

# Meaning Potential

*A publication of the North American Systemic Functional Linguistics Association*



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## Welcome!

Dear NASFLA members,

Welcome to the fall 2023 issue of *Meaning Potential*!

Our spring newsletter typically highlights opportunities for connection at the annual AAAL conference; however, there are many other great opportunities throughout the year, including this month that we want members to be aware of.

Please read on for information about a number of **free online** events where our community can gather and learn together; **books, special issues, and online resources** recently published by members; calls for **awards**; and **commentary** on of-the-moment issues.

As always, thank you all for being part of this vibrant community.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Accurso & Sheila Ameri, *Meaning Potential* editors

**Do you have a *Meaning Potential* contribution?  
Want to be a reviewer?**

Email [nasflanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:nasflanewsletter@gmail.com)

# NASFLA Leadership Introduction

NASFLA leaders typically serve two-year terms. In March 2023, the following members were elected into new or repeat roles. We appreciate your service to the North American SFL community!



Dr. Jason D. Mizell  
PRESIDENT  
*University of Miami*



Dr. Sabrina Sembiente  
COMMUNICATIONS  
COORDINATOR  
*Florida Atlantic University*



Dr. Francis Troyan  
VICE PRESIDENT  
*The Ohio State University*



Dr. Beth Dillard  
WEB MANAGER/SOCIALS  
*Western Washington University*



Dr. Michael Maune  
SECRETARY  
*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*



Dr. Nihal Khote  
CO-WEB MANAGER  
*Western Washington University*



Dr. Andrés Ramírez  
TREASURER  
*Florida Atlantic University*



Dr. Kathryn Accurso  
NEWSLETTER EDITOR  
*University of British Columbia*



Dr. Holly Graham  
MEMBER AT LARGE  
*Mount Holyoke College;  
Portland Public Schools*



Sheila Ameri  
CO-NEWSLETTER EDITOR  
*The Ohio State University*



Danny Ferguson, Anna  
Zaitseva, & Sheila Ameri  
GRADNASFLA REPS  
*The Ohio State University*



Dr. Laura Schall-Leckrone  
MEMBER AT LARGE  
*Lesley University*



# EVENTS ANNOUNCEMENTS

## November 12–16, 2023



The global SFL Interest Group will host a free online conference November 13–16 (Hobart, Australia time, meaning some sessions are on Nov. 12 in North America). There are seven exciting plenaries, as well as live and pre-recorded presentations. Become a SFLIG member [here](#) to receive a Zoom link.

Full program details can be found at the [SFLIG website](#).



## Monday, November 27, 2023

In 2022, NASFLA Leadership launched a webinar series called *NASFLA Conversations*. The next talk is a conversation between North American and Australian SFL scholars Drs. Andrés Ramírez and Yaegan Doran. Register [here](#) to receive the Zoom link.



### NASFLA Conversations

Monday, Nov 27 at 5:30pm eastern  
Register to receive a Zoom link at [nasfla.org](https://nasfla.org)

**Yaegan Doran & Andrés Ramírez**  
in conversation about interactional patterns in monolingual and multilingual dialogue across two different geographical contexts (US and Australia), and two kinds of interactional discourse (pedagogical and everyday)





# Feature Essay

## THE FUTURE IS ALREADY HERE: EXPLORING SYNERGIES BETWEEN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND SFL

Dr. Lourdes Cardozo-Gaibisso, *Mississippi State University*  
[lc1811@msstate.edu](mailto:lc1811@msstate.edu)



### Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) are two distinct fields that, for many researchers and language educators might seem unrelated, or even signify an undesirable connection. While AI deals with creating intelligent systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, SFL, is a linguistic theory that focuses on exploring the relationship between language and social context. However, a closer examination may reveal a possible synergy between these two fields that may aid both researchers and second language educators. Although there is resistance and plenty of doubts about the role that AI will play in language research and language learning in the upcoming years, and this has become particularly clear with the emergence of tools such as Chat GPT, the truth is that AI research is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to the 1950s (Kannan & Munday, 2018). As we plan and get ready for a future that has, in many ways, already arrived, exploring the synergy between AI and SFL has increasingly become a pressing issue. In this short essay I explore the convergence of AI and SFL, emphasizing how AI technologies can benefit from SFL insights, and how SFL can be enriched through the application of AI techniques both in language research and teaching.

### AI: Redefining who is languaging?

The philosophical approach to AI frameworks has evolved significantly, in part, due to advancements

in Natural Language Processing, networked learning capabilities, and the capacity to manage vast amounts of data. As a result, contemporary AI has substantial implications for language research in a broader sense and, in more specific ways, for the study of second languages (Kannan and Munday, 2018). Indeed, if we agree on the fact that language is a pivotal component of human communication and cognition, and, with AI systems being able to understand, generate, and manipulate human languaging with astonishing accuracy, this becomes a matter that requires our attention. For example, Natural language processing (NLP) models like Chat GPT have demonstrated the potential of AI to produce coherent and contextually relevant text, sometimes indistinguishable from languaging practices produced by humans.

If we shift the lens for a moment and remember the purpose of SFL, placing special emphasis on the idea that language is not just a set of grammatical rules but a tool for social interaction and meaning-making that allows speakers to create meaning by choosing specific language, it is impossible not to wonder what type of influence AI and its tools are having and will have in our near future. So, the question that follows is: What role can SFL play? With as many advantages as AI may have, there are very specific tasks related to language analysis that SFL can provide valuable insights on, and that AI technology has fallen short of addressing. These are:

**Enhanced Contextual Understanding:** A key challenge faced by AI is the inability to interpret language in context. SFL's emphasis on the role of context in shaping meaning can aid AI models in identifying the context of culture, the potential of the linguistic system, and the context of situation, which denotes the choices made from the potential given by the full system (McCabe, 2021). By integrating SFL principles, AI systems can better grasp the social and situational factors that influence language use, resulting in more contextually relevant outcomes.

**Refined Sentiment Analysis:** Sentiment analysis (see Yadav & Vishwakarma, 2020) has become a crucial component of AI-driven sentiment mining and aims to understand the emotions expressed in and through text. As SFL researchers we perform this type of analysis driving from the interpersonal metafunction, which “allows us to assign speech roles, establish relationships with others, provide subjective comments on situations, and expresses opinions through a clause” (McCabe, 2021, p. 15). By recognizing the intricacies of language that convey emotions and attitudes, AI could better discern the sentiment behind textual data.

**Ethical and Anti-Racist Language Generation:** AI-generated language raises ethical concerns, one of the main ones being the propagation of bias towards specific languaging practices. Integrating SFL's ethical considerations, which explore how language perpetuates power dynamics, can assist in developing AI models that are more linguistically and culturally sustaining by minimizing, but unfortunately not mitigating, the risk of generating biased and racist content.

**Learning from Diverse Languaging Repertoires:** SFL's attention to languaging variation across contexts, modalities and communities can aid AI models in one of SFL's main endeavors which is to

incorporate the linguistic patterns and cultural repertoires of multilingual populations (Harman, 2018) more equitably.

### Moving Forward

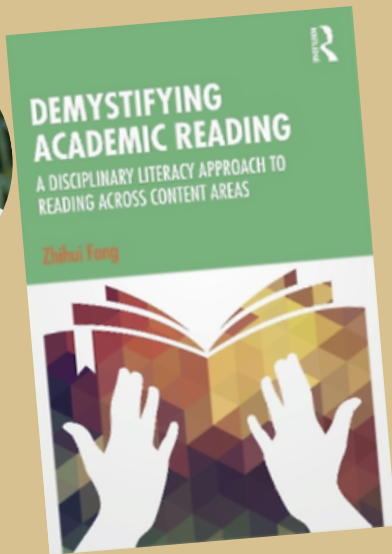
Although still undoubtedly controversial, the synergy between AI and SFL can offer a promising avenue for both researchers and educators that it is worth exploring, one of the reasons being that AI advancements have indeed outpaced us. Hence, our attention should be directed towards optimizing its advantages while reducing its disadvantages. To harness its potential effectively, a change in our viewpoint is essential. Thus, we need to transition from regarding AI as a universal problem-solving tool to seeing it as a support (Zhai & Nehem, 2023).

In summary, this synergy between SFL and AI has the potential to drive the development of systems that not only accurately process and generate language but also do so in ways that align more closely with human communication and its relationship with contexts of culture and contexts of situation. And, as the fields of AI and SFL continue to evolve, their synergy can lead to a transformational understanding of what language and languaging is.

### References

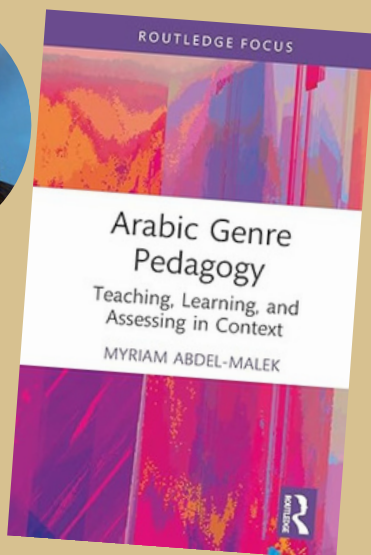
- Harman, R. (Ed.) (2018). *Bilingual learners and social equity*. Springer.
- Kannan, J., & Munday, P. (2018). New trends in second language learning and teaching through the lens of ICT, networked learning, and artificial intelligence. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación*, 76, 13-30.
- Yadav, A., Vishwakarma, D.K. (2020). Sentiment analysis using deep learning architectures: a review. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, 53 (6), 4335–4385.
- Zhai, X., & Nehm, R. H. (2023). AI and formative assessment: The train has left the station. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21885>

# NEW SFL BOOKS HIGHLIGHT



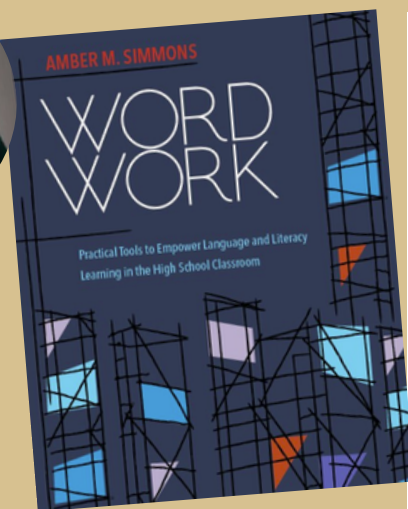
Fang, Z. (2023). *Demystifying academic reading: A disciplinary literacy approach to reading across content area.* Routledge.

- Equips pre- and in-service teachers with knowledge, understanding, tools, and resources to help students in grades 4–12 develop reading proficiencies in four core academic subjects—literature, history, science, and mathematics
- A state-of-the-art text ideal for courses on reading/literacy methods and academic literacy and eminently relevant to all educators who want their students to become thoughtful readers and powerful learners



Abdel-Malek, M. (2023). *Arabic genre pedagogy: Teaching, learning, and assessing in context.* Routledge.

- Divided into three parts: Theoretical and Instructional Framework, Spoken Genres, and Written Genres with chapters focusing on everyday social genres including exchanging information, chit-chat, and complaints
- Aligned with the ACTFL framework and Can-Do Statements
- Designed for instructors of Modern Standard Arabic novice-intermediate learners, offering step-by-step lessons with practical classroom activities on how to make the language related to each genre explicit to students
- Also useful for SFL genre-based researchers



Simmons, A.M. (2023). *Word work: Practical tools to empower language and literacy learning in the high school classroom.* National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE].

- Written for grades 9–12 English teachers & teacher educators
- Offers a primer on SFL and explores how students can use linguistic tools to enhance their own reading comprehension and argumentative writing
- Includes classroom examples of SFL analyses that help students see the ways language can position people to think and behave (e.g., through appraisal, modality, identification)
- Presents evidence of critical growth and language awareness in student dialogue and writing development
- Resources and examples to help pre- and in-service teachers support student achievement toward ELA standards and critical literacy



# NEW SFL PUBS/RESOURCES (cont'd)



[Mizell, J.D., & Accurso, K. \(Eds.\) \(2023\).](#) Antiracist genre pedagogy: From color-evasive to color-conscious literacy instruction [guest-edited special issue]. *Journal of Literacy Innovation*, 8(3).

- Includes an introduction about reckoning with race in North American genre pedagogy, five peer-reviewed articles by NASFLA members (including one video manuscript), and a closing commentary

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After 6 years of teaching courses on [Teaching the Genres of Writing using SFL Genre Pedagogy](#), Dr. María Brisk has recently updated them. The courses are substantially reorganized and feature a lot more material on middle school and the early grades. They are available for enrollment through Boston College's office of Professional & Continuing Education. Check them out! The next course commences in January 2024.

BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education & Human Development

INFORMATION FOR: ▾

SEARCH

BC.EDU LINKS

Professional & Continuing Education

EXPLORE OFFERINGS

Teaching Argument and Procedure Writing to K-8 Students

Using a genre-based pedagogy informed by systemic functional linguistics, participants will learn how to teach arguments and procedures. The strong emphasis on language development distinguishes this approach from others currently used in schools.

Format

Online via Zoom

Dates

January 9 - February 6, 2024

Cost

\$400

Register now!



# CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

## 2024 NASFLA Promising Scholar Award

### Award Description

This award is given by NASFLA in recognition of a pre-tenure scholar in North America who is in the first five years of their career and who has made outstanding contributions to applied linguistics through the use of systemic functional linguistics as a theoretical framework, an analytical tool, and/ or pedagogical resource. The selection committee will look for originality, creativity, and productivity, and for evidence of the scholarly significance of the candidate's work. Evidence and rationale should emphasize the contributions of the candidate's work to the field of SFL and comment on the nominee's potential for future contributions to the field.

The awardee will receive:

- Public recognition through NASFLA channels (business meeting, social media, announcement in Meaning Potential - the official NASFLA publication)
- \$200 in Routledge books of their choosing
- An opportunity to give an invited talk in the NASFLA Conversations webinar series
- An opportunity to publish a short piece in Meaning Potential

### Award Criteria

- Doctoral degree earned within the past five years (December 2018–December 2023)
- Promising record of scholarship drawing on SFL
- Commitment to making ongoing and significant contributions to scholarship using SFL
- Particular consideration is given to contributions that address issues of equity and diversity, as well as contributions that make connections to practice in a particular field (education, healthcare, etc.)

### Nomination Process

The nomination packet must be submitted as a PDF file and should include four items:

- a. Nominee's CV
- b. A published or "in press" paper that shows deep understanding and use of SFL in innovative and rigorous ways
- c. A brief statement from the nominee describing their current research program and how this research advances or engages the field of SFL (maximum one-page, single-spaced)
- d. A letter of support from an SFL scholar who assesses the contributions of the nominee's research and scholarship, as well as the potential for continuing contributions

Self-nominations are permitted. Please send nomination materials by **February 1, 2024** to the award adjudication committee chair, Dr. Lourdes Cardozo-Gaibisso: [l.cardozo.gaibisso@msstate.edu](mailto:l.cardozo.gaibisso@msstate.edu). The awardee will be named at the annual NASFLA meeting at the 2024 AAAL conference (Houston, Texas).