**NASFLA Newsletter, Number 4**

North American Systemic [Functional Linguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional_theories_of_grammar) Association

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NASFLA [Web address](http://www..com/): < [http://www.yorku.ca/cummings/nasfla>](http://www.yorku.ca/cummings/nasfla%3E).

Greetings.

Coming attractions: Old Newsletters will be posted on the NA-SFLA website.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, our meetings at the World Englishes Conference and the National Council of Teachers of English Convention [NCTE] went very well.

1. On to the American Association of Applied Linguistics [AAAL]….March 22-25, Sheraton National Hotel Arlington, Arlington, Virginia. < [www.aaal.org/aaal2003/>](http://www.aaal.org/aaal2003/%3E) In addition to our several Systemic Programs that were accepted at AAAL, we will be having a SYSTEMIC [CRACKER BARREL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cracker_Barrel_Old_Country_Store) information session on Monday, March 24 from 5:15-7:15. The only things on the program scheduled against us are a business meeting and a reception. We need to know if you are coming to AAAL. If we can't cover the areas mentioned below in the AAAL program memo, we will have to make up bibliographies to post on the web. The description of the 'cracker barrel' follows.

Organizer: Bernard Mohan, Chair, NASFLA Monday March 24; Time: 5:15-7:30; Room, East1

Title: North American Systemic Functional Linguistic Association [Cracker Barrel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cracker_Barrel_Old_Country_Store)

Everyone welcome to join an informal information session on Halliday's Systemic [Functional Linguistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functional_theories_of_grammar). Discussions and bibliographies will include: Multimedia, Discourse Analysis, Ape Language, Language Education/Reading, phonology, Child Language, Social Semiotics, Artificial Intelligence and Computational Linguistics.

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU WILL BE AT THE CRACKER BARREL AND/OR THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY SYSTEMIC AAAL DINNER FOLLOWING THE CRACKER BARREL. AND PLEASE LET US KNOW WHAT BIBLIOGRAPHIES YOU CAN CREATE FOR US.

We need time to make all the arrangements. Thanks. 350 papers were accepted out of 1,000 proposals for AAAL. Early registration deadline is February 2. < [www.aaal.org/aaal2003/register.html>](http://www.aaal.org/aaal2003/register.html%3E)

Correction: When we listed systemically oriented papers to be presented at AAAL in March we omitted one by Mary Schleppegrell and Mariana Achugar. The abstract is below. They will be presenting 3:55 - 4:25 on Monday, March 24, 2003.

Mary Schleppegrell and Mariana Achugar

The place of grammar in academic language development: Learning history

English language learners need to develop academic language in order to have access to grade-level content and for full participation in society. Examples from research on "learning the language of history" demonstrate how a functional analysis of academic texts contributes to the development of students' academic language and critical thinking.

2. And for the NA-SFLA mini-conference July 25-27, 2003 at the summer LSA. We have three days at the LSA Summer Institute in East Lansing, Michigan, to fill up with wonderful papers and/or workshops. We have a partial program at present, but still have openings for papers. Anyone who wants to join us please send a one page abstract to [Michael Cummings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Cummings) <MCUMMINGS@GLENDON.YORKU.CA> The LSA web page for their summer institute is < [http://lsa2003.lin.msu.edu/>](http://lsa2003.lin.msu.edu/%3E) . Check the NA-SFLA website for a partial list of participants provided in Newsletter #2.

3. And NCTE in November 2003:

The President of NCTE has invited us [again] to present a [protected, invited, co-sponsored, non-juried] paper at next year's NCTE in [San Francisco](http://FinanceReports.co/) November 20-23, 2003. We had only a few days to put the program together [it was due January 7], so we invited our International Chair, Geoffrey Williams, from Sydney University to speak, since we knew he was on sabbatical and could possibly come. Geoffrey is coming. Below is his abstract. In case we get invited for 2004, please be thinking if you could present. There is VERY little time after the November conference and the early January proposal deadline [and it is VACATION time]. The NCTE website is < www.ncte.org>.

Geoff Williams' abstract for NCTE:

Young children using functional grammar in school literacy work

 [Vygotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Vygotsky) argued in *Thought and Language*, that 'grammar and writing help the child to rise to a higher level of speech development' (Vygotsky, 1986:184). By 'grammar' he clearly meant 'the study of grammar'. However, actual evidence about the usefulness to young children of explicit grammatical study has been sparse.
 In examining Vygotsky's claim, two important questions are:
 which grammatical descriptions?
 what relations might be constructed between the grammatical descriptions and practical literacy activities from children's points of view?
 Happily, both questions can be explored empirically. A typical answer to the first question is that children should first be taught basic grammatical concepts, particularly '[parts of speech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Part_of_speech)'. From these basic concepts other descriptions might be built, but until they are understood little else can be achieved. There is, clearly, community pressure to adopt this approach. However, a consequence of beginning grammatical study with parts of speech is that children cannot easily be shown how grammar can be used as an intellectual tool (in Vygotsky's sense) in real textual work. It is very difficult to move from an analysis of parts of speech to the interpretation and critique of texts.
 Another possible answer to the first question is that children might be introduced to a meaning-oriented grammatical description such as Halliday's functional grammar (Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen, 1995). Halliday describes a functional grammar as 'a study of wording, but one that interprets the wording by reference to what it means' (1994: xvii). However, proposals to teach this grammar are usually summarily dismissed because the descriptive framework seems so evidently beyond young children's capacities.
 The Sydney-based research to be discussed in this session presents indicative evidence that young children do actually find elements of a functional grammar accessible. If this is the case, the study suggests, it opens up new possibilities for teachers to help children relate the introductory study of grammar to the practical study of texts. Evidence will be introduced which suggests that, under certain key pedagogical conditions, children can actually use functional grammar to explore the construction of texts. Four classes of children in inner-Sydney primary schools were studied: two classes of six-year-olds and two of eleven-year-olds. The texts they studied included their own writing, picture books, and expository texts.
 Williams will outline the basis of the study in [Vygotsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Vygotsky)'s theory of semiotic mediation and Halliday's theory of language as social semiotic. In particular, he will examine how children's attention is drawn to grammatical features as part of ongoing activities with texts. He will present a range of data for participants to examine in detail, including samples of children's writing, transcripts of classroom discussion, videos of classroom work, interview transcripts and outcomes of tests of knowledge.
 The session will include opportunities for participants to explore some of the educational consequences of these theoretical proposals and research data.

References

Halliday, M.A.K. 1995. An introduction to functional grammar. London: Edward Arnold.

Vygtsky, L. 1986. Thought and language. trans. and ed. A Kozulin. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press.

4. The 14th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA) will be held in Madison, Wisconsin July 24 - 29, 2005. It should be an interesting congress. [Web address](http://www..com/) for information is < [http://www.aila2005.org/>](http://www.aila2005.org/%3E) . This is the first time that AILA has been held in the US, and we should support it.

5. Mick O'Donnell and Judy Diamondstone have re-created and re-located the discussion list of Systemic Functional approaches to education. Their description of the group and how to subscribe/unsubscribe is below:

This group welcomes educators who are interested in a broadly functional approach to [describing language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_description) in a way that can be useful for classroom learning and more generally raise awareness about language as a system of resources for meaning & how the system works in flexible ways to do different things.

If you want to join the new SFL&Education discussion group, please:

1. Send an email from the account you wish to use, to:

sfl\_education-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

2. You will receive an email back asking for confirmation. It offers two options, to go to a web page, or to respond to the email. Do the second (Just hit the Reply button, then the Send button). You should be registered then.

To submit email to the list, send email to:

sfl\_education@yahoogroups.com

To leave the group, send email to:

sfl\_education-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

Happy New Year to all. Nan Fries