

## Scaffolding the Writing of Argumentative Essays in History: A Functional Approach

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A LITERACY INTERVENTION aiming to scaffold university students' writing of argumentative essays in history was implemented in a first-year Global Histories course at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, where most students had English as an additional language. The intervention focused on argumentative writing because of the importance of this genre in the discipline of history.<sup>1</sup> To write effective evidence-based arguments in history, students must engage in "knowledge transformation" rather than "knowledge telling."<sup>2</sup> In other words, students need to select and evaluate information as evidence, and interpret, generalize, and transform this information.<sup>3</sup> However, when faced with the challenging task of writing arguments, many students often list, describe, or narrate historical information as if it were factual, without making evaluations of information and perspectives, and without paying attention to the possibility of multiple interpretations of a historical event.<sup>4</sup>

Given these challenges, there is a growing body of research on literacy development in history. Most research has focused on reading, with less attention to writing.<sup>5</sup> Some studies have

highlighted the importance of explicit disciplinary instruction on how to write historical arguments by focusing on the effective use of historical documents as evidence.<sup>6</sup> While such research has provided some insights into the writing needs of history students, its focus on language has been limited. From our perspective, it is through the effective use of language that students can progress toward the challenging task of writing arguments like a historian. Thus, we need an understanding of the particular linguistic demands of historical arguments and the linguistic challenges students face. For this, we turn to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL),<sup>7</sup> which provides detailed descriptions of historical genres and their linguistic features.

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics and Genre-Based Pedagogy**

SFL provides tools for the analysis of writers' organizational and linguistic choices to construct meaning within a text. From an SFL perspective, genre is a "staged, goal-oriented, social process."<sup>8</sup> Close analysis of school genres "aims to bring to consciousness (both for teachers and students) the way in which such texts are linguistically structured and shaped and the way in which writers draw on grammar and lexis (vocabulary) to create different communicative effects."<sup>9</sup> Building on such SFL-based close textual analysis, the goal of genre-based pedagogy is to make the structural elements and linguistic features of school and professional genres explicit for students. Genre-based literacy programs invest heavily in front-loaded pedagogy through intensive scaffolding. This scaffolding is usually done by teachers engaging students in the analysis of successful written genres (deconstruction) to create texts, initially with expert guidance (joint construction) and then individually or in learner groups (independent construction). The basic principle is that students write only after teachers have discussed a model of the genre, after which teachers and students jointly construct another model of that genre, and then, once ready, the students write independently. Despite the potential of SFL in helping teachers scaffold student writing of school genres, most SFL-based literacy interventions in history have focused on reading at the K-12 level, with fewer studies on scaffolding student writing, particularly at the university level.<sup>10</sup>

The few studies on writing have described the important linguistic and organizational resources students need for writing effective school history genres.<sup>11</sup> These studies have identified a range of school history genres that students learn along a developmental continuum.<sup>12</sup> Students learn initially to write Recounts (story-like, chronologically organized genres retelling a person's life story or historical events) and Accounts (which articulate reasons for a specific chronology). Students then move toward Explanations, which are organized by cause-and-effect relationships. Later, students develop toward writing Arguments about historical figures and events. From an SFL perspective, the social purpose of argument is to put forward a point of view with supporting evidence that an audience finds persuasive.<sup>13</sup> Argumentative writing is one of the most prominent types of writing in college-level history courses, and, thus, this genre is the focus of our intervention.

SFL-based studies of argumentative history essays have identified a number of rhetorical and linguistic features of this genre. The literature describes the expected stages of argument that are important to constructing a well-organized text: an optional background section to orient the reader to the historical context, a thesis in which a central argument is set forth and the overall structure is introduced; supporting arguments with effective topic sentences; and, finally, a reinforcement of the thesis.<sup>14</sup> To achieve an argumentative stance, writers must evaluate information and perspectives, show the tentativeness of historical interpretations, acknowledge multiple interpretations of the past, and guide the reader towards accepting their perspective. To accomplish this, writers must draw on what SFL calls interpersonal resources. These include hedging (e.g., "possibly") and modal verbs (e.g., "can" or "might") to indicate the tentativeness of historical interpretations, in contrast to using bare assertions realized via non-modalized verbs (e.g., the simple past tense) that represent information as factual. Interpersonal resources also include resources for explicit reference to other voices (e.g., "the author argues that"), acknowledgment of other perspectives, and resources that comment on discourse to help align the reader to the writer's perspective and support claims (e.g., "that means" or "this shows").<sup>15</sup>

SFL research on history writing, including our own work, shows that students make linguistic and organizational choices that do not always meet the expectations of written arguments.<sup>16</sup> It is often

challenging for students to manage linguistic resources effectively to develop a consistent argumentative stance in an organized essay that responds to the prompt. As a result, students may write non-argument genres or arguments that meet some but not all the expectations of argumentation. Given these challenges, history researchers argue that students can meet genre expectations more effectively when the linguistic resources of argumentation are made explicit to them.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on this work, we designed three workshops to make explicit to students the linguistic features of argumentative writing. This intervention is part of ongoing collaboration between the first two authors, writing teachers trained in linguistics (Silvia Pessoa and Thomas D. Mitchell), and the third author, the history professor for the course under study (Benjamin Reilly). Literacy interventions that focus on language awareness, such as the one reported here, can help teachers respond to the linguistic and disciplinary needs of students.

### Context

Since 2009, we have been collecting and analyzing student writing from a first-year global histories course at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, an English-medium American university in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> In this course, students are expected to write six argumentative essays in response to prompts based on one or two primary or secondary sources. These essays are written prior to class discussion of the readings, and students have the option to send drafts to the professor for feedback. The students are to produce a well-structured essay that has a clearly stated argumentative thesis with supporting arguments. The professor's rubric explicitly values argumentative, analytical writing and explicitly discourages writing that is "narrative" and "chiefly descriptive." The categories of Argument and Evidence make up 60% of the grade. These categories include features such as "clearly stated thesis statement," "consistent organization," "explanation...of how evidence presented is relevant to the thesis," and "relevance of the argument to the [prompt]."

However, as documented in our research, the students do not always meet assignment and genre expectations. Thus, we collaborated with the history professor to develop three writing workshops to address some of the known challenges students face when writing arguments in the course. In the workshops, we used a mix of SFL

meta-language and traditional composition meta-language that students were more familiar with (e.g., “topic sentences”) in order to connect with their prior knowledge. Our goal was to scaffold the writing of historical arguments by making explicit for students some of the linguistic features of argumentation. Our scaffolding involved the deconstruction of sample texts from previous years, with students (and the history professor during early stages of intervention) calling attention to linguistic features that are valued or not valued in historical argumentation. By making these features explicit to the students, we hoped that students could more effectively meet genre expectations independently as the semester progressed.

Workshop #1 was delivered in early September 2015 after students submitted their first essay, which we used as baseline data. Workshop #2 was delivered in late September 2015 after the students wrote the second essay, and Workshop #3 took place in mid-October 2015 after the students wrote the third essay. We delivered the first two workshops during the one-hour class period, and the sixty-one students in the course attended. The third workshop was optional, delivered outside of class time, and was attended by nine students. It consisted of a review of the previously covered materials in which the students were asked to take the lead in analyzing new sample texts based on what they had learned in the prior workshops. We obtained consent from thirty-five out of the sixty-one students in the class and analyzed their post-intervention writing (175 essays) quantitatively. Meanwhile, we analyzed the writing of the nine students who attended the optional third workshop qualitatively. These nine students represent a diverse group of students in terms of the writing they produced for the first essay. Thus, we used them as a focal group. We used post-intervention interviews with them and the professor to inform our analysis of the fifty-four essays they produced. This analysis focused on their writing development in terms of adhering to the generic and linguistic expectations of argument writing in history.

In the following two sections, we present and explain the materials from the first two workshops, outlining how they were grounded in findings from our research on previous iterations of the same course. In the final sections, we report briefly on the findings from our quantitative and qualitative analysis of post-intervention student writing and discuss our plans for future work in the class.

### Workshop #1: Homework Preparation

Please review the two attached sample history essays written by former students and answer the following questions. Bring the completed homework to class.

1. Underline the thesis statement in each essay.
2. Does the thesis statement respond to the question?
3. Which thesis statement is more argumentative? In other words, which thesis statement creates a better opportunity for the student to make an argument of their own by analyzing and commenting on the source text instead of just repeating the information from the source text?

**Figure 1:** Homework Preparation. Instructions for pre-workshop review and comparison of two sample papers.

### Workshop #1: Meeting the Expectations of the Argument Genre

In our previous work, we found that students did not always produce arguments in response to the prompts, but instead produced other genres, like explanations, where they mainly reproduced information from the source text without interpreting or evaluating it. Some students elided key wording in the prompts that was meant to elicit an argumentative thesis, while others did not use every paragraph strategically to advance or reinforce the thesis. Thus, the first workshop focused students' attention on effectively answering the selected writing prompt with an argumentative thesis, following the stages of argumentation.

#### *Activity #1: Answering the Prompt and Writing an Argumentative Thesis*

As preparation for the first workshop, we asked students to review two sample essays and answer a set of questions in response (**Figure 1**). The sample essays responded to prompts about Hammurabi's Code, a set of laws in ancient Babylonia. Due to space constraints,

### Workshop #1: Sample Essays Handout

**Prompt 1:** What sort of picture do you get about the treatment of Babylonian women?

Sample Introduction 1:

Hammurabi's Code is a set of written laws from the ancient Babylonian civilization; which makes it an important source for finding out about the treatment of women in terms of the laws that were applied in society, which themselves reflect the cultural attitudes during that time period. **The main view we get throughout the laws is that women held a much lower status in society than men**, as they were considered to be much less important than the men, their lives consisted of mainly being confined to household tasks, with few rights in important matters such as divorce and marriage.

**Prompt 2:** What does this document tell us about the ancient Babylonian social structure?

Sample Introduction 2:

The Hammurabi code contains 282 rules and punishments that targeted to organize Babylonia social and economic life. **The ancient Babylonia had three classes: free people from the upper class, free people from law state and slaves.**

**Figure 2:** Sample Essays Handout. Introductions from the two sample essays assigned for homework before the workshop. Selected phrases were highlighted (in bold) by instructors during the workshop as what may be perceived as thesis statements.

we only provide the introduction for each of the essays the students had to review (**Figure 2**). The sentence that may be perceived as the thesis statement (even if it is not argumentative) from each of the sample texts is highlighted.

In class, we reviewed the students' examination of this pair of introductions and perceived thesis statements. While the students could easily recognize the thesis statement in each introduction, they experienced more difficulty explaining why the thesis statement in Introduction 1 was more argumentative. We called students' attention to the fact that this thesis statement commented on the source text, taking a position on the topic by arguing that "women held a much lower status in society than men." The thesis statement then provided a preview of the supporting sub-claims. Note that the source text,

### Workshop #1: Comparing Thesis Statements Handout

**Prompt 1:** What sort of picture do you get about the treatment of Babylonian women?

Thesis 1A: The main view we get throughout the laws is that women held a much lower status in society than men, as they were considered to be much less important than the men, their lives consisted of mainly being confined to household tasks, with few rights in important matters such as divorce and marriage.

Thesis 1B: We can see in most of the laws that women were more strictly punished than men. However, women were given certain rights like owning a certain type of property, being a witness and they could also engage in certain types of business.

**Prompt 2:** What kind of political system does Hammurabi's Code represent?

Thesis 2A: Hammurabi's code represents a mix of political systems: dictatorship, democracy, or theocracy.

Thesis 2B: The laws of Hammurabi applied dictatorship, a rigid system, and communism.

**Prompt 3:** How compelling do you find McNeill's evidence that the settlement of Southern China was slowed by the "disease gradient"?

Thesis 3A: McNeill points out several factors which contributed to the presence of the disease gradient in Southern China such as: the dangers of the Yellow River which caused many floods, a more favorable climate for parasites to flourish, and the sudden shift from dry farming to irrigation farming which brought in the risk of new disease risks. All of these factors were issues which contributed to the spread or build of diseases.

Thesis 3B: McNeill gives conclusive evidence that the steep "disease gradient" was the reason behind the slow turnout of the Chinese people in the southern regions.

**Prompt 4:** To what degree does disease influence culture?

Thesis 4A: Through reading chapter three, "Confluence of the Civilized Disease Pools", from the book *Plagues and People* by William H. McNeill, it becomes clear that diseases definitely influence culture strongly. Two aspects of culture that have been particularly affected are religion and social structure.

Thesis 4B: The establishment of empires and closed knit [*sic*] societies led to the spread of new diseases. Diseases became a significant obstacle to continuous human expansion, so much so that humanity could no longer ignore them. This in turn led to diseases' influence on culture such as the spread of Buddhism in India after 500 B.C.E., the transcendentalism in Indian religions, as well as belief in larger families in Chinese culture.

**Figure 3:** Comparing Thesis Statements Handout. Pairs of thesis statements that differed in effectiveness in responding to the prompt with an argumentative claim.



Hammurabi's Code, is a non-argumentative primary source that provides a list of laws where the status of women in society is not explicitly stated. The student has to read and interpret the laws in order to make an argument. The writer of this introduction successfully interpreted the laws and answered the prompt with an argumentative thesis about the status of women.

In contrast, the thesis statement in Introduction 2 shows no argumentative stance. Rather, it provides a descriptive taxonomy, stating that Babylonia "had three [social] classes" and naming them. The rest of the essay elaborated on the description of the three social classes without taking any stance about Babylonia's social class structure. We followed our discussion of Introduction 2 with an example of a more argumentative thesis statement in response to the same prompt: "The Babylonian social structure was essentially ruled by the class system, which can be seen by their difference in the punishments." Here, the student writer makes an argument by labeling the social structure ("ruled by the *class* system"), framing this label in terms of degree ("*essentially*"), and providing reasoning for this assertion that could be supported with evidence from the source text ("which *can be seen* by their difference in punishments").

Next, we presented students with four pairs of thesis statements to emphasize other recurrent problems with how previous students attempted to respond to prompts with an argumentative thesis in the introduction (**Figure 3**). Students were asked to compare each pair and decide which of the two is more argumentative and more fully responds to the prompt.

Prompt 1 contrasts the successful thesis statement from Essay 1, seen earlier during homework preparation, with a less successful thesis statement. The problem with Thesis 1B is that the writer offers two perspectives on the topic without taking a clear stance. The recognition of multiple perspectives is valued in history (as discussed below), but the writer needs to take a clear position, and in this introduction, the two perspectives are given nearly equal weight. Thus, the reader may be confused about the direction of this essay, since it would be preferable to save concessions to potential opposing points of view until after having presented the thesis and supporting arguments.

The set of thesis statements for Prompt 2 highlights how a labeling noun can be used to characterize an overall claim. In Thesis 2A, the writer uses a labeling noun to characterize his main argument

### Workshop #1: Excerpts from Marked Sample Essay with Effective Stages of Argument Handout

Hammurabi's Code is a set of written laws from the ancient Babylonian civilization; which makes it an important source for finding out about the treatment of women in terms of the laws that were applied in society, which themselves reflect the cultural attitudes during that time period. **The main view we get throughout the laws is that women held a much lower status in society than men**, as they were considered to be much less important than the men, *their lives consisted of mainly being confined to household tasks, with few rights in important matters such as divorce and marriage.*

The first-most noticeable way that we see **inequality between men and women** is the language itself in which each of the laws is written. Every single law is addressed to the men, with the use of the pronoun "he" throughout the text, even when the laws are closely referring to female issues. The general idea we get from this is that women were regarded as negligible when it came to issues that would deeply affect society (like laws).

The impression we get from most of the laws is that **women were confined to the household** and that **almost all professions were occupied by men**, leaving women no opportunity to directly make a contribution to the society's economy. Evidence of this is that every law concerned with the economy or a profession in any way (48 for debt; 53 and 54 for farming; 104 for trading; 215 for a physician and 229 for a builder) refers exclusively to men. This clearly illustrates that women did not take up jobs as much as men did.

One of the aspects of the **poor treatment of women** that stands out the most is the idea that ***Babylonian women were under the control of men, evident in the laws concerning marriage and divorce.*** We see that women had few consensual rights in a marriage. Law 128 is particularly interesting, as it considers a marriage's basic foundation to be sexual intercourse, especially putting blame on the woman to be "no wife" if there is no intercourse. Rather than forming emotional connections with their wives, men were encouraged to find a sexual connection first, while women had no voice in this.

In conclusion, Hammurabi's Code gives the impression of **women in Babylonian society to be considered inferior to men**, and placed mainly in the household to look after the children. The Code was also skewed positively towards men's rights, and women were mainly disregarded when it came to the basic structure of society.

**Figure 4:** Excerpts from Marked Sample Essay with Effective Stages of Argument Handout. Selected phrases were used to highlight cohesive ties between the thesis and supporting argument stages (in bold), and between the preview of sub-claims in the introduction and the corresponding supporting argument stages (underline, bold italics, and underlined bold italics).

as Hammurabi's Code representing "a *mix* of political systems," followed by supporting claims about laws that were indicative of dictatorship, democracy, or theocracy. In Thesis 2B, such a noun is lacking. The student claims that the laws "applied dictatorship, a rigid system, and communism," and followed with corresponding paragraphs expanding on each of these three parts. However, the student makes no overarching characterization of the political system to move the essay beyond description.

The last two sets of thesis statements highlight the difference between paying attention to, or ignoring, key language in the prompts. Prompt 3 invites students to frame the thesis with an evaluation of degree to answer the "how compelling" part of the question. Thesis 3B does this successfully by arguing that "McNeill gives *conclusive* evidence." However, Thesis 3A misses the opportunity to evaluate the source text's evidence, and just re-presents reasons that the source text provided for the slowing of the disease gradient. Similarly, Thesis 4A provides an evaluation ("*strongly*"), while Thesis 4B ignores the "to what degree" part of the prompt. We explained to students that such missed opportunities for evaluations of degree can result in essays that do not meet the expectations for the argument genre. Thus, in the workshop, we made it explicit to the students that to write an argumentative thesis statement for such prompts, the writer needed to make a claim about the source text with some kind of evaluation, rather than just demonstrate their comprehension of the source text by reproducing information from it.

### *Activity #2: The Stages of Argumentation*

We also went through the stages of argumentation in history writing. As stated above, the stages of argument consist of an optional background section to orient the reader to the historical context; a thesis where a central argument is set forth and the overall structure is introduced; supporting arguments with effective topic sentences; and, finally, a reinforcement of the thesis. We emphasized the importance of remaining consistent throughout the argument, since our findings indicated that lower-graded essays included irrelevant or contradictory ideas in supporting argument stages or had a mismatch between the thesis and reiteration stages.<sup>19</sup> **Figure 4** shows a successful essay that follows the stages of argument,

### **Workshop #1: Worksheet for Reviewing Sample Essays**

Read the excerpts from the sample essays provided and consider these questions:

1. Can you find the thesis?
2. Does the thesis respond to the question?
3. How well does each topic sentence support the thesis?
4. Does the conclusion clearly reinforce the thesis?

**Figure 5:** Worksheet for Reviewing Sample Essays. Guiding questions to help students apply Workshop #1 materials to new sample history essays.

with marked sections to highlight the thesis and how each stage is clearly supporting or reinforcing it.

We showed the students how this essay follows the stages of argumentation by introducing the source text and clearly stating an argumentative thesis statement (“women held a much lower status in society than men”), followed by nominal expressions that preview the content of the essay by naming the sub-claims that support the main claim (“as they were considered to be much less important than the men, their lives consisted of mainly being confined to household tasks, with few rights in important matters such as divorce and marriage”). These sub-claims are stated in the topic sentences of the body paragraphs in the same order and with the same language as presented in the introduction, and the student provides reasoning for their relevance to the main claim. Finally, the reiteration stage reinforces the thesis.

At the end of Workshop #1, to put these analytical skills into practice, we provided excerpts of two sample essays and had students analyze them using guiding questions (**Figure 5**). Due to space constraints, we do not provide the sample essays used for this activity.

We discussed the students’ analysis of the additional sample essays and finished the workshop with a list of takeaways of the material covered in this workshop that highlight some of the features of effective argumentation in history (**Figure 6**).

### **Workshop #1: Takeaways Handout**

1. Set yourself up to make an argument with your thesis.
2. Have a thesis that makes an overarching claim that shows analysis or evaluation of the source text, rather than just re-presenting information from the source text to show you have read it.
3. Make sure your thesis statement answers the question directly and completely. Don't ignore words in the prompt, especially ones that ask you for an evaluation (e.g., "to what degree").
4. Follow the stages of argument genre with a thesis statement, body paragraphs that support your thesis, and reiteration of your thesis.
5. Use your topic sentences to make claims that relate to the thesis statement, and support and advance the argument.
6. Make sure your argument is consistent from the beginning to the end of your essay. If you're thinking about the topic changes as you write, you need to revise the introduction accordingly.

**Figure 6:** Takeaways Handout. Strategies for effective argumentation in history.

### **Workshop #2: Interpersonal Resources for Argumentation**

In our analysis of previous student work, we found that students experienced difficulties using interpersonal resources—resources that are particularly valued in effective argumentation in history.<sup>20</sup> By using interpersonal resources effectively, writers are able to acknowledge source texts, show how evidence from source texts relates to their claims, manage multiple perspectives strategically, and position the reader consistently. In our workshops, we drew on the SFL-based Engagement framework to help students understand the effective use of interpersonal resources.<sup>21</sup> The Engagement framework describes how writers use these resources to position themselves in relation to other voices, as described in more detail below.

Academic arguers must make claims against a background of already-existing perspectives, and the analysis based on the Engagement framework can help us understand how successful academic writers create a balance between introducing their own

### Workshop #2: Homework Preparation

Please review the excerpts from Essay 1 and Essay 2 and answer the following questions. Bring the completed homework to class.

1. Which essay is more effective in incorporating the source text? Highlight language that is used to incorporate the source text (effectively or not) in each essay.
2. Consider the main argument and the evidence presented in the body paragraph of each essay. How do the writers demonstrate that the evidence supports the main argument? Which essay does a better job using the evidence to support the main argument?
3. Which essay is more effective in recognizing that there might be multiple perspectives on this issue? Point to language the writers use to show awareness of multiple perspectives on the issue discussed. Make a special note of language used to recognize that the reader might not agree with the argument and needs to be persuaded.
4. Consider each essay's main argument and recognition of multiple perspectives. Which essay uses this recognition of multiple perspectives to better support the argument?
5. Now that you have answered Questions 1-4, read the excerpt from Essay 3 and think about the main differences in the language used in Essay 3 compared to Essays 1 and 2. How is the information presented in Essay 3? Is the source text incorporated effectively? Can you point to any place in which Essay 3 uses language to recognize awareness of multiple perspectives?

**Figure 7:** Homework Preparation. Guiding questions for pre-workshop analysis of Engagement resources in arguments.

perspective, acknowledging the existence of other perspectives, and effectively estimating what their audience's assumed perspective will be. When we write, we are entering a conversation with all others who have written about the same topic. In other words, we are in a dialog with our potential readers. Small choices that writers make with their language reveal how they anticipate the audience will react to the statements put forth. Writers can use these interpersonal linguistic resources strategically to align the reader to their perspective (in other words, for the benefit of their argument).

### **Workshop #2: Worksheet for Comparison of Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Statements**

Consider these two examples. Do you notice any differences in the language used in the following two statements?

#### **Example 1**

The treatment of women in Babylon was unfair. The women suffered a lot. The laws created different punishments for men and women. The wife received benefits when there were children involved.

#### **Example 2**

By analyzing Hammurabi's Code, it becomes clear that the treatment of women in Babylon was unfair. According to the Code, "xxxxxx" (Code YY). This shows how skewed the laws were towards the benefit of men.

**Figure 8:** Worksheet for Comparison of Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Statements. Example paragraphs highlighting the difference between single-voiced statements and multi-voiced statements.

To prepare the students for our discussion of these linguistic resources, we asked them to review excerpts from three sample essays for homework and to consider a set of questions in response (**Figure 7**). Excerpts from these essays will be used in our discussion of Activities #1 and #2.

#### *Activity #1: The Importance of Multi-Voiced Statements in Argumentation*

In Activity #1 in the second workshop, we introduced students to the fundamentals of the Engagement framework by explaining the difference between single-voiced (monoglossic) and multi-voiced (heteroglossic) statements. When writers use single-voiced statements, such as bare assertions or presuppositions, they are expressing no room for alternative points of view, projecting complete agreement on the part of the audience, and presenting information as if it were factual. In the examples we provide to students (**Figure 8**), the statement, "The women suffered a lot," makes a bare assertion with a non-modalized verb, and therefore is single-voiced. However, when writers use multi-voiced propositions,

they are acknowledging the possibility of other perspectives while presenting their own perspective as an interpretation that needs to be argued for. We explained that there are two types of multi-voiced statements—those that *expand* the dialog with the putative reader and those that *narrow* it. For example, the statement, “The laws seem to indicate that women suffered a lot,” expands the dialog as it allows room for alternative perspectives through the modality of *seem*. On the other hand, the statement, “Women did not suffer,” narrows the dialog by acknowledging the existence of the opposing perspective (that women did suffer) while also refuting it.

We emphasized that writers typically make use of both single-voiced and multi-voiced statements within a piece of writing, but it is important to remember that argumentative writing requires the use of multi-voiced statements. We explained that if someone writes an entire paragraph using only single-voiced statements, they are presenting information as *factual*, not as something that needs to be *argued*. Strong argumentative writing often requires effective patterns of these resources combined within paragraphs. To illustrate these aspects of the Engagement framework, we presented the students with a pair of statements in the workshop (as seen in **Figure 8**). Students were asked to note any differences in the language of Example 1 and Example 2.

In their examination of these two examples, the students were able to identify the use of the source text in Example 2 to contextualize the assertion that women were treated unfairly and to bring in evidence. This is in contrast to Example 1, where there is no reference to the source text to support the assertions being made. Using Example 2, we discussed the incorporation of the source text in terms of expanding the dialog by acknowledging the source text (e.g., “According to the Code”) and quoting from it, and then narrowing the dialog by explaining the quote as it relates to the writer’s argument (e.g., “this shows”), thus bringing the reader closer to the writer’s perspective. These resources allow students to present an analysis of their evidence, formulate *reasons* to explain *why* they chose certain quotes, and assert *how* the evidence supports their claims. These resources are particularly important as research shows that “positing a claim, supporting it with evidence, and explaining the connections between claim and evidence” are aspects of argumentation that are necessary in historical writing.<sup>22</sup>



| Workshop #2: Selected Engagement Framework Handout Highlighting Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Statements |                |   |
|---|----------------|---|
| Interpersonal Resources   | Types          | Examples  |
| Single-Voiced   | Bare Assertion | Disease <i>caused</i> slowed migration.                                       |
| Multi-Voiced  |                |   |
|   | Modality       | Disease <i>may</i> have caused slowed migration.                              |
|   | Attribute      | <i>According to</i> McNeill, disease caused slowed migration.                 |
|   | Deny/ Negate   | Disease <i>did not</i> cause slowed migration                                 |
|   | Counter        | Disease caused slowed migration, <i>but</i> its overall effects were minimal. |
|   | Endorse        | <i>This shows</i> that disease caused slowed migration.                       |

**Figure 9:** Selected Engagement Framework Handout Highlighting Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Statements.<sup>30</sup>

We then provided the students with highlights of some of the different types of single-voiced and multi-voiced statements, demonstrating how they signal a relationship to already-existing perspectives, and providing more meta-language for the resources we had discussed (**Figure 9**). The students were then able to revisit the essays they read for homework, using worksheet questions to guide their analysis of Engagement resources informed by this new meta-language (**Figure 10**).

Students were also given a handout with sample essays to demonstrate single-voiced and multi-voiced resources (**Figure 11**). The excerpt from Essay 1 shows effective use of single- and multi-voiced statements to incorporate the source text in a supporting argument stage of a historical argument. The paragraph starts

### Workshop #2: Worksheet for Analysis of Engagement Resources

Answer these discussion questions based on the homework you prepared for today:

1. Which of the excerpts (1, 2, or 3) relies mostly on single-voiced statements? How do you know?
2. Which essay did you think was more effective in incorporating the source text? Using the vocabulary that we have discussed today, what is problematic about the way Essay 2 incorporates the source text?
3. Which of the linguistic resources that we have discussed today does the student in Essay 1 use? Can you label each sentence as single-voiced or multi-voiced? Can you label each multi-voiced sentence as expanding or narrowing? Can you label the specific resources the sentences are using?

**Figure 10:** Worksheet for Analysis of Engagement Resources. Guiding questions for in-workshop analysis of Engagement resources in sample essays.

with a single-voiced statement in which the author states her claim about women being under the control of men. This is followed by an attribute move (e.g., “*According to law 128*”) that expands the dialog by referencing the source text and introducing a quote that is used as evidence. The use of endorse moves (e.g., “*this is evident*” or “*this shows that*”) then narrows the dialog to show how the quotation supports the claim, bringing the reader toward the writer’s interpretation. We contrasted this excerpt with the excerpt from Essay 2, where the writer expanded the dialog by bringing in the source text as evidence, but neglected to narrow the dialog by showing how the quoted material supports the claim. The students were able to see that when writers omit the narrowing move, they are leaving the dialog open and failing to bring the reader towards their position.

To make this clearer to students, we also used the meta-language of the “quotation sandwich” to emphasize the importance of introducing and explaining quotes.<sup>23</sup> The students were already familiar with the “quotation sandwich” meta-language from their required first-year composition course: a quote needs to be inserted

## Workshop #2: Sample Essays Handout for Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Resources

### Sample Essay 1

**One of the aspects of the treatment of women that stands out the most is the idea that Babylonian women were under the control of men.** *This is evident* in the laws concerning marriage and divorce. According to law 128, “If a man take a woman to wife, but have no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.” *This shows* that marriage’s basic foundation is sexual intercourse, especially putting blame on the woman to be “no wife” if there is no intercourse.

### Sample Essay 2

**Besides these cruel conditions for women, there were a few beneficial rules for the women.** Babylonian society *was not* so mean and *actually* provided some rights for women. *Though* the women were evaluated callously and brutally, there were laws that benefited women. The women had the privilege to own their husband’s property legally *if* their husband left them and their children. Women *could* get a part of their husband’s assets to live their rest of the lives. “If a man wishes to separate from a woman who has borne him children, or from his wife who has borne him children: then he shall give that wife her dowry, and a part of the usufruct of field, garden, and property, so that she can rear her children.” (Code no: 137)

**Figure 11:** Sample Essays Handout for Single-Voiced and Multi-Voiced Resources. Samples showing more- and less-effective patterning of single- and multi-voiced resources. Single-voiced propositions are indicated in bold, dialogic expansion is indicated with underline, and dialogic narrowing is indicated with italics. The annotated text was provided to students after a discussion of their own analysis.

into a frame that introduces who wrote the words, explains what those words mean, and articulates how those words connect with the rest of the information in the paragraph. In this way, instead of inserting a “dangling” or “naked” quotation into a text, writers create a “sandwich” with the quotation coming between a set-up and an explanatory connection to their point. We suggested to students that the SFL version gave them a more theoretically informed reasoning for the need to incorporate evidence in this way, and that therefore the quotation sandwich is more than just a rule to be followed, as it is integral to the dialog they are creating with their putative reader. We

## Workshop #2: Sample Essays Handout for Positioning the Reader with Concede-Counter Moves

### Sample Essay 1

Paragraph 1 (excerpt): The main view we get throughout the laws is that **women held a much lower status in society than men**, as they were considered to be much less important than the men, their lives consisted of mainly being confined to household tasks, with few rights in important matters such as divorce and marriage.

Paragraph 4 (excerpt): One of the aspects of the treatment of women that stands out the most is the idea that Babylonian women were under the control of men. This is evident in the laws concerning marriage and divorce. According to law 128, “If a man take a woman to wife, but have no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.” This shows that marriage’s basic foundation is sexual intercourse, especially putting blame on the woman to be “no wife” if there is no intercourse. Rather than forming emotional connections with their wives, men were encouraged to find a sexual connection first, while women had no voice in this. In addition, while men had the right to ask for divorce as stated in laws 137 and 138, women did not. ***Although some rights were given to women such as the right to own land and receiving a dowry, these laws were for the sole reason that the woman can bring up the children, not for her own benefit.*** Clearly, these laws about marriage and divorce indicate women’s lower status in Babylonian society compared to men.

### Sample Essay 2

Paragraph 1 (excerpt): In the code of Hammurabi, there are many sorts of laws...During Hammurabi’s reign, women were always neglected. They were *not* seen as equally as men...Men and women were *not* treated fully and genuinely. To be precise women were *not* treated as human! **Hammurabi’s codes were really cruel and harsh for the then women society.** [*sic*]

Paragraph 2 (excerpt): The Babylonian women’s lives were really in a miserable condition.

Paragraph 3 (excerpt): The women were handled more as products.

Paragraph 4 (excerpt): Besides these cruel conditions for women, there were a few beneficial rules for the women. Babylonian society was *not so* mean and *actually* provided some rights for women. ***Though the women were evaluated callously and brutally, there were laws that benefited women.*** The women had the privilege to own their husband’s property legally if their husband left them and their children. Women could get a part of their husband’s assets to live their rest of the lives. “If a man wishes to separate from a woman who has borne him children, or from his wife who has borne him children: then he shall give that wife her dowry, and a part of the usufruct of field, garden, and property, so that she can rear her children.” (Code no: 137)

Conclusion (excerpt): Thus, from the codes of Hammurabi, *we can conclude* that the Babylonian women were suffering at that time because of negligence and inequity. *But at the same time, there were some laws which were really favorable for them.*

**Figure 12:** Sample Essays Handout for Positioning the Reader with Concede-Counter Moves. Samples showing more- and less-successful essays regarding the consistency of how the author positions the reader. Concede-counter moves are shown in bold italics and were highlighted by the instructors during discussion.

suggested the following pattern for them to effectively incorporate quoted material when writing from sources:

attribute + quote + *endorse*

We also provided the students with examples of other phrases that can be used to endorse cited information (e.g., “this *illustrates*”, “this *demonstrates*”, “this *indicates*”).

### *Activity #2: Acknowledging Different Perspectives in Argumentation*

In Activity #2, we focused on how the Engagement framework can help us understand that small linguistic choices can reveal how the writer is positioning the reader, and how these choices can be used strategically to align the reader to the writer’s perspective. We also emphasized that if writers are inconsistent in how they position the reader, they create confusion and possibly undermine their argument.

We focused particularly on the concede-counter move (e.g., “*although* this...that”), which allows writers to strategically give voice to a different perspective before aligning the reader to their perspective. This move, when used effectively, can be particularly helpful in strengthening an argument. When writers use this move, they are demonstrating an awareness of a potential opposing voice, saying that it is normal that one might hold that perspective (concession), and then countering that it is not accurate in the particular case at hand. Thus, writers give up some ground to a reader who might disagree with them before aligning the reader to their perspective. We found that higher-graded essays used this move strategically in their arguments, while lower-graded essays did not.<sup>24</sup>

To illustrate these ideas, we again used the excerpts from Essay 1 and Essay 2 that students had read for homework (**Figure 12**). We asked the students to consider several questions to help them analyze the use of these resources (**Figure 13**).

The excerpt from Essay 1 shows how the writer strategically expands the dialog by using a concede-counter move to bring in an opposing perspective (concession) and then counters that perspective to bring the reader toward her perspective. The concede-counter move is found in Paragraph 4 and is bolded and in italics.

Essay 1 clearly defends the position that “women held a much lower status in society than men.” As discussed above, the writer

**Workshop #2: Worksheet for Reviewing Sample Essays**

Read the excerpts from the sample essays provided and consider these questions:

1. Can you see any place where the students in Essay 1 and 2 anticipate disagreement from the reader? How does the student manage this?
2. What language do you see that reveals how the student is imagining the reader's position?
3. What is a big difference between Essay 1 and Essay 2 in this regard?

**Figure 13:** Worksheet for Reviewing Sample Essays. Guiding questions for the analysis of concede-counter moves.

presents ample evidence from the source text as support for this assertion, effectively expanding and narrowing the dialog by using attribute and endorse moves. What makes Essay 1's supporting argument stage in Paragraph 4 even more persuasive has to do with how the student positions the reader. She anticipates that the reader will think that there were laws that provided women with some rights, so she concedes that such an interpretation might be possible ("*Although* some rights were given to women..."). However, she then counters this concession, showing in this case that perspective is not accurate ("these laws were for the sole reason that the woman can bring up the children, *not* for her own benefit"). Her counter is completely consistent with the position asserted in her thesis.

Essay 2 is an example of an essay that brings in another perspective in a way that weakens the argument. Throughout Essay 2, the writer argues that Hammurabi's codes were cruel and harsh for women. The writer consistently narrows the dialog to bring the reader toward that perspective. This is especially noticeable in the first paragraph, where the writer uses multiple deny moves that make emphatic claims about the disadvantages for women ("*not* seen as equally"; "*not* treated fully and genuinely"; "*not* treated as human"). These deny moves suggest the writer anticipates a reader who might think otherwise, calling into existence and then refuting the opposing perspective

### Workshop #2: Takeaways Handout

1. Effective arguments use a combination of single-voiced and multi-voiced statements. If you are relying too heavily on single-voiced statements, you are probably just repeating information from the source text as factual, rather than using it to make your own argument.
2. Single-voiced statements may be used effectively in the main claim and in the sub-claims (in the topic sentences).
3. Multi-voiced statements may be used throughout a paragraph to support the sub-claim made in the topic sentence.
4. Effective arguments from sources expand the dialog by acknowledging the sources (e.g., “*According to Law # 138 in Hammurabi’s Code*”) and quoting from them, and then narrow the dialog by explaining the quotes as they relate to the writer’s argument (e.g., “*this shows that*”).
5. Effective arguments expand the dialog by acknowledging different perspectives, while narrowing the dialog by aligning the reader to the writer’s perspective, through the use of, for example, concede-counter moves.

**Figure 14:** Takeaways from Workshop 2. Linguistic resources important for effective argumentation in history.

that women were treated well. However, in Paragraph 4, the writer uses a concede-counter move to argue that there were some laws that benefited women. After spending the entire essay saying that the laws were negative for women, the author concedes the position he has been arguing (“*Though the women were evaluated callously and brutally*”) and then counters with a claim that undermines his own overall position (“*there were laws that benefited women*”). The use of this concede-counter move weakens the essay because the argument becomes inconsistent from what was being argued in the introduction and all previous paragraphs. Furthermore, in the final paragraph, where the reader expects a reinforcement of the thesis, the student restates the thesis, and then uses a counter move (“*But*”) to present the opposing perspective as if it were equally valid, closing the essay with a narrowing of the dialog away from his original position. Thus, in the workshop, we emphasized how

important it is not only to include multiple perspectives, but to do so strategically in a way that reveals a consistent positioning of the reader and helps advance the argument. We finished the workshop by giving students a list of takeaways from Workshop #2 (**Figure 14**).

### **Student Uptake of Workshop Materials and Writing Development**

While a detailed account of student uptake of the workshop materials is beyond the scope of this paper, in this section, we briefly report on some findings of our ongoing analysis of student writing development in relation to the targeted linguistic resources from the workshop. Using an SFL-based framework (the 3x3),<sup>25</sup> we have conducted large-scale and very detailed analyses. Both analyses indicate that the students who benefited the most from the workshops were those who began the semester with the least success in terms of meeting genre expectations and using valued linguistic resources effectively.

Our large-scale analysis involved Essays 1-5 by all thirty-five students (175 essays). We used a rubric to assign a score (0-3) for individual features of the essay. When comparing scores of Essays 1 and 2 with regard to what had been targeted in Workshop #1, we found significant gains among the students who had scores of 0 or 1 in these categories for Essay 1. Of the nine students who did not have an argumentative thesis in Essay 1, eight improved in this category with scores of 2.5 or 3. While in Essay 1, there were eight students who did not follow the stages of argument, five of these improved in this category in Essay 2 (and none dropped). Of the sixteen students who did not have consistency between their thesis and reiteration stages in Essay 1, twelve improved in Essay 2 (and none dropped). These findings indicate that the intervention seems to have had the greatest impact on novice writers.

Our analysis focused on the writing of the nine focal students who attended all three workshops, and it provides a more detailed look at these gains. While there were four of these students who did not write an argumentative thesis in Essay 1, all nine students did in Essay 2, and all of them wrote arguments by Essay 3. For example, Amal, one of the focal students who did not write an argument for Essay 1, made significant progress after each of the first two workshops. In



her first essay, Amal did not write an identifiable thesis. Her essay, written in response to Hammurabi's Code, addressed different topics in each of its paragraphs (political system, status of women, economy, and social structure) with no overarching claim to create a unified and consistent argument. Each of these different topics corresponds to one of the prompts that she was supposed to select; not only did Amal not meet genre expectations on this first essay, she did not meet the assignment expectations of responding to a single prompt.

Students who participated in the first workshop focused on answering the prompt with an argumentative thesis, following the stages of argumentation, and writing consistent arguments. Afterwards, Amal's Essay 2, written in response to William McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* (Prompt: How convincing do you find McNeill's argument that disease in Southern China slowed down immigration from China's north?) had a clear argumentative thesis and followed the stages of argumentation:

[T]hese parasites affects [*sic*] the farmers themselves and I find this a very convincing reason to slow down the immigration from China's north to south.

Although Amal made significant progress in incorporating the first workshop's targeted linguistic resources, she only referenced the source text once without citing it, and she did not use other interpersonal resources effectively to position her voice in relation to the source text.

After participating in the second and third workshops, which addressed interpersonal resources, Amal was more effective in using resources to incorporate the source text and to show how the evidence presented supported her argument. In an excerpt from her Essay 3, written in response to the Taika Reforms (Prompt: Based on your reading of the text, what are the most important obstacles to the centralization of the Japanese state?), she provided a strong topic sentence that tied back to her thesis and provided argumentative reasoning ("because"), clearly and effectively incorporated the source text ("According to the Book of Changes 15"), quoted from it, and explained how the quotes supports her claim to align the reader with her perspective ("meaning that"). Amal finished her paragraph with a summarizing sentence that reiterates reasoning for how the evidence discussed supports the thesis:

The local elites' power to take lands without authority is an important obstacle because it causes inequality of social class. The elites (For example, the Japanese elites: the Omi 11 and Muraji 12, the Tomo no Miyakko 5 and the Kuni no Miyakko 2) using their power can take any land, and then they get their vassals to work at their private land to make it equivalent to their preferences. According to *The Book of Changes* 15, "Their contests are never-ceasing. Some engross to themselves many tens of thousands of shiro 13 of rice-land, while others possess in all patches of ground too small to stick a needle into," meaning that in result of elites taking lands, other people get to own only small lands which causes inequality. This inequality blocks centralization because elites have greater power than the low class, so they are benefiting more.

Although there is still room for improvement in Amal and other students' writing, it appears our explicit instruction accelerated students' development towards meeting the expectations of the course and the argument genre. As the semester progressed, many students wrote more effectively organized arguments, drawing on the source text as support for their claims, acknowledging different perspectives, and showing an awareness of how this is done with language. In our analysis of a previous iteration of the course, eighteen of twenty-four students wrote non-argument genres for the second essay, and of the six who wrote arguments, three were arguments that met some but not all genre expectations.<sup>26</sup> Our quantitative and qualitative analysis of student uptake of the workshop materials lends more support to those who have argued for the value of explicit language-based disciplinary instruction.<sup>27</sup>

### Future Work

Our work in this course is ongoing. We are currently analyzing the entire corpus of student writing and we aim to refine the content of our future workshops. In these new workshops, we would like to place greater emphasis on the use of interpersonal resources to create an argumentative stance throughout the paragraphs of an essay. Our ongoing analysis shows that, while students can rather quickly grasp the notions of answering the prompt with an argumentative thesis and following the stages of argumentation, remaining argumentative throughout the essay and using a variety

of multi-voiced and single-voiced statements remains a challenge for many. The history professor plans to take a more active role in the workshops and to clearly incorporate the meta-language in his feedback to his students and in his writing rubric. We understand that continuing collaboration between language experts and disciplinary faculty is necessary. It takes time for teachers “to develop expertise in these strategies.”<sup>28</sup> Teachers need “more experience before they [can] use SFL to ‘do history’ with their students.” Teachers need “additional modeling, coaching, and practice.”<sup>29</sup> We believe that our collaborative work will allow for this. We believe that our functional approach to history argumentative writing can help teachers and students understand disciplinary writing expectations and enhance student writing development.

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