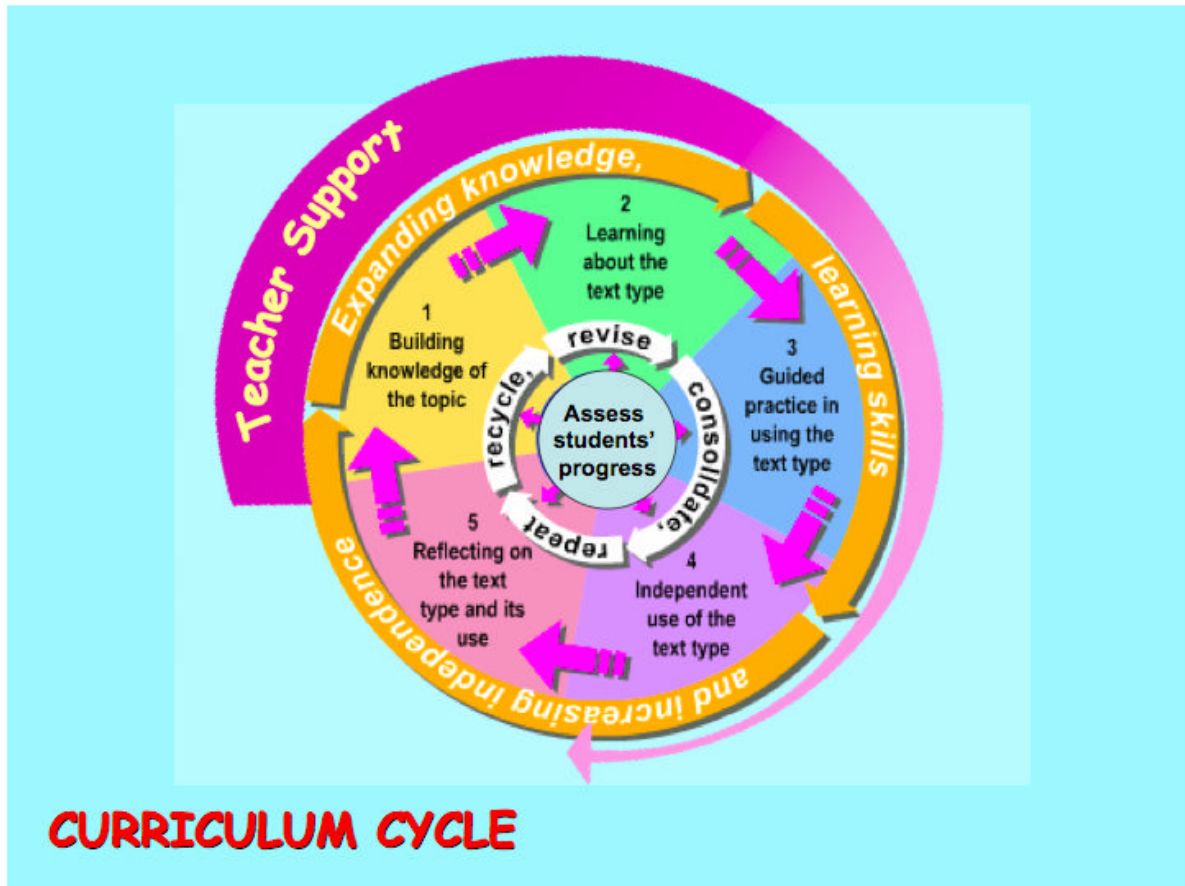


GRAMMAR: WHY ALL THE FUSS?

Bev Derewianka
University of Wollongong
8th September 2007



Functional Grammar	Traditional Grammar
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... is based on the functions that language serves within our lives. It is concerned with how language has evolved in our culture to enable us to do things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... is based on syntax and grammatical categories. It is concerned with the form and structure of language, and the labelling of grammatical units.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... sees language as a resource for making meaning – a vast network of choices. It provides tools to investigate and critique how language is involved in the construction of meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... sees language as a set of rules and conventions which allow us to make judgements about correctness and incorrectness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... emphasizes the text as a whole and how texts are patterned. Smaller units of language can be focused on as they occur within the whole text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... operates at the level of the sentence and below, often building up from smaller to larger units (morpheme, phrase, clause, etc.).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... recognizes that grammatical patternings in texts vary in particular ways according to the context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... does not recognize context as significant. It is more interested in a 'general' description of language than in one which enables the description of how texts differ from context to context.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... recognizes the nature and roles of both spoken and written language and highlights their important similarities and differences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... is essentially a description of written language and does not attempt to describe the grammatical characteristics of spoken language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... seeks to describe authentic language in use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... generally uses idealised samples of language constructed to teach a particular point of grammar.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... sees learning language as an on-going process which involves engaging in ever-broadening contexts and extending one's meaning-making potential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ... sees language learning as the acquisition of correct forms.

Some findings about the role of grammar and terminology

Central to the debate about the role of grammar in developing writing is the question of the value of grammatical terminology and access to this metalanguage. Cognitive psychologists have repeatedly signalled the importance of metacognition (Hayes and Flower 1980; Martlew; Kellogg 1990; Wallace and Hayes 1991; Butterfield et al 1996) in the writing process, because writing is a process which demands self-monitoring (Kellogg 17). Metacognitive knowledge plays a role in every stage of the writing process: in moving planning from an over-emphasis on content to greater consideration of the strategic goals of the task (Hayes and Flower 1980); in the process of revision (Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001); and in developing self-regulation (Englert et al). Bereiter and Scardamalia argue that the benefit of metacognition is that it renders *'normally covert processes overt'*.

For many teachers *'the "writing virtues" of their pupils often went unseen and unacknowledged because of their own lack of knowledge about language'* (Gordon 2005:63). In contrast, weak linguistic knowledge can lead to an over-emphasis upon identification of grammar structures without fully acknowledging the conceptual or cognitive implications (Myhill) of that teaching. Equally it can lead to sterile teaching, divorced from the realities of language in use: Applebee, for example, notes two studies in the US which showed that topic sentences and paragraph patterns taught in school bear little resemblance to those found in 'real' prose (Applebee)

Carter (1990) maintains that the demise of formal grammar teaching and with it the absence of a metalanguage in the classroom has been disempowering, preventing learners from *'exercising the kind of conscious control and conscious choice over language which enables both to see through language in a systematic way and to use language more discriminatingly'* (Carter 1990:119).

Terminology and rules are pointless if your mind hasn't grasped the concepts behind the terminology' (Keith 1997:12).

The report concluded that there was a *'significant gap... in teachers' knowledge and confidence in sentence grammar and this has implications for... the teaching of language and style in texts and pupils' own writing'* (QCA 1998:35). From a pedagogical perspective, linguistic subject knowledge is more than the ability to use appropriate terminology, but involves the ability to explain grammatical concepts clearly and know when to draw attention to them. Andrews suggests that it is *'likely to be the case that a teacher with a rich knowledge of grammatical constructions and a more general awareness of the forms and varieties of the language will be in a better position to help young writers'* (Andrews 2005:75), and Gordon (2005) found that teachers who developed more secure linguistic knowledge were able to see beyond superficial error in children's writing to evidence of growing syntactical maturity.