

LOOKING AT THE "MENTAL PICTURE OF REALITY" OF
AN EFL TEACHER: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS¹

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Abstract

In this study, I analyze an interview conducted with a Brazilian EFL teacher. Through the analysis of transitivity, I aim at understanding how he² encodes his teaching experience and professional roles. The study highlights some of the potentialities of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1994) as a theoretical framework to be used to categorize teachers' discourse, making both the discussion and interpretation of data more systematic. Analysis of the research participant's discourse reveals, on the one hand, his concerns with the quality and development of his teaching practice, as well as with his learners' needs. The analysis also shows, on the other hand, that he does not seem to share his professional responsibilities collaboratively with his colleagues and students. These findings may be helpful to debates in language teacher education for the benefit of both prospective and practicing teachers. *Keywords:* EFL teacher; reflective interview; systemic functional linguistics; transitivity.

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 46	p.179-210	jan./jun. 2004
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1. Introduction

In this paper I aim at analyzing a language teacher's discourse, focusing on his perception of himself as a professional. More specifically, I am interested here in seeing how a Brazilian EFL teacher encodes his teaching roles, interweaving his different memories in a continuous trajectory as a teacher. Through the analysis of transitivity, I try to see which "mental picture of reality" (Halliday, 1994, p. 106; Butt et al., 2000, p. 46) he has in relation to his profession. In a Hallidayan perspective, I am interested in how language is used "(...) to make sense of what goes on around them [human beings] and inside them" (Halliday, 1994, p. 106). In other words, the focus is on how a teacher sees himself as a subject acting in the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Brazil.

There is a recognized need to provide FL teachers with opportunities to verbalize their practice. Recent literature on the topic highlights the importance of a critical reflection on teaching (Burns, 1999; Knezevic & Scholl, 1996; Richards, 1998, Heberle & Meurer, 2001; Heberle, 2001). In fact, there are many examples of successful attempts at this kind of inquiry in Brazil, such as: Almeida Filho (1999), Celani (2003), Gimenez (1994), Reichmann (2001), Telles (1996), and Vieira-Abrahão (1999). All these studies agree on the possible contributions that a reflective approach may bring to the teaching field. Favoring a text-analysis pursued within its social context, the claim I would like to make here is that, since Halliday's theory of language holds the notion that "there are no meanings waiting around to be encoded; the meaning is created in language" (Halliday, 1994, p. xii), his grammar may be a valuable alternative for text analysis, helping researchers to analyze data in a systematized context-bound perspective.

Within this framework, and taking into account that "one's discourse is an effect of one's subjectivity rather than vice-versa" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 122), I suggest that teachers' texts should be further analyzed within the socially constituted nature of language and identity-construction. In this regard, I propose to analyze a reflective

meeting I had with the teacher who participated in my MA study (Malatér, 1998).

The focus of this meeting was on this teacher's teaching practice, about which he talked enthusiastically. The data were transcribed and analyzed following some of the textual parameters set forth by SFL (Halliday, 1994). In order to fulfill the aim of this study, an analysis of *transitivity* will be presented, focusing on the *participants* (i.e. social actors), *processes* (i.e. verbs) and *circumstances* (i.e. "the whys and whens and wherefores" [Butt *et al.*, 2000, p. 47]) referred to during this informal interview.

First I briefly review some of the literature on teacher development, trying to establish a connection between the construction of teachers' identities and their roles. Then, I introduce Halliday's ideational metafunction, which is realized through the system of transitivity, connecting it to my main purpose. Next, I move on to the empirical context of this research, presenting in detail the *context of situation*, i.e. the *who*, *what* and *how* of the present study, establishing the frame to be analyzed. After that, I present the data analysis and discussion. Finally I suggest some possible contributions of the analysis made here to the debate about language teacher education.

2. A concept of teacher education

Language teachers are usually seen as friends, as dictators, as mediators, as inflexible or as open-minded people. For each of these perceptions, there will be a different view on how teachers should be educated as professionals. Roberts (1998), for example, proposes four *models of the person*, which have different conceptions about the objectives, content and process of human learning. These models, according to the author, will influence teacher education and the *models of the teacher*. In other words, "what a teacher is, what s/he knows and how s/he learns" (p. 13) will vary according to how the teacher is pictured by herself/himself and by other people, depending on the interactions s/he establishes. According to these models, the person

may be seen: “as input-output system”, “with self-agency”, “as constructivist”, or “as social being” (Roberts, 1998, p.13).

Although each of these four perspectives throw light on different facets of teacher learning, I agree with Roberts (1998, p. 44) when he suggests a *social constructivist approach* as a frame for language teaching education. In this perspective, there is an interdependence between the personal and the social dimensions which will strongly influence our identity as teachers. As pointed out by the same author, “our development will be framed by the relationships and dialogue that are available to us” (p. 44). In other words, our selfness, as teachers, is influenced by many othernesses. This is in line with Halliday’s view of humans as social beings (see Halliday, 1978). The present study will highly consider this socially constructed identity as a reliable perspective in the process of becoming a teacher.

It seems that this process needs to be further investigated in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) contexts; and to fulfill this aim, teachers need to propose and/or participate in research of their own interest (as suggested by Moita-Lopes, 1996; and Burns, 1999). In both proposing and participating in research, teachers would focus on their own teaching practices and on their possible impacts on learners’ education. By the same token, the pertinent literature considers teaching as a process that requires constant reflection on the part of those who are involved and interested in it. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), *critical reflection* involves the process of questioning, and “in asking and answering questions (...), teachers are in a position to evaluate their teaching, to decide if aspects of their own teaching could be changed, to develop strategies for change, and to monitor the effects of implementing these strategies” (p. 2). This study considers *reflection* a constant and principled investigation, an essential element that may help teachers in their lifelong improvement process. I am aware, however, that — as pointed out by Vieira-Abrahão (2001) — the FLT community needs to achieve a better understanding of the contributions and limitations that a reflective approach may bring to FL teacher education.

Reflective sessions may help teachers better "map" their professional and developmental situations. Burns (1999), for example, argues that teachers in different educational settings encounter very similar practical concerns. Thus, we, teachers, should share our professional problems and search *collaboratively* for possible solutions and achievements. This is not to suggest that teaching environments and teachers' experiences should be generalized; due to their *diversity*, it would be impossible. The main point here is that teachers' practices should be *shared critically*.

The literature in teacher education has shown how difficult it is to change conceptions, practices and beliefs. Nevertheless, teachers have to be *open* to innovation and new challenges. According to Gimenez (1994), "teachers are always learning from their experiences as teachers", and this is a "never-ending process" (p. 10). This assertion implies that teachers, as agents of societal change, should reflect on and question their beliefs, trying to better know themselves and to assess both their perceptions and classroom practices. In other words, teachers need to believe that not only can they change their verbalization, but they can also change their actions, as suggested by Freeman (1991). Otherwise, teaching may become a reproduction of past experiences, and teachers take the risk of perpetuating inadequate practices. The idea of better knowing (i.e. mapping) their practice, thus, becomes relevant.

Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) corroborate this view by saying that "attitude change may be necessary, but it is not sufficient" (p. 359). When there is a connection between 'saying' and 'doing', we have not only a "language of words" but also a "language of practice" (Connely & Clandinin, 1988, p. 66).

Williams and Burden (1997) highlight that the study of beliefs may be very helpful because "...the consistency with which teachers' actions reflect what they claim to believe would appear to be a vitally important aspect of effective teaching" (p. 63). Therefore, beliefs about classroom interaction, for example, are reflected in teachers' models of teaching and learning languages; and hence, in their practices. Gimenez

(1994) also points to “the importance of teachers’ beliefs in attempts to understand the rationale for their decisions in the classroom” (p. 21).

As we can see, the literature proposes that critical reflection is a relevant aspect of continuing teacher education. Hopefully, this practice may contribute to a better understanding of our identity as teachers. Fortunately, as briefly pointed out in the Introduction to this study, the reflective notion has received attention in the Brazilian teacher education literature. Besides the increasing number of studies within this line of research, some qualitative improvements may be seen, as well as a constant search for new alternatives of methodologies, subjects, discussions, and ways of disseminating the benefits of such developmental perspective.

Considering that assuming different teaching roles, the teacher may, as a consequence, implement different classroom actions and propose different interactions, this study focuses on a teacher’s view on his own teaching. As previously explained, I suggest that SFL may be very helpful to interpret data critically within a social context.

3. Transitivity: the essentials

In SFL, analysis of language considers *language in use*, not in isolation. In other words, language forms and functions should be focused on as interdependent systems in which meaning and use are amalgamated. Halliday (1994) reinforces this idea by saying that “(...) the form of the grammar relates naturally to the meanings that are being encoded” (p. xvii). Within this perspective, language is a *sociosemiotic element*, i.e. language realizes the context of situation in which discourse takes place. In this theoretical frame, language is seen as a social system of meaning that constitutes human experience (Motta-Roth & Heberle, 1994, p. 238).

Our experiences, as human beings, may be represented in many different ways. In a functionalist view, such differences will be determined by “(...) who we are, what we are doing or how we are feeling at the time” (Halliday, 1994, p. 114), which will be instantiated by the lexicogrammatical choices we make when we speak and/or

write. As both our inner and outer experiences are represented, in the grammar of the clause, by the system of *transitivity*, special emphasis will be given to it in this section.

According to Halliday (1994), the central conception of "modelling experience" is that "mental pictures of reality" consist of 'goings-on' selected by the speaker or writer (p. 106). These goings-on, which are realized by verbal groups (Bloor & Bloor, 1995), are labeled as *Processes* (called simply verbs in traditional grammar).

Halliday classifies six types of Processes in English: Relational, Verbal, Mental, Behavioural, Material, and Existential. In a very broad perspective, they express the notion of 'being', 'saying', 'sensing', 'behaving', 'doing', and 'existing', respectively. Each Process may have three elements: the Process itself; the Participants in the Process (which are classified accordingly); and the Circumstances related to the Process (Heberle, 1997; Praxedes Filho, 1996). Butt *et al.* (2000) say that, in a clause, the Participants are the "thingness" (p. 66), the Processes, the "eventness" (p. 69), and that the Circumstances "illuminate the Process in someway" (p. 64).

At this point, few examples from the data³ here analyzed may illustrate what has been briefly reviewed on the system of transitivity:

MATERIAL PROCESSES

|| then I brought material, other sorts of material related to pollution, ||
31.⁴

then	I	brought	material, other sorts of material related to pollution
X ⁵	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Participant: Goal

|| I developed a sort of functional method. ||
82.

I	developed	a sort of functional method
Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Participant: Goal

MENTAL PROCESSES

|| I know || that I'm not the best teacher in the world, || right? ||

12.

I	know	that I'm not the best teacher in the world. ⁶
Participant: Senser	Process: Mental	Participant: Phenomenon
Projecting clause		Projected clause

|| I don't think || that's a very, very good book, || right? ||

24.

I	don't think	that's a very, very good book
Participant: Senser	Process: Mental	Participant: Phenomenon
Projecting clause		Projected clause

RELATIONAL PROCESSES

|| that I'm not the best teacher in the world ||

13.

that	I	am not	the best teacher in the world
X	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational	Participant: intensive Attribute

|| We are under this pressure, || right? ||

53.

We	are	under this pressure
Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational	Participant: circumstantial Attribute

Right?

(Discourse marker)

As highlighted previously, transitivity is used here as a tool for discourse analysis. Considering that "reality is made up of PROCESSES" (Halliday, 1994, p. 106), special attention will be given to the analysis of the processes used by the research participant. The "entities involved in the process" (Bloor & Bloor, 1995), i.e. the participants, and the circumstances are also analyzed.

4. Research context

According to Halliday (1994), language use is sensitive to the context of situation in which it is used. Therefore, when critically analyzing discourse, it is essential that the context be clearly stated. The features of the context of situation are: the *field of discourse* (i.e. "the nature of the activity, and subject-matter"), the *tenor of discourse* (i.e. "the role relationships among the participants"), and the *mode of discourse* (i.e. "the channel, and the part played by language in the total event" [Halliday, 1978, p. 227]). In other words, they are extralinguistic features that influence the language choices in a given situation. In this section, details will be given about each of these features.

Among the many ethnographic research procedures, following both the *seeing* and *asking* perspectives (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Van Lier, 1988), used in my 1998 study, there was an "informal talk" (Malatér, 1998, p. 64), between the research participant (a Brazilian EFL teacher) and the researcher (myself), in which we discussed teaching beliefs and behaviors. This talk took place just before one of his classes, and lasted for fifteen minutes.

The contextual configuration of the reflective informal meeting with the Brazilian EFL teacher-object of analysis in this piece of research-can thus be characterized by the context-of-situation features as follows:

Field- *social activity involved*: the first of three reflective meetings with the EFL teacher who participated in my MA study. The teacher was asked to talk freely about his teaching practice; *participants share a convergent aim*: to investigate a teacher's discursive construction in relation to his TEFL practical experience. At the time of data collection

the participant of this research was teaching a course at the non-credit foreign language program at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Brazil⁷.

Tenor – agents of interaction: one teacher-researcher (myself) and one EFL teacher; *roles*: the former as “interviewer” and the latter as “interviewee”; the researcher asked the participant to talk freely about his TEFL experience; whenever necessary and based on the teacher’s answers, some questions or requests for further explanations were introduced. My research participant is a male certified EFL teacher from Brazil, who was working on his master’s degree in Applied Linguistics at the Post-graduate Program in English and Applied Linguistics at UFSC, Brazil. He received his undergraduate degree at UFSC. At the time of data collection, i.e. June 1996, he was 24 and had not had any living or teaching experiences abroad. With four years of EFL teaching experience at the time, he promptly accepted to take part in the study. His experience includes teaching children and teenagers, although he prefers teaching adult learners. He has taught private students and has also taught in private language institutions. When data were collected, he was teaching his second semester at the non-credit foreign language program at UFSC. His voice is predominant in the interview; *social distance*: minimum; *social relation*: asymmetric (the interviewer guided and determined the topic of the reflective meeting, although the researcher and the research participant were colleagues in the MA program, and the meeting was informally developed).

Mode – role of language: constitutive; *channel*: phonic (before transcription); graphic (after transcription); *medium*: spoken (informal) language.

As pointed out by Halliday (1978), once the context of situation has been detailed, we may predict the kind of information to be described and interpreted⁸. Based on the context detailed above, we may speculate, for example, that the teacher would talk about some events that constitute his history as an EFL teacher, and about some of his personal experiences which have contributed to his development

as a teacher. Therefore, some of his memories and plans would be shared. The researcher, on the other hand, although proposing an open-ended interview, would try to bring the discussion to her focus of investigation.

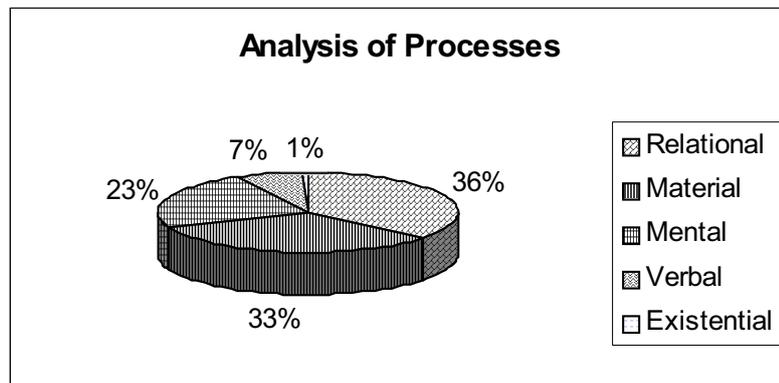
Now I move on to the description and interpretation of the data.

5. Analysis of transitivity features in the data

In the systemic functional approach to language, each clause encodes three meanings simultaneously, i.e. Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. However, since this study focuses on the resources a teacher draws on to construe his teaching experience in his professional world, i.e. "both the outside world of physical phenomena and the inside world of feelings, beliefs and reflection" (Hasan & Perrett, 1994, p. 184), processes and their supporting functional roles will receive special attention since they are related to the Ideational/Experiential meanings which are realized by the system of Transitivity.

Through a detailed analysis of the data, the most frequently used processes, i.e. Relational, Material and Mental, and their respective participants, i.e. Carrier/Attribute, Actor/Goal and Senser/Phenomenon, provide support for the elements and roles that are valued and assumed by the research participant in relation to his teaching profession.

All the clauses produced in the interview were categorized⁹ according to Halliday (1994). In a total of 152 complete ranking clauses¹⁰ used by the teacher in the whole interview, 163 processes¹¹ are present: 59 are Relational processes of the attributive type; 53 are Material; 38 are Mental; 12 are Verbal; and only 1 is Existential. The following pie chart illustrates the percentage of each 'going-on' used in the analyzed interview:



The linguistic data here scrutinized reveal that the research participant uses, most frequently, processes of *being*, *doing*, and *sensing*. In this section, besides presenting the percentage of occurrence, some examples of each will be given and what each process and its participants reveal, in relation to the teacher’s view on language teaching and his roles, will be explored.

5.1. Attributive Relational processes¹²

Some examples of relational processes of *being* are:

||In fact, it’s a sort of double fold || I mean || a two fold knowledge||
6.

In fact,	it [teaching]	is	a sort of double fold [knowledge]
X	Participant: Carrier (anaphoric)	Process: Relational	Attribute

|| Sometimes it’s hard. ||
52.

Sometimes	it [teaching]	’s	hard
Circumstance	Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational	Participant: Attribute

|| I had an experience... a brief experience with children ||

146.

I	had	an experience a brief experience	with children
Participant: Carrier	Process: Relational	Participant: Attribute	Circumstance

According to Halliday (1994), with the use of this kind of process, a relation is established between two entities, i.e. "something is being said to 'be' something else" (p. 119). In the fifty-nine Relational Processes (36% of the processes used), the most frequent Carriers are:

<i>I</i> [teacher]	8 times
<i>You</i> [teacher]	4 times
<i>It</i> [teaching]	5 times
<i>It</i> [this teaching experience]	4 times
[the sort of] <i>teaching</i>	3 times
<i>It</i> [Interchange Book]	6 times
<i>It</i> [to deal with the book]	3 times

Analyzing the Attributes used in relation to these Carriers, we find a great variety but a very low frequency of repetition. The following chart gives us an idea of this variety:

CARRIERS	SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES USED
<i>I, You</i> [teacher]	two sorts of knowledge; very lucky; a little more strict [with teenagers]; fifteen students.
<i>It</i> [teaching], <i>It</i> [this teaching experience], [the sort of] <i>teaching</i> .	a very difficult task; difficult; very rewarding; hard.
<i>It</i> [Interchange Book], <i>It</i> [to deal with the book]	a bit, a sort of superficial; complete; a very complete course book.

Considering the process under investigation in this section, and the relationship between Carriers and Attributes, some issues may be explored: a) how does my research participant see himself as a teacher?

how does he see teachers in general?, b) how is teaching perceived?, and c) what is his opinion about the textbook used in his classes?

Discussing the data above, it is possible to say that this teacher thinks that teaching is a very complex activity, which demands many responsibilities on the teachers' part, and different kinds of knowledge, e.g.:

You [teacher] need to have two sorts of knowledge (cl. 4¹³);
You [teacher] need to have the linguistic knowledge and also the knowledge related to content (cl. 5)¹⁴.

Besides, he further emphasizes the complexities involved in teaching, e.g.:

teaching is a very difficult task (cl. 2);
it [teaching] is very hard (cl. 9).

Although signaling these professional challenges, the teacher also perceives teaching as a "very rewarding" task, e.g.:

It [teaching adults] was very ah... rewarding (cl. 65).

Besides that, the teacher's different teaching experiences may have a different impact on his perceptions, e.g.:

It [teaching adults] was fantastic (cl. 94);
It [teaching adults] was *one of the best*⁵ experience (cl. 96);
I had an experience, a brief experience with children (cl. 146);
and I found it [the experience with children] great (cl. 147).

As pointed out above, his teaching experiences vary from "very difficult" or "hard" to "very rewarding". These perceptions on teaching might interfere with his teaching decision-making process and with his self-image as a teacher.

Two sorts of teaching difficulties emerged during the interview: a) the book – “we [teachers] are under this pressure [the textbook]” (cl. 53) – which he has to follow in class; the Attributes given to it are: “a sort of superficial, [not] complete”; and b) the teaching of teenagers, the Attribute given to it is: “much more difficult” than teaching children and/or adults. In relation to this latter aspect, the teacher says that

you [teacher] need to be a little more strict with teenagers (cl. 118);
with an adult it’s easier (cl. 133);
it’s much more difficult [[to teach teenagers]] (cl. 142).

Besides, he emphasizes the idea that different groups of learners, i.e. children, teenagers, or adults, will behave differently in the classroom, and that the teacher needs to act accordingly.

Taking into account all these complexities, the teacher highlights some of the constant challenges he has to face, but it seems that he tries to learn from the positive, and also from the negative experiences he has to deal with. When asked about how he copes with his complex profession, he said:

I know I know that I’m not the best teacher in the world, right? But I try to... to... to... to... to... prepare my classes. I always try to see the students’ needs. OK?

It seems that, in order to minimize teacher-centeredness and in an attempt to face the teaching difficulties, he takes the students’ needs into account, when planning a class. In other words, admitting not being ‘the best’, a kind of utopian perfect teacher, he emphasizes the importance of ‘preparing a class’ because, this way, “the class [students] will be more [involved]” (cl. 34).

5.2. Material processes

Some examples of material processes of *doing* are:

|| But I try to... to... to... to... to... prepare my classes. ||

14.

But	I	try to prepare	my classes
X	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Participant: Goal

|| Because last semester I taught Interchange One. ||

58.

Because	last semester	I	taught	Interchange One
X	Circumstance	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Participant: Goal

|| because they are learning English ||

120.

because	they	are learning	English
X	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Goal

According to Halliday (1994), “[Material processes] are processes of ‘doing’. They express the notion that an entity ‘does’ something or ‘makes’ something happen” (p. 110). In the fifty-three instances of Material Processes (33% of the processes used) the *Actor*, usually *I* or *You* [teacher], does something related to education and to teaching/ learning practices. In other words, the research participant portrays himself as actively acting on his profession and, as a consequence, assuming certain active roles. In this perspective, he depicts himself as taking decisions that he considers to be important in order to fulfill his expectations as a teacher, e.g. “then I brought material, other sorts of material related to pollution” (cl. 31), in order to help students to talk about the topic.

A close look at the Material Processes used in the interview reveals the most frequent *Actors*:

<i>I</i> [teacher]	24 times
<i>You</i> [teacher]	5 times
<i>We</i> [teacher and students]	3 times

Other Actors used were: *my father*, *I* [ordinary person], *their* [his students] *previous teachers*, and *they* [adults], each of them being used only twice during the reflective informal meeting.

Some examples of the most frequent Actors are:

I [teacher] try to prepare my classes (cl. 14);
I used functions (cl. 81);
 Because when you [teacher] are teaching a foreign language (cl. 3);
we [teacher and students] worked with functions (cl. 74).

The linguistic analysis gives evidence to the fact that the classroom actions (i.e. planning, preparing, teaching) are centered on the teacher himself (*I* and *you* [teacher], totalizing 54.6% of the Actors used). The students seem to be directly involved in the classroom actions only in 5.6% of the clauses, occasions when they are tutored by the teacher, as indicated by the use of the pronoun *we*:

at the same time we [teacher and students] are going to go *deeper into* the subject (cl. 39);
 and we worked with functions (cl. 84).

It seems that the students act upon the teacher's choices of topics for discussion and of teaching approach. In this perspective, students are not seen as partners in deciding what is to be carried out in class. This lack of partnership is supported by the fact that the in-class activities are previously planned by the teacher to be performed by the classroom participants. In other words, this *we*, used by the teacher, refers to the

performers – in this case, teacher and learners – of his pre-class planning (which does not seem to be changed during the class).

On the other hand, the teacher shows some concern about a) his students' needs, as evidenced in:

Because lesson topics [[which are not presented in a deep way]] (cl. 22);

Because I didn't use to teach them the same way [[that their previous teachers had taught them]], grammar (cl. 78).

The concerns of the research participant are also related to b) his own personal experiences, which may influence his teaching, e.g.:

Because my father got retired and went to live there (cl. 70 and 71);

this [teaching teenagers] is very difficult for me (...) probably this is because [of] the way I was brought up (cl. 128 and 130),

making him prefer to teach adults rather than teenagers.

At this point, it seems interesting to see towards whom or what the Material Processes are discursively directed. Therefore, let us take a look at the most frequent Goals, out of the thirty-one used by the research participant:

<i>English</i>	4 times
<i>Teenagers</i>	3 times
<i>Them</i> [students]	2 times
<i>Adults</i>	2 times

Other Goals were used only once, e.g. *a foreign language, grammar, the way I was brought up, this sort of thing* [teenagers']

behavior], *this sort of people* [teenagers], *functions, a sort of functional method, my class, and the questions.*

Some examples of Goals include:

I've been studying English for seven years (cl. 66);
 I've been teaching English for four years (cl. 67);
 when you are teaching adults (cl. 114).

The English language and the students (teenagers or adults) are the most frequent Goals which receive the "materialization" of this teacher's actions, as can be seen in:

Because I didn't use to teach them [students] the same way
 [[that their previous teachers had taught them]] (cl. 78);
 I don't like to teach teenagers (cl. 122);
 And I can't deal with this sort of thing [teenagers' misbehavior] (cl. 127).

5.3. Mental processes

Some examples of mental processes of *sensing* are:

|| I always try to see the students' needs. || OK? ||

15.

I [teacher]	always	try to see	the students' needs
Participant: Senser	Circumstance	Process: Mental	Participant: Phenomenon

89.

|| they really liked it..... ||

they [students]	really	liked	it
Participant: Senser	Circumstance	Process: Mental	Participant: Phenomenon

Mental Processes (23% of the total) are relevant to be focused on since they describe states of the mind and detail psychological events. This kind of process denotes emotions (affection), senses (perception) and knowledge (cognition).

Out of the thirty-eight Mental processes of the analyzed corpus, the two most frequently used *Sensers* (81.5%) are:

<i>I</i> [teacher]	26 times
<i>They</i> [students]	5 times

Some examples of the use of these *Sensers* are:

And I [teacher] don't think that's a very good book (cl. 24 and 25);

They [students] liked it a lot (cl. 93);

because I learned a *lot* mainly in terms of methodology (cl. 102).

These *Sensers* show how the teacher is concerned about his own performance as an affective entity, trying to construct a positive professional image of himself, and also taking into account his students' likes and dislikes. The clauses in which Mental processes are used reveal a certain amount of affective involvement since the *Senser*, usually the teacher himself or his students, is a conscious being who feels, thinks and/or perceives (Halliday, 1994, p. 118). This way, the teacher is not only interested in his personal feelings when teaching, but he seems to be engaged in helping students to learn in a more pleasant way, taking their needs and likes into account. Some examples of this aspect are:

I [teacher] know that I'm not the best teacher in the world, right? (cl. 11 and 12);

I always try to see the students' needs (cl. 15);

And I don't think that [Interchange book]'s a very good book (cl. 24 and 25).

It is also interesting to see that he values the adult learners' interest in and motivation for studying English, e.g.:

Because they [adult learners] need [to study English] (cl. 135), in opposition to they [teenagers] are at the English school because their parents are insisting on it, right? (cl. 137 and 138)¹⁶.

As the Phenomenon "is that which is 'sensed' – felt, thought or seen" (Halliday, 1994, p. 117), it is worthwhile to take a look at the choices made in relation to this Participant type: *it* [his way of teaching (used twice), teaching teenagers, teaching children, teaching practice at a private school (each used once)]; *the students' needs, what* [students' needs (once)], *two people* [who know how to deal with teenagers (once)].

5.4. Existential and Verbal processes

As Existential and Verbal processes together represent only 8% of the whole processes used, one example of each is presented.

|| there will be more participation on the students' part ||

35.

there	will be	more participation on the students' part
X	Process: Existential	Participant: Existent

|| because I'm gonna ask || them to read the questions ||

36.

because	I	'm gonna ask	them to read the questions
X	Participant: Sayer	Process: Verbal	
Projecting clause			Projected clause

It is worthwhile mentioning that 71.4% of the Sayers used refer to *I* [teacher], e.g.

What else can I say about teaching? (cl. 17);
because I'm gonna ask them to read the questions (cl. 36).

In the former clause, the research participant seems to establish an inner talk, questioning himself about what else he may share about his own teaching experience. In the latter clause, he is giving details of one of his classroom plans: to ask his students to read and answer some questions, prepared by himself, about a certain topic in order to make them [students] "go deeper into" it.

The only example of the Existential type of process, which is present in the corpus (see above), may signal a dilemma faced by the teacher, that is, he tries to avoid classroom teacher-centered activities, promoting "more participation on the students' part".

Further studies and more in-depth data analysis would contribute to elucidate the points raised in this section. An investigation into how and why teachers take their teaching decisions, comparing their professional *wants* (Mental Processes) and *doings* (Material Processes), would be very relevant for the TEFL field.

5.5. *Circumstances*

As the "circumstantial elements (...) occur freely in all types of process" (Halliday, 1994, p. 149) and may convey a dimension of extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, matter, or angle, (p. 151), they are, in a discursive perspective, a relevant element to be considered. The data analysis shows that five, of the fifty-eight Circumstances used, are related to the research participant's personal life experience in a town called *Garopaba* (9.6%), e.g:

[my first experience as a teacher of English language] [was]
[at a school] in Garopaba (cl. 69) – where he had had a
remarkable teaching experience;

Four Circumstances are related to time (*when*, 6.8%), e.g.:

when you are teaching adults (cl. 114) – in this case he is expressing some of his beliefs in relation to the teaching of adults, in contrast with teaching teenagers (as explored earlier);

Three Circumstances are related to place (*at CCI* [there], 5.1%), e.g.:

And I taught here at CCI [a language institute] (cl. 99)

Two Circumstances are related to time again (*now*, 3.4%), e.g.:

And now I'm teaching Interchange Three (cl. 62).

6. The EFL teacher's represented experience

The analysis carried out in this paper, following a SFL framework, has shown that the teacher presents facts related to his teaching experience mostly by means of Relational Processes whose occurrence amounts to 36%, as in the clauses:

I was lucky at that time [referring to a group of only fifteen students];

This is very difficult for me [referring to his difficulty in dealing with teenage learners].

Furthermore, he is also an active "builder" of his own history as a teacher (as indicated by the high percentage of Material Processes, 33%) as well as a "mediator" of some contributions to his students' emotions (as indicated by the high percentage of Mental Processes, 23%). He clearly tries to take into account his own and his students' previous experiences in order to prepare and propose better classes, e.g.

I try to prepare my classes. I always try to see the students' needs;
 If talking [I talk] about levels of age, for example, you [teacher] cannot behave in the same way.

Although there is a high occurrence frequency of the pronoun *I* as an *Actor*, there is not enough evidence to affirm that this teacher's classes are teacher-centered. In order to better understand the many variables involved in his teaching practice, classroom observation should be carried out. On the other hand, the data show some evidence of a lack of a collaborative working environment; the agents of teaching practice are himself, as a teacher, and his students; there is no mentioning of other teachers and/or pedagogical coordinators. Besides, the pronoun *we*, when referring to the teacher and students, does not denote in-class partnership. It means that pre-class decisions are taken by the teacher, trying to take into consideration students' needs. Once these decisions are taken, they influence what will be performed by the students in class, but there is no evidence of pedagogical adjustment during the class.

In this regard, considering that language education aims, in a broad sense, at helping learners to meet their educational needs, expectations and interests, language education in general should let learners assume more active roles in classrooms. Otherwise, classes may be conducted, in a very traditional view, being centered on teachers who take on most of the responsibilities for such complex cognitive processes as learning and teaching. This teacher-centered perspective is part of a strong teaching culture, which is currently being reflected upon, criticized and given special attention in the field¹⁷.

An important aspect that emerged from the data analysis was the fact that the research participant presents a commitment with his practice as a teacher, trying to minimize a teacher-centeredness position. This effort is emphasized by the fact that the teacher perceives the learners' needs as a relevant classroom variable to be taken into account when both planning and teaching his classes, as detailed in section 5.1.

Another aspect revealed by the teacher was the fact that he does not like teaching teenage learners. This point is evident in clauses such as:

To tell you the truth I don't like to teach teenagers (cl. 121 and 122).

Although he has had an enjoyable teaching experience with children, he prefers teaching adults. This teaching preference originates from his own teaching experience, as explored in section 5.2.

This teacher also presents some evidence of continuous critical thinking about his profession, e.g.:

And from now on I think I should work more with this vocabulary part (cl. 44) – since the students already have the “knowledge of the structure”;

I learned *a lot* mainly in terms of methodology, right? And in terms of teacher talk, in terms of [[how you, a teacher should behave]], right? (cl. 102 and 103);

I had an experience, a brief experience with children and I found it great. Because they learn so fast. It is really fantastic (cl. 146, 147 and 148).

This teacher's professional awareness and criticism is a very positive fact to the TEFL field. This fact may positively contribute to his teaching practice and to his development as a committed professional.

7. Final remarks

In this study, I have focused on the analysis of a teacher's discourse in relation to his teaching experiences and viewpoints, associating a systemic functional approach to language with a reflective perspective on teacher education. It seems that this procedure may help teachers and researchers analyze linguistic data within a theoretical framework that considers language as a social practice.

The grammatical theory here suggested for data categorization, i.e. systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994), has proven to be an efficient tool to access inner and outer kinds of experiences, i.e. individuals influencing and being influenced in daily social life. Besides that, SFL provides us with a possibility of combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis (combination suggested by Chaudron, 1986), which may increase both research validity and reliability.

As emphasized earlier, this study does not propose an overgeneralization of results. It was focused on the initial steps in mapping a teacher's professional identity. According to Burns (1999), "the increase in individual and collective knowledge about teaching, as it occurs through teachers' own experience, has the potential to bring research and practice closer together in productive ways" (p. 14).

In order to establish a bridge between research and practice, it is necessary, I believe, to further investigate the personal and social history of teachers and better understand the discursive construction of Brazilian EFL teachers' identities (as explored, for instance, by Celani & Magalhães, 2002; Malatér, 2001a, 2001b; Vereza, 2002). Taking a reflective approach into account, it seems that our voices, as teachers, should be more frequently heard, and a special look at how we organize our experiences should be taken. In other words, how our reality is encoded and how our meanings are constructed may provide the TEFL field with valuable insights, mainly on teachers' social practices as professionals. This procedure would be in line with one of the challenges in educational research: to better understand the complex process of becoming teachers, especially foreign language teachers.

Based on SFL, the present study explored the very nature of a teacher's text and its meanings in relation to his own perceptions on professional roles. I suggest that this approach to the analysis of our texts, as teachers-under-constant-construction, should be emphasized with prospective teachers during their language teacher education. Within this perspective, teacher educators would also have an

opportunity to analyze their own texts in order to reconstruct their history, which, in turn, may influence future teachers in both their personal and professional growth, as well as help to make this type of social practice a continuous and permanent action in our profession.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to my colleague Pedro Henrique Lima Praxedes Filho for his valuable linguistic suggestions and emotional support. I also wish to thank Dr. John McAndrew (Macquarie University, Sydney) and the editors for their criticism and suggestions on this paper. I highlight that remaining errors are my own.
- 2 Since the research participant is male, the pronouns he/his/himself will be used when talking directly about him.
- 3 In this section, examples of the three most frequent Processes will be presented.
- 4 The numbers refer to the original order of occurrence of the clauses in the corpus.
- 5 'X' indicates a clause structural segment that has no functional role within the system of transitivity.
- 6 See the first example of "relational processes" that follows.
- 7 This is a university extension program regularly offered by the Foreign Language Department at UFSC especially to the academic community. The teachers are from the Foreign Language Department or from the Post-graduate Program in English and Applied Linguistics. The department offers ESP courses - especially reading, and regular language courses in which the four skills are developed at basic, intermediate and advanced levels. My research participant described his group of students as a "heterogeneous" intermediate group. It consisted of seventeen EFL learners (eight male and nine female), attending the 5th semester of English. Classes were held in the evening, twice a week, for two hours, over one semester.
- 8 I acknowledge that "in SFL social context is modeled through register and genre theory" (Martin, 2001, p. 45). It means that both genre and register play a role in skewing linguistic choices. This point is not further developed in this text. For a detailed consideration, see Hasan (1985) and Martin (2001).

9 Some examples will be given when discussing the data in this section.

10 There are three occurrences of incomplete clauses in the corpus. E.g.:

because if	you...	Φ	Φ	sometimes
X	Participant: ?	Process: ?	Participant: ?	Circumstance

(cl. 119)

11 The processes in the “down-ranked clauses” are also considered in this analysis.

12 There are no occurrences of the identifying type of relational process in the corpus.

13 According to the convention used in this text, it means clause number 4 (based on the original order of occurrence in the corpus).

14 Some examples from the corpus will be included. Due to space constraints, they will not be necessarily fully analyzed.

15 Italics are used to indicate emphasis in the original.

16 In this section, in order to better illustrate what has been discussed, it was necessary to bring examples of clauses with processes different from the Mental type.

17 One example of this fact was the “National Meeting of University English Language Teachers”, held in Londrina, Brazil in 2001, having as main topic the “Education of Teachers in Changing Times”.

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