

Syntax and the consumer
revisited: an SFL for EFL

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1. Syntax and the Consumer

Halliday 1964 “Syntax and the Consumer”:

- The value of a particular linguistic theory can only be assessed in relation to a particular set of application goals;
- One linguistic theory may serve better for one application, while another may serve better for others.

1. Syntax and the Consumer

- SFL has mainly evolved in a context of **teaching English or Linguistics to native speakers.**
- As such, it is not perfectly adapted to the needs of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).
- The needs of TEFL students are substantially different.
- SFL thus needs to be adapted and contextualized for use in a TEFL environment.

1. Syntax and the Consumer:

1.2 Some Consumers of SFL

*SFL for
Mother-tongue
Literacy*

*SFL for
Clinical
Ling.*

*SFL for
EFL*

*SFL for
CDA etc.*

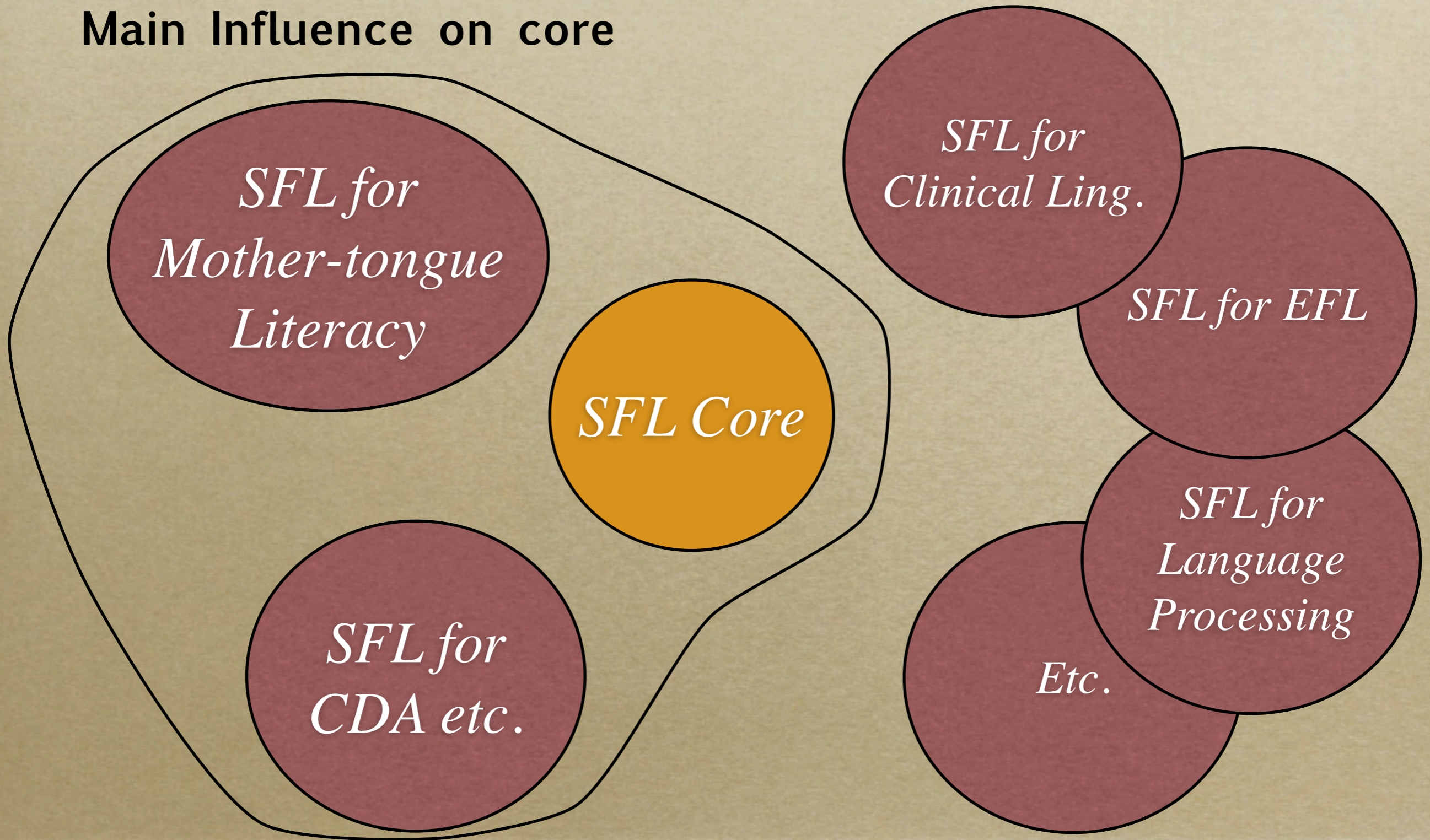
*SFL for
Language
Processing*

etc.

1. Syntax and the Consumer:

1.2 Some Consumers of SFL

Main Influence on core



1. Syntax and the Consumer:

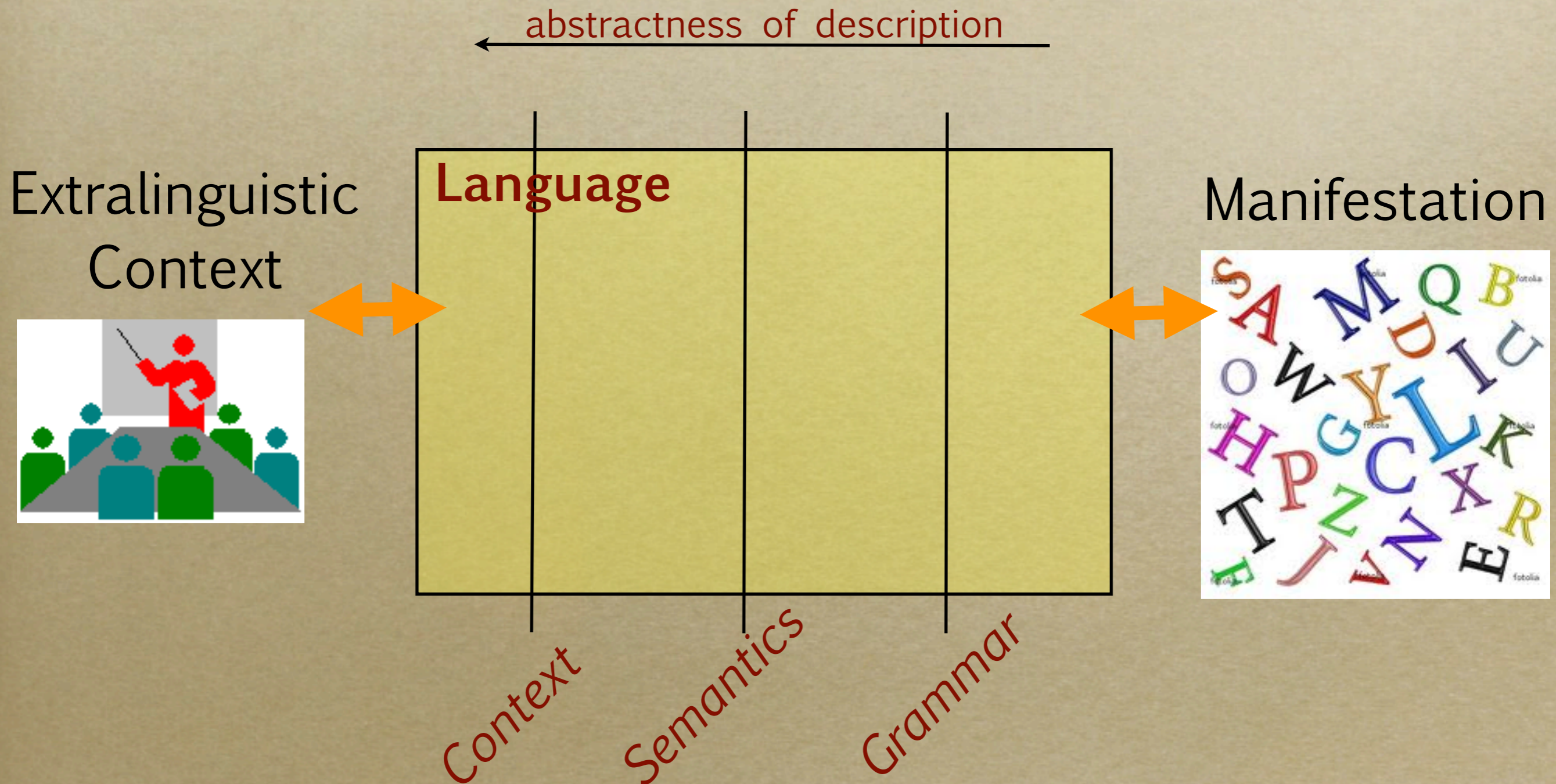
1.4 Extending Markets

- SFL has made strong in-roads in Discourse Analysis world-wide.
- Mother-tongue schooling, strong influence in Australia and (more limited) in Britain.
- However, less SFL used in TEFL worldwide:
 - At lower levels, traditional grammar used.
 - SFL enters as students apprenticed into the language.
- Can we make a variety of SFL more suited for TEFL?



1. Syntax and the Consumer:

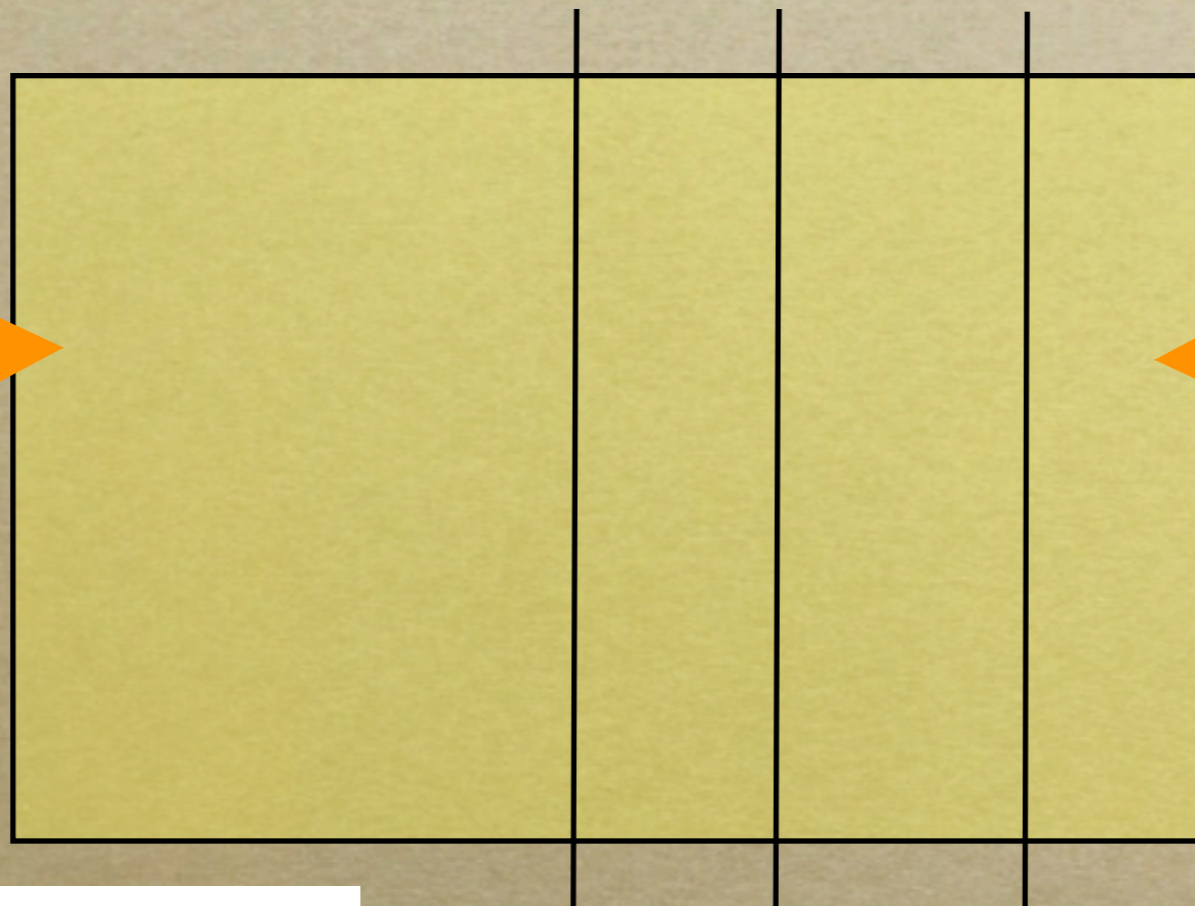
1.3 Positioning Grammar in the Linguistic Space



1. Syntax and the Consumer:

1.3 Positioning Grammar in the Linguistic Space

Extralinguistic
Context



Manifestation



SFG_N: SFG using notional criteria
SFG_S: SFG using syntactic criteria
Q&G: Quirk and Greenbaum

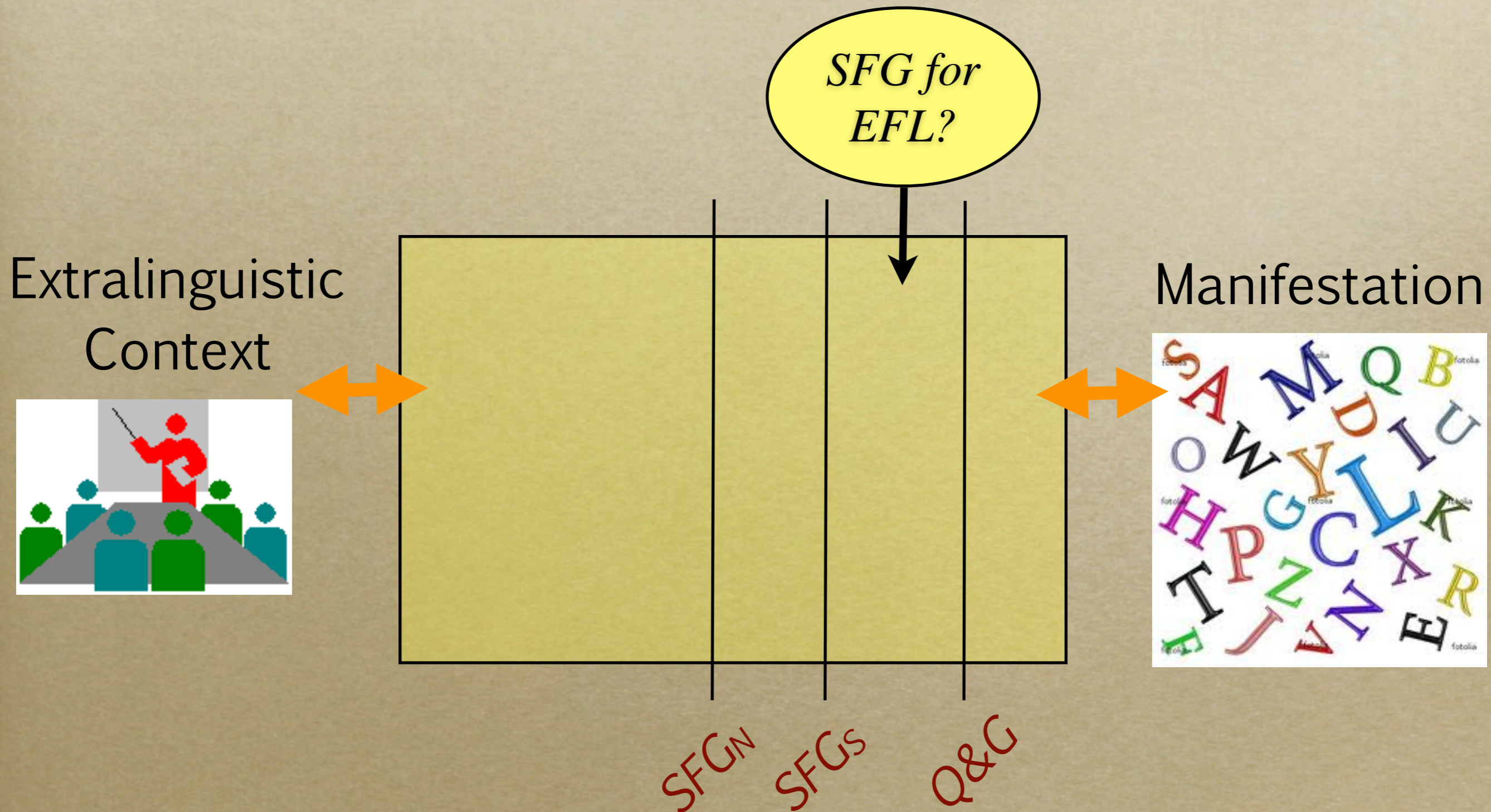
SFG_N

SFG_S

Q&G

1. Syntax and the Consumer:

1.3 Positioning Grammar in the Linguistic Space



2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL Teaching



2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

- When moving towards an SFL-informed EFL curriculum, one needs to examine each tool in the SFL workbench, and ask what it offers to the language learner, and whether it improves over the functionality of more traditional approaches.
- Learner of English as a mother tongue come into class with a reasonable grasp of how to form sentences, and thus language teaching can focus on both how to use language effectively (in terms of both production and interpretation).
- EFL students at a basic level on the other hand come into the classroom lacking knowledge of how to form structures, and need to be taught how to construct grammatically correct sentences as well as how to use them effectively.

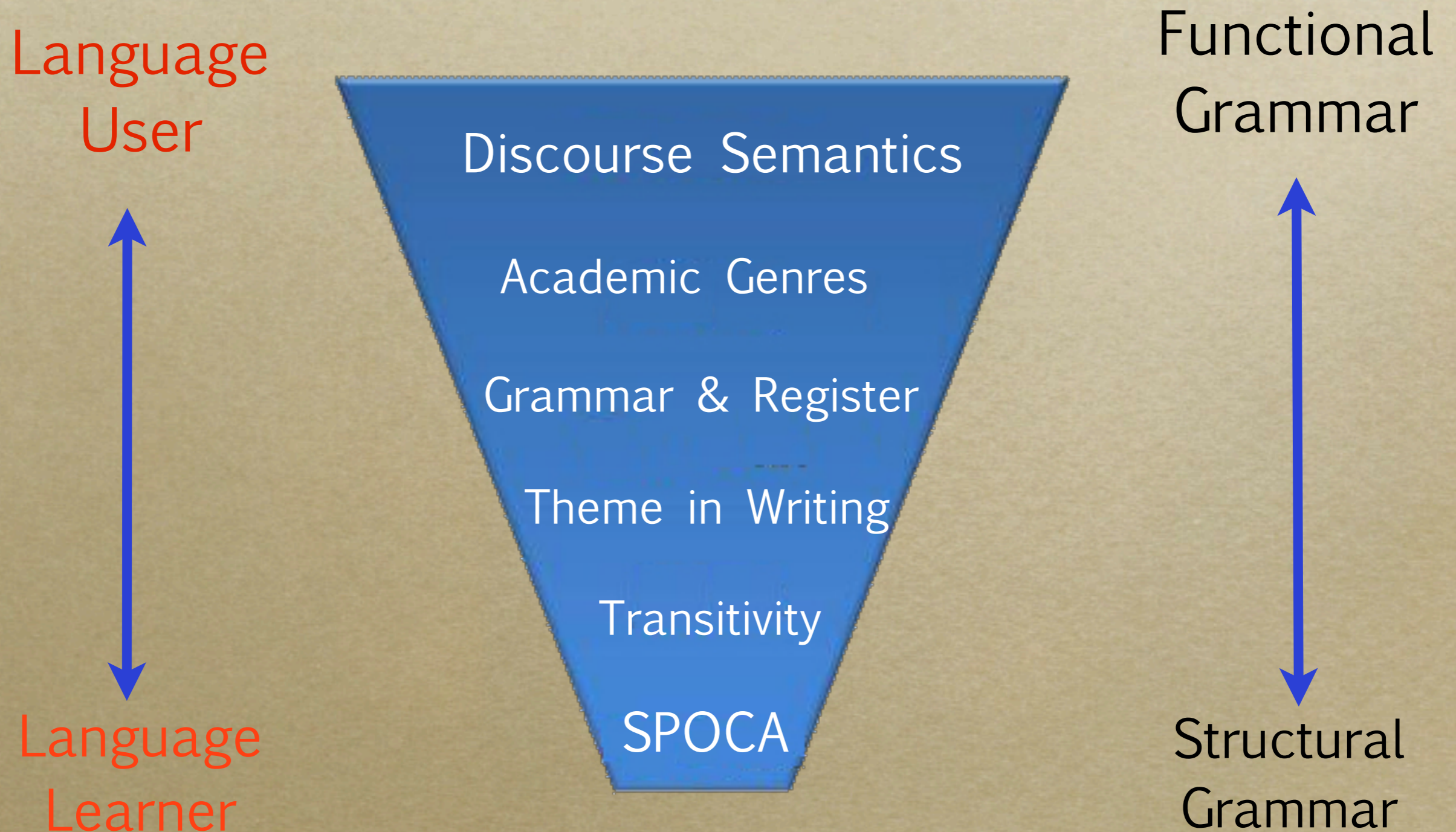
2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

- Not talking about teaching higher-level students in English degrees, who have already mastered at least the basics of the language.
- In my university, we teach SFL quite happily to students of 3rd or 4th year, discourse analysis, and even courses labelled SFL.
- I am concerned mainly about students at an A1 to B1 level just leaning to function in the language.
- In our case, 1st Year of an English degree in a Spanish University.

2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL



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2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

Whole-School Genre Maps: (B. White and B. Culance):

- Efforts to organise the teaching of genres across the different years of school, different content areas

Whole-School Genre Maps:

- At the UAM, we are starting to apply this idea to **grammar** teaching in University-level English degrees.
- Teachers should build on each others work as the students move through the degree, rather than each teacher working in isolation (repetition, contradiction, confusion).
- But difficult...

2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

2.2 Mood

- Halliday's Mood layer very close to traditional grammar in many ways:
 - Subject, Complement, etc.
 - Categories of declarative, interrogative, imperative
- Halliday uses 'Complement' where traditional approaches use:
 - Object (potential to be Subject)
 - Complement (no potential to become Subject)

2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

2.2 Mood

- In our department, we follow the traditional labelling (Quirk and Greenbaum):
 - Students already know these or similar categories from school.
 - Why confuse them with changed terminology when they are struggling with issues of learning English.
 - Differences in this aspect are not fundamental.

2. An SFL-informed Grammar for EFL

2.3 Theme

- THEME can be directly taught in the Writing components of EFL courses.
- However, benefits are not specifically for language learning: writing in their native language also improved.
- Where differences exist between thematic resources of the first and second language (passive, etc.), the explicit teaching of theme and thematic progression can have direct benefits to the learning of language.

2. Transitivity for EFL students

2.4 Tense/Aspect

- Halliday's "past in present" etc. abandoned for the more structural traditional approach (simple-past, past-perfect etc.)
- First teach the individual constructions: perfect, progressive aspect, modal etc.,
- Then teach tenses in contexts of use:
 - "How to talk about past actions/states",
 - "How to talk about past habitual actions"
 - "How to talk about ongoing actions"
 - etc.
- Use idea of **state**, **event** and **habitual action** to explain why some doings and happenings are expressed in the simple present, and others in the present continuous.

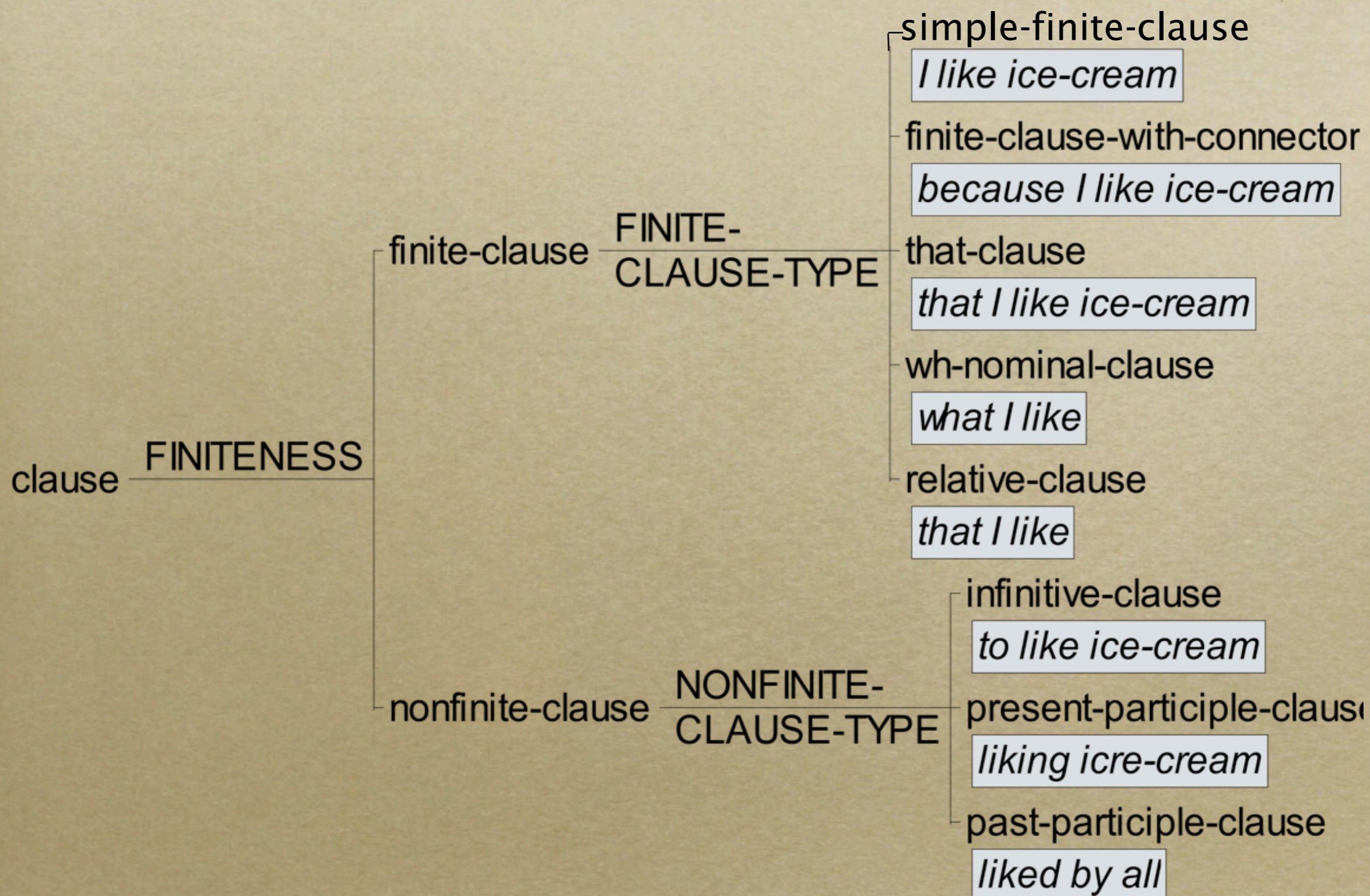
2. Transitivity for EFL students

2.5 Finite and Nonfinite clauses

- We spend a lot more time on teaching this area than covered in Halliday IFG.
- Appropriate construction of **wh-nominal clauses** and **relative-clauses** particularly problematic at lower levels.
- Knowing which types of clauses can go in which syntactic slot particularly problematic for most EFL students
 - I forgot to go shopping
 - I remember going shopping

2. Transitivity for EFL students

2.5 Finite and Nonfinite clauses



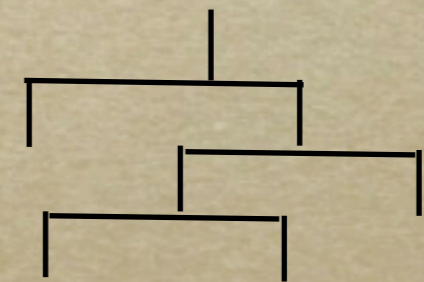
2. Transitivity for EFL students

2.6 Nominal Groups

- We teach fairly directly the Hallidayan approach.
- Functional division of the NG into Deictic, Epithet, Classifier, Thing, Qualifier seems to work well with students.
- A very important area for lower level EFL learners, as large proportion of their errors here.

Determiners		Premodifiers				Thing	Qualif.
Predet.	Det	Ordinal	Quant.	Epithet	Classif.		
<i>each of</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>first</i>	<i>three</i>	<i>lovely</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>classes</i>	<i>this year</i>

3. Transitivity and Notionalism



She said...

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- Halliday: Language evolved as a way of expressing meaning, so we should expect the formal patterns of language to reflect the organisation of the meaning system.
- This belief is deep in the thinking of SFL, and many of our decisions as to grammatical organisation thus make reference to the meanings expressed.
- But language also evolved to be acquired by infants. So we should expect language to be regular in structure, to simplify the learning task.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- While Halliday's grammar is organised around the functions of a meaning system, he did intend the "grammar" to be founded also in structural regularity.
- For instance, verbal clauses are not defined just as clauses that express verbal action.
- There must be "potential for projection", i.e., to contain a clause rank-shifted as a part of the clause, e.g.,
 - He said that he was coming -> **Verbal**
 - We talked about the weather -> **Behavioural**

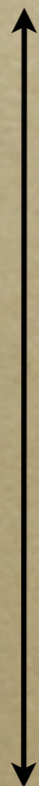
3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- However, there has been a growing tendency within SFL to ignore structural aspects of clauses when assigning them to transitivity classes.
- In 2004, a survey of 70 Systemicists around the world showed that many of us prefer semantic criteria over grammatical criteria:
 - More than a third coded “We talked for hours” as verbal
 - More than a half coded “We talked about the weather” as verbal.
- Yet “talk” has no potential for projection.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

Clines of notional-structural criteria:

Behavioural



Verbal

We cried for hours.

1.....

We talked for hours.

2.....

We talked about the weather.

3.....

We said something.

4.....

We said that the weather was bad.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- So, SFL is moving towards notionalism, while Halliday himself tried to ground all of his categories on structural criteria.
- Even IFG 3rd edition has started to waver: ‘talk’ in the following is said to be a verbal process (p252):

“Chiruma would find any opportunity to talk to that priest about Kukal.”

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- But even if we try to follow grammatical criteria, there are times when we have to be purely notional in SFL.
- For instance, to see whether the following sentence is *verbal* or *mental*, we do not appeal to any structural criteria, but rather ask ourselves about the situation which it describes:

We agreed with each other that I was right.

- So, at least in some cases, our grammatical decisions are based on issues of content

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

We agreed with each other that something should be done.

- What about:

I agree with the President that something should be done.

- No necessary verbal activity at all, so mental?

- Does this change **your** coding decision?

- Should these sentences be coded differently for process type?

3 Transitivity and Notionalism

Others have made the same point:

“Halliday has consistently argued that “all the categories employed must be clearly ‘there’ in the grammar of the language”.

However, in the case of transitivity, it has proved difficult to implement that assumption in all cases: the grammatical criteria by which one process type can be differentiated from another are not always precisely definable, and ‘purely’ semantic criteria may be implicitly or explicitly drawn on.”

Geoff Thompson, Workshop Abstract, Euro SFL meeting, 2007

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- **My point:**
 - What good does it do a beginning learner of English to know whether “We agreed that I was right” is verbal or mental?
 - Does this categorisation help them speak the language better?

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- Clines of notional-structural criteria (ii):

Relational

She was tall.

1.....

She was happy.

2.....

She was very pleased.

3.....

She was pleased.

4.....

She was pleased by his comment.

5.....

Mental

His comment pleased her.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- Related cases: Relational or Material? (or behavioural)
 - I stood on the bridge.
 - I was standing on the bridge.
 - He was sitting down for 5 hours.



3. Transitivity and Notionalism

Material or Mental?

A. I added up the numbers.

B. I calculated the total.

C. I calculated that I had enough.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

Verbal or Material/Behavioural?

A. He said something.

B. He said that he was coming.

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- My General points here are:
 - If experienced Systemicists, often native speakers, have problems working out what process type a given clause is, what chance does someone have who is just learning to put together a few words to communicate?
 - And even if they could identify the process type of “agree”, “own”, or “calculate”, does that help them form sentences with these words?

3. Transitivity and Notionalism

- Use of semantic criteria in process type classification result in lots of clausal forms which are syntactically dissimilar being lumped together
 - E.g. He has a car vs. The car was owned by me.
 - E.g., I talked WITH John vs. I said something TO John
- Process Type Analysis is great if you want to find out what is going on in a text (how participants are construed, etc.).
- But for students still struggling to form the past tense, it all just adds to the confusion.

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar



4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- Before the publication of *Introduction to Functional Grammar (IFG)* in 1985, Halliday's linguistic model assumed a linguistic model like:

<i>Context</i>	Field	Tenor	Mode
<i>Semantics</i>	Ideational	Interpersonal	Textual
<i>Grammar</i>	Transitivity	Mood	Theme

- But in IFG, the distinction between **ideational** semantics and **transitivity** disappeared.

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- IFG 1st ed, p101: Processes, participants and circumstances are “semantic categories”, but “Transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in the language”

<i>Context</i>	Field	Tenor	Mode
<i>Semantics</i>	Ideational	Interpersonal	Textual (Theme, etc.)
<i>Grammar</i>		Mood	

- Many SFG textbooks now use “ideational” for the grammar.

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- The need for a separate transitivity and experiential semantics is most noted when grammatical metaphor is present:

	I	grasped	the idea
Grammar	Actor	Process: material	Goal
Semantic	Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomena

	Dawn	met	us	at the summit
Grammar	Actor	Process: material	Goal	Circ: location
Semantic	Circ: time	Process: material	Actor	Circ: location

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- Halliday and Matthiessen “Construing Experience” (1998), first real specification of an ideational semantics.
- However, some complain it was basically “grammar” viewed from above

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- However, various SFLers have noted that using the same transitivity labels in both Semantics and Grammar is confusing:

“I can't help wondering whether we should simply impose the lexico-grammatical categories of Participant, Process and Circumstance (and the sub-types of these) on to the semantics in this way. If the lexico-grammar and the semantics are different strata, then shouldn't we at least pause before we simply treat them as if they are both the same (both operating with the same categories.)”

Peter White, Syfling, 2005

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

“In general I am not comfortable with proposing a rank, stratum or metafunction without a distinct axially motivated system of valeur. Construing Experience... can be criticised for proposing a semantics consisting of virtually the same systems as those worked up for transitivity, mood and theme - just with relabeled options. It seems to me that if we are going to stratify, and open up an additional stratum on the content plane, potentially organised by rank and metafunction, then we should be more ambitious.”

(Jim Martin, Sysfling, 2011)

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

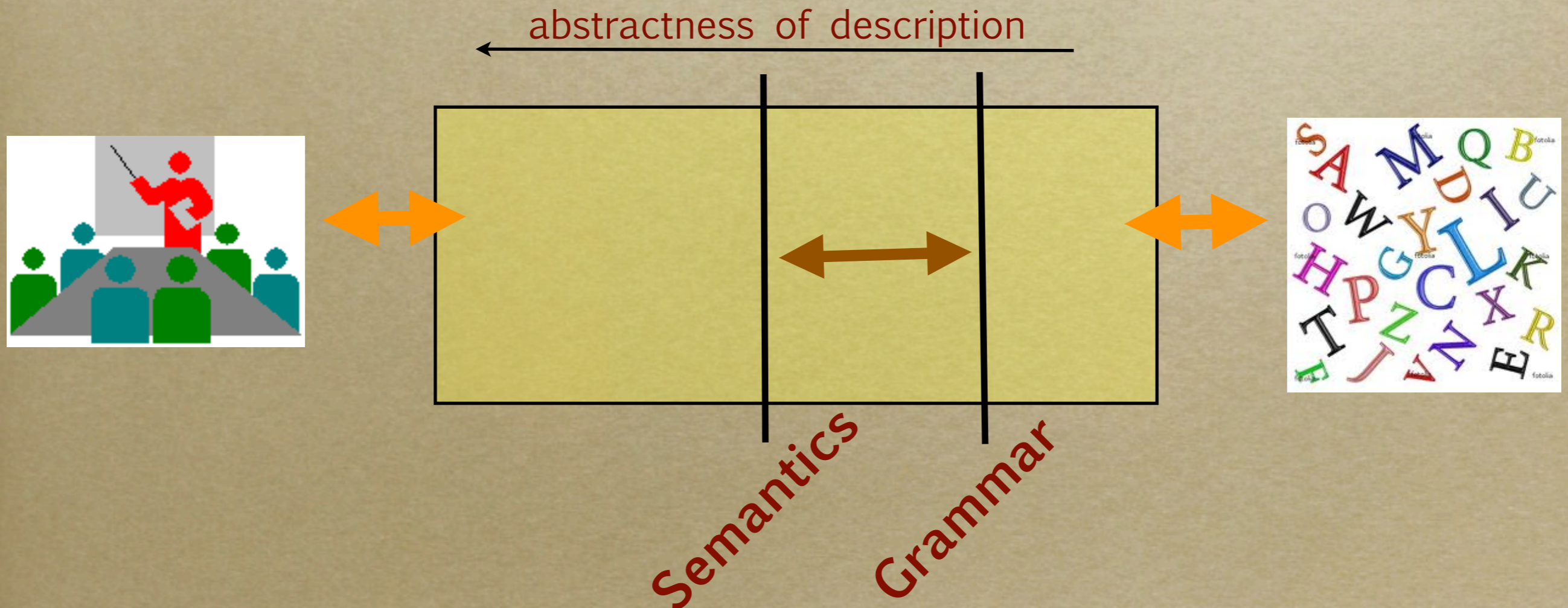
- If we do provide separate ideational semantics and transitivity, and both do distinct work, what do we change?

“I think we do need a further set [*of labels*] for the lexico-grammar, keeping the existing labels for the semantics. The question then is what labels we might use ... I have been exploring the possibility of using relatively neutral pattern labels of the sort that Susan Hunston, Gill Francis and others have been working on; but those seem to be too far from the rest of the model.”

Geoff Thompson, Sysfling, 2005

4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- If we are going to use a separate representation for experiential semantics and transitivity, then surely they should be at different degrees of abstraction from the textual manifestation.



4. Separating Semantics and Grammar

- For EFL teaching purposes, I will follow this approach
 - Separate ideational and transitivity descriptions.
 - Maintaining the current SFL experiential labelling for the semantics (6 process types, Actor/Goal etc.), with more notional criteria.
 - A new grammar which is organised more around issues of structural regularity and the needs of language learners.

5. Transitivity for EFL



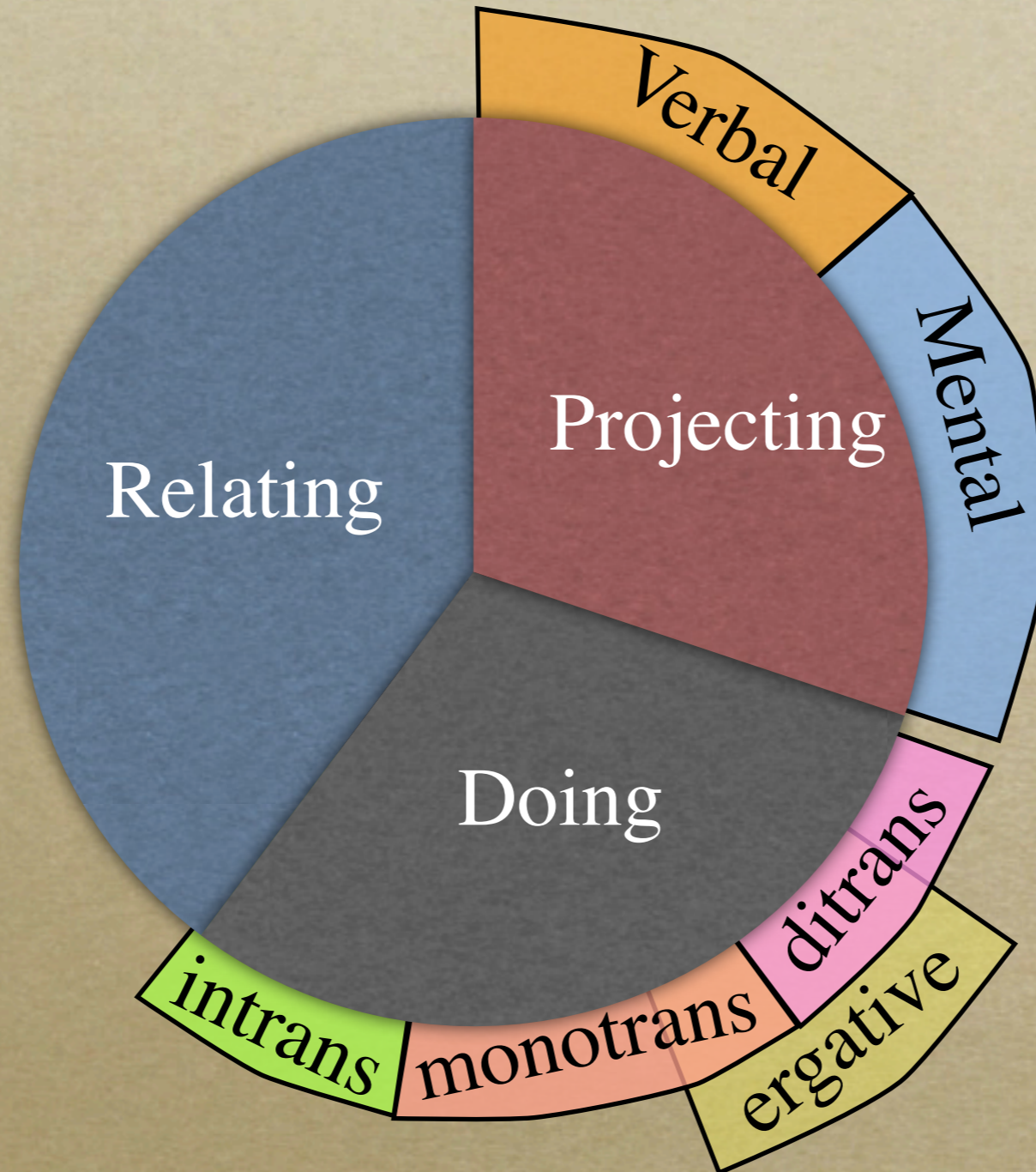
5. Transitivity for EFL students

- There is a lot of value in the SFL approach to Transitivity
- Particularly for extracting meaning from text (discourse analysis, how are participants construed, etc.)
- But for TEFL applications, one needs to decrease the notional (semantic) emphasis and increase the structural emphasis.
- More structural approaches (Greenbaum & Quirk etc.) are dominant in the field.
- What follows is the compromise I have been teaching my students.

5. Transitivity for EFL students



5. Transitivity for EFL students



5. Transitivity for EFL students

5.1 Simplified relating clauses

Relating

- **Relationals** are very much a mixed bag structurally
- Brings together units such as:
 - I have an apple (can't passivise)
 - I own that car / That car is owned by me (can passivise)
 - This indicates that there is a fault somewhere. (passive, +projection)
 - I am happy that you are here. (attributive projection)
 - He is standing on the bridge (default pres. tense=continuous)
- So, what are the **structural similarities** of the class?

5. Transitivity for EFL students

5.2 Simplified relating clauses

- Our 1st year students are really not set up to master the relational process classification in the full model.
- So I teach a very reduced set:

Verbs which take at least two participants,
but do not passivise

- Centrally: **be, have**
- Also verbs of becoming: **He became president in 2006.**
- Also **verbs of perception** when used with an adjectival attribute: **It felt/smelt/tasted/looked/sounded burnt.**
- Also seem/appear: **It seems sound, it appears wet.**

5. Transitivity for EFL students

5.2 Simplified relating clauses

Relating

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- So I teach a very reduced set:

Verbs which take at least two participants,
but do not passivise

English only,
other languages
will have their own
structural
regularities

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5. Transitivity for EFL students

5.2 Simplified relating clauses

What is out:

- Those relational verbs which can passivise:
 - I own that car
 - This indicates that there is a fault somewhere.
- Material States:
 - He is standing on the bridge
- Not much time spent on identifying/attributive distinction in first year

5. Transitivity for EFL students

5.2 Projecting



Projecting

- Reasonably standard treatment of verbal and mental processes.
- Structural criteria, not notional.
- In teaching, avoid confusing examples.
 - *We agreed, we calculated, etc.*
- Lots of focus on the usage issues they need, e.g.,
 - *I remember getting it / I remembered to get it.*
- Sayer/Adressee/Verbiage roles introduced as needed.
- Relate “address-oriented verbal process” to being ditransitive processes, as they already have this term,
- The say/tell distinction important to Spanish learners as Spanish verb “decir” covers both contexts.

5. Transitivity for EFL students



Doing

Doing etc.

- Mix of all clauses which are not relating or projecting.
- Most material express actions, change of state, movement
- Our teaching based on complementation, so **Intransitive, Monotransitive, Ditransitive**
- Based on the verb's potential, not the actual number of participants in the clause.

5. Transitivity for EFL students



- Focus on **ergative verbs**, as differences in ergativity between languages affects translation:
 - El jarrón se rompió.
-> The vase broke, NOT The vase was broken
- Not all English ergative verbs are ergative in Spanish.
- Very useful to use notion of Agent and Medium (or Undergoer) to get through to them how ergative verbs are different.

The banana

ripened

<i>Undergoer</i>	<i>Process</i>
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The sun

ripened

the banana

<i>Agent</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Undergoer</i>
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The boys

played

<i>Agent</i>	<i>Process</i>
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6. Conclusions



6. Conclusions

- This paper has assumed that the umbrella of SFL is wide enough to shelter multiple variants of the framework, each oriented to particular consumers.
- I have presented the model colleagues and I are working on implementing within the English Department at the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid.
- Since Quirk and Greenbaum was already the default there, it was easier to work with a compromise between this and SFL.
- I tried to make clear that the full SFL model is too difficult for low-proficiency learners.

6. Conclusions

- For SFL to be useful to language learners, it should ‘import’ meaning into the grammar only so much as is justified by the patterns of structural regularity of the grammar.
- After all, apart from **evolving to express meaning**, language has also **evolved to be acquired by infants**, and we can thus expect a reasonably regular relationship between structures and meanings.
- A grammar for EFL learners requires a stronger emphasis on structural patterns
- In a European context, drawing on a Quirk/Greenbaum style approach may re-use the terminology they already have.

6. Conclusions

At UAM:

1. The first year students start with this hybrid grammar with a structural orientation.
2. As the students move from **language learners** to **language users**, more functional linguistics is introduced into their courses.
3. By 3rd and 4th year, they are receiving fully SFL courses.