# Introducing grammar as a communicative resource: A functional approach

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## Abstract

Academic Learning Advisors working at tertiary level in New Zealand institutions are frequently required to provide feedback to students relating to aspects of language use at the lexico-grammatical level (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, punctuation). This feedback is reactive, typically in the context of a one-to-one consultation during which students proffer a draft of an academic assignment with a request for comments. The discussion requires a certain amount of (often unfamiliar) meta-language which varies in sophistication and depth depending on a number of factors, including the language background of the student. In recognition of the increasingly diverse student body, many institutions proactively provide courses which aim to provide students with an introductory overview of English grammar. This paper outlines the introduction of a functional approach to the teaching of grammar at Auckland University of Technology's Student Learning Centre. The novelty of this approach centres on the explicit adoption of a functional model of language as outlined by Halliday (1985), an approach which has been widely adopted in Australian universities, but which appears to have had limited currency in New Zealand institutions.

## Keywords

Academic writing, autonomy, functional grammar, Halliday, language awareness, text types, traditional grammar

## Introduction

In recognition of the increasingly diverse student body at Auckland University of Technology, and in response to recent enquiries from students requesting grammar classes and vocabulary sessions, the Student Learning Centre: Puna Aronui (SLC), has developed an introductory programme providing students with targeted information about English language structures and functions which are appropriate for the university context. The programme is called *English for Academic Skills Independence* (EASI) and is designed to complement SLC *StudySmart* workshops which cover a range of topics [study skills, critical thinking, assignment preparation, academic integrity, numeracy and maths]. All SLC programmes are designed to

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enhance development of academic literacies, to promote learner autonomy and cultivate heutagogic awareness, and ultimately, to help students engage more effectively in their studies.

This paper argues that if the nuts and bolts of written language – grammar, vocabulary, punctuation – are to make sense to students, then it is necessary for teachers to frame these elements within a robust model of language, rather than presenting grammar as a set of (seemingly arbitrary) rules, characterised by exceptions and irregularities. The theoretical underpinning for EASI is Michael Halliday's (1985) Systemic-Functional Linguistics, a powerful and elegant model which has been widely adopted in Australian universities, but which appears to have had limited currency in New Zealand institutions. In order to provide some context, I outline the approach SLC staff have adopted in establishing the EASI language skills programme in terms of planning, needs analysis, prioritisation of focal areas, and the logistics of materials development. The next section puts the spotlight on one component of the EASI programme, the "grammar" component, and, taking the clause as the basic orienting unit, considers the advantages of treating grammar as a system of resources for making meanings. The final section provides a critique of the EASI materials and our pedagogical approach, in the context of a 12-hour pilot, drawing on feedback from a focus group comprising six students, four teachers, and one objective observer.

## Establishing a new language skills programme

Having identified a need for some sort of language skills programme, our first step was to set up an exploratory meeting with the teaching team and two invited guests, a senior representative from AUT's School of Languages and AUT's newly appointed Diversity Manager. This first planning meeting enabled us to identify other service providers and to identify potential conflicts of interest; it also provided us with an opportunity to articulate a clear understanding of our role and scope within the terms of reference of the SLC, bearing in mind that delivery of foundational courses in English is *not* our primary role. This responsibility falls within the ambit of AUT's International House which provides IELTS and Cambridge foundational training. AUT's School of Languages also offer two pre-degree courses: Certificate in English Language [AK1237] which provides students with the academic English skills for further education; and Certificate in English for Academic Study [AK3309] which prepares students for degree level study. The SLC's aim then, is to complement existing programmes with a targeted language orientation programme, not provide a comprehensive language course.

In order to focus our thinking with respect to the content, pedagogical approach and logistics, a needs analysis was conducted over a series of meetings, with discussion prompted by the following probing questions:

1. Who needs language awareness workshops?

2. What language issues are apparent?
3. How do students currently approach grammar?
4. Why adopt a functional approach?
5. What should be covered and what excluded?
6. What are the objectives of the workshops?

From an institutional perspective, the need to address academic factors which impact student success and retention has been well documented. See, for example: Tinto (1993, 1997); S. Thomas (2000); L. Thomas (2002); and Thomas and Tight (2011). Taking into account the diverse student body, and given the limited opportunities which some students have had to acquire what Bourdieu (1993) terms "cultural capital", a significant proportion of the work done by Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs) in Student Learning Centres involves clarifying lecturers' expectations and illuminating aspects of academic discourse – including explicit reference to grammar and vocabulary. When considering language issues at tertiary level, while cognisant of the dangers of deficit model thought patterns, it is nevertheless worth noting that the literature is replete with accounts of student language problems resulting in writing assignments of varying degrees of intelligibility; in fact, as Strauss (2013) observes, "virtually all students, regardless of their linguistic background require some type of writing support" (p. 2) and she cites a number of authors who have explored this aspect of academic literacy (Baynham, 2000; Casanave, 2008; North, 2005; Strauss & Walton, 2005; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). TLA interactions with students on a one-to-one basis reveal a wide range of concerns clustering around language use at the lexico-grammatical level. An informal survey of colleagues and students at AUT suggests that lecturers frequently provide feedback on students' (mis) use of vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and punctuation. However, it is one thing for a lecturer to indicate that "sentence structure needs attention" and quite another for a student to translate that comment into appropriate corrective action. With respect to our target students we concluded that the language awareness workshops will benefit both undergraduates and postgraduates; it was anticipated that the content will be of interest primarily to students for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL students), but also of interest to native speakers, particularly those who were studying language oriented subjects such as sign-language interpreting.

When considering the multiple approaches to grammar and students' varying experiences of this term it may be observed that references to grammar evoke different reactions including at one extreme, avoidance, even fear; such negative affective responses can perhaps be attributed to ignorance and confusion. From a personal perspective, through observation of and discussion with students over two decades as a language teacher, it strikes me that many students view English grammar as a set of (sometimes bewildering) rules, inconsistencies, and proscriptions along the lines of "Never start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction" and "Avoid split

infinitives". Through discussion with colleagues in a range of educational contexts – including at ATLAANZ conferences – it is clear that many TLAs similarly lack a clearly articulated model of language with which to explore language use. Neither do lecturers and supervisors necessarily have knowledge about how language works according to Strauss (2012).

If TLAs are going to work productively with students in developing academic literacies, it makes sense to consider a practically oriented model with a pedagogical pedigree. Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics model has established a solid reputation over the last three decades with widespread applications in educational contexts from primary level through to postgraduate. Applied to educational contexts, the model has received positive endorsement from students, teachers, parents and education departments, particularly in Australia and increasingly throughout Asia. Tim Moore (2007), writing from an Australian tertiary perspective, affirms that ". . . Halliday's system is able to be applied in uncomplicated ways to teaching situations, . . . [and] has the potential to reveal in significant ways some of the challenges and confusions that students face when grappling with writing in their discipline areas" (p. 52).

## Theoretical grounding

Halliday's (1985) model of language, with its sociological orientation, encourages engagement with naturally occurring text and draws attention to the context of situation (which is always embedded within a context of culture); this means that any example of language use, or "text", can be usefully analysed with reference to the contextual variables which determine not just the genre, but also the "register" or formality of the language used. One of the most useful features of Halliday's model is the explicit focus on the functional nature of language, as outlined in Allan (2005):

> This approach takes as its starting point the assumption that every time we use language, we do three things simultaneously: we talk or write about some*thing*, i.e., we use language to talk about our experience of the world around us; we talk or write to someone, i.e., we use language to interact with other people; and when talking or writing, we make *links* between the elements of language in order to create whole units of meaning, or coherent texts. With reference to the language system, there are a number of resources that cluster around each of these three dimensions, which Halliday refers to as *metafunctions*: the *ideational* metafunction (resources for talking about the world), the *interpersonal* metafunction (resources for interacting with others), and the *textual* metafunction (resources for creating cohesive and coherent texts). From a pedagogical perspective, viewing language in relation to these three dimensions provides a useful way for teachers to introduce elements of the language system to students. (p. 237)

An emphasis on meaning in context is underpinned by Halliday's concept of "system"; this can be elucidated by introducing the related notion of "stratification", which enables an analyst to explore text along three dimensions: firstly, semantics (meanings); secondly, lexico-grammar (interplay between vocabulary and syntax); finally, phonology/graphology (spoken or written language). This stratification reveals a relationship between the meanings being expressed through the semantic system, enabled through the lexico-grammatical system, and encoded through the phonological or orthographical system (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Within the lexico-grammatical stratum, the concept of the "rank scale" reveals a hierarchy of functional elements: morphemes > words > groups and phrases > clauses > sentences > paragraphs > texts. Every linguistic choice made by a speaker or writer is constrained by the systemic options available. This awareness allows the user (and/or analyst) to view a language as a system of choices or as a network of *meaning* potential, that is, a set of resources for making meanings – rather than as a set of rules. From a pedagogical perspective, this dual emphasis on semantics and network options (i.e., on the communicative potential of language) can be seen as empowering students, in contrast to more traditional approaches in which technical manipulation of linguistic form is emphasised; a typical example of the latter might involve changing a sentence from active voice into passive voice.

In order to better understand how textual choices operate in context, it has been helpful to engage with the foundational genre-based literacy research which was undertaken in tandem with functional linguistics (especially in the United Kingdom and in Australia) focusing particularly on the 1980s and 1990s. Early genre research focused on schematic structure (Bhatia, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1994; Swales, 1990); other genre researchers oriented their attention more towards the specific lexico-grammatical features of various text types (Hammond, 1987; Martin & Rothery, 1986). Arising from this research, a significant body of work emerged with an explicitly pedagogical orientation (Allan, 2005; Christie, 1993, 1989; Christie & Martin, 1997; Derewianka, 1990; Feez & Joyce, 1998; G Lock & Tsui, 1999; Wu & Tsui, 1997). More recent publications critique genre theory as it is applied across a range of disciplines (Christie, 2013; Freadman, 2012).

Numerous insights from various genre-based literacy research programmes have informed the development of pedagogical reference grammars and teaching materials. To take one example, understandings of theme-rheme development as articulated initially by Halliday (1985) have prompted researchers to identify thematisation patterns in a range of text types. From a student perspective, an explicit awareness of the linear nature of written text helps to focus attention on the choices available for starting a sentence; this awareness is invaluable to any writer, and especially to tertiary students, whose success is often measured according to their ability to convey subtle nuances of meaning through academic assignments. In practical terms, this has implications for the choice between, for example, active and passive voice. Rather than being told that "this is formal writing so you should use passive voice", it is

more useful for students to consider "voice" as a system of choices within the textual metafunction. The writer's decision to use either active or passive voice in a given clause should derive from careful consideration of the strategic and rhetorical effect desired, within the context of the surrounding text. In a well-written assignment, any such decision can retrospectively be analysed in terms of thematic patterning which can be seen to contribute to the text's coherence and cohesion. As has been demonstrated through empirical studies "the more successful writers [are] able to control their thematic choices more consistently than the less successful writers" (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p. 220).

Space precludes further discussion, but interested readers are encouraged to explore other writers who have written in depth about the pedagogical benefits of adopting systemic functional grammar (Coffin, Donohue, & North, 2009; Eggins, 1994; Fontaine, 2012; J. Jones, 2013; R. Jones & Lock, 2011; Lock, 1996; Polias, n.d.; Thompson, 2013). The Australian "Stories for Learning" platform provides a series of accessible and useful resources for engaging with functional grammar, with a pedagogical orientation (Hess, n.d.). An increasingly wide range of print and electronic resources for students (and teachers) are being made available, typically corpus driven and written from a functional perspective; foremost amongst these is the groundbreaking *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* reference book (Hands, 2011).

## Operational decisions

Having identified a model the next question to consider is coverage: What should be covered and what excluded? What focus? Our intention is not to be comprehensive but to provide practical information about language structures and patterns of use with an academic orientation. Initial discussions identified five key areas in which students need support: grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, pronunciation and conversation skills; within each of these key focal areas we brainstormed specific target language issues as outlined in the next section. The learning outcomes and overall objectives of the EASI programme can be summarised as follows:

1. Students view grammar, vocabulary and punctuation as resources for communicating precise meanings; students develop the ability to use appropriate grammatical structures for academic assignments; students develop proof-reading skills and are able to critique their own writing, applying metalanguage as appropriate.

2. Students develop productive and receptive vocabulary skills: word building, awareness of formal, informal, technical and academic registers.

3. Students develop conversation skills (suitable for group work and typical encounters in an academic environment); students have an opportunity to practise skills in a supportive, guided environment; students develop an awareness of pronunciation considerations, including vowel quality, final consonants, intonation contours, eliding consonants and vowels.

Our objectives in establishing this programme included empowering students with a practical and accessible framework with which to explore language use. This is in line with pedagogical approaches which seek to promote autonomy and self-efficacy as outlined by Biggs (1987); Bandura (1997); Benson and Voller (1997); Benson (2001); Fazey and Fazey (2001). This is also in line with a heutagogical orientation in which cultivation of metacognitive awareness is a primary objective (Hase & Kenyon, 2007).

Given that our intention was to provide targeted information, as opposed to a comprehensive language programme, the first step in terms of planning was to prioritise focal areas. In practical terms, this involved two brainstorming sessions: the first with key informants (including two EAL speakers) comprising a lecturer from AUT's School of languages, AUT's new Diversity Manager, the SLC Manager, and three TLAs with backgrounds in English linguistics and ELT; the second brainstorming session was conducted with colleagues at the annual ATLAANZ conference at EIT in Napier in November, 2013. Following a prompt in the form of a grammar Wordle (see Figure 1), participants were asked the following two questions:

1. What aspects of grammar should TLAs focus on – that is, what are the high priority areas?

2. Where would *you* start?

*Figure 1.* Grammar Wordle containing random grammatical terms

There was almost unanimous agreement at both sessions that the most useful starting point should be sentence structure, with particular emphasis on the role of the clause.

After a series of follow-up discussions the areas identified for the grammar component coalesced as follows, outlined within a framework of twelve 30-minute sessions:

- Sentence structure
- Subject verb agreement
- Key tenses
- Active and passive voice
- Verb types (including auxiliary verbs)
- The reference system (pronouns and articles)

## Materials development

The materials development phase proved to be an enjoyably stimulating experience, characterised by collegiality and little nuggets of new information gleaned from colleagues' presentations [2]. Over a three-month period which incorporated the summer break, four TLAs collaborated on the development of the teaching materials, each person undertaking to concentrate on their respective area, that is, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and oralcy (incorporating pronunciation and conversation skills). We agreed on a classroom teaching approach which would be logistically manageable, engage students, arouse interest, and promote student autonomy. For convenience and consistency it was decided to use PowerPoint slides complemented by Word documents and links to carefully selected websites. In the interests of reducing paper, it was decided to make all material available online, which would also allow for the programme to be rolled out on three campuses and delivered by colleagues who may not have had a hand in developing the original materials; this, therefore, required the addition of comprehensive presenter notes. The outline for each component follows the same approach, beginning with the teaching point, followed by one or more in-class interactive activities designed to stimulate discussion and promote learning. Each component concludes with a suggested follow-up task or tasks such as "fill in the blanks" exercises or links to relevant websites. Six critiquing sessions were held, during which each TLA presented their slides and noted feedback from teaching colleagues and one invited observer, a non-native speaker. Materials were further revised following the pilot, and then put up on the SLC website and the programme promoted through a range of media including faculty contacts. With respect to the timeframe, and given the numerous demands on students' limited time, it was decided to provide EASI as a 12 week programme, to be run over two semesters, with six sessions in the first half of each semester; each session to run for

[2] I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the materials development and teaching team: Quentin Allan (Grammar); Mark Bassett (Vocabulary), Dr Pedro Silva (Punctuation), Robyn McWilliams (Pronunciation and Conversation skills). Our collective gratitude is also extended to Lian-Hong Brebner (Diversity Manager), Pat Pawson (School of Languages) and to our students for their enthusiastic participation and useful feedback. I also wish to thank the participants who attended my workshop at the 2013 ATLAANZ Conference. Finally, I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions - most of which have been adopted; naturally I take responsibility for any lapses or infelicities.

two hours. In order to get feedback from students we trialled the first six sessions with a focus group of undergraduates and postgraduates from a representative range of language backgrounds, across different disciplines. Following feedback, the materials were revised within a one-month window before the first semester rollout.

## Introduction to functional grammar within the EASI framework

In keeping with the sociological orientation of the Hallidayan model, the first "grammar" session within the EASI programme begins by drawing students' attention to the importance of considering text (e.g., the PowerPoint display projected onto the screen) in the context of the immediate situation (a classroom session), and within the wider context of culture (an English medium university, in Auckland, New Zealand), as in Figure 2.

*Figure 2.* Text in context (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000)

The point is made that a functional approach is interested in explaining how language is used in real situations, and in exploring how language works. This requires the introduction of some technical terms which are introduced with reference to a diagram of a ladder, illustrating the notion of the "rank scale", as in Figure 3.

The Language Ladder

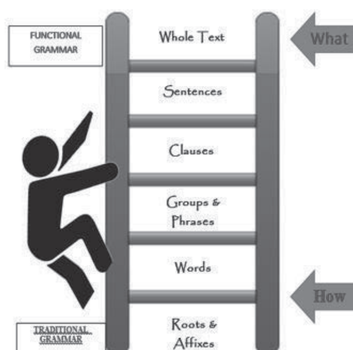


*Figure 3.* The language ladder (this graphic inspired by Moura, n.d., as cited in Hess, n.d.)

Rather than climbing the ladder from the bottom (as with traditional grammar), the EASI approach starts at the top of the ladder, with a focus on whole texts. Having established that there are indeed such things as distinguishable texts types, students are led to discuss the mechanisms involved in correctly identifying text types. Through a series of interactive activities students are given to understand that we can easily recognise text types such as narratives, reports and essays through structure, function and distinctive grammatical patterning. An introductory task prompts students to explain the difference between a story and an essay; after discussing in pairs, students typically reply that they can easily distinguish between the two, but articulating the difference is less straightforward. Differences are teased out with reference to a summary table, as in Figure 4.

| | narrative | essay |
|---|---|---|
| Structure | ➢ Orientation<br>➢ Complication<br>➢ Rising action<br>➢ Climax<br>➢ Resolution<br>➢ Evaluation<br>➢ Coda | ➢ Introduction<br>➢ Body<br>➢ Conclusion<br>➢ References |
| Function | To entertain | To develop an argument |
| Grammar | ➢ Names, places<br>➢ Past tense<br>*Bond aimed his revolver …* | ➢ Theories, issues<br>➢ Present tense<br>*Smith (2007) argues that …* |

*Figure 4.* Text comparison table (Labov & Waletzky, 1967)

This leads to a focus on the role of the clause, with the observation that when analysing language, it is useful to consider the clause as performing three roles simultaneously: firstly, to represent experience (what is going on); secondly, to interact (interpersonal meaning); and thirdly, to organise text (textual meaning). See Figure 5.

| Function of clause | Meaning | Grammar |
|---|---|---|
| to represent experience | What/process/where | Noun group<br>Verbal processes<br>Circumstances |
| to interact | interpersonal | Tense/aspect<br>Polarity<br>Mood<br>Modality |
| to organise text | textual | Point of departure<br>Active/Passive |

*Figure 5.* Summary: Functions of the clause

Drawing on examples from a recognisably academic context (a laboratory report), students are led to explore how manipulation of grammatical variables within each of the three metafunctions leads to a change in meaning or emphasis. In order to establish the context in which the text is located, students are shown two orienting photographs, as in Figure 6.

*Figure 6.* Earth science laboratory: Furnace and soil sample (Reddy, n.d.)

A series of PowerPoint slides is then used to illustrate how the answers to various probing questions enable a systematic analysis of the grammar. Questions such as

“What is going on?”, “Where?”, “When?”, and “How?” place the focus on the role of the clause to represent experience:

***The soil*** *was placed in a furnace.* [what]

*The soil* ***was placed*** *in a furnace.* [process]

*The soil was placed* ***in a furnace****.* [where]

When considering the various interpersonal meanings, attention is focused on the role of the clause to position the writer in terms of temporal distance (i.e., tense and aspect), in terms of the truth value asserted for the propositions (i.e., polarity and modality), and in terms of interpersonal attitude: stating, asking or commanding (i.e., the mood system).

*The soil* ***is being*** *placed in a furnace.* [tense - continuous]

*The soil was* ***not*** *placed in a furnace.* [polarity - negative]

*The soil* ***must*** *be placed in a furnace.* [modality - directive]

***Was*** *the soil placed in a furnace?* [mood - interrogative]

When focusing on the linear nature of text and the potential of the clause to organise the ordering of information, an obvious starting point is whether to use active or passive voice, that is, whether the subject of the sentence performs the action indicated by the verb:

***We*** *placed the soil in a furnace.* [voice - active]

Or whether the subject of the verb is affected by the action of the verb:

***The soil*** *was placed in a furnace.* [voice - passive]

This leads neatly on to a consideration of other options for thematisation (e.g., adverbials to represent circumstance):

***In a furnace*** *was placed the soil.* [point of departure]

These options at the level of the clause can be summarised with reference to a tripartite diagram indicating each metafunction, as in Figure 7.

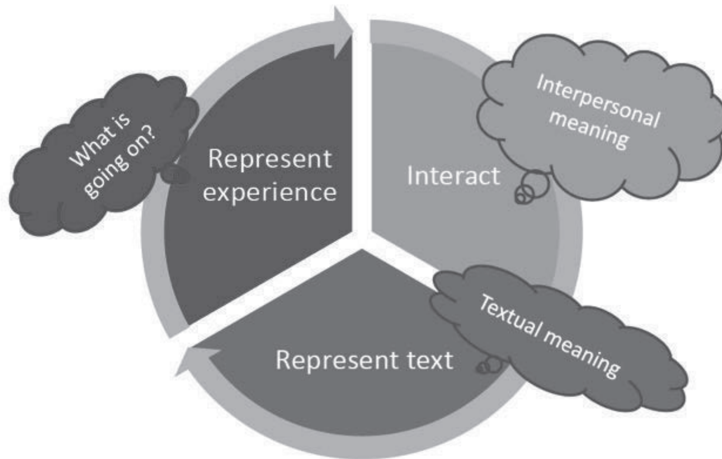


*Figure 7.* Three functions performed by the clause [3]

Having established the three-part function of the clause, illustrated with examples oriented to a clearly recognisable ideational field (a university earth science laboratory), the point is now made that a functional model of language sees grammar as a resource for expressing meanings, as summarised by flipping the table, as in Figure 8.

| Grammar | Meaning | Function of clause |
|---|---|---|
| Noun group<br>Verbal processes<br>Circumstances | What/process/where | to represent experience |
| Tense/aspect<br>Polarity<br>Mood<br>Modality | interpersonal | to interact |
| Point of departure<br>Active/Passive | textual | to organise text |

*Figure 8.* Grammar as a resource

To sum up, the first "grammar" session aims to orient students to the importance of the contextual variables in determining the choice of grammatical structures and

[3] Halliday's "Ideational meaning" (which incorporates experiential meaning), has been replaced with the more accessible gloss "What is going on?"

lexical items. Illustrative examples are taken from a clearly identifiable textual context and the clause is introduced as a key structural building block of text. The concept of the rank scale is illustrated with a graphic, presented in poster form, permanently displayed at the front of the classroom; moving up and down the "ladder" encourages students to consider the interplay between context, text and available language choices. Subsequent sessions aim to build on these basic principles. The specific focus for each subsequent grammar session is outlined as follows:

1. Introducing the clause: 3 functions: experiential, interpersonal, textual
2. Sentence structure: simple and compound sentences
3. Sentence structure: complex sentences: subordinating conjunctions
4. Sentence structure: complex sentences: relative pronouns
5. Subject-verb relationships; tense: present simple and past simple
6. Tense: present perfect
7. Sentence structure: implications for academic assignments
8. Thematisation: active and passive voice options
9. Modality: likelihood and obligation
10. Verb types and processes: material, mental, behavioural, verbal, relational
11. Reference: pronouns; articles; pointing to time and place
12. Text types: focus on grammatical features

## Discussion

This section provides a critique of the EASI programme drawing on triangulated data from a focus group of EAL students, the teaching and materials development team, and an independent observer. Feedback from the pilot indicated that the programme was useful, well designed and worth running; the level was about right with new terminology reduced to a minimum, and introduced carefully. A targeted approach helped students to identify and prioritise aspects of grammar to focus on, for example, with respect to tense, students appreciated knowing that their time would be better spent mastering the form and function of the salient tenses in academic writing (present simple, present perfect, past simple) in contrast to the disproportionate time many have spent on trying to master, for example, the past perfect, when this tense is not actually so important for academic writing. Given that coverage is not designed to be comprehensive, but targeted, students appreciated links to online resources for further exploration. Careful pacing of the sessions means that key

concepts are recycled and students are not overloaded; explicit links between the various components provide an opportunity for students to make connections between grammar, punctuation and vocabulary, for example, identifying cohesive resources in the language. The teaching materials are attractive and well designed and it was useful to have the PowerPoint slides available on the website. Feedback from focus group discussions underlines the importance of recycling a small set of academically oriented texts. Supporting materials such as the posters are useful for reference. With respect to the suggested homework, students indicated that they do not have enough time to do the tasks, but it is nevertheless useful to have the answers. EASI is not a credit-bearing course; however, in terms of acknowledging students' initiative in signing up for the programme a letter of attendance will be issued to students who attend 80% of sessions. A further review will be undertaken of the complete 12-session programme in preparation for roll out across three campuses in 2015.

Further development options include the possibility of introducing peer-review writing classes as discussed by Garrard (2013), that is, aiming to develop a community of writers where students read and critique each others' work in facilitated workshop sessions. This initiative could be complemented by a moderated online discussion forum. The possibility also exists to further develop the EASI programme in response to students' performance in a post-entry language assessment such as Paul Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test (Nation, 2011) or the Diagnostic English Needs Assessment (DELNA) which has been operating at Auckland University since 2002 (Read & Randow, 2013).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, if students are to succeed at university in their chosen discipline, in the process of drafting a particular assignment they need to be able to predict and control the contextual variables which determine lexico-grammatical choices; also, when reading and analysing academic texts, students need to recognize how other writers may be manipulating grammar for particular purposes. This paper has argued that a functional model of language can help students to develop powerful metacognitive academic literacy skills. Early indications from the first cohort of EASI students are positive and encouraging; interested readers are invited to view the resources at the AUT website (Student-Learning-Centre, 2014).

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