

This presentation critically engages with Jessica Flanigan's *Why It's OK to Have Bad Spelling and Grammar* (2025), a provocation that challenges long-standing assumptions about correctness, linguistic authority, and the social power of prescriptive grammar. Drawing from my perspective as an Australian teacher educator with experience with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), I examine both the value and the limitations of Flanigan's argument that grammatical "non-compliance" should be normalised as an act of linguistic liberation. While her critique illuminates the ways in which correction practices can reinforce classed and racialised hierarchies, it also risks overlooking the pedagogical and emancipatory potential of explicit, functional grammar teaching.

In the Australian context, SFL has long provided a meaning-focused model of grammar that enables students to analyse how language constructs relationships, positions readers, and circulates social ideologies. This stands in contrast to the prescriptive, decontextualised grammar that Flanigan critiques. At the same time, one recent change to the Australian Curriculum: English, the removal of the Language Variation and Change sub-strand, raises concerns about diminishing space for critical engagement with linguistic diversity and the sociopolitical forces shaping language use. Using examples from classroom practice and research, this presentation illustrates how SFL-informed pedagogies can support students to think critically about texts, recognise linguistic plurality, and develop agency as readers and writers.

Participants will be invited to reflect on the ethical and political dimensions of grammar teaching and to consider how explicit knowledge about language, when approached through SFL, can expand rather than restrict students' repertoires. The session aims to strengthen educators' capacity to design pedagogies that value diverse ways of using language while equipping students to interrogate and challenge the textual worlds they encounter.