



## Editors

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# **Empowering students to construe worlds and experiences in poems using Systemic Functional Grammar**

**Radhia Besbes**

## **Abstract**

*The present study proposes a model of reading that can be applied in the poetry classroom to enable students to produce a linguistic-based literary interpretation. It precisely draws on Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) to investigate the way the speaker in a poem imagines the reality and accounts for his/her own experiences of the world in language. To validate the findings of the study, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Eliot 1917) is selected as a case for examination. With special focus on Transitivity, the poem is studied from the perspective of the Experiential Metafunction, including processes and the associated, participants and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Thompson 1997). A qualitative approach, based on the model proposed is applied in the examination of the poem and findings revealed that Systemic Functional Grammar can provide students with useful tools for poetic interpretation. Making use of linguistic data in a systematic and logical way can develop the students’ understanding of how language works to achieve specific purposes and to make meaning, which in turn can empower them in one of the very challenging classes, the poetry class (Kleppe & Sorby 2018; McCrocklin & Slater 2017; Dutro et al. 2012).*

## **Keywords**

*Empowering students; poetry pedagogy; functional grammar; transitivity; experiential metafunction; “the Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

## **Introduction**

From Homeric epics to slam performances, going through Elizabethan sonnets and Victorian dramatic monologues, poetry has always played a fundamental role in human society, meeting, in variable degrees, aesthetic, academic, emotional and pedagogical needs. Indeed, critics agree that it boosts innovation in expression, stylistic and linguistic creativity, depth of perception and critical thinking, while cultivating pleasure and appreciation of the complex and the unfamiliar.

In a language learning context, research and teaching experiences revealed that poetry, which exploits the potentials of language to

their extremes, makes a useful tool for promoting literacy in many ways. Kleppe and Sorby (2018) suggest that poetry, among other literary genres, provides teachers with a great variety of texts that can be used to support multiple learning styles. Strömner (2013) conducted a study on the important ethical role played by poetry in teaching social and moral norms. Basing their study on previous research and experiments on the impact of poetry on education, Hadaway et al. (2001) state that poetry constitutes an appropriate “vehicle for providing practice and pleasure in oral language skill development” (Hadaway et al. 2001, 796) especially in a learning environment where English is a foreign language (EFL). For instance, at an early level, learners consider poems as the best genre through which they can learn and appreciate what they learn (Sandhaug 2018, cited in Kleppe & Sorby 2018). However, as they advance through grade levels, they come to perceive poetry as a pointless and a forbidding subject (Kleppe & Sorby 2018; McCrocklin & Slater 2017; Dutro et al. 2012).

Thus, poems that are the most enjoyable learning vehicles for children turn into scary subjects of study to learners as they age, especially at College level. This happens because students shift from simply enjoying poems to critically studying them, and from learning about the world through poems to exploring the worlds of poems. In an EFL context, the exercise is most often more intimidating because of the students’ limited command of English (Dutro et al. 2012) and of their restricted cultural knowledge (Carter 2014). At this level, poetry no longer constitutes a mere pedagogical vehicle to teach certain values or skills, but a subject of study which requires a new pedagogy and adjustable teaching methods.

The present study intends to propose a flexible method of teaching poetry, while conceiving of it as a multi-modal medium of knowledge acquisition that can reach English Language Learners (ELLs). In that, it attempts to re-think the usual ways that poems are processed in the classroom, namely, the New Critical methods, and to propose a Linguistics-based model of analysis that helps students access poems both academically and aesthetically. Hence, a simplified application of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) based on the work of Halliday (1994, 2004) and his colleagues is suggested for the interpretation of a sample poem entitled “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Eliot 1917).

## **1. Approaching poetry in the EFL environment and the applicability of SFG**

For decades, teachers have been using strategies of poetry teaching which have proved to be overwhelming for the EFL learners. The New Critical approaches which were suggested by early and mid-twentieth century critics, such as Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks etc., as effective for taming the poems' monstrosity have turned loose. This very mode of exegesis with its ambitious project to defeat the ambiguities of poetic texts through close and scrupulous examination of its artistic and literary devices has yielded conflicting and impressionistic interpretations (Truong 2009; Iser 2006). It has proved that close reading focused only on literary and poetic devices in a given poem may override another because of the devices' power to disclose an infinite number of meanings. What is at stake, here, is not the indeterminate nature of meaning, but the process of interpretation itself. Meanings of poems change whenever the procedures of analysis change, which compels justification of accounts and claims.

This situation has led to questioning the effectiveness of the new critical procedures in the poetry classroom and has cried out for more systematic and logically organized methods of approaching poems to which many disciplines have contributed. To tap the potential of poetry at the college level, boundaries of disciplines are to be disrupted in order to introduce efficient and more research-based methods of poetry instruction. The thrust of these methods shall no longer be the autonomy of the poem, as is the case with New Criticism,

but issues such as the language and structure of the work, its message, the organization of its sign relationships, its patterns and their communication, the inroads made into its contextual realities, the processing and reception of texts, and the exposure of assumptions inherent in the work. (Iser 2006, 3)

Accordingly, many disciplines and philosophies have addressed themselves to the task of proliferating a variety of reading approaches such as Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Reader Response, Linguistics, etc. While, these fields of study have yielded a wide

range of literary theories and approaches, Linguistics has proved to be a good supplier of systematic tools of analysis as far as the teaching of poetry is concerned (Fowler 1996, 1979; Halliday 1971). In spite of the controversy about the use of such tools in the Literature classes (Lodge 1966), research has revealed that making use of linguistic data in a systematic and logical way can develop the learners' capacity to proceed in the meaning making activity and to prove their initial intuitions and impressions about the significance of a given literary work (Truong 2009; Guo 2008; McGee 2002).

Systemic Functional Grammar, first developed by Halliday in the 1960s, is a branch of Linguistics which is concerned with the study of how people use language in specific situations to represent their experiences of the world and to establish relationships through well-constructed and coherent texts. Halliday (1994) proposes a framework to account for the uses of language within a specific context in order to convey specific meanings that functional grammarians call 'metafunctions'. He assumes that "a functional grammar is essentially a 'natural' grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used" (Halliday 1994, xiii). Based on this definition, all the components of a text, spoken or written, are functional.

Within an SFG framework, language is considered as a web that connects the design of a text to its context of use and overall meaning, which emerges from a logical connection between formal grammatical systems and their function. (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Butt et al. 2000; Thompson 1996; Halliday 1994). With respect to the context of language use, functional grammarians assume that speakers or writers mobilize different clause components in order to convey three different metafunctions of language. First, to represent their experiences and ideas about the world, they rely on clause constituents such as: participants, processes and circumstances, establishing thereby the experiential metafunction. Second, to interact or make exchanges with others or again to set up, maintain or break social relationships speakers and writers resort to a particular arrangement of clause constituents or a tense system. For instance, greetings, questions, explanations, requests or orders require a particular grammatical system to convey the appropriate metafunction which is in this case the interpersonal one. Finally, both the experiential and interpersonal metafunctions



of language are the outcome of the design of a coherent text. “What the message is concerned with” (Halliday 1994, 38) or “theme”, as called by functional grammarians, has to be appropriately used and clearly distinguished in the clause in order to establish the textual metafunction. This is how the attention of readers or listeners is drawn through the repetition of a word or reference to its synonyms and hyponyms (Halliday 1994).

In this sense, a functional approach to language “is interested in what language choices are available within any particular situation, and in which choices are more likely to result in an effective text which achieves its purpose” (Derewianka 1990, 17). Therefore, it suggests an array of options to show how meaning can be constructed through an examination of grammatical systems. Although, still not widely used by teachers of literature, researchers in language argue that SFG proposes effective and research-based instruments that can be helpful in the analysis of literary texts (McDonald 2011; Gallardo 2007; Norgaard 2003; Unsworth 1999).

In her application of the systemic functional approach to three fictional works by James Joyce, Noorgard (2003) starts from the assumption that a work of literature, no matter how complex it can be, is a functional act of communication between writer and reader. Thus, she suggests that SFL provides useful instruments for readers to deal with the literary text and its intricacies. For her, a functional approach to literature enables readers to “see and make sense of deviations against a background of that which we could have chosen instead” (Noorgard 2003, 215).

With respect to characterization in fiction, several researchers have conducted studies to explore character traits through a systematic investigation of language use. Gallardo (2007), for instance, was concerned with the study of the lexical and textual patterns to explore the traits of the male and female characters in Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1994). McDonald (2011) also focused on the lexical choices made by the author of *I am Susannah* (Libby Gleeson 1987), in his study of the female protagonist of the story. McCrokin and Slater (2017) drew on previous studies and proposed a simple and comprehensive SFG model in the analysis of the characters of Harry Potter and Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowlings 2007).

As for poetry, few attempts at studying poetic texts using SFG have been made by researchers from the field of Linguistics such as Butt (1997), Lashari and Bughio (2014), and Montassari (2017), but have not been proposed for teaching purposes. Although poems can make good study samples because of their size and their stylistic intricacies compared to other literary genres, a functional analysis of poetry is still not popular in the classroom. This is probably the result of the analytical requirements of SFG which may be a source of trouble for both the teachers and the students.

While briefly surveying literary analysis using SFG in the classroom, McCroclin and Slater (2017) point to the difficulties that teachers and students may encounter due to their limited knowledge of the SFG terminology and its analytical framework. To meet with the basic needs of the teachers of literature, these two researchers have put forward an approachable method to process textual patterns and language use in literary texts. Building on the results of a previous experiment they conducted with teachers of literature (Slater & McCrocklin 2016), they argue that this method has great pedagogical potential as it proposes a research-based model of analysis. In their study, they assume that

By examining a literary text from an SFG perspective, we can explore how an author has used language to construct a particular reality. Teaching students—not only our English language learners but all students—to be able to identify how language is used to construct particular meanings in text means helping them develop critical literacy skills. Students learn not only *what* meanings are conveyed but also *how* they are conveyed. (McCroclin & Slater 2017, 85)

Consequently, in an EFL context, where learners may need a systematic approach for the study of foreign poetry, SFG can be very helpful. With a good command of English grammar and of how it works along with “an intuitive sense of what is important” in a poetic text (Cummings & Simmons 1983, xv), non-native students can proceed in the interpretation of a poem, while connecting its use of language to a presupposed intuitive meaning. This process is based on training students on the application of functional grammar to initiate them to construe much of the meaning of poems by themselves.

The present study intends to introduce a simple model of reading that can be applied in the poetry classroom to enable students to produce an academic and a linguistics-based literary interpretation. Its objective is to boost their analytical skills and to enhance their appreciation of and interaction with poems. In view of that, the study proposes an analysis of a sample poem. This analysis draws on SFG to explore the way the speaker, in the highly experimental Modernist poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (T.S. Eliot 1917) imagines the reality and accounts for his experiences of the external and internal worlds. With special focus on the grammatical system of transitivity, this poem is studied from the perspective of the Experiential Metafunction.

## **2. The experiential analysis of a poem**

According to Thompson (2014), the transitivity system, which is part of the experiential metafunction is at work when people speak about their experiences of the external world and how they feel or think about it. Despite the complexity of its jargon for literature students and teachers (McCrokin & Slater 2017), with some training, it can provide reliable tools for the study of a poem which tells the story of a persona going through an intricate emotional experience.

The text selected for the present study is “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Eliot 1917), which first appeared in print during WWI. The poem opens on a note from the depth of hell taken from Dante’s *Inferno* 27 and it tells the story of Prufrock, who sets out for a tea party to date a lady. It takes the form of a dramatic monologue that can be defined as

A lyric poem which reveals "a soul in action" through the conversation of one character in a dramatic situation. The character is speaking to an identifiable but silent listener in a dramatic moment in the speaker's life. The circumstances surrounding the conversation, one side of which we "hear" as the dramatic monologue, are made clear by the implication in the poem, and a deep insight into the character of the speaker is given. (Thrall, Hibbard & Holman 1960, 155)

Through this genre, the speaker is given voice to elaborate on his/her own portrait, to deliver his/her own perception of life and to introduce readers to his/her internal world.

To investigate the way the speaker in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” deals with reality and reveals his own external and internal experiences, it is appropriate to analyze the poem from the experiential perspective. Downing and Locke (1992, 110) state that the experiential metafunction of language “permits us to encode, both semantically and syntactically, our mental picture of the physical world and the worlds of our imagination”. It thus follows that the analysis of the selected poem from this perspective can yield interesting findings.

Given the specificity of the SFG framework and in order to simplify the process, the study is carried out in steps. First students of poetry need to be introduced to the concepts to be used in the analysis. A basic explanation of the concepts of transitivity and of the three functional components: processes, participants and circumstances is to be provided. Second, the poem will be divided into clauses as the fundamental meaning structures in a text (Butt et al. 2000). Third, the students will be guided in the selection of the samples, in that only the processes and their associated participants and circumstances which relate to the main character (J. Alfred Prufrock) are to be reproduced as samples for the study.

In terms of transitivity, each clause in the poem is often broken down into three functional constituents that functional grammarians call process, participant and circumstance. The most important of these is the process, which is grammatically realized by verbal groups. It tells about happening, doing, thinking, sensing, being, becoming and saying associated with a specific participant. Circumstance adds circumstantial information about the process and is essentially realized by adverbial or nominal groups or prepositional phrases (Bloor & Bloor 2013, 2001, 1995). While all these constituents are to be examined in our study, a special attention is to be drawn to processes as the major ingredient in a clause (Ning 2008)

The SFL framework breaks processes into six categories based on their grammatical and semantic differences: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Halliday (1994, 2000),

however, assumes that the basic processes used in language are the material, the mental and the relational. He contends that the behavioral, the verbal and the existential processes are always between the material, the mental and the relational. Noticing that the behavioral and existential processes are almost absent in the selected poem of our study, the focus of the analysis will be basically drawn to the material, the mental, the relational, and the verbal processes and their associated participants and circumstances.

### **3. Findings and discussion**

48 processes in the poem have been examined: 11 material (22.5%), 18 mental (37.5%), 08 relational (16.5%), 06 verbal (12.5%), 02 behavioral (4%) and 03 existential (6%). The examination of the poem from the experiential metafunction revealed that the speaker, Prufrock, used more mental processes than any other category. In conformity with the nature of the poem as a “dramatic monologue” about an emotional experience, Prufrock was concerned with self-revelations. Still, the poem, which is supposed to be about a love story, does not involve any emotive processes. J. Alfred Prufrock’s love song does not uncover emotional experiences or love messages that lovers are expected to share. It instead delivers only information about the protagonist’s state of mind. Prufrock refers only to himself when he uses mental and sensing processes.

#### **3.1. Material processes**

Material processes involve physical action and happenings and therefore they form the largest and most diverse category in transitivity (Thompson 2014). Yet, in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, and as far as the main personae is concerned, processes indicating physical actions and happenings are very limited in number and impact compared to other processes. Probably because the poem is about a love experience, the main character is expected to engage more in feeling than in doing. Thus, only eleven material processes (in bold) are used in the poem and are reproduced as samples for the study.

*Table 1: Analysis of the material processes (active) in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

<b>Participant: Actor</b>	<b>Process: Material</b>	<b>Participant : Goal</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>
I	<b>have gone</b>		at dusk
One that	<b>will do</b>		
Ø	<b>Swell</b>	a progress	
Ø	<b>Start</b>	a scene or two	
I	<b>Wear</b>	the bottoms of my trousers	rolled
I	<b>wear</b>	white flannel trousers	
I	<b>Walk</b>		upon the beach
Human voices	<b>Wake</b>	Us	
We	<b>drown</b>		

*Table 2: Analysis of the material processes (passive) in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

<b>Participant : Goal</b>	<b>Process : Material</b>	<b>Participant : Actor</b>	<b>Circumstance</b>
I	<b>am formulated, sprawling</b>	(by the eyes)	on a pin
I	<b>am pinned and wriggling</b>	(by the eyes)	on the wall

Analysis of the material processes revealed that not much is done and achieved in the poem. Tables 1 and 2 showed that throughout the poem’s 133 lines, only eleven material processes, in relation to the main character (Prufrock), are used, with two processes (formulate and pin) in the passive voice. Four of these processes are intransitive (go, do, walk and drown), which is indicative of the character’s inability to act and go through experiences. After the

epigraph fragment from Dante's *Inferno* 27, the poem opens with the speaker's request "let us go" which indicates a situation of imprisonment from which he desires to depart. All action rests upon the speaker being set free from his interlocutor's prison. He is then expected to embark on a particular experience. (Childs 1988; Halverson 1968) However, in a room full of women who "come and go / Talking of Michael angelo" (ll.13-14), poor Prufrock is incapable of performing any noteworthy action. Instead, he sprawls and wriggles on the wall to which he feels nailed by the eyes of the ladies.

When looking at the participants in these clauses (actors and goals), it becomes clear that, with the exception of the last actions, everything is done by the speaker, who refers only to himself. The walking and going are performed by Prufrock. Only in the last lines of the poem do we see him using "us" in "wake us" and "we" in "we drown" without providing any details about the identity of the partner. Still these pronouns are not indicative of possible conscious action as Prufrock refuses to wake up and face the reality of things. The moment the human voices wake them up, they drown. As for the goals in the examined samples: "the bottoms of my trousers", "my hair", "white flannel trousers", they confirm the impression that the main character is not involved in any serious action related to love. He simply worries about his appearance and how the women in the party perceive him.

Even the few circumstantial details in the examined samples reveal nothing of substance about Prufrock's love story. They do not inform about a specific emotional atmosphere where we expect the partners to act. Feeling pinned to a wall is indicative of the character's suffering from imprisonment and worthlessness. This hinders significant actions or happenings to take place, and pushes the protagonist to engage basically in mental activities.

### **3.2. Mental processes**

The mental processes, which consist of the verbs of sensing, feeling and cognition and stand for what goes on in the internal world of the mind (Thompson 2014; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004) form the major category in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (37.5%). In the following table (Table 3), we examine samples of the mental processes (underlined) used in the poem.

*Table 3: Analysis of mental processes in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

Sensor	Process Mental	:	Phenomenon	Circumstance
I	<u>have known</u>		Them	already
	<u>Known</u>		them all	
I	<u>have known</u>		them all	
I	<u>have known</u>		the arms	already
	<u>Known</u>		them all	
I	<u>have known</u>		The evenings, mornings, afternoons	
I	<u>have measured out</u>		my life	With coffee spoons
I	<u>Know</u>		the voices	already
I	<u>have known</u>		the eyes	already
I	<u>have known</u>		the arms	
I	<u>have seen</u>		my head	
I	<u>have seen</u>		The moment of my greatness	
I	<u>have seen</u>		the eternal footman	
I	<u>Meant</u>			at all
I	<u>Mean</u>			
I	<u>have heard</u>		the mermaids	singing each to each
I	<u>do not think</u>			
I	<u>have seen</u>		Them	riding seaward on the waves

When we examine the underlined samples, we can infer that the verbs of cognition dominate with “know” used 10 times, think, mean and measure used only once and they mainly appear in negative clauses as in “This is not what I meant” and “I do not think that they



will sing to me”. Sensing processes (see and hear) are also used. Prufrock used the verb of cognition “know” excessively to confirm and emphasize his knowledge of so many fanciful things (the arms, the evenings, mornings, afternoons, the voices and the eyes). This character builds on previous trivial experiences with women and cannot therefore propose to the lady he is dating or commit himself to any emotional or physical exchange with her. As the underlined samples show, in his love song, Prufrock does not use any processes of emotion, tell any story of love adventure or make any love declaration. This probably connects to a presupposed intuition that the speaker is emotionally frustrated, irresolute and afraid of going through experiences and adventures. His inability to act and to get involved in emotional exchanges are direct results of his procrastination and of his own perception of himself, which can be inferred from the relational processes used in the poem.

### 3.3. Relational processes

The relational processes (in italics) establish a relation between the speaker “I” and a variety of values (no prophet, Lazarus, not Prince Hamlet, an attendant lord, the Fool, a pair of ragged claws) and attributes (deferential, glad, politic, cautious, meticulous, ridiculous...). Through such processes, Prufrock produces his own portrait and introduces readers to the way he conceives his own reality. Once functionally explored, the samples in Tables 4 and 5 will disclose the cause behind Prufrock’s feelings of impotence and despair.

*Table 4: Relational processes (identifying) in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

Token	Process: Relational/ Identifying	Value
I	<i>Am</i>	no prophet
I	<i>am</i>	Lazarus
I	<i>am</i>	not Prince Hamlet
I	<i>am</i>	an attendant lord,
I	<i>am</i>	the Fool
I	<i>should have been</i>	a pair of ragged claws

*Table 5: Relational processes (attributive) in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*

Carrier	Process: Relational / Attributive	Attribute
I	was	afraid
I	am	deferential, politic, cautious, meticulous, ridiculous
I	grow	Old

Tables 4 and 5, in which the relational processes are examined, reveal that the identity Prufrock attributes to himself confirms our intuitions about this character as incapable of any normal sensibility. Although he is the center of the poem, he is no hero but simply an “attendant”. He pretends to be Lazarus who is going to reveal interesting knowledge, but does not dare to take any serious action because he is actually an irresolute person. He is “cautious”, “meticulous”, “ridiculous”, and worst of all, he is “a fool”. With such relational processes in the poem, our expectations about any possibility of love or emotional exchange are further lowered. Afraid, hesitant to act and to love, Prufrock is only capable of talking.

### 3.4. Verbal processes

Verbal processes “are intermediate between mental and material processes: saying something is a physical action that reflects mental operations” (Thompson 2014). Being a dramatic monologue, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, is a speaker’s self-declaration; it is about what Prufrock says to his silent listener(s). However, there are verbs of saying and telling inside the poem which establish a verbal process. The following fragments display the verbal processes (in bold) and how they are used in the poem. Through a functional analysis of such processes, in Table 6, we have found that the speaker is self- centered and does not dare communicate with people in the party.

(They **will say**: “How his hair is growing thin!”)  
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin  
(They **will say**: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)  
(Eliot 1917, ll.41-4)  
  
To **say**: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to **tell** you all, I **shall tell** you all”—  
If one, settling a pillow by her head  
**Should say**: “That is not what I meant at all;  
That is not it, at all.” (Eliot 1917, ll. 94-8)

Table 6: Verbal processes in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”

Sayer	Process : Verbal	Receiver
They	<b>will say (2)</b>	
I	<b>tell</b>	<b>you all</b>
I	<b>shall tell</b>	<b>you all</b>
I	<b>say</b>	
I	<b>say</b>	

As Table 6 shows, six items are examined: will say (2), tell, shall tell, say (2). Whether the sayer is Prufrock (I) or the women in the party (they), there is no direct exchange of information. “They will say” does not imply that they have really said anything to anyone. The future tense of “say” along with the parenthesis reveals that the ladies’ gossip is merely a hypothesis that takes place in the mind of Prufrock, who is anxious about his physical decay. The main Sayer is Prufrock and the main receiver is “you all”, which is in conformity with the nature of the poem as a ‘dramatic monologue’, in which the speaker does all the talk without expecting any response. The speaker in this poem does not give the impression to be conversing with someone else. The limited number of the verbal processes in the poem (12.5%) along with the absence of clearly identified interlocutor reveals that the character is alone and lonely, and all his declarations are internal self-revelations, which imply a split

personality. Therefore, the interlocutor who traps him in some sort of a Dantean inferno, is no one else but his other self.

## **Conclusion**

Developing the learners' analytical skills while enhancing their appreciation of the aesthetic and the unfamiliar, are challenging tasks. Through a functional examination of the language used in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the present study intended to propose a comprehensive model which enables students to construe the world and experiences of the central character. Being concerned with the examination of the experiences of the protagonist, we referred to the experiential perspective for the analysis of the poem drawing basically on the material, mental, relational and verbal processes and their associated participants and circumstances.

Given the specificity of the SFG framework and concepts, the study suggests that the process be carried in steps. First, students of poetry are to be guided throughout the reading activity to produce initial ideas and impressions about the poem that are to be confirmed or disregarded after the analysis. Second, they are introduced to the SFG concepts to be used. Third, they need to be helped in the selection of the samples that are to be analyzed. Finally, students are encouraged to check, during the analysis, whether their intuitions about the character's world and experiences are confirmed.

Once these experiences are revealed, students can recognize how meaning is constructed through linguistic systems and therefore become more sensitive to the power of language in disclosing particular meanings within particular contexts. With the variety of tools that SFG proposes, this model can boost the students' analytical skills for academic purposes in the poetry classroom and, therefore, enhance their appreciation of the aesthetic peculiarities of poems. As revealed through this study, a simple SFG analysis of the protagonist, with special focus on the Experiential Metafunction and the related processes, participants and circumstances can equip students with applicable methods to prove their intuitions and initial impressions about the characters' identity and experiences.

To conclude, in a language learning context, to study a poem, is to deal with language and its uses. Making use of linguistic data in an appropriate way can develop the students' understanding of how

language works within specific contexts, which in turn can empower them in one of the most challenging classes, the poetry class. Therefore, SFG, as an analytical framework shows a great potential for literary interpretation in a language learning environment, where students can learn about language through poems and learn about poems through language.

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