

## **Writing in German as a foreign language in Norwegian upper secondary school: An investigation of patterns of language choices for meaning-making**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of this article is to identify and describe characteristic patterns of language choices in texts written by Norwegian upper secondary school students of German as a foreign language (GFL) (age 16/17, school year 12, 5th year of FL learning). The study maps language choices in a set of 12 learner responses to a writing prompt about interpreting a film title. The aim of the study is to describe these choices in terms of how the learners use ideational meaning-making resources to arrive at meaningful content. The study takes a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach and analyses the responses in terms of the following lexicogrammatical and discourse semantic systems of resources: Transitivity, taxonomic and logico-semantic relations. The study finds several strategies and language choices that presented themselves as particularly relevant for meaning-making. For example, the learners reach an interpretation through clauses relating two messages to each other, and one of those two messages is typically structured in a complex way. Overall, the study provides insights into relevant patterns for expository writing in general and such that seem important to the particular context in which the response was situated. The article also points to the sophistication of the learners' language use and the linguistic demands regarding the task at hand. In line with existing research, the current study also shows how SFL and genre theory can be successfully applied to the analysis of responses by beginner to intermediate GFL learners.

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## Keywords

German as a foreign language writing, systemic functional linguistic, meaning-making, language choices, expository genre/text type.

## 1. Introduction

Writing development in a foreign language (FL) goes beyond the teaching, learning and assessment of linguistic and syntactic features (e.g., *Council of Europe*, 2001; Hyland, 2019; Lund & Casado Villanueva, 2020). Rather, it needs to “be interpreted as a journey toward meaningful content production and the realization of communicative goals” (Yasuda, 2019, p. 2). Yet, this perspective on learners’ written productions has traditionally received little attention in research (e.g., Bunch & Willett, 2013; Troyan & Sembiante, 2020). Also, frameworks such as the *Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR)* (*Council of Europe*, 2001) lack detailed descriptions of how learners can and need to use language to respond meaningfully to certain situations (Troyan, 2020). In particular, research is scarce on how non-English FL learners (i.e. learners of a foreign language other than English) make meaning in response to different communicative goals, especially regarding learners of the primary or secondary school classroom (e.g., Reichelt, 2016; Yasuda, 2019). Against this backdrop, the aim of this research study is to analyse written responses to a writing prompt provided by upper secondary school learners of German as a foreign language (GFL) in terms of meaningful content production.

The data used in this study stem from the TRAWL (Tracking Written Learner Language) corpus (Dirdal et al., 2022), which is a compilation of authentic texts written by pupils in second and foreign languages in different parts of Norway. The study takes departure in data comprising 12 GFL learners (age 16/17, school year 12, 5th year of FL learning) responses to a task in the corpus. This task consists of eight individual writing prompts, all eliciting short responses. In line with Ørevik’s (2019) genre categories, the learners’ eight individual responses are considered as an analysis of a film. In the present study, the focus is on the learners’ responses to the first of the eight writing prompts, which are categorized as expository writing and as an interpretation as part of the film analysis (Ørevik, 2019).

In line with, for example, Ørevik (2019), Troyan & Sembiante (2020) and Yasuda (2019), the current research study approaches meaning-making in terms of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) theory (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). According to this theory, there are always three kinds of meanings simultaneously made when language is used. These meanings or functions are to construe experience (ideational meaning), to enact personal and social relationships

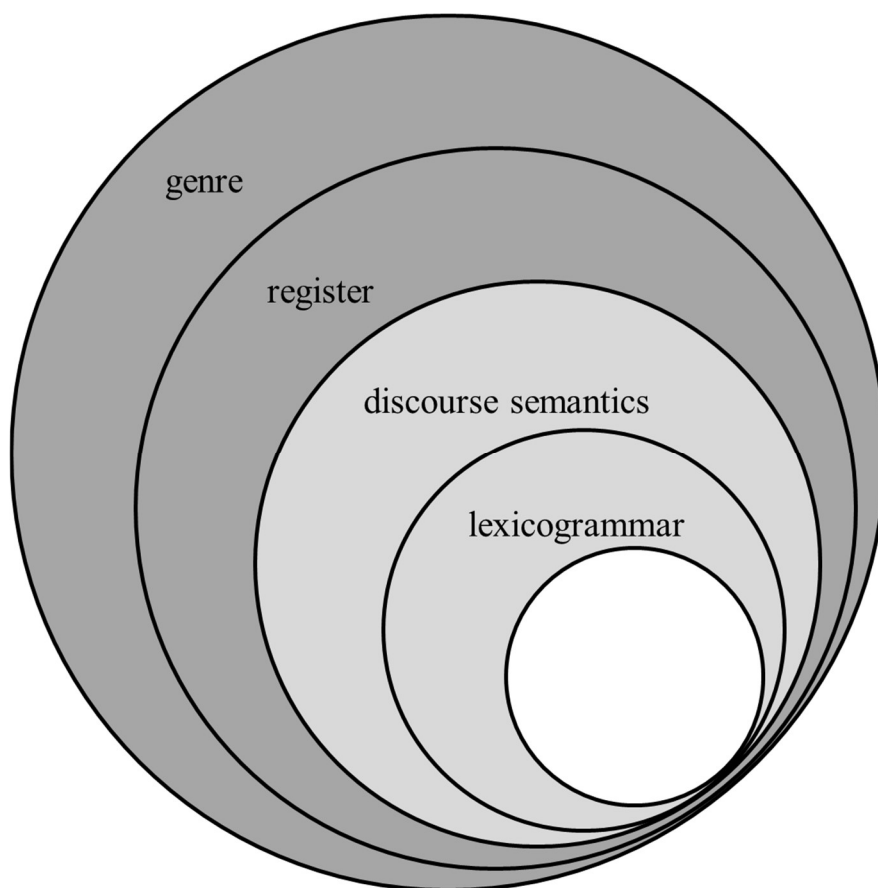
(interpersonal meaning) and to organize discourse (textual meaning) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The way those meanings are realized is by patterns of language choices. Due to the considerable amount of texts to be analysed, the focus is only on how the learners make ideational meaning. In this regard, the following research question is proposed: Which patterns of language choices can be identified in learners' responses to tasks to make ideational meaning to an interpretation in the genre of film analysis in the secondary school GFL context in Norway?

The second section presents the theoretical framework in which genre and meaning-making are conceptualized, and the resources for ideational meaning-making are described. The preceding section illustrates the data and methods used, while the fourth section presents the identified patterns of language choices in the learners' responses. The fifth section discusses the extent to which the learners realized their responses were in line with the genre. It further discusses how the co-text and context in which the task is situated play a role in the journey towards meaningful content. The final section concludes and outlines some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

According to Troyan (2016), SFL theory “can enable a closer examination of language use in context through a whole-text approach that has not been possible in existing standards-based pedagogies informed by the existing frameworks for writing” (p. 331). In SFL theory, language is considered to function contextually. This implies that language choices “interface with what goes on outside language”, while the interfacing part can then be regarded as meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 25). Accordingly, each language choice on the lexicogrammatical level of language and, as Martin and Rose (2007) add, also on the discourse semantics level of language, then make three kinds of meaning simultaneously, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning. To describe and analyse those meanings and language choices in terms of what is going on outside of language, Halliday proposed a layer of register with the three register variables of field, tenor and mode. Those three variables can then be used for describing a communicative situation in the following ways: How does a speaker/writer need to talk/write about the situation (field), enact particular relationships with the listener/reader (tenor) and organize the discourse (mode) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 30–35). Additionally, Martin (1992, 2009) also proposed the layer of genre to describe language use in context (see Figure 1). Martin (2009) further defines genre as a “staged goal-oriented social process” (p. 13) and

claims that goals can only be achieved throughout the entire course of a text, through recurrent stages with particular configurations of field, tenor and mode and through different phases. While stages are considered highly predictable in genres, phases are more variable character connected to the field and the writers' individual choices (Rose & Martin, 2014).



*Figure 1: Meanings at different levels (adapted from Martin, 1992, 2009)*

### *2.1 Genre and meaning-making*

In previous SFL-based research, meaning-making has commonly been described in terms of genre. For example, Troyan (2016) describes how a Spanish fourth-grade student makes meaning to a landmark description, while Ryshina-Pankova (2020) describes how meaning can be made to an anecdote on childhood in an introductory German course. Other examples of studies are those of Abdel-Malek (2020) or Schleppegrell & Go (2007), who interrogate how Arabian or middle school English as second language learners make meaning to a recount of an experience. In all those studies, the analysis takes departure from previous knowledge of the genres

and their characteristic meaning-making features, such as described in, for example, Martin and Rose's (2008) genre categories.

In the secondary school FL classroom, however, writing prompts often do not elicit clear-cut genres (Ørevik, 2019). This is because the context and communicative purpose of writing tasks in the FL learning environment generally differ from natural communication contexts (Halliday, 1999). Especially in the non-English FL context, the most dominant purpose of writing is the activity of language learning with a specific focus on overall target-language acquisition and grammatical accuracy (e.g., Kvam, 2012; Reichelt, 2019). In addition, other characteristics of the beginners to intermediate FL learning process make it further challenging to analyse texts as clear-cut genres: Responses are characteristic of short text length, and learners often have limited linguistic repertoires and knowledge of the characteristics of genres in the FL. This is particularly the case for secondary school non-English FL writing (Knospe, 2017).

Against this backdrop, Ørevik (2019) approaches the categorisation of genres differently to, for example, Martin and Rose (2008). In her work, Ørevik (2019) analyses texts for reception, writing acts and samples of main genres situated in a secondary school English as a foreign language (EFL) context in Norway. Overall, she draws on Martin's (2009, p. 13) definition of genre but places it in between text type and genre, with the former understood as texts comprising different communicative tasks, such as *argue* or *describe*, and the latter as recurrent configurations of features that coincide with the text's external criteria of context and communicative purpose, such as a letter to the editor (Ørevik, 2019, p. 8; see also Biber, 1989; Pilegaard & Frandsen, 1996). Thus, Ørevik (2019) takes a complementary perspective on genre in terms of genre and text type. In that regard, she describes individual and main genre categories. The latter are based on predominant text types, such as *expository*, which can also be linked to the macrofunctions of the *CEFR* (Council of Europe 2001, p. 126). Against the observation that "writing tasks do not always elicit clear-cut genres or text types" (p. 101), Ørevik (2019) also resorts to the *Wheel of Writing* model (Berge et al., 2016) to assign each kind of text to one main category. Berge et al.'s (2016) model provides an overview of different acts of writing in the monolingual classroom, and each of those acts are connected to one of six main purposes of writing. For example, writing acts such as *interpreting*, *comparing* or *exploring* are linked to the purpose of *knowledge development*, which Ørevik then calls expository writing (see Table 1). By equating purposes and text types, Ørevik can assign the different acts of writing to specific text types (see also Hasund, 2022).

Table 1: Description of the main genre category expository by Ørevik (2019, p. 105)

Main genre category	Typical writing acts	Individual genres included in the main category
Expository	<i>Interpret, compare, explore, analyse, discuss</i>	Expository article/documentary; expository talk/ presentation; essay exploring a topic; analysis of literature and film; news report; feature article

Along with her genre categories, Ørevik (2019) determines the individual genre of film or literature analysis and describes it as a social process in which films and literature are discussed and reflected on with the overall purpose of knowledge enhancement (p. 107). The tasks which elicit this individual genre can be of different natures, for example, “mere elements of analyses, such as character descriptions and comments to poems” (p. 145). Regarding the main genre categories, she assigns the film analysis to the expository main genre category. A typical writing act for film analyses and, accordingly, for expository writing are interpretations.

Ørevik’s (2019) genre categories comprise information on how meaning is made along the following criteria: The social process, communicative goals and rhetorical organisation. As part of her work, she also analysed how the register (field, tenor, mode) and meaning (ideational, interpersonal, textual) variables are configured in some individual genres, like the expository article from the expository main genre category. Her investigations into the configurations of the register and meaning variables are based on interrogations into how the lexicogrammatical choices are configured. This approach is in line with other SFL-based research studies, such as those mentioned before, even though the studies differ in how they approach the register and meaning variables as well as the use of lexicogrammatical resources.

### 2.2 Lexicogrammatical and discourse semantical resources for ideational meaning-making

In SFL theory, there are different systemic works that comprise descriptions of meaning-making resources. A major work that describes lexicogrammatical systems of resources is Halliday’s functional grammar (e.g. Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Regarding the construction of ideational meaning, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe lexicogrammatical resources systematically under the headings transitivity and taxis/logico-semantic relations. Martin and Rose (2007) criticise Halliday for not taking account of lexical relations as a major strategy for ideational meaning-making. From a discourse semantics perspective, they thus describe how

those kinds of relations can be patterned and realize ideational meaning. Inter alia, they propose to look at lexical relations in terms of a system called taxonomic relations.

In line with the research goals of the current study, inquiries are proposed into systems from both a lexicogrammatical or discourse semantic perspective, namely into transitivity, logico-semantic type and taxonomic relations. In the following, these systems are explained and findings regarding their patterns in expository writing are discussed.

### 2.2.1 Transitivity

Transitivity centres on processes and participants. According to functional grammar, each sequence, figure or “going-on” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 213) consists of a specific process that – depending on its type and subtype – construes different domains of experience and involves a range of participants. The three most dominant process types are presented in Table 2, together with participants that are directly involved. The participants are often conceived through nominal groups, which can, for example, be formed through simple common or proper nouns or pronouns such as *David*, *the garden* or *I*.

Table 2: Major process types, their meanings and characteristic participants (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 311)

Process type	Meaning	Participants	Examples
material:	‘doing’	Actor, <u>Goal</u> Actor, <u>Scope</u>	i. <i>David fed his flock [of sheep].</i> ii. <i>The sisters played football.</i>
mental:	‘sensing’	Senser, <u>Phenomenon</u>	iii. <i>I recall this story [[he is telling]].</i>
relational:	‘being’		
attribution	‘attributing’	Carrier, <u>Attribute</u>	iv. <i>The garden seems large</i>
identification	‘identifying’	Identified/Token, <u>Identifier/Value</u>	v. <i>The issue is [[that no one is here]].</i>

Regarding processes in expository writing, Ørevik’s (2019) analysis of the expository article emphasises *material* and *relational* processes as dominant. In addition to that, two previous studies on expository writing suggest that participants might characteristically be of more complex form. For example, Melissourgou and Frantzi (2018) described syntactic complexity as one feature of English expository articles. Biber et al. (1998) pointed to a high frequency of *that*-clauses in expository writing in English in academic contexts when predicates are complex or when facts or previously stated information are provided (p. 78) – both can likely be the case in interpretations. Rather complex ways of realizing participants include expanding them

through *embedded* phrases (see example *i.* in Table 2, marked as [ *J* ]) or *embedded* clauses (see examples *iii.* and *v.*, marked as [ [ *J* ] ]). If participants are realized through nominal groups comprising *embedded* clauses, the latter can take two forms (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 492–93): They can either be formed as *defining relative* clauses and function to postmodify the *head* of the group (see example *iii.*), or they can take the form of an *enhancing embedded* clause with a *head/thing* of its own (see example *v.*).

### 2.2.2 Logico-semantic relations

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 428), logico-semantic relation types comprise the resources to link sequences of figures within *clause complexes*. While *expansion* is the main type to link experience of the same order, *projection* is the main type to connect experience of a different order. Both types of logico-semantic relations can be further described along subtypes (see Table 3, which includes the suggested notations for functional grammar analysis). For example, one subtype of *projection* is *idea*. This type can often be found when a *mental* process with the experience of *thinking*, *believing* or *wanting* of one order is related to a phenomenon or *idea* clause on a higher order (pp. 253–54, 443–44).

Table 3: Categories of expansion and projection (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 444)

Type	Examples
Expansion	
elaborating	= <i>She is an active child, as many children are.</i>
extending	+ <i>She is an active child, while her brother is more listless.</i>
enhancing	x <i>Sitting still is difficult because she is such an active child.</i>
Projection	
locution	“ <i>She said that she could do that.</i>
idea	‘ <i>She thought that she could do that.</i>

Research suggests that both *expansion* and *projection* might be relevant to ideational meaning-making in expository writing. On the one hand, Biber et al. (1998) and Melissourgou and Frantzi (2018) identified syntactic complexity and causality as typical features. This overlaps with Ørevik (2019), who found a dominant use of enhancing logico-semantic relations in expository articles in the cases of explanations and expansion on circumstantial information. On the other hand, Biber et al.’s (1998) findings concerning a high frequency of *that*-clauses might point to a high use of projection.



### 2.2.3 *Taxonomic relations*

Another important strategy in linking experience and establishing causality is described by Martin and Rose (2007) as the establishment of taxonomic relations. Taxonomic relations are described by them as “the chains of relations between elements as the text unfolds, from one clause to the next. [...] [which] progressively construct taxonomies of people, things, places and their qualities” (p. 75). Ways to establish these lexical chains are through the relationships of *repetition*, *synonymity*, *contrast (opposition and series)*, *class (class to member and co-class)* and *wholes/parts* (pp. 73–90).

### 2.3 *Approaching lexicogrammatical and discourse semantical resources in texts*

As various studies on meaning-making show, there are different ways of inquiring into the different lexicogrammatical systems and discourse semantical sets of meaning-making resources. The differences found across the studies also stress that each researcher must find a way to deal with the “central challenge to micro-analysis [...] [which is] the immense complexity of discourse” (Martin & Rose, 2007, p. 266).

For the approach of the current article, two studies are considered particularly relevant, Ørevik’s (2019) and Troyan and Sembianti’s (2020). Ørevik’s (2019) work presents a comprehensive and deductive approach to describing significant aspects of register and meaning configuration in individual genres based on lexicogrammatical analyses of texts at the clause level. Amongst others, she analyses English texts for reception thoroughly for their transitivity structure and logico-semantic relations by drawing on Halliday’s functional grammar approach. Troyan and Sembianti’s (2020) compiled various questions and units of analysis for interrogating the configuration of the register and meaning variables in any genre. This way of inquiring into texts is similar to, for example, Schleppegrell and Go’s (2007) and Troyan’s (2016). In all those three approaches, the focus is not on analysing clause by clause like Ørevik (2019) did in her dissertation, but on individual elements of the clause. Thus, Troyan and Sembianti (2020), for example, analyse verbs, noun groups or adjective groups to make statements about the configuration of processes, participants or details surrounding the attribute. Regarding their units of analysis, they draw on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and Eggins (2004) as well as on Brisk’s (2015) and Derewianka’s (2011) grammar descriptions. Another approach which has been partially considered relevant for the current study is Rose and Martin’s (2014). For assessment purposes, however, they propose questions and analytical examples that inquire into the configurations of language at the level of context (purpose, staging, phases), register,

discourse and grammar. Inter alia, they inquire into the discourse level in terms of ideation, proposing a focus on the writer's lexical resources to construct the field.

As the theoretical overview shows, meaning-making and language choices can be analysed and described by inquiring into configurations on the level of genre, register, meaning, discourse semantics and lexicogrammar. Nevertheless, research shows that meaning-making can be approached in different ways. Considering the nature of the data, its genre as well as the research aim, researchers must take their own stance towards which and how to analyse meaning-making resources.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Data

As mentioned, the empirical data for this article comprises 12 short authentic learner texts from the TRAWL corpus that constitute an interpretation as part of a film analysis. The choice of the data was motivated by the fact that it should present various responses that appear comparable in terms of the use of meaning-making resources. Also, the responses should be of short text length for comparing and describing patterns in a more comprehensive way. A last criterion for choosing the data was that the responses should appear demanding in terms of meaning-making, so that patterns of texts can be investigated that are yet not fully part of the learners' common meaning-making repertoire.

The data set chosen for the current study was retrieved from a mock exam context of one upper secondary school GFL classroom in which the learners were in year 12 and their fifth year of learning German. In the TRAWL corpus, this data set is coded as DLDA and was collected in the spring of 2018 by a student assistant (see Dirdal et al., 2022). The task of the DLDA set includes eight writing prompts (see Appendix) on a film viewed by the learners, named "Das Leben der Anderen" [*The Lives of Others*]. The film is set in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and is about the figure Gerd Wiesler, who was asked to spy on the artist Georg Dreyman. Once Wiesler discovered that the observation only served his superior's private intentions, namely, to get rid of Dreyman and win over his partner Christa-Maria Siedland, he changed his way of observing the couple. The responses to the eight prompts of the DLDA task are considered distinct stages of the genre film analysis.

The first stage was chosen for the in-depth analysis stage and constituted a response to the following prompt: "Was ist mit dem Titel des Filmes gemeint? Wer sind 'die Anderen'? Kann

der Film mehr als nur eine Meinung haben?“<sup>1</sup>. This did not explicitly indicate a communicative goal. However, it can be concluded from the questions of the writing prompt that the purpose was to write an interpretation with the wider aim of enhancing the understanding of the film. All learners' responses to this task were short, ranging between 32 and 92 words, with an average length of 53 words. The choice of this stage was motivated by the fact that every learner responded to this prompt in similar ways and that it seemed demanding in terms of meaning-making, judging from the fact that the responses were characterised mainly by learner language with a high frequency of grammatical and syntactical errors. Concerning the writing prompt, the following is noteworthy: The word “*Meinung*” is used improperly here as it means “*opinion*” in German, not “*meaning*”.

### 3.2 Method

The present study seeks to qualitatively analyse language choices presented as relevant to meaning-making in interpretations as part of a film analysis across 12 learner responses. The approach taken in this study is to inquire into the variable of field and ideational meaning-making, the latter in terms of central patterns of lexicogrammatical and discourse semantical resources. In line with Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the register variable was approached through one question (see Table 4). The study's focus on the units of analysis takes departure in systems or sets of meaning-making as described by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and Martin and Rose (2007). The focus on taxonomic relations was added as fewer clear patterns of logico-semantic relations might occur in short texts. The questions for interrogating meaning-making are based on Ørevik (2019), Troyan and Sembiente (2020) and partially Rose and Martin (2014).

Table 4: Methodological approach

<b>Field</b>	What is the topic about?
<b>Focus on</b>	What are typical ....
	... processes?
	... participants and what are they like?
	... logico-semantic relations?
	... taxonomic relations?

<sup>1</sup> “What is meant by the title of the film? Who are ‘the others’? Can the film have more than one meaning?”

In line with Ørevik's (2019) deductive approach, language use will be analysed schematically. This also allows comparing language use across all responses. In the following, the analytical approaches and tools used in the current study are presented:

1. *Field*: Based on all learner responses, the configuration of the field variable is identified.
2. *Phase analysis*: Individual phases are identified in the learner responses and labelled according to their function. This enables the detection of patterns across the analyses in a more straightforward manner.
3. *Transitivity analysis*: This analysis identifies characteristic processes and participants, by juxtaposing them on a clause-by-clause basis. This adapted analysis from Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, pp. 211–358) allows analysing the transitivity structure of learner language. The analysis also draws on Ørevik's (2019) and Steiner and Teich's (2004) descriptions of text examples.
4. *Analysis of taxonomy*: This analysis is based on Martin and Rose (2007, p. 82). All occurrences of lexical items in the learners' responses are identified, and their relationship with each other is indicated.
5. *Analysis of logico-semantic relations*: Following Ørevik (2019), the learner responses are analysed for the use of clause complexes. In that regard, instances of *expansion* and *projection* together with their subtypes are identified (see Table 3). This analysis is based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 656) and Eggins (2004).

The present study aims to analyse learner language in its original, authentic form. However, learner language characterized by many grammatical and syntactical errors can be variously interpreted by readers. Therefore, two versions of the learners' responses were re-interpreted before the analysis. In the first version, deviances from the norms were outlined (by underlining and marking with “\*”). In the second version, corrections were made according to how I, the researcher, interpreted the text. Where learner language was difficult to interpret, no such corrections were made, and the analysis treated those parts with caution. Within the analyses, deviations from the norms were indicated only when they were connected to the system of analysis. For example, verb choices that did not align with the intended process were indicated in the analysis of transitivity.

The following findings section presents summary descriptions of the individual analyses of language choices in all 12 learner responses. These descriptions are provided in terms of field, phase structure, transitivity structure, taxonomic relations and logico-semantic relations. In the

findings section, translations are only provided as glosses in the running texts but not for the sentences in the examples. This is because a decision would have been required for each of these examples regarding how to translate the learner language. For the sake of clarity, the examples do not include indications of ambiguous spelling. For example, the word “[w]elt” in learner P60262’s response will be stated as “welt”. Instead, the examples will use square brackets to present corrections or explanations (marked with “=”) that are necessary to understand the analysis.

#### 4. Findings

This section presents relevant patterns of language choices for meaning-making, which were identified in the learners’ responses to the writing prompt asking the learners to interpret a message, organized according to the five analytical steps presented above.

##### 4.1 Field

All learner texts are about who or what is meant by “die Anderen” [*the others*] or by the title “das Leben der Anderen” [*the life of others*]. Those who or whose lives are meant are one or more of the following: People living in the West/in “Westberlin” or people observed by the state security service of the former GDR (“DDR”) or the spy “Gerd Wiesler”.

##### 4.2 Phases

In all learner responses, meaning is construed through at least two phases – one comprising interpretative statements of who “die Anderen” are and one encompassing explanations of the statements. In this second phase, descriptions are made of what the state security is doing, what “Gerd Wiesler” is doing/experiencing or desires or what “die Anderen” are feeling or thinking.

##### 4.3 Transitivity structure: processes and participants

In the first phase containing interpretative statements, *relational* processes can be found as central elements to meaning-making in all learner responses. At least one of those processes is in the *identifying* mode, typically realized by the learners through the verb groups “sein” [*to be*], “bedeuten” [*to mean*] or “ist gemeint” [*is meant*] (see examples *i. - v.*). While also other verbs can be found, they appear defective in clauses being of *identifying* mode structure.

- i. *Die Anderen sind die Menschen im West Deutschland*. (P60267)
- ii. *“Die Anderen” sind alle [[die überwachen werden]]*. (P60265)
- iii. *Der Titel kann [[, dass man sieht das Leben der Anderen,]] bedeuten*. (P60266)
- iv. *Mit dem Titel “Das Leben der Anderen“, ist es gemeint [[, dass das Leben von Gerd Wiesler handelt von jemand Anderen]]*. (P60269)
- v. *Es [=der Titel] konnte \*über [auf] \*[[...]] [diejenigen] [[\*wer Stasi hat überwachten]] \*handeln [hindeuten]*. *Oder die Menschen an der Anderen Seite. Also West-Deutschen*. (P60260)

Across the learner responses, three participants occur as *Identified/Tokens* in *relational* clauses: “Der Titel” [*the title*], “Das Leben der Anderen” [*The Lives of Others*], or “die Anderen” [*the others*]. More variation can be seen across those participants, which the learners use to identify or give a value to those three previously mentioned participants. Examples of participants taking the role of *Identifier/Value* can be found in examples *i.-v.* (marked as *underlined*). Regarding their structure, the following becomes clear: They are often of quite complex nature and realized by the learners in one or more of the following ways:

- *Noun complexes* (see example *v.*).
- *Embedded* phrases that further characterize the nouns “Leben” [*life*] or (references to) the noun “Menschen” [*people*] (see examples *i.*, *iii.* and *iv.*).
- *Embedded* clauses (see examples *ii. - v.*) that occur frequently and may take two forms:
  1. As a *defining relative* clause, used to express that a certain group of people are monitored by the state security or have a certain attitude towards the former GDR (see examples *ii.* and *v.*).
  2. As an *enhancing embedded* clause, denoting that one or more people are dealing in some way with a different life (see examples *iii.* and *vi.*)

In the phase comprising explanations, learners particularly make use of *material* and/or *mental* processes. In part, learners also use these processes in *embedded* clauses of interpretative statements. While some *material* verbs like “arbeiten” [*to work*], “leben” [*to live*] or “überwachen” [*to monitor*] occur across various responses, the learners differ otherwise in their use of *material* and *mental* verb groups, depending on what the learners chose to focus on in their response. The examples in *vi. - viii.* provide some insights into the range of *material* and *mental* verb

groups used (The verb phrase “ist ... \*gegen (=dagegen)” [*to be against*] in example *vi.* is understood as a *mental*-like verb after Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 273). As can be seen in examples *vii.* and *viii.*, also *relational* processes are sometimes used in the explanations. These are often expressed through the verb phrases “war” / “waren” [was/were] or “hatten” [had]. In example *vii.*, also the verb phrase “wird \*geprägt” is understood as a relative verb.

- vi.* ... weil sie [=die Anderen] nicht die DDR stützen. Sie Leben i [in] einer welt wo sie nicht ales können sagen or meinen. Sie müssen verstecken der Beweis das Sie gegen Die DDR ist. (P60662)
- vii.* Die Gesellschaft in der DDR wird \*Geprät [=geprägt?] mit der strengen Zensur. Es war ein Überwachungsgesellschaft. Sie, dass in Stasi arbeitet, überwachen anderes Leben. Sie haben sehen wie ihren geliebt. (P60665)
- viii.* Sie [=die Menschen in Westdeutschland] hatten viel mehr Freiheit als die Einwohner im Ost. Gerd Wiesler war einen einsam Mann, und hat sein Leben, durch Christa-Maria und Georg, gelebt. Er wünschte sich ein mehr inhaltsreich Lebe, und sah auf Georg und Christa-Maria, wie ein Beispiel. (P60667)

While the use of *material* and *mental* verbs shows considerable variation, the participants in those processes appear more uniform: On the one hand, many noun groups can be found that either revolve around the items “DDR” or “Ostdeutschland” or are related overall to this lexical field (e.g. “Stasi” [*state security service of the former GDR*] or “Überwachungsgesellschaft” [*surveillance society*]) (see examples *vi.* and *vii.*). On the other hand, participants often refer to or revolve around people in the film context, as can be seen in example *viii.* Both groups of participants are particular in how they refer to a coherent outer context associated with specific actions and facts. Seemingly, a lot of experiential meaning is thus construed through a limited number of participants. This becomes particularly clear in learner responses that only comprise short additional explanations such as in P60661’s: “Weil sie [=das Paar] nicht für das Leben in Ostberlin war”. A third commonly found participant is the noun “Leben” (or “Welt” as in example *vi.*). The noun group takes the role of *Scope* and is often further qualified, for example, by the attributes “\*schöne” [*beautiful*], “\*mehr inhaltsreich” [*meaningful*] and “armes und langweiliges” [*poor and boring*]. This participant is thus often clearly positively or negatively loaded.

#### 4.4 Taxonomic relations

As shown, participants are from a limited range of lexical fields and mostly refer to the context of the GDR and the film. Accordingly, coherent experience is construed by lexical items that stand in *co-class* or *co-part* relation to each other. As both contexts comprise stark contrasts of positively or negatively associated ways of living, namely the East vs West, Gerd Wiesler vs the couple (Christa Maria Sieland and Georg Dreyman) and a boring vs an exciting life, the learners characteristically establish the relation of *opposition* by drawing on at least one pair of opposing lexical items in their responses. The construed contrast between the lives of some and that of others is further emphasised in various ways by the learners: By giving lexical items further positive or negative attributions, by certain verb choices like “wünschten” [*desired*] or “ist ... \*gegen” or by more lengthy explanation phases. In the latter, a more comprehensive negative or positive picture of the life of a specific group is characteristically construed, which then eventually contrasts clearly with one or more opposing lexical items. As can be seen in the responses P60662, P60665 and P60667, which contain more lengthy explanation phases (see examples *vi.*, *vii.* and *viii.*), various lexical items stand in *co-class/co-part* or *synonymous* relationship with each other and thereby construe a clear picture of a life which is or is not desirable, for example,

- *DDR – welt wo sie nicht alles können sagen or meinen (P60662, example vi.)*
- *DDR – strengen Zensur – Überwachengesellschaft (P60665, example vii.)*
- *West Deutschland – Freiheit – Christa-Maria und Georg – inhaltsreich Lebe, (P60667, example viii.)*

Thus, the relations of *co-part* and *co-class*, *synonymity* and also *repetition* appear important for construing coherent experience, while the relation of *opposition* is the core strategy across the learner responses for construing the causal relationship between the lives of some and that of others. As can be seen, the context provided various options for the learners to establish the different taxonomic relations.

#### 4.5 Logico-semantic relations

The analysis shows that causal relationships are established by learners also through logico-semantic relations, even if this is not a central strategy across all learner responses. For construing causality between the interpretative statements and explanation, the most common type of relation is expansion of *enhancing* subtype. Here, the interpretative statement is enhanced



through a clause comprising the conjunction “weil” [*because*]. In example *ix.*, this type of relation is even used twice by the learner. Another type of expansion used to explain further who “die Anderen” are occurs in two learner responses, and this is *elaboration*. In those cases, the learners expand the interpretative statement through the connector “also” [*thus*] (see example *x.*).

Beyond those types of expansion, projection of the subtype *idea* also appears as a logico-semantic relation that is particularly relevant to meaning-making in various learner responses. The learners use this relation to signify that the interpretative statement is something which the learner, thus “Ich” [*I*], considers as true or possible. Central to this are clauses that are realised through the verb phrases “denken” [*to think*] (see example *xi.*) and “glauben” [*to believe*]. These expressions appear to be a particular choice in that they constitute a rather personal way of using language and further increase syntactic complexity. As example *xi.* shows, the interpretative statement is not only formed as an *embedded* clause, but the latter even becomes part of a larger clause complex headed by the projecting clause.

- ix. Das Leben der anderen, kann vielleicht illustrieren Dreyman und Christa-Maria's Leben. Weil sie nicht für das Leben in Ostberlin war. Der Titel kann auch das Leben für Gerd Wiesler illustrieren, weil er für Stasi arbeitet. (P60661)*
- x. Die “Anderen“ sind Georg Dreyman und Christa-Maria Sieland, also die Personen, die überwachten war. (P60669)*
- xi. Ich denke, dass „die Anderen“ die Personen sind, die von Stasi überwacht werden. (P60272)*

#### 4.6 Summary of the most central language choices for meaning-making

To arrive at an interpretation, the findings show that *relational* processes in the *identifying* mode are most central. However, interpretative statements can hardly be construed by participants taking the form of a single common or proper noun as the *Identifier/Value*. Instead, nominal groups with noun complexes, *embedded* phrases and *defining relative clauses* are found to be common ways of realizing the participant. Especially if the learners choose the *relational* verb groups “gemeint ist” (as suggested in the writing prompt) and “bedeuten”, participants were characteristically formed as *enhancing embedded clauses*. As the learners can refer to an outer context that is coherent, presents common knowledge and comprises clearly definable opposing groups, they can, however, resort to a limited number of lexical resources for construing experience through the taxonomic relations of *co-class*, *co-part*, *synonymity*, *repetition* and

particularly *opposition*. To intensify the opposition between the lives of some and that of others, various learners choose to add more sequences to the explanation or attribute a certain quality to the neutral item “Leben”. As the analysis shows, the taxonomic relation of *opposition* is central to establishing causality. This relation is construed by various learners also through the logico-semantic relationship of *enhancement* with the conjunction “weil”. Another logico-semantic relationship which is further established across various learner responses is the relationship of projection. This relationship is used to construe the interpretative statement as an idea of the author/learner.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of the current article was to identify and describe language choices used by Norwegian GFL learners to make meaning to an interpretation in the genre of literature/film analysis. The study presented a detailed account of how learners used meaning-making resources. In particular, the findings identified the central role that *relational* processes in the *identifying* mode – together with, in part, very complex participants taking the role of *Identifier/Value* – have for arriving at an interpretation. These specific choices corroborate Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) claim that *relational* processes “represent a strategy for expanding the naming resources of language” (p. 277), something which matches the writing act of this interpretation. Other identified patterns, such as the use of *that*-clauses (in this study to realize *embedded* and *idea* clauses), *material* processes and the establishment of *causality*, are also in line with features which Biber et al. (1998), Melissourgou and Frantzi (2018) and Ørevik (2019) found to be specific for expository genres. The current study's findings further pointed out how resources were used specifically for the task at hand. For example, it became clear that the context of the film analysis was decisive to how participants were chosen and how these choices contributed to construing experience. This stresses the role of what Halliday (1999) calls “co-text”, in this case the film “Das Leben der Anderen”, which is set in the context of East Berlin of the former GDR. Furthermore, the study has shown that the writing prompt and the learning context are decisive for how language choices are patterned. This becomes particularly clear in the learners’ decisions to project interpretations as personal ideas. This is in line with Hasund and Hasselgård (2022), who point out that writing in the secondary school EFL context is characterised by personal language choices. Overall, the current study thus presented several relevant patterns of language choices for meaning-making to a specific task and context.

As the findings have shown, the co-text and the context can be helpful to the learners' journey to meaningful content even if the learners' linguistic repertoire is yet limited. Even if learners do not correctly realise lexical choices, they can quite easily be understood as they refer to a coherent outer context. The fact that *relational* processes play a central role in meaning-making to the interpretation of the DLDA task further helps the learners in their meaning-making process. This is because the correct realisation of *relational* verb groups is also less decisive for meaning-making as they can be considered as non-salient in *relational* processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 262). Nevertheless, the findings also presented how the overall context might lead to further demands. The latter was, for example, the case when learners draw on the relational verb group "gemeint ist" from the writing prompt which requires *Identifiers/Values* of more complex syntactic structure. Also, the learners' decision to establish interpretative statements as projected ideas leads to an enhanced syntactic complexity which needs to be navigated with an often limited linguistic repertoire. Detailed descriptions of how learners characteristically make meaning to a particular task at hand thus not only provide important insights into relevant patterns of language choices but also into how the meaning-making process is influenced by the context surrounding a specific task. Furthermore, descriptions such as those of the current study are vital to understanding what learners can already do on their journey towards meaningful content production. The findings showed that each learner's reply could be understood as providing an interpretation through similar patterns of phases and language choices. The learners managed to do so with their current linguistic repertoires despite varying degrees of errors in their responses. In line with studies from other learning contexts (e.g. Bunch & Willett, 2013; Yasuda, 2019), the descriptions obtained in the present study additionally show how learners navigate complex language demands. Particularly, the construction of complex *Identifiers/Values* presents high demands in terms of structuring groups and clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 491). Thus, the findings of this study also showed "what *can* be done with language, rather than what *cannot*" (Schleppegrell & Go, 2007, p. 530 [emphasis in original]). All this stresses the need for more research into how primary or secondary school non-English FL learners use language to make meaning, as writing prompts and the learners' (meta)linguistic repertoires are often of a particular nature in this learning context.

As both general and highly specific patterns of language choices were eventually identified, the present study suggests how to analyse language choices for meaning-making when the study data is of short text length. In that regard, the study advocates that Ørevik's (2019) genre typology serves as a fruitful starting point for the analysis of non-English FL learners' responses. Consistent also with other previous works from the non-English FL learning environment (e.g.

Abdel-Malek, 2020; Ryshina-Pankova, 2020), the findings further suggest that approaches within SFL theory can be flexibly adapted to the non-English FL context, also with regard to secondary school education. Even though meaning-making cannot be described exhaustively and even less so across 12 different learner responses, the study still provides evidence to the claim that “[a]ll texts can [...] be described in terms of both form and function, that is, how their elements are organized for making meanings and the purposes this serves” (Hyland, 2019, p. 19).

## 6. Conclusion

This study investigated characteristic patterns of language choices for ideational meaning-making in secondary school GFL learners’ responses to a prompt asking for an interpretation as part of a film analysis. The study revealed several strategies and language choices that presented themselves as relevant for meaning-making. While some patterns appear to be rather common for expository writing in general, the study also demonstrated patterns that are specific to the co-text and learning context in which the writing was situated. Beyond that, the study also provided insights into the sophistication of the learners’ meaning-making.

Against this backdrop, the findings may have important pedagogical implications. First, descriptions like those of the current study can provide important information on what syntactic and linguistic features need to be particularly focused on in supporting the learners in their journey towards meaningful content production. In the case of the task analysed in the current study, these were *relational* processes with an *Identifier/Value* that is often realized through noun complexes, *embedded* phrases and clauses. Also, logico-semantic relationships were typically used that express projection and thereby increase the level of syntactic complexity even further. Second, the findings stress the need for a stronger focus on function instead of form in the secondary school non-English FL classroom (e.g. Hyland, 2019; Kvam, 2012; Reichelt, 2019). Finally, the findings make a contribution to pointing out that a genre-based analysis can help to approach data from different learning contexts on a whole-text level. In this way, a better understanding of meaning-making to different main functions as, for example, provided by the CEFR (*Council of Europe*, 2001) can be provided.

For arriving at a broader understanding of meaning-making in secondary school FL learning contexts, however, more research is needed that focuses on writing done in other classroom settings or on responses to tasks that elicit other genres or less uniform meaning-making strategies. Research is also desirable that has a stronger focus on the learners’ individual strategies

of language use. Looking at the value that research on meaning-making can have and the need for findings from other writing contexts, authentic learner data as provided by the TRAWL corpus are of core value.

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## **Appendix A. The DLDA task (Source: TRAWL corpus)**

Prüfung 2. März 2018

**Hilfsmittel: Ordnett +**

Ankunft (Buch)

Arbeitsblatt "Das Leben der Anderen" (Papier)

**Schreiben:**

Die DDR und Das Leben der Anderen – Handlung & Themen

Beantworte die folgenden Fragen so gut und soweit möglich:

### **1. Das Leben der Anderen**

Was ist mit dem Titel des Filmes gemeint? Wer sind 'die Anderen'? Kann der Titel mehr als nur eine Meinung haben?

### **2. Ort und Zeit**

Wo befinden wir uns in diesem Film? Wie können wir sehen, dass der Film/die Handlung in den siebziger/achtziger Jahren spielt?

### **3. Personbeschreibung**

Beschreibe und vergleiche zwei von den Personen in dem Film (nicht Gerd Wiesler)!

### **4. Eine dynamische Person**

Warum/wie können wir sagen – und sehen –, dass Gerd Wiesler eine dynamische Person ist, also eine Person, die sich während des Filmes verändert?

### **5. Bild und Handlung**

Was wird hier von diesen Männern geplant?

[In the original, a picture is given]

### **6. Was für Themen werden in dem Film behandelt?**

**7. Was, findest du, bedeutet es eigentlich, ein guter Mensch zu sein – in dem Film und im Leben?**

**8. Beschreibe das Leben in der DDR nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg:**



## **Appendix B. The learners' responses to the first prompt of the DLDA task (Source: TRAWL corpus)**

### **P60260**

Ich glaube das dem Titel mehr als nur eine Meinung haben. Es konnte über wer Stasi hat überwachten handeltn. [o]der die Menschen an der Anderen [S]eite. Also West-Deutschen. Wir kennen und begleitend die Menschen von Ost-Deutschland. Ich glaube das ist die Meinung mit der Film. Und das wir konnten selbst über es denken.

### **P60261**

Das Leben der anderen, kann vielleicht illustrieren Dreyman und Christa-Maria's Leben. Weil sie nicht für das Leben in Ostberlin war. Der Titel kann auch das Leben für Gerd Wiesler illustrieren, weil er für Stasi arbeitet.

### **P60262**

Der Titel, das Leben der Anderen Meinung ist das die Anderen hat ein Anderen Leben weil sie nicht die DDR stützen. Sie Leben i einer [w]elt wo sie nicht ales können sagen or meinen. Sie müssen verstecken der Beweis das Sie gegen Die DDR ist. Der Titel mein das Sie haben einer ganzer anderes Leben als die der stützen die DDR.

### **P60263**

Der Titel des Filmes handelt von der Verlorenheit der Individuums in Ostberlin. "Die andren" ist der Menschen in Westberlin, dass eine schöne Leben hat. Der Menschen, dass in Ostberlin wohnen, wunsch in Westberlin wohnen, weil es ist sehr schön in Westberlin. Ich denke, dass der Menschen in Ostberlin wunsch in Westberlin wohnen, weil Ostberlin ist nicht gut.

### **P60265**

Der Film heißt "Das Leben der Anderen" und handelt über einen Mann wo heißt Gerd Wiesler. Er war einen Spion. Der Stasi-Hauptmann wird von seinem Freund Grubitz eine Beauftragt. "Operative Vorgang" wird inzeniert. Operative Vorgang war der überwacht bei Georg Dreyman und seine Freundin Christa-Maria. Bei dem Wiesler das Paar heimlich überwachen soll. Ich glaube, dass "Die Anderen" sind alle die überwachen werden. Die Gesellschaft in der DDR wird Geprät mit der strengen Zensur. Es war ein Überwachengesellschaft. Sie, dass in Stasi arbeitet, überwachen anderes Leben. Sie haben sehen wie ihren geliebt.

### **P60266**

Der Titel kann, dass man sieht das Leben der Anderen, bedeuten. In dem Filme, erlebt Gerd Wiesler allez in das Leben der Paar Georg und Christa sind "die Anderen" und haben ihr Leben überwacht. Ich denne, dass Gerd durch die Paar leben. Warum den[k]e ich das? Weil Gerd hat ein armes und langweiliges Leben, lebe er sein leben durch die Paar.

**P60267**

„Die Anderen“ sind die Menschen im West Deutschland. Sie hatten viel mehr Freiheit als die Einwohner im Ost. Gerd Wiesler war einen einsam Mann, und hat sein Leben, durch Christa-Maria und Georg, gelebt. Er wünschte sich ein mehr inhaltsreich Lebe, und sah auf Georg und Christa-Maria, wie ein Beispiel.

**P60268**

Der Titel meint, dass wir ein blick in das leben “der Anderen kriegen und wie das Leben war da. “die Anderen“ ist die mennschen i DDR, weil wir sehen wie das Leben i DDR war mit die Stazi-überwachung. Es kann auch dass Gerd Wiesler ein Blick in die norm[al]e Leute in DDR kriegt.

**P60269**

Mit dem Titel “Das Leben der Anderen“, ist es gemeint, dass das Leben von Gerd Wiesler handelt von jemand Anderen. Die “Anderen“ sind Georg Dreyman und Christa-Maria Sieland, also die Personen, die überwachten war. Der Titel kann auch bedeuten, dass viele Menschen von Anderen Lebens beschäftigt sind.

**P60270**

Mit dem Titel “Das Leben der Anderen“ meint der Schriftsteller vielleicht, dass der Film handelt sich um die Stück der Georg Dreyman schreibt über die Welt draußen die DDR. Dreyman versucht die Augen die DDR-einwohnern aufzusperren. Die Anderen kann doch beider die Ost- und Westdeutschen sein und der Titel kann viele bedeutungen haben.

**P60271**

Der Titel “Das Leben der Anderen“ kommt von der Spionage auf Georg Dreyman und Christa Marie Sieland.

Der Stasi-Mann Gerd Wiesler hat sich in ihrer Leben gelebt, wenn er sie abgehört hat.

**P60272**

Ich denke, dass „die Anderen“ die Personen sind, die von Stasi überwacht werden. Wir bekommen einen Einblick in das Leben für die normalen Menchen im DDR. Der Titel kann selbstverständlich mehr als nur eine Meinung Haben.