

EXPLORING CRITICAL LITERACY WITH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: AN EXAMPLE FROM AUSTRALIA

EXPLORANDO O LETRAMENTO CRÍTICO COM OS PROFESSORES PRÉ-SERVIÇO: UM EXEMPLO DA AUSTRÁLIA

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Abstract: This paper intends to present a suggestion of how to practice critical literacy with *pre-service teachers* (PSTs), and their students, in order to fulfill the aims of the *Australian Curriculum* of English. Therefore, using notions of systemic-functional grammar found in Halliday (2004), Halliday & Hasan (1976), Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), and Martin (1992), we analyze a set of nine newspaper articles related to gender issues, social behavior and adequacy at the workplace. By discussing structure of that genre (narrative with an Orientation, Complications and a final Resolution), grammatical performance (Modality, nominalization, cohesion, voices of verb), and their implications in the social use of language, we point out ways through which our choices regarding textual configuration and the linguistic system are used to achieve certain communicational purposes. In this sense, we demonstrate how useful is, to the speaker, acquiring grammar knowledge, so he/she can have the right to active participation in post-modern societies, arguing and evaluating the other's arguments.

Keywords: *professor; systemic-functional grammar; gender*

Resumo: Este artigo pretende apresentar uma sugestão de como praticar a letramento crítico com os professores pré-serviço (PPS), e seus alunos, a fim de atender os propósitos do *Currículo Australiano* de Inglês. Para tanto, usando noções de gramática sistêmico-funcional encontrados em Halliday (2004), Halliday e Hasan (1976), Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) e Martin (1992), analisamos um conjunto de nove artigos de jornais relacionados às questões de gênero feminino/masculino, comportamento e adequação sociais no local de trabalho. Ao discutir estrutura desse gênero textual (narrativa com uma Orientação, Complicações e uma Resolução final), o desempenho gramatical (Modalidade, nominalização, coesão, vozes verbais), e suas implicações no uso social da linguagem, apontamos formas pelas quais as nossas escolhas, com relação à configuração textual e ao sistema linguístico, são usadas para atingir certos fins comunicacionais. Nesse sentido, demonstramos quão útil é, para o falante, adquirir conhecimento da gramática funcional, para que assim ele possa ter o direito à participação ativa nas sociedades pós-modernas, argumentando e avaliando os argumentos do outro.

Palavras-chave: *professor; gramática sistêmico-funcional; gênero*

Introduction

While there are many current concerns about the basic literacy skills of pre-service teachers (PSTs), we should not lose sight of their need for critical as well as functional literacy. They need to be able to take the role of the “text analyst” (FREEBODY & LUKE, 2003) and to introduce their students to analytical practices. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the 1st International Conference on English Grammar, Hyderabad, India, July 1999.

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Such critical literacy is one of the aims of the Australian Curriculum English, the new national curriculum currently being disseminated across the nation. The English curriculum is divided into three strands: Language, Literacy and Literature. One of the aims of the Literacy strand is that:

Students learn to comprehend what they read and view by applying growing contextual, semantic, grammatical and phonic knowledge. They develop more sophisticated processes for interpreting, analyzing, evaluating and critiquing ideas, information and issues from a variety of sources. They explore the ways conventions and structures are used in written, digital, multimedia and cinematic texts to entertain, inform and persuade audiences, and they use their growing knowledge of textual features to explain how texts make an impact on different audiences (*Australian Curriculum English Version 4.0 (ACARA 2013) Rationale and Aims*)

In order to fulfill the aims of the curriculum, PSTs will need critical literacy skills such as these, which they can pass onto their future students. Here I would like explore an example of ‘doing’ critical literacy with PSTs, in this case relating to gender issues in a series of newspaper texts which form a type of narrative.

Although this ‘story’ appeared in the Australian press some time ago, it is worth revisiting because the gender issues are so obvious. Today’s PSTs can easily see the examples of gender bias, because the views presented are largely different to those of today. In addition, PSTs find the story amusing, partly due to the incongruence with today’s views. However, issues surrounding the construction of gender in the media do remain relevant today. Armed with the tools of analysis obtained from examining this clear-cut example, PSTs are better equipped to tackle current media texts, in which the construction of gender bias may be subtler. The views expressed in the focus texts may have seemed normal in the past; similarly, there are values in today’s texts which have been normalized, and which may not be clear without a critical analysis. As well as this, there are many gender-related issues in today’s classrooms, wherever they may be in the world. Whether we consider talking, reading, writing or access to computers, there are concerns about the relative achievements and affordances available to girls and boys. For instance, students can be constructed as having more or less power and knowledge depending on the semiotic systems, whether they be spoken, written or multimodal, at play in the classroom. It is crucial that future teachers play their part in helping to eliminate this type of discrimination.

1 The data

The set of written texts discussed here can be used with PSTs as part of introducing them to critical literacy, with a focus on gender and to a lesser extent on status. This set of texts has the advantage that the issue is an internationally relevant one and one on which everyone will have an opinion: What clothing is appropriate for the workplace? While the focus here is on PSTs, secondary students would also benefit from an exploration of critical literacy as exemplified in this paper. As well, some of the issues raised are suited to children of all ages, as even pre-school children have opinions about gender!

The texts, all on this particular topic, were taken over a period of ten days from the *West Australian* newspaper – The articles appeared in the *West Australian* newspaper in 1994 – the only state-wide daily newspaper in Western Australia (WA). Unfortunately, for copyright reasons, we cannot present the texts in their entirety; instead we quote from their most relevant parts.

2 Analysis

In this section I will discuss the linguistic analyses and how they can be applied to these texts in order to develop the critical literacy of the PSTs.

The story broke on July 23rd in the following manner:

Article 1

“A WA Parliamentary Hansard reporter has been told she could be sacked for wearing trousers into either the Legislative Council or Assembly.” (The Legislative Council or Assembly are the two Houses of state Parliament.)

Even this *first sentence* of the series of articles raises some critical literacy issues which can be discussed with PSTs. Firstly, you can draw on their knowledge about genre, the type of “staged goal-oriented social process” (ROSE & MARTIN, 2012, p. 1) a text or set of texts goes through to achieve its purpose. In Western Australia, PSTs are introduced to genre in the First Steps

materials, especially the First Steps Writing Resource Book (EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 2013). The newspaper ‘story’, made up of the series of articles, can be introduced as a Narrative, with an Orientation, a Complication, and, as we will eventually see, a Resolution. Article 1, introduced above, contains the Orientation to the story as a whole.

Typically, an Orientation functions to introduce the characters and setting of a story, among other background information. It is interesting to examine how this is done here. The main character is presented as “A WA Parliamentary Hansard reporter”. In order to identify the reporter as a female, PSTs use their knowledge of the English Reference system (HALLIDAY & HASAN, 1976, p. 31-87; HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 549-561; MARTIN, 1992, p. 93-157). The reference system is about identifiability: “does the speaker judge that a given element can be recovered or identified at the relevant point in the discourse or not?” (HALLIDAY & MATTHIESSEN, 2014, p. 623). It often involves the word classes of pronoun and article. PSTs track the cohesive tie back from the pronoun ‘she’ to show that the reporter is female. This is an early indication that gender is a significant issue in our story. However, other than this we are given very little information about the reporter: she is not named. Again, this suggests that the story is about gender rather than simply about one individual.

We are not told who the other characters in the story are. PSTs can use their knowledge of the English system of Voice (DEREWIANKA, 2011, p.150) to look at the construction of verbal groups in the text. The main choice in the Voice system is between Active and Passive, where an Active clause tends to foreground the Agent and a Passive clause does not. The first verbal groups in the story are in the passive voice: “has been told” and “could be sacked”. We are not informed who told her this, who would sack her, or whether they are the same person. In grammatical terms, these clauses lack an Agent (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 284f), a more active participant who does things to other people: “The Agent is the external agency where there is one.” (HALLIDAY & MATTHIESSEN, 2014, p. 343). So the reporter is being constructed as having things (the ‘telling’ and the ‘sacking’) done to her.

The setting is also introduced in the first sentence in the story: we are told that both Houses of Parliament are important. Apart from the characters and location of the story, the third element mentioned in the Orientation is the main issue involved: “wearing trousers”. The setting of the

Houses of Parliament is relevant to the issue, as clearly it is acceptable, in Australia and many other countries, for women to wear trousers in most locations! The gender dimension is not explicitly stated, but it is there by implication: obviously the problem is not just wearing trousers in itself but the fact that a woman is doing it. So in the first sentence of the first article in our story we already have a Complication: the threat of sacking.

As our story unfolds, the issue of wearing trousers at work is expanded and elaborated on, and different characters are introduced. At the end of the first sentence we are told that, “her union claims” that the threat of sacking the woman has occurred. This introduces a new participant, the union, which is speaking for the reporter, thereby distancing her from the action: we notice that she is still not speaking for herself. We should also notice the semantics of the verb ‘claims’: the implication is that what the union says may not necessarily be true. PSTs can use their knowledge of Modality (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 613-625) in relation to this: in cases like this, “Modality means likely or unlikely” (HALLIDAY & MATTHIESSEN, 2014, p. 144). The students understand how probability and certainty are expressed in English, from zero realization in the case of absolute certainty through various Modal expressions. Thus they will recognize the ‘could’ in “could be sacked” as a Modal. As the story goes on, they will identify other uncertainty markers and discuss their effects.

In the *second sentence* some of the participants are further identified: the union is given a name (Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance). The Agent of the ‘telling’ is also revealed: “chief Hansard reporter Neil Burrell”. Here we notice that the character’s credentials are shown before his name: this is a way of giving him authority. What the union says is again described by the verb ‘claimed’, thus bringing in an element of doubt once more. The name of the Hansard reporter is not given (probably it has been suppressed); she is referred to as “the worker”. The threat has been recoded to, “could be suspended”, rather than ‘sacked’, representing a downgrading of meaning.

The issue has become wearing ‘slacks’. This can bring up an interesting discussion about vocabulary with the PSTs (and younger students as well). For example, are slacks the same as trousers? What words do they know for these items of attire in other languages? Do languages seem to find it necessary to distinguish items worn by men from those worn by women, even

though they may be very similar? For instance, are the kilts worn by some Scottish men ‘skirts’? What about kaftans and sarongs: are they worn by both genders? If there are differences in the terminology, what might be some reasons for those differences? In critical literacy it is relevant to look at lexical semantics: how vocabulary is organized in relationships such as synonymy (words with similar meanings), antonymy (words with opposite meanings), meronymy (words in a part/whole relationship, such as ‘arm’/‘body’) and hyponymy (words in a “kinds of” relationship, such as ‘frog’/‘animal’). (See HALLIDAY & HASAN, 1976; HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 570-578.) Below it will become clear how this is related to our story, as we look at the vocabulary built up around clothing.

In the *third sentence* the issue is coded in more official terms: “the policy which prevented a female staff member wearing trousers”. The issue has now become a ‘policy’, and there is no uncertainty involved: trouser-wearing is not allowed. The PSTs can compare this sentence with Sentence 1 in terms of Modality (uncertainty markers). Generalisation has also occurred: the individual case has now been extended to refer to all female staff members: this makes it a more powerful issue. This is an example of where it is worth encouraging PSTs to look closely at the language and the structure of the noun group. Post-modifiers (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 329-331) such as, “which prevented a female staff member wearing trousers” are a way of packaging information into a text, resources that come after the Thing (head noun – in this case, ‘policy’) in the noun group (DEREWIANKA, 2011, p. 44). PSTs will be more willing to investigate the structure of nominal groups (noun groups) if they can see the purpose of the various elements in the group: in this case the ‘policy’ sounds more official, and is easier to discuss, if it is coded as the one noun group. In the text the trousers policy is also described as ‘archaic’ and ‘discriminatory’ by the union secretary. Here we can see that the writer has attributed these adjectives to another participant, one who has some authority. This is a device used to add credibility to a story.

In the *fourth sentence* the Threat is made more explicit: “she could lose her job”. Note again the use of Modality here, with the word ‘could’; while the probability of the event occurring is not particularly high, the seriousness of the issue is emphasized.

In the *fifth sentence* a trend begins that continues throughout the text: the number of voices that have something to say on the issue starts to increase. We have already heard from the union secretary in sentence 3, but now these voices begin to proliferate, giving their opinions as a kind of testimonial. First the politician Liz Constable is introduced, initially by mentioning her credentials, and then by reporting her activities: she has worn trousers into the Assembly. Dr Constable gives a Reason against the no-trouser policy: “many women wear trousers in the workplace”. She adds her Opinion, that “(trousers) should be allowed into the chamber”, but she also gives a condition: “provided they are smart”. The adjective ‘smart’ would be a productive one to discuss with PSTs, who will in any case need to have a discussion at some stage of their pre-service careers about what is appropriate dress in the workplace.

Dr Constable’s comments give us an extra classification of the word ‘trousers’: some trousers are ‘smart’ and some are not. The afore-mentioned ‘slacks’ could possibly come under the category of trousers that are ‘not smart’ but, again, this is a matter of interpretation and there are no doubt cultural differences. Liz Constable is the most active female participant in the story so far, although, interestingly, her title (which could be an indication of status) is not used anywhere in the text.

As the text unfolds there are several more ‘testimonials’ from various participants. In *sentence 7* another Member of Parliament (MP), Alannah McTiernan, says that “she wears ‘pants’ into the House regularly”, giving the Reason that, “it is her preferred style of dress”, which includes the Opinion that she likes wearing trousers. This is the first time that the issue of what women like or want has been raised in this story. However, it is significant that Ms McTiernan does not directly say, “I like wearing trousers.” Instead, her statement is coded as a noun group (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 311-335), “her preferred style of dress”. Here we see the use of nominalization, changing a verb (‘like’) into a noun group (“**preferred** style of dress”). Such nominalizations (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 69-70; DEREWIANKA, 2011, p. 161f) are very common in written texts, especially those that are ideologically loaded, as this one appears to be. They can be a way of saying something less directly or obviously, or of avoiding mentioning the Agent. For instance, instead of saying, “People have degraded aquatic ecosystems”, we can refer to, “The degradation of aquatic ecosystems.” (DEREWIANKA, 2011, p. 161). PSTs will need to understand how nominalization works in order to undertake academic reading and writing and to help their own

students interpret texts. For example, under the Australian Curriculum English, Year 8, students will need to “Understand the effect of nominalization in the writing of informative and persuasive texts.”

In *sentence 8* Ms McTiernan also provides another reason in favour of trouser-wearing: “pants can be just as formal as a dress”, thereby setting up a dichotomy: if you can’t wear trousers, what else can you wear?

A third MP is introduced into the story, firstly by mentioning her qualifications (*sentence 9*): “Cheryl Davenport was outraged by the policy”. This is the most direct and strong statement of opinion so far. However, we see that it is in the Passive voice, and that space is not given for any Reasons or further comments, so that the gist of the statement is that Ms Davenport is simply expressing a feeling.

Finally, there is a fourth testimonial sentence (*sentence 10*) from another MP, Barbara Scott, who states that she wears “dresses and skirts”, because it is “her preference”; note that this last expression is nominalized: she does not say, more directly, “I prefer dresses and skirts”. She also gives a further Opinion: “she would not be against female Hansard reporters wearing slacks”, followed by a Reason/Condition: “if that was their choice”. Again, the final item is nominalized: “their choice”, which could be coded more directly as, “that was what they **chose** to do.” Here Ms Scott is explicitly giving her opinion on the no-trousers policy. She also mentions reasons for wearing particular types of clothing in terms of ‘preference’ and ‘choice’. However, these terms are nominalized; she does not directly say, “Women should wear what they want.”

In the article all four of these testimonials are given in indirect speech: none of the MPs is directly quoted, which would perhaps have given more of a sense of authority to their remarks. It is also noticeable that the voice of the Hansard reporter herself is not heard until some time later in this series of texts, and, as we have already remarked, she is not named.

As we have demonstrated here, this first article represents the Orientation to our story. It has been examined in some detail as it sets the scene for what happens in the rest of the narrative and also makes use of many of the devices that encode the ideologies behind the text.

The following articles continue the narrative.

Article 2

The following day, June 24th, the article “MPs BACK RIGHT TO WEAR TROUSERS” appeared, accompanied by a photograph of four female MPs dressed in trousers. The article states:

“Labor MLC [member of the Legislative Council] Cheryl Davenport said she would ask the joint house committee, which runs Parliament, to reconsider the “no-trousers policy”. Three other MPs would also sign the letter. The women described the ban as ‘anachronistic’ and ‘discriminatory’.”

In a further development, the reporter’s union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, lodged a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission. The *West Australian* reported that: “Commissioner June Williams said yesterday the woman had grounds for complaint.”

Here we have another protagonist in the story, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner. We also have some reasons given for the no-trousers policy from the chief Hansard reporter, Neil Burrell. He says that the policy is, “derived from tradition but four years ago staff had voted in favour of it continuing.” In this way the chief reporter puts responsibility for the policy back onto the Hansard staff, of which the woman reporter is a member. He also denies that he threatened to sack the woman, saying that, “he did not have the authority to do so.” He passes responsibility for action (Agency) onto the Legislative Council President and Legislative Assembly Speaker, who, interestingly, happen to be interstate at the time.

The main thrust of this article is that it shows more Participants (HALLIDAY, 2004, p. 175-178) entering into the action. (The term ‘Participant’ is used in functional grammar analysis to describe a constituent (or part) of a clause; here we also use it in the related sense of characters in our story.) We still have not heard from the reporter herself. At this stage the issue was taken up by Alston, the cartoonist for the *West Australian*, who depicted the Speaker in full judicial regalia asking the reporter the rhetorical question, “What do you think you look like?”

The topic was dormant for a while, before being taken up again five days later (June 29th).

Article 3

Article 3 shows a broadening of the number and type of people consulted for their opinion on the issue. Previously, apart from the people directly involved, only women MPs had been asked for their opinion, but now other ‘professional’ women are called upon. The article begins: “Many women managers and professionals in Perth do not wear trousers to work, but all agree that a policy forbidding them is archaic.”

The article is accompanied by a photograph of two professional women, one in a trouser suit and one in a miniskirt.

One of the people consulted is the Information Commissioner, a woman, who states, “I would even let my male staff wear kilts if they wanted to.” Another comment comes from the coordinator of corporate development at the Ministry of Fair Trading, also a woman, who states: “The main thing is does the person get their job done, not what are they wearing”.

As a result of consulting experts such as fashion designer Liz Davenport, Article 3 adds to the development of a “lexical set”, a set of vocabulary items where the members, “stand in some recognizable semantic relation to one another” (HALLIDAY & HASAN, 1976, p. 285). In this case the set describes the items of clothing in question: a trouser suit, a suit with a skirt (“skirt suit”) and a (tailored) jacket and skirt. Article 3 is also the first of the newspaper articles to use direct quotations and represents the most direct statements of the issues so far:

- Staff can wear kilts “if they want to”: note that this is **not** nominalized, so that the verb, ‘want’ is emphasized.

- The Information Commissioner’s comment that what somebody does (Agency) is more important than what they look like.

Article 4

The narrative now becomes more complicated. On the same day as Article 3 appeared (June 29th), the *West Australian* reported the opinion of the Premier, Richard Court, on the issue, under the heading, “COURT STEPS INTO STRIDES WRANGLE”. Here we have a new term for the

item of clothing under discussion: ‘strides’ is an Australian word for trousers. This article is also the first one on the issue written by a male reporter. It opens:

“Premier Richard Court joined the row over trousers yesterday by saying women MPs and staff should wear dresses or skirts into State Parliament’s two Houses.”

Note that the issue has now become a ‘wrangle’ or ‘row’ (terms with more negative connotations), and that Mr Court is widening the terms of reference of the issue. Up to this point the question raised has been whether parliamentary reporters (described here as ‘staff’) should be able to wear trousers to work. The Premier has broadened this to include women MPs. This now creates a new development in the Complication of our narrative, because:

1. The implication is that, being Premier, Mr Court commands a great deal of power in relation to this issue, whether this is legally the case or not.
2. The Premier has (gratuitously) placed into question the right of female MPs to wear trousers, something that was never an issue until this point. Up until now the fact that some female MPs wore trousers to work had been used to imply that this was appropriate dress for Parliament and that other women working there should be able to wear trousers also.

The Premier (who is directly quoted) gives Reasons for his Opinions:

1. He is ‘old fashioned’. (Perhaps more of an Excuse rather than a Reason.)
2. It is “a matter of wearing the appropriate clothes for the occasion”. Court states that, “in certain operations we **demand** certain standards.” Here he uses the pronoun ‘we’, sometimes known as the ‘royal plural’ in cases like this, perhaps implying that there may be others who also back him up. The use of the verb ‘demand’ is also significant, as it carries a great deal of power.

The Premier continues: “for example in protocol, where we meet international visitors on a daily basis ... we have very high dress standards.” He states that he wants women staff “to wear skirts or dresses in that situation.” He does not mention what some international visitors might think of women wearing miniskirts like the one in the photograph on the same page (nor for that matter of his male staff wearing kilts). He justifies his views about dress rules in Parliament by stating that, “it is a chamber where people are determining laws and we should be setting standards, we should be showing respect for the institution.” He attempts to make an analogy between what he

considers he has to wear to work and women having to wear dresses. He reveals: “I am not that comfortable myself in wearing suits”, stating that he is more comfortable in jeans and deck shoes, which he used to wear in his previous position. However, he emphasises, this would not be appropriate for Parliament.

Here the Premier speaks directly in the first person about his own comfort. Indirectly he is saying that it does not matter whether women are more comfortable wearing trousers or not.

At this point another participant enters the discussion: this time it is a male MP, Graham Edwards. He has given notice in the Legislative Council “that he would move that the Council grant female parliamentary staff the right to wear trousers to work”. He is reported as stating that, “the rules on trousers were archaic and sexist”. Mr Edwards says, “The Premier’s refusal to countenance Hansard reporters wearing trousers is as silly as the Parliament telling me I have to wear shoes”. We are then informed that, “Mr Edwards lost both legs in Vietnam in 1970.”

The addition of Mr Edwards’ views emphasises the discriminatory nature of the trousers policy. The cartoon for the day reinforces the notion that this is a human rights issue, taking it further by comparing the “thought police” in the state capital who dictate what women can wear to “thought police” overseas who suppress demonstrators who are expressing their opinions.

The Complication to our story caused by the Premier’s intervention appears to have increased the newsworthiness of the issue: the next day, June 30th, three more articles appeared in the *West Australian*.

Article 5

One of the articles from June 30th names the reporter, Judyth Baverstock, for the first time. The first sentence of this article constructs the issue in military terms:

“Legislative Council president Clive Griffiths came out **fighting** [my emphasis] yesterday in the war on who should wear the pants in the Houses of State Parliament.”

Mr Griffiths accuses the reporter of handling the issue ‘appallingly’. He says that he is ‘sad’ (!) that she took the issue straight to the Equal Opportunity Commission rather than to him. A union

spokeswoman says that Mrs Baverstock has been criticized for getting union help, but that it was the union who raised the issue in the media. One of the MPs who signed the pro-trousers letter, the Opposition spokeswoman for women's interests, Dr Judyth Watson, is reported as stating her opinion rather bluntly:

The whole issue should never have happened.

There should not be a policy on what women could wear.

There are so many issues we should be talking about for women – such as violence and health.

Dr Watson's comments function to put the whole issue in perspective, including the elaborate lexical networks that are being developed for the different types of trousers and dresses.

Article 6

Alongside Article 5, which contains Dr Watson's comments, is another one that continues the trend of elaborating on the different types of clothing. 'Experts' who have been consulted are the owner of a boutique in an exclusive suburb and an "image consultant".

Article 7

A further article that pays detailed attention to types of clothing also criticizes the Premier's 'dress sense'. We are told that:

Liz Carberry, of Carberry's Model Agency ... had a few tips on how Mr Court could dress more 'appropriately' for his role as leader of the State:

He's a nice, sweet man but **I'm not sure** that he's got much style', she said.

He **tends to** dress down but he needs to be jazzed up **a bit more** to look powerful.

He needs to wear darker, stronger colours and **maybe** a change of glasses would help.'

Mr Court went for safe colours such as brown.

I'd love to have a go at him. I'd even offer him a free make-over.

Apparently the Premier declined Ms Carberry's kind offer of a make-over. This article counteracts the credibility which would normally attach to Mr Court's opinions, solely due to his role as Premier.

Articles 5, 6 and 7 are accompanied by a large photograph of a woman wearing an expensive trouser suit being led by a rather mannequin-like male. It is an interesting juxtaposition of a serious discussion of the issue (Article 5) with three other items (the other two articles and the photograph) all going into detail about fashion. This gives the impression that the issue is being treated with a lack of gravitas. The Premier's alleged lack of "dress sense" is further underlined by an earlier report in the *West Australian* (June 22nd) in which he is shown wearing a teddy-bear-motif tie when announcing to the media that he had helped conceive a child.

Article 8

On the same day as Articles 5, 6 and 7 (June 30th) were two letters to the Editor under the heading, "Leave clothing taste to women". One of these letters is clearly by a woman, while the gender of the other author is not clear. Thus, two other voices of members of the public are added to the debate.

Article 9

Finally there is a Resolution to the saga. On July 1st the *West Australian* used a front-page article to make the announcement:

"RULING IRONS OUT TROUSER DISPUTE"

The article is accompanied by a photograph of Mrs Baverstock wearing a skirt. However, the caption suggests that this may be the last time we see her dressed in this way. The article informs us that on the previous day:

The presiding officers, Legislative Assembly Speaker Jim Clarko and Legislative Council President Clive Griffiths declared they had no objection to women wearing slacks.

And that: In future, female Hansard reporters would be allowed to wear trousers of an appropriate standard.

It is interesting that the decision is coded as being the personal opinion of these two men: “they had no objection”, that they are presented as Agents in ‘allowing’ the reporters to wear slacks or trousers, and that these trousers must be “of an appropriate standard”, which is not defined.

In response to the decision, Mrs Baverstock is directly quoted for the first time. She says: “I didn’t think it was an issue. It was my opinion that because the presiding officers allowed female MPs to wear pants in the chamber, that it was a non-issue”.

Mrs Baverstock is thus neutralizing the issue of status, which has been an underlying motif in this debate: the question of whether there should be different rules for women in higher status positions (MPs) and lower status ones (reporters). The union secretary is also quoted as giving his opinion on the whole case: “it’s been a sorry affair which has done nothing for the reputation of Parliament or Western Australia”.

As well, the Opposition Leader in the Upper House, John Halden, states:

It was unfortunate that the Premier had not shown the same degree of leadership on the issue as the presiding officers.

After this happy Conclusion, the media was silent on the issue.

3 Discussion

The analysis above brings up issues of empowerment and rights in the workplace that are relevant to all Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs), and should provide fruitful discussion as they provide their own perspectives on the data and perhaps its connection with their own lives. The issue of appropriate dress in the workplace is one that does arise in teacher training and can be the source of some angst.

The powerlessness of many of the women involved in this story, both in fact and in the way that it is reported in the media, is striking. Nearly all of the actions are performed by men. It is a man who makes the alleged initial threat of sacking the reporter. It is a man (the union secretary) who takes the case to the Equal Opportunity Commission. Two men (Parliamentary presiding officers) make the final decision on what should happen. Another man, the Premier, tries to complicate and widen the scope of the issue by giving his opinion on what all women working in the vicinity of Parliament, including MPs, should wear, even though the right of women MPs to wear trousers was never in question.

The women participants who are presented as the most active are the four MPs who write to the presiding officers. Even so, we are never informed of whether they have influenced the final decision or not. All other women are extremely peripheral to the action, even if they are constructed as ‘experts’ on fashion. The woman at the center of the case is not given a name until well into the story, and is not given a voice until the matter is resolved.

Even though this story occurred some time ago, the issue of women being judged on their appearance is one that has not gone away, even in relatively progressive countries. In many other countries there are laws about what women can wear in public, and severe penalties if these rules are violated. Depending on the context, it may be appropriate for PSTs to discuss some of the general issues with their practicum classes, even though the children may be too young to read these particular texts. Some examples of possible focus questions could be: What is suitable clothing for women and for men? Is there any overlap between the two? What kind of clothing do we wear in different places and on different occasions? Is clothing different in different countries? Why? Why do we wear school uniforms? Who can tell us what to wear? PSTs would need to use their judgement about what is appropriate for their own classes. In this way the children’s critical thinking and critical literacy could be encouraged.

Conclusions

Quite apart from engendering an interesting discussion on social issues, guiding the PSTs through the analysis presented above should also develop their knowledge of functional grammar in

context. It is very important that they can see the usefulness of the grammar and understand that it is not just something to be learnt by rote. As this article has illustrated, the following areas of language in context are extremely relevant to the close examination of texts that is essential for critical literacy:

- Knowledge of genre and how a text unfolds to realize its social purpose. In this case, as series of texts made up a narrative with an Orientation, Complications and a final Resolution.
- An understanding of Modality and how various devices can be used to express probability and certainty, sometimes with the aim of ‘softening’ a message.
- Recognition of nominalization and how it can be used to code something as a fact, or to disguise Agency.
- Knowledge of cohesion, especially the role of lexical cohesion in building up lexical sets to construct a particular view of the world.

Other areas of grammar, such as post-modification in the noun group and the different choices associated with voice (active and passive) have also been exemplified above.

In addition, textual study of this kind may increase students’ skills in spoken discussion and in giving opinions backed up by data, using justification and reasoning. It may help them to recognize essential elements of the Argument genre and to evaluate the arguments of others. Beyond this, it is hoped that PSTs will find their own datasets of texts of particular interest to them and critically analyse them. Being critically literate is an essential skill for active participation in 21st century society.

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