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## The Development of Abstraction in Adolescence in Subject English

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When I was invited to contribute to a volume devoted to “advanced literacy,” I did wonder a little at the theme: In what sense was the word “advanced” intended? Did it mean advanced in the sense that it concerned older students at advanced (i.e., tertiary) levels? Or did it mean advanced in the sense that it involved thinking about literacy at some level *beyond the basics*, however we conceived those? Or did it, perhaps relatedly, mean advanced in the sense that it suggested developing students who could take up challenging (i.e., advanced) positions in their writing, in which case it might suggest some interest in critical literacy, and all that that implies? It might in fact mean all these, although it will be as well if I begin by setting some constraints on what I intend in responding to the notion of the acquisition of advanced literacy.

The thesis I shall propose here is that:

- advanced literacy is developed in the secondary years;
- the movement to the secondary experience is as much a rite of passage as is the entry to the kindergarten and lower primary school;
- it is with the transition to the secondary school that students must learn to handle the grammar of written English differently from the ways they handled it for primary schooling, and that it is these changes that constitute the “advanced literacy” that is needed for future participation in further study and many areas of adult life;

- the changes in the grammar, which I want to talk about with respect to subject English, are various, although collectively they create the capacity in the successful writer, to handle the building of generalization, abstraction, argument, and reflection on experience that advanced literacy seems to require.

I might of course choose to look at development of literacy across different subjects. A great deal of relevant work has been done by Martin, Rothery and their colleagues in the so-called “Write it Right Project” of a few years ago (see several papers in Christie & Martin, 1997, for a discussion of some of the work that emerged from that project). However, I have chosen to look at English for several reasons:

- It happens to be the school subject whose teaching I have been researching most closely for the last 2 years;
- English interests me anyway, because it is the one compulsory subject in all states in Australia for all the years of secondary school, so it is clearly perceived as important in the culture;
- While the teaching of literacy is an important issue in all other subjects, it is subject English that, ostensibly at least, is committed to the teaching of language itself as an overt object of study;
- Finally, although there are features of literacy performance that are common across the secondary subjects, there are also features peculiar to each subject and its discourse. In the interests of economy, I am thus going to look at only English.

I should note as I proceed that the focus of my discussion will be on students’ writing, although I would argue that what I shall say has consequences for reading and its teaching as well.

### **ESTABLISHING SOME TERMINOLOGY**

It will perhaps be useful briefly to establish several of the terms I shall use, most of them drawn from systemic functional (SF) linguistic theory, and all of them generally relevant to building my arguments concerning development of capacities for abstraction, generalization, and argument, as features of advanced literacy. The first of the terms I shall refer to is that of “abstractness,” a term to be used here in a reasonably orthodox sense, in that it involves uses of abstract nouns, such as “quality,” in an expression such as “she has good qualities.” Abstractness is not a feature of early writing, and we may reasonably assume that a degree of life experience is required before children give expression to it, especially in their writing. Another term is that of “technicality,” used here to refer to those linguistic items that are used in establishing the technical language of some discourse. The following is an example of a sentence taken from a 9-year-old child’s writing, demonstrating both that she understands the meaning of the technical item “erosion” and that she is able to deploy it in a piece of writing:

“Erosion is the gradual wearing away of the soil by wind, running water, waves and temperature.”

Emergent control of technicality in language is a necessary feature of the development of advanced literacy.

Another, often related term to be used here is that of “grammatical metaphor” (Halliday, 1994, pp. 342–367), an expression that has come into use to refer to the ways in which the “congruent expressions” of the grammar of speech are turned into the “noncongruent,” or metaphorical, expressions of the written mode. The congruent way to represent experience in the English clause is in a process (expressed in a verbal group), associated participants (expressed in nominal groups), and where needed, associated circumstance(s), expressed either in a prepositional phrase or an adverbial group:

1. *The soldiers* (Participant; nominal group) *attacked* (Process; verbal group) *the town* (Participant; nominal group) *with guns* (Circumstance; prepositional phrase).

The congruent way to link the experiential information of this clause to another is by means of a conjunctive relationship, thus:

The soldiers attacked the town with guns and then removed the treasures.

If we were to represent these two clauses in a noncongruent or metaphorical manner, we would write:

2. *The soldiers' attack on the town with guns* (Participant; nominal group containing two prepositional phrases in Postmodifier position to the noun *attack*); *led to/was followed by* (Process; verbal group) *the removal of the treasures* (Participant; nominal group containing one prepositional phrase).

Why term this metaphorical? The answer to that rests on acceptance of the notion that the congruent is the unmarked way we represent experience, and that the alternative or marked realization, in that it plays with and changes the grammar, is a form of metaphor. Thus, in our metaphorical example in (2), the two independent clauses in (1), expressed as we typically might say it in speech, have been turned into the one clause of writing, by a process that (i) turns the action of a clause (*the soldiers attacked the town*) into the nominal group of writing (*the soldiers' attack on the town*), and (ii) buries the conjunctive relationship between the original two clauses (*and then*) in the new verbal group (either *led to*, or *was followed by*). Emergent control of noncongruent expression, or grammatical metaphor, so Halliday (1994) has written, is a phenomenon of late childhood at the earliest, although my own observation is that for many students it emerges in adolescence, and even then very unevenly.

Apart from instances of grammatical metaphor that are experiential in character, like those I have just discussed, where it is the elements that construct ex-

periences that are made noncongruent, there are other examples of grammatical metaphor that are interpersonal, where it is the perspective or stance of the writer toward those elements of experience that is expressed metaphorically. Interpersonal meaning is expressed in the resources of mood and modality. A congruent expression might read: *Certainly he told the truth*, where *certainly* carries modal significance, expressing the writer's judgement. A noncongruent way to express this might be: *I'm sure he told the truth*, or perhaps *It is obvious he told the truth*. We can demonstrate that *I'm sure* is metaphorical, by using Halliday's test of a tag question to establish the subject of the clause: *I'm sure he told the truth, didn't he?*, not *I'm sure he told the truth, aren't I?* The expression functions as an alternative to *certainly*. As for *it is obvious*, this is simply one of the many expressions available in English for asserting opinions, all of them carrying modal significance, and constituting substitutes for modal adverbs such as *probably* or *certainly*. The development toward control of generalizations and abstractions that characterize advanced literacy includes developing control of interpersonal metaphor, for this is involved in the related development of capacity for judgment and expression of opinion. As I shall suggest later, emergent capacity for judgment expresses itself in more than one way, for adverbs other than those having a direct modal significance seem to be involved.

These matters having been established, we can now move to consideration of a range of written texts by Australian school students, selected because they represent examples of texts produced in subject English classrooms across several years of schooling. Subject English—at least in Australia—seems to value and reward a particular range of text types: narratives, especially in the primary and junior secondary years; a number of text types I would loosely group as “literary critical,” including book (or film) reviews and character studies, especially in the junior secondary years, and, by the mid secondary years, literary critical pieces, involving expository texts discussing major themes in literary works; and finally, what I shall term “opinionated pieces,” generally about social issues, such as drug abuse, and selected because they are current, and because they are intended to allow students opportunity for expression of personal opinion. The latter texts seem to emerge by the mid secondary years, although the pattern is variable.

For the purpose of developing this discussion, I shall examine three instances of narratives, then I shall go on to examine two literary critical pieces, and finally I shall discuss two opinionated pieces about social issues. The seven texts have been selected both because they offer a range of text types or genres found in subject English, and because they are drawn from across the primary and secondary years. All but one of the texts were collected in Australian schools, and I know something of the contexts for writing in which they were produced. They were written by both L1 and L2 students, and were not drawn from privileged schools. In fact, with the exception of the last text I shall use, taken from the pages of a Melbourne newspaper, the texts were drawn from students in schools in some reasonably under privileged areas. I should note in addition, that although I would suggest the texts are representative of Australian experience across the years of schooling, all the texts used (with the exception of the one printed in the newspaper, where a teacher's opinion was not sought) were judged by their teachers to be good.

## NARRATIVE TEXTS

The first narrative to be displayed here was written by a bilingual speaker of English and Russian, when she was 6 years old. It is a reasonably complete, if rudimentary, instance of a narrative genre, although my interest is less in establishing its generic structure, and rather more in establishing those features of the child's uses of language that mark this as a young text, written by a child who does not control grammatical metaphor. For convenience, I shall set the text out showing the elements of structure. I shall also mark in italics those aspects of the story which reveal aspects of the characters, either what they are like, or how they respond to events. Capacity to *intrude* observations about responses into the unfolding of those events is an important aspect of narrative writing.

### Text 1

#### **Orientation**

Once upon a time there was a Fairy who was pretty. She had one child. *She was good to people and animals.* She went to the fairy shop and got a toy bear for her girl. She washed the bear when she came home. *Her child was happy.*

#### **Complication/Resolution**

When the bear tore Mum mended it. Mum loved the child.

#### **Closure**

We say goodbye.

As noted, Text 1 is rudimentary, and it has an extremely simple Complication, yet for a child of her years it is a successful piece. It makes fairly successful use of reference, the naming and linking through anaphora of the participants in the narrative, and this is unusual in my experience in such a young child. My overwhelming observation is that young children in the first years of schooling take some time in sorting out the nature of the referential items to be used in writing, and that is because they understand reference much more fully as a feature of the language of speech, where a great deal of reference is exophoric, referring to elements in the shared context of speaking. Learning to handle the endophoric references needed to create a successfully coherent written text takes some time. The endophoric reference here works to assist in holding all elements of the story together in a reasonably coherent way. However, having said that, we should also note that the young writer is confused, in that she begins her tale by writing of *a Fairy*, although toward the end of the story she has become *Mum*. The text is set out as Fig. 3.1.

The nominal group structures in which participant roles are realized are extremely simple: *she, her child, the bear*. The process choices, realized in the verbal groups, sometimes express action as in *she washed the bear*, or sometimes they build attributes as in *her child was happy*, and once Anna uses a mental process of affect, *Mum loved the child*. Two prepositional phrases build Circumstances: *to the fairy*

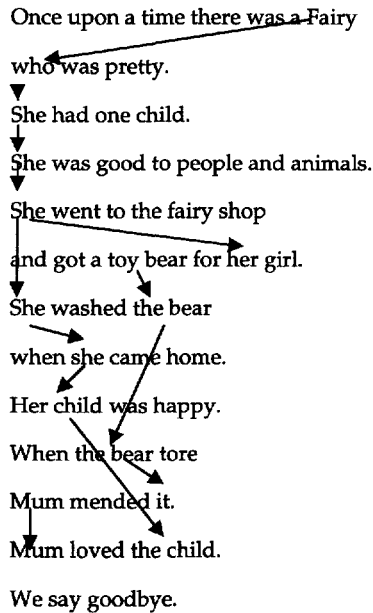


FIG. 3.1. Reference in Text 1.

*shop* and *for her girl*. Most of the topical Theme choices are unmarked, apart from the opening Theme *Once upon a time*—in itself a very common feature of young children’s stories.<sup>1</sup> In fact, for the most part topical Themes conflate with the Subjects of the verbs, so that the commonest Theme choice is *she*. Overall, then, this is a simple instance of a narrative, using a series of clauses that construct information in congruent ways, and showing a commendable grasp of the needs both to create a

<sup>1</sup>The term “Theme” is used in systemic functional theory to refer to what is thematic in the clause (Halliday, 1994). Theme is defined as “the point of departure for the message of the clause.” In English, but not in many other languages, Theme comes in first position in the clause. Theme itself has three potential elements, which correspond to the major metafunctions recognized. Topical (or experiential) Theme refers to what is the experiential focus of the clause. Interpersonal Theme builds some aspect of relationship in that some interpersonally relevant information is made the focus, as in the use of the finite: *Would you like this?* Or in the use of a vocative: *Mary, did you see that?*, or in the use of an adverb that builds judgment: *Certainly you can come to our house*. Textual Theme corresponds to the textual metafunction, and is to do with the role of “tying clauses together.” Textual Theme is typically realized in a conjunction. Where the three types of metafunctions occur, they do so in the order: textual, interpersonal, topical. Topical theme is of course the commonest Theme choice, and it may be either marked or unmarked. The usual or unmarked topical Theme conflates with the Subject of the clause. However, English speakers and writers often employ marked topical Themes, sometimes expressed in a prepositional phrase, sometimes in an adverb, sometimes in a dependent clause. Thematic progression in texts is very important, for it is a major resource for carrying the text forward. Achieving control of Theme is an important developmental task for children.

# TIMMY THE CLOCK.

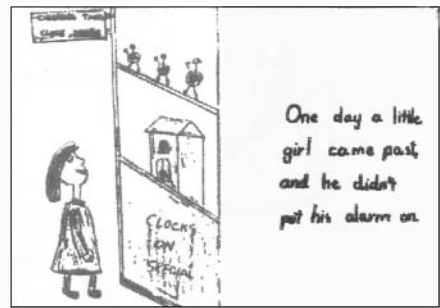
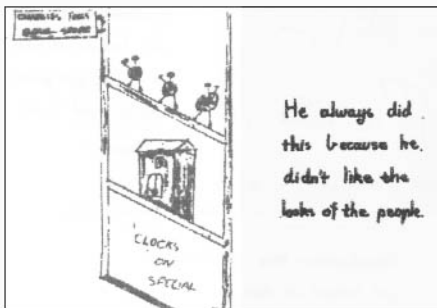
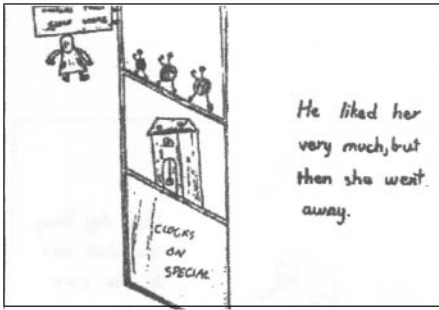
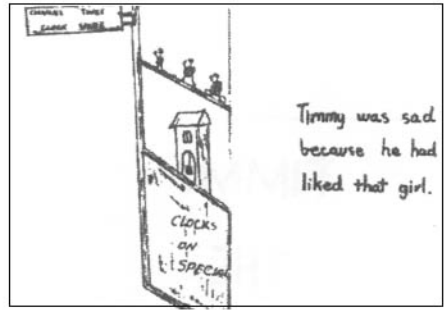


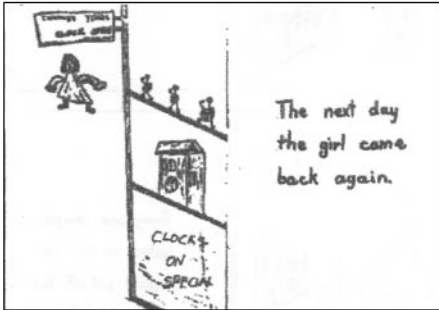
FIG. 3.2 Timmy the clock was published by Deakin University Press in the Deakin University Bachelor of Education Children Writing Study Guide, published in 1989. Efforts to trace the writer have proved unsuccessful.



He liked her very much, but then she went away.



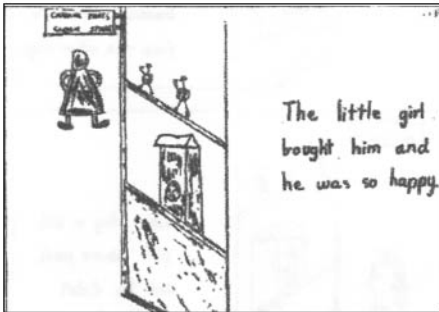
Timmy was sad because he had liked that girl.



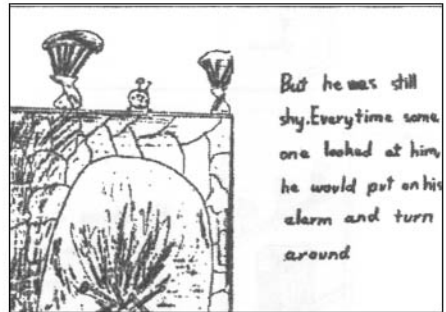
The next day the girl came back again.



He was so happy that he put on his alarm and started jumping for joy.



The little girl bought him and he was so happy.



But he was still shy. Everytime some one looked at him, he would put on his alarm and turn around



Except, when the girl looked at him.

FIG. 3.2 continued.



sense of internal coherence in the text, and to order it in such a way that it builds a sense of generic completeness.

Text 2 is an instance of a narrative written by a boy in the last year of primary school, about 11 or 12 years old.

My discussion of Text 2 will be in some ways incomplete. It was originally written as a little book, so that each double page involved an illustration on one page and an accompanying page of text on the other. The story is told through a great deal of the information in the accompanying pictures, and because I do not intend to consider these, I fail to do the writer full justice. The story of "Timmy the Clock" was written as part of a class activity devoted to researching and then writing stories for young readers. My object in looking at the text is to offer some commentary on the linguistic changes in such a text by a writer some years older than Anna, who wrote Text 1. For convenience, I have set out the text here, commenting on some linguistic features down the side.

The text is identifiably by an older writer, although its clause structures are still entirely congruent. Like the earlier example of a narrative, this one interweaves Process types, some to do with actions (*he would set off his alarm*), and a number to do with establishing attributes of the main character (*he was shy*), whereas two are mental processes of affect (e.g., *he had liked the girl*). The nominal group structures realizing the Participant roles are again simple, although a little more varied than was the case in Text 1: *Timmy the Clock, a little girl*. There are two principal differences compared with the first text. One difference is the more varied range of conjunctive relations between clauses, involving some to do with cause (*because he was shy*), others to do with additive and time relations (*and he didn't put his alarm on; un-*

<p><b>Orientation</b>  <del>One day</del> Timmy the Clock was in the store window.</p> <p><b>Complication</b>          No one would buy him because he was so shy.  <i>Every time people looked him, he would set off his alarm clock, until he bounced around to face the other way.</i>  <i>He always did this, because he didn't like the looks of the people.</i>  <del>One day</del> a little girl came past, and he didn't put his alarm on.          He liked her very much, but then she went away.  <i>Timmy was sad because he had liked the girl.</i></p> <p><b>Resolution</b>  <del>The next day</del> the girl came back again.  <i>He was so happy that he put on his alarm, and started shouting for joy.</i>          The little girl bought him and he was so happy. But he was still shy. <i>Every time some one looked at him, he would put on his alarm and turn around. Except when the girl looked at him.</i></p>	<p>Text has a series of clauses which build information in a congruent way.</p> <p>Marked topical Themes signal the passage of time.</p> <p>Protagonist's feelings &amp; responses to events in italics.</p> <p>Few Circumstances (realised in prepositional phrases) e.g. <i>in the store window</i></p>
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FIG. 3.3 Schematic structure and some salient linguistic features in Text 2.

*til be bounced around*), and others of a contrastive nature (*but he was still shy*). The other difference is that Text 2 has a much more varied range of topical Themes, including several marked ones that serve to signal the passage of time: *one day, the next day*, and so on. In the case of Text 1, as we saw, the topical Themes were not varied, and for the most part, they identified the mother in the story: *she*. Development of control of Theme in writing would seem to be a feature of the primary years. Like the development of control of reference, to which I alluded in the case of Text 1, achieving control of thematic progression in writing is a developmental task of some significance, principally because the thematic organization of written language is very different from that of spoken language. However, one qualification needs to be noted: It is that thematic progression in writing varies considerably, depending on the target genre and its goals.

In summary then, Text 2 succeeds on a number of grounds. It has a reasonably successful sense of the target generic structure—a characteristic in which it does better than Text 1, in fact; it makes successful use of thematic progression to unfold the events of the story; it interplays some clauses that build events and others that construct responses to events; and it builds a range of conjunctive relationships between its clauses, all of them helping to advance the overall organization of the story and its meanings. Like Text 1, its clause structures are congruent, while its nominal groups are still reasonably simple, and it uses few prepositional phrases to build circumstantial information.

The third narrative I shall consider was written by a student of non-English-speaking background, though he was by no means a recent arrival in Australia, and he was in year 8, about 14 years old. His narrative is far too long to reproduce, and with some regret therefore, I must simply cite extracts from it. I shall select the opening phase of the narrative, and the closing phase. The story concerns a group of people who plot to steal a fabulous diamond brooch from a museum, an activity in which they almost succeed, but they are finally stopped and their leader is shot. The opening is set out first, and as above, I shall offer some running commentary on the linguistic features, before discussing it below. I should note that in this text, unlike the earlier ones, there are several instances of embedded clauses (Halliday, 1994, pp. 242–248), so-called because they are said to be embedded within other linguistic entities that have rank. For example, in the following there is said to be one clause, which contains an embedded clause within in, shown with the notations [[ ]]: *The man [[who spoke to me]] was a visitor to this country*. Here *The man [[who spoke to me]]* is the nominal group that expresses the Subject of the clause, and the embedded clause has no status as an independent clause. Interestingly the 14-year-old writer of Text 3 uses embedded clauses as a useful resource in expanding his nominal groups and sometimes also within his prepositional phrases. The emergence of such features in his writing has developmental significance.

Several linguistic measures mark this narrative as written by an older writer than Texts 1 and 2. The opening sentence *sets the scene*, using, among other things, an identifying process realized in the verb “to be,” and employing a cluster of embedded clauses, which are made most apparent if we set them out thus:

tonight was the night [[when one of the greatest burglary plans [[ever known to man’s history was being put together]] ]].

<p><u>Orientation</u> It was one cold, stormy winter night, not your usual winter night because tonight was <u>the night</u> [[when one of the greatest burglary plans [[ever known to man's history was being put together]]]]</p>	<p>Identifying process to set the scene.</p> <p>Clause embeddings expanding the nominal group (double underlines).</p>
<p><u>Down in a small village just outside a small town</u> <u>two men</u> [[called Jack and Small]] and a lady were sitting near an old fireplace in a small broken down house waiting for their boss. <u>As they sat there</u> the door swung right open and in that moment lightning struck. The shadow of a tall big man appeared in the doorway. All three of them felt their hearts jump up into their throats and then back down due to the fright they got. A deep voice but in a soft town (tone) asked, "Do you know why I called you here?" "Yes, so we could reunite our old gang", the small fat dark-haired fellow answered. "That's correct, Small, but that isn't just the reason" the shadow replied.</p>	<p>Marked topical Theme choices underlined (single underlines).</p> <p>Several expanded nominal group structures (e.g. <i>the shadow of a tall big man</i>).</p> <p>Circumstances realised in prepositional phrases: <i>down in a small village outside a small town; in that moment; near an old fireplace in a small broken down house; out from the dark corner of the room to the brighter area of the fire.</i></p>
<p>He continued to walk towards them out from the dark corner of the room to the brighter area of the fire. The shadow slowly disappeared and <u>a clear image of a tall, huge looking man</u> [[dressed in a black coat]] appeared in the chair beside them. He looked at each person waiting for an answer but they just sat there blankly staring at him.</p>	<p>Two adverbs realize different circumstantial information: <i>slowly; blankly.</i></p> <p>Clause embedding expanding nominal group structure.</p>

FIG. 3.4 Some salient linguistic features in the opening of Text 3.

The effect of the clause embeddings here is to *pack in* information in the nominal group structure, in a manner particularly characteristic of written language. The capacity to exploit the resources of the nominal group structure here and elsewhere in Text 3 is in considerable contrast to the extreme simplicity of the nominal group structures in the earlier two narratives. Other instances, not always employing embedded clauses, include: *one cold, stormy winter night; the shadow of a tall big man; a clear image of a tall, huge looking man* [[dressed in a black coat]]. Clearly, the nominal groups in which participant roles are realized suggest considerable confidence in manipulating the grammar of writing, especially for the construction of experiential information. Another resource used successfully is that of the prepositional phrase, creating important circumstantial information: *down in a small village outside a small town; near an old fireplace in a small broken down house; out from the dark corner of the room to the brighter area of the fire.* Interestingly, two adverbs realiz-

<p><del>With the awakening of the sun's rays</del>  thousands of curious people were on their way  to see the spectacular display of jewellery in  the enormous newly-opened museum.  <del>Outside a line had developed all awaiting for  the moment [[the doors opened]]. The pushing  and shoving of the crowd</del> was getting bigger  until finally the doors burst open and the  crowd rushed in, all with mouths open,  astonished with their first glimpse of the  wonderful Museum.</p> <p>..... Text omitted</p> <p>The boss at that time was still holding the  brooch in his hand as if nothing would make  him let go. Then he jumped up, aimed with  his gun at the security guard and... BANG! a  shot from behind him.</p> <p>.....Text omitted</p> <p>The boss just fell flat on top of the table for he  had been shot in the head. Blood was slowly  dripping down the side of his face and  dripping off the edge of his cheek. He was  positioned <u>like a drowning man</u> <del>[[reaching for  a life guard]]</del> and there in the palm of his huge  hand &lt;&lt;still dazzling with shininess&gt;&gt; lay the  Golden Brooch.</p>	<p>Grammatical metaphors  involved in building expanded  nominal groups: <i>the awakening  of the sun's rays; the enormous  newly opened museum; the  pushing and shoving of the crowd.</i></p> <p>Marked Topical Themes (single  underlines)</p> <p>Adverb to build more  circumstantial information</p> <p>Prepositional phrase with  embedding to create  Circumstance: <i>like a drowning  man</i> <del>[[reaching for a life guard]]</del></p> <p>Enclosed clause (&lt;&lt; &gt;&gt;)  strategically placed to enhance  Circumstance: <i>in the palm of  his huge hand &lt;&lt;still dazzling  with shininess&gt;&gt;</i></p>
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FIG. 3.5 Some salient linguistic features in the closing stage of Text 3.

ing circumstantial information appear in this text: *the shadow slowly disappeared, and they just sat there blankly staring at him.*

Students in the primary years typically make little use of such adverbs. Some adverbs of intensity may appear, such as "so" in the story of "Timmy the Clock," just as we can also find evidence of modal adverbs, like the one used by the writer of Text 3 in *they just sat there*. However, more often than not, circumstantial information is not considerable in the writing of primary aged children, and, so I have also found, it does not necessarily develop for some time into the secondary years. The commonest circumstantial information, where it appears, is realized in prepositional phrases, as was the case in Texts 1 and 2. We have also noticed the appearance of such information in Text 3, where indeed it is more abundant. What significance, then, might be attached to the appearance of the adverbs in Text 3, written by a boy

in adolescence? Circumstantial information expressed in prepositional phrases, of the kind found in Texts 1, 2, and 3 is all to do with time (*once upon a time*) or place (*out from the dark corner of the room to the brighter area of the fire*). As resources for building circumstantial information, what adverbs seem to offer is capacity to introduce information about manner: This is certainly true of the two I have identified in Text 3. It would seem that this kind of facility for constructing information to do with manner is essentially a characteristic of the relatively greater maturity of adolescence, and of the developing capacity to use language for the expression of judgments about behavior.

I shall now turn to the last phase of the story of the Diamond Brooch. I should note that the story unfolds with an account of the crowds forming outside the museum to see the diamond brooch, and the coming of the burglars, who succeed in gaining entry to the museum and in getting the diamond brooch, although they are nonetheless foiled in their attempt to escape with it.

Several instances of grammatical metaphor are noticeable here, the first of them in the marked topical Theme in the first clause: *with the awakening of the sun's rays*. This is in fact an example where the metaphor is both grammatical and lexical. Expressed congruently, this would read: *When the sun rose*. Other instances of grammatical metaphor may be found in: *the enormous newly opened museum*, and *the pushing and shoving of the crowd*. The effect, in both the latter two cases, is to create nominal groups, whose function in the story is to help build the experiential information on which the tale depends. The embedded clauses, as I noted previously, are interesting, not least because there are several of these, helping to expand the experiential information in both Participant roles and Circumstances. One enclosed clause falls towards the end of the text: *and there in the palm of his huge hand <still dazzling with shininess> lay the Golden Brooch*. The latter type of clause, unlike the embedded clause, is not down ranked within another entity: Instead, it is a dependent clause that is redeployed from its usual or unmarked position, to achieve some particular linguistic effect.

The text overall reveals considerable differences compared with the earlier narratives. First, it makes extensive use of quite elaborate nominal group structures to build both its Participant roles and the prepositional phrases that build Circumstances. Second, in creating several of these it employs grammatical metaphor, demonstrating that the writer has begun to understand how to exploit such a resource to good effect, and to write what are instances of noncongruent realizations. Third, as noted earlier, it makes effective use of several adverbs, all of them to do with the manner by which someone or something behaves. Adverbs create different circumstantial information from prepositional phrases, as I have noted, and it is significant that they appear in this narrative, although not in those by the younger writers.

### LITERARY CRITICAL PIECES

I examine here two texts, the first by a student in year 8, and about 14 years old, the other by a student in year 10, and about 16 years old. As I indicated earlier in this discussion, literary critical texts appear to be required in the English program of the junior secondary school, although they are not extensively found in the primary

years as far as I can tell. Text 4, written by a boy of second language background (although not recently arrived) is a character description of the central character in the Australian novel, *Thunderwith*, written by Libby Hathorn. It will be apparent immediately that because the genre is different from the narrative, it makes somewhat different demands on the language used. For convenience I have again set the text out with some commentary down the side.

Character discussion is very heavily involved with the building of abstractions, and one measure of this and of how different are the grammatical realizations involved, compared with those of narratives, is the fact that in this text there are very few processes of action. On the contrary, the majority, realized in the verb "to be," build attributes of Lara, such as *Lara is a young, reliable, teenage girl*. Occasionally, the writer uses an identifying process to build a strong statement of opinion about the character as in: *other qualities of Lara are her determination and her reliability*. Lexical metaphor (Lara uses her "reservoir" of emotional strength or *I would describe her as an army tank in emotional traumas*) help develop the character description. These seem rather forced to me, by the way, although my observation during the years I taught in high schools myself was that sometimes adolescents did strain to achieve successful effects when using metaphorical language, and I believe this is itself a developmental matter. Topical Theme choices are varied, many of them unmarked, although the marked Themes have a major function in constructing the development and progress of the text: *after the recent death of her beloved mother; throughout the book; despite her extraordinary resistance to emotion*. At times too, this student uses an interpersonal Theme choice, as in: *In my eyes, Lara is an exceptionally determined person*. In the last concluding paragraph, he uses textual Theme to signal closure: *To sum it all up*. Later in the last paragraph, he uses a dependent clause in Theme position, whose effect is to foreground the fact that he is stating his opinion of the character: *If I were to change one part of Lara, I would change her ability to fight back*. One further matter to do with expression of judgment needs to be mentioned: It is the cluster of uses of modal verbs in the last paragraph, where, as is the convention for such a genre, several observations construct statements of opinion: *without one of these elements, Lara would not be herself; without Thunderwith, Lara would not have able to pull through the period of sadness; if I were to change one part of Lara, I would change her ability to fight back; with a little bit more aggression, Lara would be a much better person*. Finally, and bearing in mind my earlier observations about the emergence of uses of adverbs in adolescence, it will be noticeable that the young writer here makes use of several adverbs all having significance for their roles in building judgment about the character: *unbelievably, surprisingly, and exceptionally*.

No easy comparison with the narrative texts is possible or even sensible because the genres differ and their social purposes are very different. However, we can make some observations about the developmental changes apparent in a student who writes as in Text 4, some of which at least accord with the observations made about Text 3, which as we saw was written by a student of a similar age to the writer of Text 4. The most notable of the changes are apparent in the writer's capacity to employ abstractions, constructed either in the uses of abstract nouns such as *qualities, determination, or reliability*, or through the use of grammatical metaphor, creating nominal groups such as *her extraordinary resistance to emotion*. Many of the nominal

<p><b>Character Introduction</b>  <u>Lara is a young, reliable teenage girl in the book 'Thunderwith'. After the recent death of her beloved Mother Cheryl, Lara needs to come to terms with the fact [that she has to move in with her step family].</u></p>	<p>Expanded nominal group structures (double underlines)</p> <p>Marked topical Theme (single underlines)</p> <p>Abstractness: <i>distinctive qualities; emotional strength.</i></p>
<p><b>Description</b>  Lara has many distinctive qualities. The most distinct of these qualities, is her emotional strength. <u>Throughout the book, Lara needs to use her 'reservoir' of emotional strength against her step mother Gladwyn and the bullying of Gowd Gradley.</u> <i>Lara is an unbelievably strong person. I would describe her as an army tank in emotional traumas.</i></p>	<p>Lexical metaphor: <i>reservoir of emotional strength</i></p> <p>Expanded nominal group using grammatical metaphor.</p>
<p>However, <u>despite her extraordinary resistance to emotion,</u> Lara does not stand up to the bullies. She takes life as it comes and does not make any attempt to change it. <i>This is one of the weaknesses of Lara. I think that if Lara was a little bit aggressive, her life at Wallingat would have been surprisingly different.</i></p>	<p>Many processes build attributes of Lara (e.g., <i>she is an unbelievably strong person</i>)</p> <p>Marked topical Theme.</p> <p>Italics to indicate judgments re the character</p>
<p>Other qualities of Lara are her determination and her reliability. <i>In my eyes, Lara is an exceptionally determined person.</i> She has set out to do something and there is no turning back.</p>	<p>Abstractness: <i>one of the weaknesses of Lara; her determination &amp; her reliability.</i></p>
<p>Lara's canine companion, Thunderwith is an addition to her positive attitude. Lara thinks of Thunderwith as a reincarnation of her Mother. Thunderwith gives Lara the strength when she needs it. It is only at the end that the horrible truth faces Lara. The loss of Thunderwith.</p>	<p>An identifying process builds strong statement about character.</p>
<p><b>Evaluation</b>  <u>To sum it all up,</u> <i>Lara has a very interesting character and personality. Her determination, emotional strength and reliability make Lara what she is. Without one of these elements, Lara would not be herself. Thunderwith is a major part of Lara as well. Without Thunderwith, Lara would not have been able to pull through the period of sadness that she experienced. If I were to change one part of Lara, I would change her ability to fight back. With a little bit more aggression, Lara would be a much better person.</i></p>	<p>Several modal adverbs help build judgments re the character: <i>unbelievably, surprisingly, exceptionally.</i></p> <p>Textual Theme: <i>to sum it all up.</i></p> <p>Marked topical Theme</p> <p>Building of judgment through abstraction: <i>her determination, emotional strength &amp; reliability make Lara what she is.</i></p>
	<p>Marked topical Theme.</p>

FIG. 3.6 Schematic structure and some salient features in Text 4.

groups in which Participant roles are constructed are quite elaborate, making effective use of this resource for constructing experiential information. Theme choices, some marked and others unmarked, show a good sense of ordering of the overall text. Other Themes, chosen for their interpersonal significance, show emergent control of capacity to express judgment and opinion, although it needs to be acknowledged that such expressions were not required in the narrative texts.

I shall now turn to the second of the literary critical pieces I have chosen. This one is far too long to reproduce, so regretfully I shall reproduce only two small sections of the essay. It is an essay written by an L1 student, about 15 years old, and she had been asked to discuss the major themes in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In Fig. 3.7 I reproduce only the opening paragraph in which she sets out what her thesis is to be, and then her concluding paragraph.

The writer of Text 5 understood that in this kind of literary critical piece, the skill was in doing more than simply retelling the story of the novel. On the contrary, the object in such a piece is to abstract away from the events (although the writer must demonstrate a familiarity with them) and to generalize about life and experience from the events. Hence she positioned herself very cleverly with the opening generalization about life in the first clause (*Life is about growing up, learning new things, meeting different people*), followed by the second clause that establishes a link between that generalization and the novel (*and the book To Kill a Mockingbird is about all of these*). As was the case in Text 4, many of the processes here are realized in the verb "to be," for their role is in building generalizations about the book and its themes, or statements about the characters. I should note that many of the para-

<p>Life is about growing up, <del>learning new things</del>, meeting different people, and the book <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> is about all of these. Many situations throughout the book show the children's reactions and emotions. Jem and Scout are the main characters in the story and being children, they view everything with a fresh and unprejudiced outlook. They are guided by the steady hand of their father - Atticus Finch, the local lawyer and distinguished member of the town's society. He helps them deal with life's blows, the good times and the bad.</p>	<p>Opening generalization about "Life".</p> <p>Abstract notion: <i>life</i>.</p> <p>Instances of grammatical metaphor: <i>they view everything with a fresh &amp; unprejudiced outlook; they are guided by the steady hand of their father; he helps them deal with life's blows.</i></p>
<p>Text is omitted</p> <p>Yet, it is agreeable that the novel <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> is all about children growing up as that is what children do best. They try new things, figure stuff out, cope with their own struggles and the rest of the world's, while at the same time just try to have some adventure and little fun.</p>	<p>Closing generalization: (growing up) is [[what children do best]].</p>

FIG. 3.7 Some salient linguistic features in Text 5.



graphs within the body of the essay did employ other process types, as details of the novel's events were told. Participant roles are often here expressed as abstractions: *life; children's reactions and emotions*. Instances of grammatical metaphor build propositions about the novel and its themes, as for example, in the expression *they view everything with a fresh and unprejudiced outlook*, where the Circumstance *with a fresh and unprejudiced outlook* is offering essentially an abstract idea, based on observation of the children's behavior in several situations in the novel. The closing generalization has two parts, built in the two clauses in the sentence, *It is agreeable that the novel To Kill a Mockingbird is all about children growing up, as that is [[what children do best]]*. It is of course, something of a cliché to say that growing up is what children do best. This too, it seems to me, is an instance of a student striving to establish what is expected of her for this kind of genre.

Overall, the student in this text has demonstrated capacity to abstract away from the events of the novel, and to build observations about life and its themes. Subject English appears to value the writing of such literary critical genres, and it rewards them in young writers.

### OPINIONATED TEXTS

The last two texts I shall examine typify those texts that English requires for the expression of opinion. The first is by a student in Year 8, whose class had been discussing the values of using animals for entertainment, as in circuses. She wrote a discussion genre, in which she set out to indicate the issue, provide arguments both for and against the use of animals in such a manner, and then provide her own point of view. The realizations here are largely congruent, although the young writer demonstrates that she is in control of a number of aspects of the grammar of written language. The text is set out in Fig. 3.8.

The target genre in Text 6 is rather different from that in either Text 4 or Text 5. This one sets out to review arguments for and against, and then to offer an opinion. The opening paragraph states the issue briefly, using an identifying process, where one Participant has an embedded clause in it: *the name of the topic [[we're talking about in this essay]]*. Several Processes are realized in verbs of behaving (*in the report [[we read]]*) and of saying (*it said*), revealing that the writer is aware she is reporting on matters read about and researched. Generic references (*to people* and *most people*) indicate the writer is aware that she is offering general statements about the attitudes of certain groups, rather than dealing with individuals, where specific references would be more appropriate. Topical Theme choices are both unmarked and marked, and they serve to structure the overall text in an orderly way (*in the report [[we read]]*), whereas some textual Themes also have an important role in structuring the text (*but then on the other hand*). The adverbs used are significant for their modal roles: *they're nearly always in confined spaces; the animals are not usually kept ... ; they can't exactly force people to join*.

I now turn to Text 7, the only text used here that did not come from an Australian classroom. It was written by a school girl, called Lauren Kiratzis, who was, at the time, 16 years of age, and in Year 11 of her schooling. The letter appeared in the major Melbourne newspaper *The Age*. I have selected the text, although it is not from any of the classrooms I have researched, because it represents a type of opin-

<p><b>Statement of issue</b>  “Should we use animals for entertainment” is the <u>name of the topic [we’re talking about in this essay]</u>. Below, I have stated the positive and negative points for this issue.</p>	<p>Opening statement of the issue.  Expanded nominal group with embedded clause  Verbal process (<i>said</i>) &amp; behavioural processes (<i>read</i>)  Enclosed clause to foreground an important point.  Marked topical Themes</p>
<p><b>Arguments for</b>  <u>In the report [we read]</u>, it said that &lt;&lt;in order to let a particular species survive &gt;&gt; we need to at least capture a few to show to the public, to let them learn about the animals and then maybe the public would do something to help the endangered animals. It said the animals are never hurt or tortured during training or the performances and they are kept in very clean, natural yards while not performing. <u>At one stage</u> it said that animals are the core element of circuses and the statistics proved that people like the animals best at the circus, therefore, human circuses would not meet the public demand. Most people judge circuses on their old ways, not on the current, improved ways.</p>	<p>Lexical metaphor:  <i>animals are the core element of circuses.</i></p> <p>Varied range of conjunctive relationships:  <i>in order to; and then; therefore; so; and; which.</i></p>
<p><b>Arguments against</b>  <u>But then on the other hand</u>, animals like the elephants and bears are very prone to <u>stress so they make a habit of standing in one place and rocking or swaying, which is bad for their joints and feet. Things like constant travelling and performing in front of very large audiences nearly every day</u> affect this. They’re nearly always in confined spaces and the biggest places [[they are ever in]] are the circus arena or tent, which is also really small. The animals are not usually kept in their natural habitat, which stops their basic instincts <u>like fighting for mates, building nests, hunting, etc.</u> from being used to such a large extent like they do in the wild. An alternative is to use humans in circuses because they can’t exactly force people to join, they have to be voluntary.</p>	<p>Textual Theme signals shift in the construction of the text’s arguments.</p> <p>Large nominal group in topical Theme position</p> <p>Abstract nominal group:  <i>their basic instincts</i></p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b>  <u>After looking at all these facts</u>, I believe that it’s wrong for us to keep animals in circuses for our entertainment. We should be able to entertain our selves, not rely on animals. For this reason, and the ones [[I have mentioned before]], I believe it is wrong for us to train and force animals to perform in circuses.</p>	<p>Some modal adverbs:  <i>nearly; usually; exactly.</i></p> <p>Strong assertion of opinion, using marked topical Theme &amp; modal adjunct <i>I believe</i>; also use of modal verbs: <i>we should be able to entertain ourselves.</i></p>

FIG. 3.8 Schematic structure and some salient features in Text 6.

ionated text that is regularly encouraged in the upper secondary English classrooms. The text was inspired by the advertising campaigns run on television by a weight loss organization called Gloria Marshall. The advertisements were designed to persuade even teenage girls of the need to diet and change their shapes if they were to be considered feminine. Such aggressive advertisements have been criticized more than once in Australia, as providing poor information to many adolescents. Text 7 is set out in Fig. 3.9.

<p><b>Abstract</b>  <i>As an average-sized, year 11 student, I feel compelled to express my concern at the current Gloria Marshall Weight Loss Program advertisement on television.</i></p>	<p>Marked topical Theme.                  Strong interpersonal statement: <i>I feel compelled to express</i></p>
<p><b>Statement of Issue</b>                  The advertisement portrays a girl of average weight and her mother shopping without success for a formal dress, thus prompting the girl to suggest that they should both join the Gloria Marshall program.</p>	<p>Varied range of dependent clauses: <i>thus prompting the girl to suggest...; having recently experienced my year 11 formal</i></p>
<p>The advertisement continues by showing the girl as slim and glamorous in an evening gown, as she greets her formal partner. <u>Having recently experienced my year 11 formal I can relate to the dilemma of being unable to find a dress [that looks and fits perfectly] ].</u> However, <u>I am greatly angered by the fact [that Gloria Marshall is using an average-sized teenager as the basis of her advertisement].</u></p>	<p>Marked topical Theme                  Embedded clauses in nominal groups</p>
<p><b>Argument 1</b>  <u>Although the average Australian woman is size 12 to 14, we are constantly bombarded with the exaggerated and incorrect notion [that teenagers should all aspire to be size 8 or 10 like the models [filling the pages of fashion magazines] ].</u></p>	<p>Marked topical Theme                  Clause embeddings to build complex nominal groups</p>
<p>Therefore, although the girl in the Gloria Marshall advertisement is not overweight, <u>the pressure [placed on teenagers [to attain the "perfect body" ] ] makes her desire [to lose weight] understandable.</u></p>	<p>Textual Theme to shift argument forward                  More embeddings in nominal group structures.</p>
<p><b>Argument 2</b>                  The pressure on many Australian teenagers, especially girls, due to this type of advertising is disturbing. <i>It is of great concern that a reputable company such as Gloria Marshall is encouraging young women to conform to society's unreasonable and blatantly incorrect expectations.</i></p>	<p>Interpersonal metaphor: <i>it is of great concern..</i></p>
<p><u>With anorexia nervosa and bulimia so prevalent in our society</u> how is this latest campaign, helping the self-esteem of the average sized (12 to 14) teenage schoolgirl?</p>	<p>Forceful adverb                  Marked topical Theme</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b>                  Teenagers should not be trying to lose weight while their bodies are still growing. It is obvious that this advertisement is sending the wrong message to teenagers.</p>	<p>Rhetorical question                  Modal verb: <i>should</i>                  Interpersonal metaphor: <i>It is obvious</i></p>

FIG. 3.9 Schematic structure and some salient linguistic features in Text 7. Text from *The Age*, October 7, 1998. Text reprinted with permission of the author, Lauren Kiratzis.

This text shows considerable skill in deploying the resources of written language. It uses several key marked Themes, signaling steps in progress of the argument: *as an average-sized year 11 student; although the average Australian woman is size 12 to 14; with anorexia and bulimia so prevalent in our society*. It makes very successful use of interpersonal Themes: *it is of great concern that a reputable company...; it is obvious that this advertisement...* The text makes considerable use of modal adverbs: *I am greatly angered; we are constantly bombarded; the pressure placed on many Australian teenagers, especially girls*. The text creates a number of participant roles using expanded nominal groups, at least several of which involve clause embeddings. Some at least of the nominal groups involved build abstractions: *the*

dilemma of *[[being unable to find a dress [[that looks and fits perfectly]]; the exaggerated and incorrect notion [[that students should all aspire to size 8 or 10 like the models [[filling the pages of fashion magazines]] ]]*. It is around the creation of such abstractions that much of the argument of the text depends. Unlike the earlier texts by much younger writers, such as Texts 1 and 2, this one shows greater facility in the uses of various dependent clauses, some of them nonfinite, such as: *by showing the girl as slim and glamorous in an evening gown; thus prompting the girl to suggest that they should both join the Gloria Marshall program; having recently experienced my year 11 formal*. The writer of Text 3, the narrative by a 14-year-old student, did have some similar expressions: *he looked at each person waiting for an answer but they just sat there blankly staring at him*. A greater facility in uses of various clause dependencies would appear to be one of the measures of growing maturity in writing.

## CONCLUSION

In this discussion, I have sought to review the common range of text types taught in subject English in Australian schools, and to develop some measures by which the nature of students' control of written language must change if they are to achieve the kinds of advanced literacy that participation in a complex early 21st century will require. I have suggested that although the particular configurations of linguistic features required for different text types will always differ, there are nonetheless certain linguistic features that the evidence suggests must change if students are to attain adequate advanced literacy. As I noted much earlier, all the texts (with the exception of Text 7) were regarded as good by the teachers concerned. The texts did not for the most part come from privileged schools, although having said that, I should also observe that the fact that some students produced the texts I have discussed does not mean that all the students in the various classes were able to do as well. Learning to write is actually quite hard, and one of my principal reasons for undertaking the analyses here is to arrive at some explanation of the features of developing maturity in literacy, so that we can use that knowledge to devise better teaching programs. Hence in the following discussion, I attempt to summarize what appear to be measures of developing success in writing.

First, control of reference, especially those properties that build endophoric reference to make a coherent written text, is very important in the developmental processes of learning to handle written language. The writer of Text 1, it will be recalled, was reasonably successful in this regard, although she did manage to confuse the manner of referring to one of the protagonists in her story. Most primary school students learn to handle reference in writing. However, it is my observation that some of the weakest students in the secondary school still have trouble controlling reference in written language, tending instead to rely on the features of reference in speech, with confusion often resulting.

Second, control of Theme would seem to be a very important aspect of learning to handle written language. As I hope my discussion has revealed, Theme choices are very important in ordering and progressing a text forward. Theme is different in writing from speech, and one of the earliest developmental tasks involves a recognition of this. With growing maturity, writers learn to deploy a range of Theme choices, and although their configurations differ say, in a narrative, compared with

an opinionated text, in both cases, much depends on facility in use of Themes, both for linking to what has gone before in the text, and for pushing the discourse forward. By the end of the primary school, many students have developed considerable facility with Theme, and I believe that control of this must be one of the early measures of success in control of writing.

Another observation I would make about writing development is that although primary-age writers produce clauses that offer congruent realizations, it will be into the secondary years that noncongruent realizations appear. The writers of Text 3, Text 4, Text 5, and Text 7 all showed some facility with grammatical metaphor, causing them to create at least some noncongruent realizations in their texts. A third, sometimes related, feature of developing writers is a growing facility with handling of abstractions. Creating an abstraction does not always depend on grammatical metaphor, for, as we have seen, it can be constructed by the use of various abstract nouns as in Text 6. But the effect of developing control of writing is that capacity to handle abstraction becomes more marked.

A related, but perhaps less well-noted observation about the grammatical features of maturing writing lies in the proportionally greater uses of processes of being of various kinds, realized in the verb “to be,” or one of its equivalents. Once a writer moves into construction of abstractions and generalizations of various kinds, the tendency is to build either identifying statements (e.g., [*growing up*] is *what children do best*), or statements that build attributes (e.g., *Lara is a young, reliable teenage girl in the book Thunderwith.*) It does not follow that processes of action, of mental activity or of behavior necessarily disappear (in fact the types of processes used are a condition of the type of genre). However, it does follow that the more texts become discussions that involve abstractions, arguments, and generalizations, the more the tendency will be there to build “being” statements around these things.

A fifth and again related feature of developing control of writing lies in development of considerable facility in creating elaborate nominal groups, sometimes including clause embeddings, although they are not a necessary feature. It is these that are heavily involved in the building of abstractions and generalizations just alluded to. The general effect of uses of complex nominal group structures is that the writer is able to *pack in a great deal of information*, and it is this feature, as much as anything, that accounts for the greater density of writing over a great deal of speech. Mature writers can *say a lot more things* than can young writers, such as the writer of Text 1.

Another resource that writers learn to exploit in order to provide a great deal of information is that of the Circumstance. The first sources of circumstantial information in young writers are prepositional phrases, and they create either Circumstances of place (*in the store window*) or of time (*once upon a time*). But these are reasonably sparse in young writers, emerging in greater quantity in older writers. As for the other principal means by which circumstantial information is created—adverbs—these would seem to be not a frequent feature in the writing of primary-age students. They appear more commonly in the secondary years, and on the evidence I have provided, they may be loosely grouped into two categories: those of manner (*slowly; blankly*), and modal adverbs (*nearly; constantly*). Both types of adverbs are actually involved in expression of opinions and/or judgments, and it seems that it is only with developing maturity that these begin to feature in students’ writing.

Finally, what can we conclude from all this of what it is that subject English values and rewards? It seems that subject English—at least as it is taught in Australia—values and rewards capacity to write narratives, various literary critical pieces, and certain opinionated pieces. Narratives are valued because they offer opportunity to express truths about human experience and opportunity for self expression. The literary texts and the opinionated texts, both of which belong to the secondary years, are valued because they promote capacity to express personal opinion. In my observation, subject English attaches great significance to personal opinion and self expression, although it needs to be noted that the English teaching profession is sometimes rather naive about its claims in these areas. The narratives that are sought and rewarded in schools are essentially orthodox in terms of structure and ideology, and the other texts devoted to literary works or to critical social issues are also essentially of an orthodox kind. Furthermore—a worrying aspect of the naivete I have referred to—many English teachers subscribe to the view that in the interests of promoting self expression and personal opinion, teachers should leave a great deal of the decisions about *what* to write about, and *how* to write about it, to their students. Among the many problems this creates is the lack of a technical language in subject English that can be used, among other matters, to refer to grammar in writing instruction. That is because many English teachers do not believe it is their role to teach a knowledge about language so they employ no metalanguage either for discussing the types of texts to be written, or the linguistic features of these. Much of the significant knowledge of English, then, remains tacitly part of the curriculum, available to those students who, by life circumstance and opportunity, are enabled to develop the necessary facility with language for success in the subject. But for many other students, what represents success in English remains elusive, part of the “hidden curriculum” of schooling. When one considers, as I noted in my opening remarks, that subject English is the one subject that remains compulsory for all the years of secondary schooling, we perpetuate significant social injustice when we leave access to useful knowledge about language as a matter of chance.

Whatever the particular text type sought in the English program, what is overwhelmingly valued in the texts of developing maturity—and hence of advanced literacy—is the capacity to deploy language in ways that abstract away from immediate, lived experience, to build instead truths, abstractions, generalizations, and arguments about areas of life of various kinds. Capacity to handle these things can be taught. Let's teach!

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