and injustice and grapple with how to position Standard English (SE) in their classrooms. Some instructors have the perspective that there is a right and wrong way to write in formal settings; they thus correct students' language or tell them what they need to do to write in 'appropriate' ways. Other instructors do not address students' language at all, not wanting to disrespect the linguistic varieties students bring from their communities. The student may thus get feedback through a paper covered in red ink or receive little feedback at all.

These scenarios illustrate how deficit discourses can emerge from misunderstanding register variation. Teachers may be unable to communicate with students about subject area content or help them understand how language works to achieve the purposes of different disciplines, students' cognitive capacities may be underestimated, and writers may not receive relevant feedback. All of these have negative consequences. A better understanding of register can help change the context of learning for students and teachers.

2. What is register?

Register refers to the meanings and language choices that are at stake in different situational contexts. For purposes of this essay, I focus mainly on register choices in formal educational contexts where learners are reading and writing and discussing what they read and write, from primary school through university education. By 'register choices,' I mean the wordings; the lexical and grammatical structures that we use to make and share meanings. As we engage in different social activities, the

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language choices through which we share meanings constitute registers that vary. Teaching and learning about different registers is an important part of language teaching and learning, and like other aspects of language learning, requires opportunities for engaging in meaningful interaction through language. Learning the registers of formal education is important for learners of English in contexts around the world. Unfortunately, appreciation of this need is perhaps least recognized in English-speaking countries, such as the U.S.A., where differences in register and their implications for learning at school are often overlooked, misrepresented, minimized, or denied.

While we might consider other ways of naming ACADEMIC LANGUAGE or a LANGUAGE OF SCHOOLING, we need to recognize that classroom learning calls for all students to use language in new ways in different school subjects, where they encounter and engage in new registers. My purpose here is to address some misconceptions about what it means to support students to add new register repertoires. In the end, I hope to have shown that recognizing and addressing register variation can empower learners to make language choices that enable them to both enact their multilingual identities and participate in developing and sharing new knowledge in classroom activities.

3. Critiques of the notion of a language of schooling

The critiques of the proposal that a school-based register can be described[1] cluster around these points: (1) that contrasting school language with everyday language is reductionist and insufficient; (2) that referring to school language as more complex implies a deficit perspective on the other registers students bring to school; and (3) that students do not need to learn new registers in order to participate in advanced learning at school.

3.1 Critique 1: School language vs. everyday language is too simplistic a dichotomy

Often critiques of a language of schooling focus on the presentation of school language as distinct from everyday conversational language. It is true that representing language on only this continuum of two register options is reductionist and inaccurate. To contrast formal and informal registers or everyday and academic registers is at best a shorthand that requires further explication. Registers vary in a host of ways that need to be represented as a set of interacting continua. In fact, each situational context evokes meanings that can be realized in many ways.

The relationship between social context and language choice is dialectical; the situations in which we use language shape the choices we make, and our language then shapes the situation as the social action continues. As we speak or write, variation in the topics, interactants' relationships, and modalities through which messages are constructed continuously shift as meaning emerges from both context and language. Describing register variation calls for recognizing the multiple ways registers vary and evolve. This variation is not random and unpredictable; to the contrary, we are able to interact with each other successfully because we have some sense of what meanings are at stake in different contexts. Just as everyday registers emerge from and shape the multitude of everyday contexts, so too, school registers emerge from and shape the contexts students learn in. Variation in how familiar students are with the context is an important variable in the ways they are positioned to participate.

3.2 Critique 2: Complexity in language is not unique to academic contexts

Another issue that discussion of register differences often evokes in its critics is the idea that having a conception of a language of schooling contributes to linguicism through the presumption that this register is more linguistically complex than other registers. MacSwan (2020, p. 34), for example, argues that:

> Research focused narrowly on 'the language demands' of school runs the risk of contributing to standard language ideology, by giving the impression, or directly asserting, that the language of school is intrinsically more complex than language used in other contexts: that school language alone can be used for argumentation, concision, or with complex grammar.

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The grammar of school language cannot be characterized as more complex than the grammar of other registers. Halliday (1987) has shown how linguistic complexity cannot be described in terms of more or less; it needs to be understood in its various dimensions, as different registers are complex in different ways. He shows how the clause chaining of informal speech is complex in the ways it enables us to move from point to point. For example, I might say to a friend:

> I wish she could just make up her mind, because if she doesn't really want to go on the trip, in spite of having agreed to ages ago when we could have canceled and gotten a refund, she should tell me right now before the deadline passes and we're stuck paying for it anyway.

The structure of this utterance is complex in its levels of subordination and the multiple semantic links that are made (*because … if … in spite of … when*) but the prosody of speech helps listeners follow and parse this without difficulty. In writing about this, however, I might say: 'I'm worried that a change in her decision after the deadline means forfeiting the whole cost of a holiday we were really looking forward to.'

Here, the complexity comes from distilling what is said in whole clauses in speech into two dense noun groups (*a change in her decision after the deadline … forfeiting the whole cost of a holiday we were really looking forward to*) linked with a verb that presents the semantic relationship between them (*means*) in writing. The topic is the same in both the spoken and written versions, but the difference in whom I am interacting with and the shift from speech to writing evoke different language choices that shift the register. Grammar can be complex in different ways.

However, the linguistic complexity students encounter in school registers is different from other registers in ways that are consequential for student learning. MacSwan (2020, p. 34) goes on to argue that:

> Rather, language research aiming to improve conditions for children who do not do well in school should seek to discover how children use language in non-school contexts and for non-school tasks, with the aim of informing strategies for connecting school experiences with home experiences.

I agree with this point about making connections between home and school experiences and consider it the key to engaging learners with respect, as I discuss further on. However, the ways of explaining and arguing expected in different subject areas call for development of new registers as a part of learning the disciplinary practices. It is not that argumentation can be done only in school registers; we do argue with each other about many things in many contexts. However, learners need to argue in new ways in the different subjects they study (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010). This relates to the relationship between language and knowledge and its implications for learning.

3.3 Critique 3: Students do not need new registers for advanced learning

Language develops along with the specialized knowledge and ways of thinking that students learn in different subject areas. Specialized knowledge co-evolved historically with new ways of expressing that knowledge in language, as Halliday's (1993) analysis of the development of the language of science demonstrated. Registers of scientific theorizing evolved as results from scientific experimentation were distilled into concepts expressed in language in noun groups and embedded clauses that relate them in causal, conditional, or other sequences that present theories in concise ways. In that sense, the registers of science writing and speaking are functional for engaging with science theories and practices.[2]

Helping learners recognize the linguistic features of the texts they read and write offers them *entrée* into the discourses of schooling and enables them to participate more readily in the creation of new knowledge and the critique of received knowledge. Analyzing the structure and function of new patterns of language gives learners power to recognize how they are being positioned by the texts they

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read and to make language choices in the texts that they write that truly represent the meanings they want to share. In contexts of schooling, describing register features and engaging students in considering the meanings in those registers should be part of developing their critical language awareness, and need not limit learners' options or diminish the value of other registers. Teachers need to be able to talk with students about the linguistic features of the registers through which subject area practices are learned, especially in secondary education and beyond, where more abstract meanings become prominent (Schleppegrell & Christie, 2018).

A key goal of all language teaching is to enable learners to expand their potential for meaning-making in new contexts. Schooling differs from everyday contexts in having knowledge-development goals that are specified and institutionalized. Different developmental pathways in different disciplines shape these goals, but all are achieved through the development of both language and knowledge. Ultimately, students are asked to demonstrate their learning through registers that I characterize as academic or school-based. That entails teaching and learning new registers. Language teachers are especially well positioned to recognize this and support the development of new registers as students learn, but teachers, students, teacher educators, and researchers all have roles to play.

3.4 Summary

I have shown that three common critiques of recognizing that students have new registers to learn in schooling reflect misunderstandings of what register is. The first point, that distinguishing between everyday and school-based registers is simplistic, is one I align with, but the implication I draw is not that we thus do not need a notion of register. On the contrary, the complexity of register variation means we need to understand and make it a focus of attention. The second point, that identifying school-based registers valorizes them as more complex, is something to work against by helping teachers and learners recognize different kinds of complexity and see the value of a notion of register in the opportunities it offers to talk about language and context. The third critique, that students already control the language they need to accomplish any tasks that they encounter at school, misunderstands language development and the importance of supporting advanced learning through attention to the patterns of language that are functional for making meanings in different subject areas and genres as students move through schooling. Understanding the relationship between language and context is the key to understanding register variation and its role in social life.

4. Register variation and its relationship to context

The different speech communities in which we interact prepare us to participate in some social practices and not others, and position us to recognize what is expected in some social situations and not others. As we participate in different social situations that are enacted in language, we make choices about what to say or write and how to say or write it that have meaning for members of the speech communities we belong to, but that might not be meaningful or relevant in other contexts. This may be most obvious to us when we move to a new context that we have not experienced before; for example, joining a club, starting a new game or sport, or learning a new skill. As we move through our daily life, we consciously or unconsciously shift the ways we talk and interact. It is this difference in language choices that makes up the register variation we all experience.

While language choices are not deliberate or conscious for the most part, we can appropriately use the word *choice* to recognize that speakers and writers always select from a myriad of other possible ways they might have used language in any particular moment. Different choices present different meanings that may be consequential for how we are heard. At the same time, not understanding register variation may lead us to be poor listeners, not able to hear or see meanings presented in language that distracts us.

All normally developing children enter elementary school with register repertoires that are serving them well in interaction with their families and communities. In school, they continue to be socialized into different ways of using language as they participate in new practices that are realized in different

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registers. By understanding how registers vary across classroom activities and subject areas, teachers can better support students' participation and learning, and research can take into account the role register plays in issues of equity and social justice, such as those emerging in the scenarios presented before.

SFL's theory of register proposes that the language choices we make in any moment of interaction are shaped by three variables of the situational context: the activities we are engaged in (the FIELD), the people we interact with (the TENOR), and the modalities through which we communicate (the MODE)[3]. These three aspects of variation interact with each other, and the different constellations of language choices that emerge constitute different registers. Registers evolve as the genres of social life evolve; they are dynamic realizations of language that shape and are shaped by the social situation. These three strands of meaning that we can analytically tease out as we characterize a register are simultaneously and not separately realized, but it is helpful to think about the different ways each aspect of the situational context activates different language choices in contexts of schooling.

First, the activities. In a typical school day, students will engage in activities that include close interaction with friends about their lives; formal learning of multiple subjects through reading, writing, and interaction; informal learning through hands on and experiential learning; and in many more ways as well. Each activity has patterns of language use that can be described. Just a few words can evoke this aspect of register; consider, for example, how words like *biology class, lunchroom, soccer game*, and *art room* suggest different ways of talking and learning. This Field variable activates language related to the topics and ways of reasoning that are typical of an activity and can most easily be seen in the word choices we make; both in the specific vocabulary of the activity and how specialized or everyday the language of the activity is in the specific context.

Second, and interacting with this, is the influence of variation in the interpersonal relationships students have with their interlocutors and how the participation structures of schooling shape the ways they talk and write. Learners make different language choices when speaking to the whole class and when speaking in a small group; when interacting with a close friend compared with interacting with someone they have just met or interact with infrequently; and when interacting with a teacher or administrator rather than when with a peer. This Tenor variable shows up in the ways we refer to our interlocutors (e.g., *Ms. Smith* vs. *you guys*, etc.), in the ways we ask for help (e.g., *give me that pen*; *would you have a pen I could borrow?*, etc.), and in the ways we express our attitudes (e.g., *that's crazy*; *I don't agree with that*; *I would like to file a complaint*, etc.).

The third way register variation can be recognized is in the Mode through which we structure what we say or write in order to make it cohesive and meaningful. Our language choices depend on whether we can get immediate feedback from our interlocutors (when we see the person we are talking to vs. when we communicate without any visual feedback, as on the phone, or through writing); the modalities and channels involved (speech, writing; online, through different portals); where visual supports are available that also add to or enhance the meanings we are sharing (e.g., gestures, graphs, illustrations, etc.); whether we are limited by word/character restrictions (on various online platforms); and whether the language constitutes the social action (as in writing a letter) or accompanies some other social action (as in talking together while cooking).

These context variables (in the Field of discourse, Tenor of discourse, and Mode of discourse) are realized in language choices that constitute the various registers through which we enact our social lives. For example, when we speak to family members as we work together to prepare dinner, our Tenor choices will realize closeness, frequent contact, and low degree of power difference in the ways we address each other, question and direct each other, and share judgments and evaluations. At the same time, the Mode choices will also realize a (sometimes multiparty) dialogic exchange where we also have visual/aural contact and can communicate with gestures, and we may talk about various topics along with talking about the activity of cooking. While any Field might accompany cooking together, how specialized or technical the language is will depend on the levels of expertise we have and share as we address different topics, and the food being prepared will also be referred to. We could thus describe in general terms a set of context variables and linguistic features that characterize the register of cooking together.

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Someone who has never cooked together with someone else, or who has cooked with others in a very different context, might initially struggle to join in the talk that occurs in a new context of cooking together. Some of that difficulty might have to do with the new Field: new kinds of food, cooking implements, and practices; other aspects of difficulty might come from the unfamiliar Tenor: new ways that the people are interacting with each other, perhaps being more familiar or less familiar than what the newcomer is accustomed to. As the new person becomes socialized into the new register of cooking together in the new context, they have a lot to build on from previous experience around food and people. We encounter moments like this throughout our lives, where the ways of using language we bring to a new activity have to expand to enable our participation, and where we build from what we already know and can do with language as we develop it further.

Table 1 offers an overview of continua proposed by Eggins (2004) to capture variables related to Field, Tenor, and Mode from an SFL perspective. As Table 1 shows, these three context variables can be described in relation to different dimensions that are best thought of as intersecting continua.

By considering the Field, Tenor, and Mode dimensions of the context of formal education, in *The language of schooling* (2004) I described language choices that are typical of the texts students are asked to read and write. The context of Field calls for meanings that draw on the specialized language of different subject areas and disciplines, often with dense noun groups and embedded clauses that present knowledge and develop theories. The Tenor enacted in these texts often calls for interpersonal meanings that project an authoritative voice through mood and modality choices and evaluative language that presents reasoned judgments. The Mode of constructing what are often monologic texts calls for presenting meanings that structure the knowledge being shared in genres that unfold in expected ways, with language choices that mark the organization of the text and cohesively present knowledge in dense structures.

I wrote *The language of schooling* to describe at a general level the new registers students encounter at school as they move from the early years, where language is less distant from the registers of everyday life, into the more specialized registers of secondary school and beyond. While of course, as described above, there is tremendous register variation across the school day, my goal was to identify features of the social context and language that are typical of the texts students read and are expected to write in classroom activities across subject areas. In these situations, there is a high probability that certain language choices will be at stake and that not all learners would be similarly positioned to recognize the meanings through which learning is enacted and seamlessly participate in them. I used mainly written texts and focused on the challenges of reading and writing to suggest that schooling is a context that calls for presenting ideas (Field), taking a stance (Tenor), and structuring a text (Mode), and I described features of this school register that could be brought to students' attention to support them in working with language in new ways in classroom learning. I also described how this general notion of an academic register could be further specified for science and history or for writing an expository essay, showing how registers can be characterized at different levels of delicacy.

5. Attending to register development

Both second language learners and speakers of various dialects of English, despite engaging with rich register repertoires outside of school coursework, may be unfamiliar with the registers through which

Table 1. Variables that shape how language varies to respond to the context of situation (based on Eggins, 2004)

FIELD (what is going on)	TENOR (who is interacting)	MODE (modalities for crafting messages)
The topics and how specialized they are	The frequency of interaction	Whether monologic/dialogic; whether feedback is available
	The interactants' affective involvement and power differences	Whether language accompanies or constitutes the social action

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schooled knowledge is presented. All students are capable of learning new registers, but they do not all start at the same point. Some learners come with prior experiences that enable them to seamlessly move into classroom learning, taking up school registers that are similar to the registers they already have experience with. For other students, engaging with the registers of academic learning risks revealing their unfamiliarity. Using language in new ways is always initially awkward and fraught with potential for errors and infelicities, bringing threats to identity. Such learning needs to be supported by respectful and welcoming attitudes on the part of their interlocutors.

5.1 Learning to control the registers through which knowledge is developed and demonstrated

Understanding register variation can help teachers see students from a new perspective. Coffin and Donahue (2014) show how what they call MEDIATED TEXT ANALYSIS DISCUSSIONS can support instructors and students to talk about the meanings students' texts present. Understanding the writer's thinking then enables instructors to suggest language choices that communicate what they intend. The higher education students they discuss are studying applied fields such as health, education, and film and business studies. Coffin and Donahue point out that in these contexts, students' sharing of nonacademic experiences needs to be articulated in relation to the abstract, theoretical knowledge of academia.

In one example (that I briefly describe in ways that do not capture the full sophistication of Coffin and Donahue's explication), they present a text written by Zuna, a multilingual Nigerian woman who had lived in England for nine years at the time of their study. Coffin and Donahue (2014, p. 19) describe her as 'eager to understand and adopt university ways of writing and learning … [but] there is a mismatch between her intentions and achievements.' In a program of study for Health and Social Care, Zuna writes a report about SOCIAL EXCLUSION, OUTREACH, and ADVOCACY that requires her to move between abstractions from theory and material illustrations of concepts related to her current professional work. Coffin and Donahue show how this genre calls on her to draw on linguistic resources that are still emerging along with her understanding of the concepts. Her register choices are not a good match for the meanings she intends.

In her report, Zuna has been developing a taxonomy of SOCIAL EXCLUSION that includes financial exclusion and employment exclusion. Then, she writes: 'Third, there is exclusion in its social sense, which identifies exclusion partly with alienation from social networks, and partly with the circumstances in Thornhill community for example, advocacy for socially excluded people is also poor in this community' (Coffin & Donahue, p. 172). Engaging in mediated text analysis, the instructor asks Zuna about the purpose of the paragraph that ends with this sentence. She says that she wanted the reader to understand what advocacy is. Coffin and Donahue identify two issues that work against her to accomplish this through the language choices she has made. First, rather than situate the *circumstances in Thornhill community,* the community she has been working in, as a context in which alienation can be illustrated, she presents this noun group at the same level of her taxonomy as the abstract *alienation from social networks*. Then, she introduces ADVOCACY as an example of social exclusion rather than a response to it, misrepresenting the conceptual framework she is developing. The dialogic mediated text analysis reported by Coffin and Donahue surfaces these mismatches between her purpose and what she is able to realize in her writing, and the authors show how modelling and dialogue about alternative ways of accomplishing her goals support Zuna's writing development.

Zuna's writing challenges may be perceived as problems of thinking, but the dialogue reveals that she has a good understanding of what she wants to accomplish; her challenge is in presenting her professional experience in interaction with the constructs from her field of study with integrity. She is clearly reaching to present an academic voice that shows how the work she has done in her professional context relates to the disciplinary theories she is learning about, but needs support to make language choices that help her achieve that goal. This is not an issue of learning vocabulary or grammatical rules; instead, it calls for understanding the language she can use to present the semantic patterns of the knowledge in interaction with the theories she is drawing on. Instructors who recognize

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this as an issue of register are positioned to support students like Zuna to bring their own knowledge to their learning. In this case, she needs to develop language patterns that enable her to present the field of study and texture her report in ways that stage a cohesive unfolding of her explanation. This calls for reconfiguring the language to do the defining and theorizing she intends. New registers can be taught and learned, but this calls for teachers who understand the role of register development for writing in academic contexts and who are able to apprentice students into the written genres of different subjects.

5.2 Recognizing the limited role of Standard English

Understanding register can also support instructors to see SE[4] in a new light and focus on students' thinking and meaning-making to provide useful feedback. Critics of the concept of a language of schooling frequently conflate it with SE and suggest that teaching academic registers promotes standard language ideologies that devalue other varieties of English and their speakers. In my view, this misunderstands both SE and academic registers. SE is an ideological construct with a rule-based conception of the English language that varies, depending on local norms. It is inaccurate to tell students that they need to use SE to be successful in life, as many people thrive and succeed in contexts where other varieties of English are used. SE rules address elements of language that are rarely significant for meaning, and those rules are most usefully applied when editing writing for audiences that expect SE to be used. The rules of SE will not help students like Zuna, whose infelicities in writing have to do with meaning, not rules of correctness. Many students' community varieties of English do not follow the rules of SE, so expectations for use of SE that do not account for differences in the effort needed to learn to use it are most burdensome for working class and minoritized/racialized students. Learning the semantic patterns of the academic disciplines can be situated in relation to the meanings at stake, motivating students much more than learning abstract rules that seem arbitrary and unrelated to meaning.

5.3 Fully supporting bilingual development

The example of Zuna also speaks to the problem of bilingual teachers who are unfamiliar with specialized registers in their languages other than English. Teachers who come from immigrant families in English-speaking countries and who have had no opportunity to learn the registers of academic language in the languages they spoke at home often do not control the registers through which subject matter is taught and learned at school in the languages they speak fluently in their home and community contexts. This is a challenge for teaching school subjects. Again, this is not just a problem of lack of vocabulary. Recently, Hernandez Garcia (2023) studied a social studies teacher who was engaging her students, including newcomers to English, in talking about the legacy of colonialism in the Middle East. The teacher spoke fluently about colonialism's legacy in English, but when she tried to talk about it in Arabic with the newcomers, although she could refer to different countries, such as Lebanon, as former *colonies,* words failed her when she tried to talk about the colonial legacy. Hernandez Garcia points out that *colony* refers to a concrete entity, but the expression 'colonial and Eurocentric history' in the text students were reading is an abstraction. While in English the teacher readily shifts registers to explain what it means that 'the colonial and Eurocentric history' still influences the Middle East today, her language resources did not extend to making this same point in Arabic in the moment of interaction, despite her fluency in the language. To offer students sophisticated explanations of the content in Arabic, teachers' control of specialized registers needs to be extended.

5.4 Summary

Every student brings to the classroom expertise with a wide range of experiences and registers. No matter what language or variety of English they speak, they have learned to adjust their language choices as they interact with people in different social positions in their communities, engage in different social practices, and use different modalities for communication. Motivating and positioning learners as

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capable by recognizing and valuing the meanings they share in the registers they bring to school is the basis on which it is possible for them to add new knowledge and registers.

6. Learner identity and register development

As they speak, students enact their identities, and teachers need to listen to and think carefully about the meaning in what is being said, especially when what learners share is presented in unfamiliar registers or from different epistemological perspectives. Listeners who respond in ways that reject or discount speakers and their language perpetuate injustice and inequity and hinder the learning of all. Those who critique the concept of a language of schooling do so for the most part through awareness of the 'white gaze' (Flores & Rosa, 2015) with which many educators still hear and see students from minoritized communities. Changes in school curricula are needed to disrupt the colonization and structural racism that has historically excluded many learners and created classroom structures that valorize only certain ways of learning and knowing. But as we work toward that goal, attention to the ways language works to present science, literature, history, mathematics, and other disciplines is also needed to support learners to engage with and critique what they are reading and writing.

6.1 Respecting learners

Teachers, teacher educators, and researchers all have roles to play in learning more about register variation and supporting learners to adopt new registers related to the knowledge they are studying. Language is best learned in contexts where learners are engaged in meaningful activities with interlocutors who seek to understand them and support them to say/write what they want to share.

Teachers can focus on meaning in interacting in the classroom and responding to writing, respecting and engaging with the linguistic repertoires students bring as they support development of learners' language and knowledge. Recognizing the bi/multilingualism of speakers of different dialects/varieties of English is an important step toward this goal. Differences in the register repertoires students bring to school should be seen as an asset, where engaging with the multiple ways of being and knowing represented by those registers can be enriching for all. Teacher educators can address register development as an integral part of language teaching and learning, modeling through exploration of the range of registers prospective teachers themselves bring to the classroom. Activities that help prospective teachers recognize that register variation represents different social experience and ways of meaning can help them in turn support their students to respect and value the knowledge others bring. Researchers can develop new ways of talking about and studying register differences that recognize their full complexity, moving beyond the problematic school/home dichotomy.

6.2 Shifting registers

Language classrooms should be places where learners' language is respected and they are supported to engage in register shifting that enables them to draw on familiar resources as they add new registers. Drawing on a range of registers is an important part of connecting new knowledge to what is already known. Learners benefit from talking about what they are learning using less dense registers (Bunch, 2014; Leung, 2014) and teachers can plan activities that support students to draw on registers they are already familiar with as they develop additional registers that enable them to engage in new disciplinary practices.

Moving between registers supports learners to participate in learning and critiquing new knowledge. As they discuss what they have read, they can identify the multiple meanings in the choices authors make, and as they write, they can consider their own language choices (Aull, 2024).

6.3 Being explicit about register differences

Students are aware that they make different language choices in different contexts and they typically enjoy discussing these differences. Learners can be agentive in contributing to teachers' and researchers'

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understanding if given opportunities to engage in dialogue about language. Talking explicitly about language with a focus on meaning, teacher educators can support prospective language teachers to learn about the registers their students will bring and the variation in register that they will encounter, just as they support the learning of vocabulary, grammar, and new genres. Researchers can recognize that register development is an intrinsic part of language development and help the field think in new ways about what develops in language as students progress. Studies can further develop descriptions of different pathways into advanced language learning that recognize lexicogrammatical development in the multiple complex meanings realized in different registers.

A focus on register offers learners understanding about language that recognizes the relationship between meaning and context and makes the expectations of the 'hidden curriculum' (Christie, 1985) of schooling more explicit. Talking about differences in register supports students to develop critical language awareness. Doing this in contexts of learning disciplinary practices (e.g., Gibbons, 2006) respects them as capable of engaging in the discourses of academic communities and participating in new knowledge development. SFL scholars have illustrated how even young learners get engaged with register when supported to analyze language from this perspective (e.g., Gebhard & Graham, 2018).

7. Conclusion

Let us welcome all languages and registers to the classroom and make language choices a point of discussion. Systemic functional linguistics offers multiple tools and strategies for talking explicitly about register differences in interaction with learners at different ages and proficiency levels. Learning new registers is an important aspect of language development; school-based registers are resources for developing, sharing, and critiquing new knowledge across subject areas and in different genres. We can value our students' various social identities by demonstrating respect for the language they bring and help them build on what they bring as they develop new knowledge that extends their linguistic repertoires.

Notes

[1] I was not the first person to suggest this; my work built on that of scholars such as Jim Cummins (1992), whose conception of a difference between everyday spoken language and language at school was both widely taken up in productive ways and widely attacked along the same lines as I address here. See Cummins (2000) for an overview.

[2] Halliday also notes that these grammatical patterns have also been taken up, less functionally (unless perhaps the goal there is obfuscation), in the language of bureaucracy.

[3] For more on SFL see, for example, Eggins (2004); Halliday and Hasan (1985); Martin and Rose (2007). The SFL description of register has its basis in a theory of language in social context that recognizes that contexts set up expectations for language use that are shaped by the choices speakers make. Context and language are in a dialectical relationship that is constantly shifting and evolving. SFL offers a functional grammar that enables language form to be linked with the meanings realized in language, and research from other linguistic traditions that analyze corpora using traditional linguistic categories have offered commensurate analyses of the features SFL describes in functional terms (e.g., Biber's register studies; see Goulart et al., 2020; see also Schleppegrell & Christie, 2018).

[4] Paraskevas (2020, p. 3) points out that: 'The variety that has been chosen as "Standard English" is not linguistically superior to other varieties: rather, the variety spoken by those who had political and economic power was the one that was chosen in the late 1400s as the standard variety, was codified (that is it was recorded in dictionaries and grammar books) and, finally, used in multiple literary, political and judicial domains.'

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