

Research Trends in Systemic Functional Linguistics Studies of Language Textbooks (2020–2025)

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Abstract

This study aims to identify research directions, thematic patterns, and research gaps through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The PRISMA 2020 framework was employed to screen 445 publications, including those indexed in Scopus and in national journals indexed in SINTA 1–3. The data collection technique used in this study was documentary research, involving the systematic retrieval of scholarly articles from the Publish or Perish (PoP) database, which is indexed in Scopus and SINTA 1–3. Data analysis followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which guided the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion processes, and ensured transparent and standardised reporting of the systematic review. The findings reveal that SFL-based studies of language textbooks during 2020–2025 are predominantly focused on ideational meaning, particularly transitivity analysis, which is widely used to examine representations of gender, ideology, and social values in English language textbooks. The second dominant strand involves interpersonal meaning, especially appraisal system analysis, while the third focuses on textual meaning through thematic structure, cohesion, and text readability. In addition, the integration of genre analysis and multimodality has emerged, indicating an expansion of SFL applications within discourse-based literacy contexts. The findings also highlight significant research gaps, including the dominance of English-language contexts, the limited number of studies on Arabic and non-Western-language textbooks, and the lack of integration among SFL, corpus-based approaches, and AI-driven analytical technologies. This study concludes that SFL research is moving toward a more integrative and multimodal paradigm, while also offering substantial opportunities to expand SFL-based studies of Arabic language textbooks to strengthen the global representation of Systemic Functional Linguistics in language education.

Keywords

Arabic Language, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Systematic Literature Review (SLR), Textbook.



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INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are a central component of language learning, as they provide the structure for instructional content, linguistic models, and sequences of learning activities that directly shape students' learning experiences (Richards, 2014). In the context of language education, textbooks may exhibit strengths in format and organisation, yet remain limited in their treatment of discourse, meaning representation, cohesion, and cultural dimensions (Alshumaimeri & Alharbi, 2024). The quality of discourse within texts plays a crucial role in learning success, as texts must stimulate higher-order thinking skills and support students' literacy development (Tomlinson, 2023). Therefore, systematic analysis of language use and discourse structure in textbooks is essential to ensure their alignment with the needs of contemporary learners.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a robust providential framework for evaluating language within social and ecological contexts (Halliday, 1967). From an SFL perspective, language is viewed as a system of meaning realised through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Bakuuro, 2017). Gabbianelli argues that applying the SFL framework to textbook analysis enables researchers to evaluate how texts represent experience (ideational meaning), construct social relations (interpersonal meaning), and organise coherently for learning purposes (Gabbianelli, 2023). In textbook evaluation, SFL-based analysis also reveals the extent to which texts support rich and meaningful linguistic experiences that facilitate students' literacy development and language acquisition (Djatmika et al., 2022). Consequently, the application of SFL is particularly strategic for assessing the quality of Arabic language textbooks, especially those used in schools and madrasahs.

During the period 2020–2025, scholarly interest in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) within language and educational research has increased significantly, in line with a paradigm shift toward literacy-based and discourse-oriented approaches to learning (Hyland, 2022). Global studies indicate that SFL has been extensively applied to the analysis of English and Vietnamese language textbooks, particularly to examine thematic progression, cohesion, transitivity, genre structure, and the realisation functions within SFL (Alshumaimeri & Alharbi, 2024; Darong, 2025; Darong & Regus, 2024; Dost, 2025; To, 2018). In contrast, SFL-based studies in Arabic have primarily focused on texts, such as media discourse, news texts, and Qur'anic verses (Alamiri, 2018, 2022; Alamiri & Mickan, 2016). Consequently, systematic investigations that map research trends in SFL-based analyses of Arabic language textbooks remain highly limited and insufficiently documented (Alfraidi, 2021).

This situation underscores an urgent need to examine methodological developments, research foci, and theoretical contributions produced over the past five years.

Furthermore, recent curriculum transformations, such as the Kurikulum Merdeka, emphasise development, text comprehension, and context-based learning, thereby requiring textbooks that align with SFL principles (Zamjani et al., 2024). Previous studies have demonstrated that SFL can effectively assess the extent to which textbooks present communicative, cohesive texts aligned with instructional objectives (Darong, 2025). However, several studies report that Arabic languages prioritise linguistic aspects and social context, which are central to the SFL framework (Royani & Nawawi, 2020). Accordingly, mapping research trends is essential to identify existing strengths, limitations, and research gaps that warrant further development.

Advances in text analysis technologies, such as corpus linguistics, bibliometric mapping, and computational discourse analysis, have also created opportunities to integrate SFL with more objective, data-driven digital tools. Nevertheless, studies applying such integrative approaches to Arabic language textbooks remain scarce (Aladeemy et al., 2024). This condition highlights a critical research gap that needs to be addressed through a systematic investigation grounded in a Systematic Literature Review approach.

To map the development and research trends of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in language textbook studies during the period 2020–2025, this study is designed to address three main research foci. Q1 focuses on the characteristics of SFL research on language textbooks, including the types of textbooks analysed and the languages investigated. Q2 examines the aspects of Systemic Functional Linguistics applied in language textbook research during the 2020–2025 period. Finally, Q3 analyses the primary research foci and identifies research gaps in SFL-based studies of language textbooks during the same period. The SLR approach enables a more in-depth identification of knowledge development, inconsistencies in research findings, and opportunities for future research. Accordingly, the findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to advancing SFL in textbook studies and practically to improving textbook quality in educational institutions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) research Design to map research trends related to the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in Arabic language textbooks during the period 2020–2025. This approach was selected

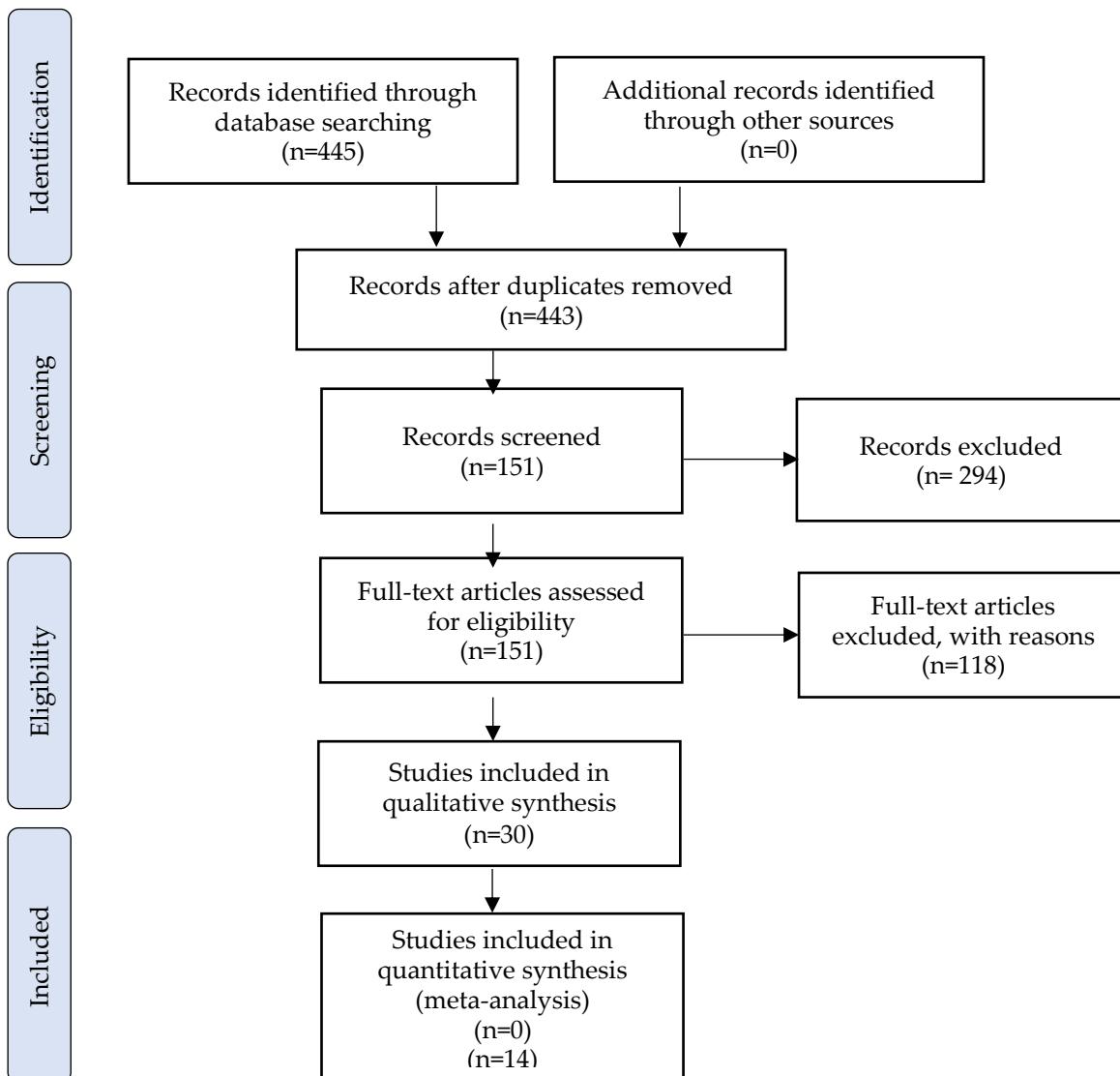
because it allows for a comprehensive overview of the development of research foci, methodological tendencies, and underexplored research gaps. To ensure methodological rigour, this study adopts the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. PRISMA is a set of evidence-based minimum criteria designed to support the reporting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses that assess the benefits of specific interventions or phenomena (Liberati et al., 2009; Matthew et al., 2021). The PRISMA framework consists of four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Saifudin et al., 2025). The identification stage involves determining the search strategy by formulating key search terms, publication timeframes, and selected databases. The screening stage includes removing duplicate records, verifying access, and conducting an initial article review. The eligibility stage involves full-text re-reading of the remaining articles to assess their compliance with the research topic, methodology, language, and contextual focus. Finally, the inclusion stage consists of selecting components by applying the leioncriteusedlied in this study.

Table 1. The inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication year	2020–2025	< 2020 / > 2025
Theoretical framework	Explicit SFL	Non-SFL / implicit
Object of study	Language textbooks	Non-textbook media
Context	Language education	Non-educational contexts
Type of publication	Journal articles	Proceedings, theses, books
Access	Full-text available	Abstract only

To clarify the article selection process in this review, a PRISMA flow diagram is employed to illustrate the stages from article identification to final inclusion.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram



At the identification stage, a total of 445 articles were retrieved from scientific databases, with no additional records identified from other sources. After removing duplicate records, 443 articles remained and were subsequently screened based on their titles and abstracts. During the screening stage, 151 articles were deemed relevant and advanced to full-text assessment, while 294 were excluded for not aligning with the research focus. At the eligibility stage, an in-depth evaluation of the complete texts was conducted, resulting in the exclusion of 118 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Consequently, 30 articles were deemed eligible and included in the qualitative synthesis. This study did not involve quantitative synthesis or meta-analysis because the data were qualitative and descriptive.

The research sample consisted of journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 that explicitly examined Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) within the context of Arabic language textbooks. The articles were sourced from reputable databases, such as Scopus, and from nationally indexed journals listed in SINTA. The inclusion criteria covered studies that addressed SFL frameworks in language education, focusing primarily on textbook-based research and Araas aas a seclanguageagee multi-. A stage selection process, 30; articles met A stage used a criterion-related, etcollewereon involved systematic keyword searches, downloading full-text articles in PDF format, and extracting relevant metadata, including research objectives, textbook-related objects of analysis, SFL components examined, and research methodologies employed. The data we analysed was from Twitter. Meanwhile, analysing the patterns of analysisFL, including metafunctional analysis, thematic progression, cohesion, and readability, and examining their pedagogical implications for the development of Arabic language textbooks.

This analytical process provides a comprehensive understanding of research directions and highlights emerging areas for future investigation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the PRISMA-guided screening process of 445 articles, a total of 30 reputable journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 were included in this systematic literature review. These selected studies focus on the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in the analysis of language textbooks across various educational contexts and languages. All of the included studies serve as the empirical basis for addressing the three research questions proposed in this review.

Table 2. Criteria Breakdown of Reviewed Studies

No	Article Title	Name of Source
1	(De) Construction of Gendered Identities in ELT Materials: A Systemic Functional View	Forma y Función
2	Constructing History through Process and Participant Types: An SFL Analysis of Matric-Level Pakistan Studies Textbooks	<i>Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)</i>
3	Gender Representation in PTB English Textbook for Grade 8: A Transitivity Analysis	<i>Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)</i>
4	How English Texts Work for Deaf Learners: A View from Systemic Functional Linguistics' Transitivity System	ELE Reviews: English Language Education Reviews
5	Representation of Self and Other in Two Tunisian EFL Textbooks: An Appraisal Perspective	Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics
6	The Intersection of Psycholinguistics and Systemic Functional Linguistics in Textbooks	PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

7	Thematic Structure and Thematic Progression in Reading Texts in Vietnamese High School English Textbooks	World Journal of English Language
8	Unveiling Halliday's Textual Metafunction in Indonesian and Samoan EFL Textbooks for Year 10	ETERNAL (English Teaching Journal)
9	Promoting the formation of environmental awareness in children: the representation of nature in Chinese language textbooks	Journal of World Languages
10	The Interpersonal Meaning of the "Elephant" Report Text toward EFL Secondary Students' Textbook	Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature
11	The representation of counterproductive religious values in a selected chapter of an Indonesian ELT textbook: Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis	Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Research
12	Unpacking linguistic features in EFL textbooks using systemic functional linguistics: Transitivity, Mood, and nominal group structure analysis	Eastern European Journal of Psycholinguistics
13	The characteristics of diagrams in scientific explanations: Multimodal integration of written and visual modes of representation in junior high school textbooks	Science Education
14	The representation of social actors in EFL textbooks: a systemic functional linguistics perspective	Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics
15	'Is the Picture Worth a Thousand Words?': The Interpersonal Meanings of a Dialogue in an EFL Textbook	<i>JOLLT (Journal of Languages and Language Teaching)</i>
16	A Social Semiotic Analysis of Register Variables in the Indonesian Government-Distributed English Textbook	Englie: English Learning Innovation
17	Arguing Dialogically: Engagement Resources Used in an Indonesian Senior Secondary EFL Textbook	Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature
18	Does the English Textbook for Young Learners in Indonesia Promote Gender Equality?	Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics
19	Interpersonal meaning in multimodal English textbooks	Journal of World Languages
20	SFL-Driven Analysis of English Reading Materials within the Textbooks for High School Students in Indonesia	LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network
21	The Ideational Meanings of Multimodal Texts Presented in an EFL Textbook	Teaching & Learning English in Multicultural Contexts (TLEMC)
22	Using linguistic-informed analysis to assess model texts for teaching EFL Reading	Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics
23	An appraisal analysis of narrative text from the 11th-grade English textbook	Allure Journal: A Journal of Applied Linguistics, Linguistics, and Literature
24	Lexical density and variation in Indonesian folklores in English student textbooks: an SFL study	Leksika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Pengajarannya
25	Genres Classification and Generic Structures in the English Language Textbooks and Economics and Islamic Economics in an Indonesian University	LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research
26	Systemic Functional Linguistics, Legal Genres, and Their Configurations in the Textbook of Islamic Law and Jurisprudence at a University in Indonesia	Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies

27	Multimodal Analysis of Gender Identity in ELT Textbooks	Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences
28	The Representation of Consumptive and Productive Behaviours in English Textbooks for Senior High School Students	Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra
29	The Representation of Gender in a Textbook Entitled When English Rings a Bell	Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra
30	The Textbook and the Deskilling of Teachers' Work: A Comparative English-Spanish Functional Linguistic Analysis	Academia

The mapping of the 30 articles presented in Table 1 indicates that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based research on language textbook studies has experienced significant development during the period 2020–2025.

The majority of the articles focus on the analysis of English language textbooks for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners across primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. These studies highlight critical aspects of social and linguistic representation embedded in instructional texts. Several studies address issues of gender representation, as illustrated in the works of (Rasti (2025) and (Aesarohh et al. (2022). Other studies examined social and environmental texts, collected data on religious values, and examined environmental awareness (Andriani, 2024; anecological texts).

Analysis of the linguistic focus across the mapped studies demonstrates that all three core metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics are variably employed in language textbook research. The ideational metafunction is prominently represented in studies examining the structural elements of language, such as transitivity, process types, and participant roles.

He intr(peet dandnal metafunctioni(s captured in studies exploring the use of mood, modality, and interpersonal meaning in interactive dialogues in EFL textbooks, as shown in research by (Chen202 (Maesaroh et al., 202 (M)firoh (2021), and Sugianto et al. (2) . The metafunction is textualised in texts. And metafunctions isettextualised cohesiveddressed textual aspects, as demonstrated by (Auli et al., 202;(Jat), Ika et al., 202;(Thi), and et al., 202).

This review further reveals a significant increase in SFL-based research during the period 2022–2025. Within this timeframe, SFL has increasingly been adopted as a primary framework for educational discourse analysis and language curriculum development.

Three main factors drive this trend. First, there is a growing awareness of the importance of function- and context-based language analysis, which effectively explains the relationship between linguistic form and social meaning. Second, national curriculum policies increasingly emphasise

communicative competence, critical thinking, and multimodal literacy, positioning SFL as a highly relevant analytical framework in language education. Third, advances in technology and multimodal analysis have expanded the application of SFL to visual and digital domains, including the analysis of illustrated texts and electronic teaching materials.

Thus, the period 2022–2025 marks a crucial phase in strengthening Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as an adaptive, context-sensitive linguistic approach to addressing the challenges of language education in the digital era.

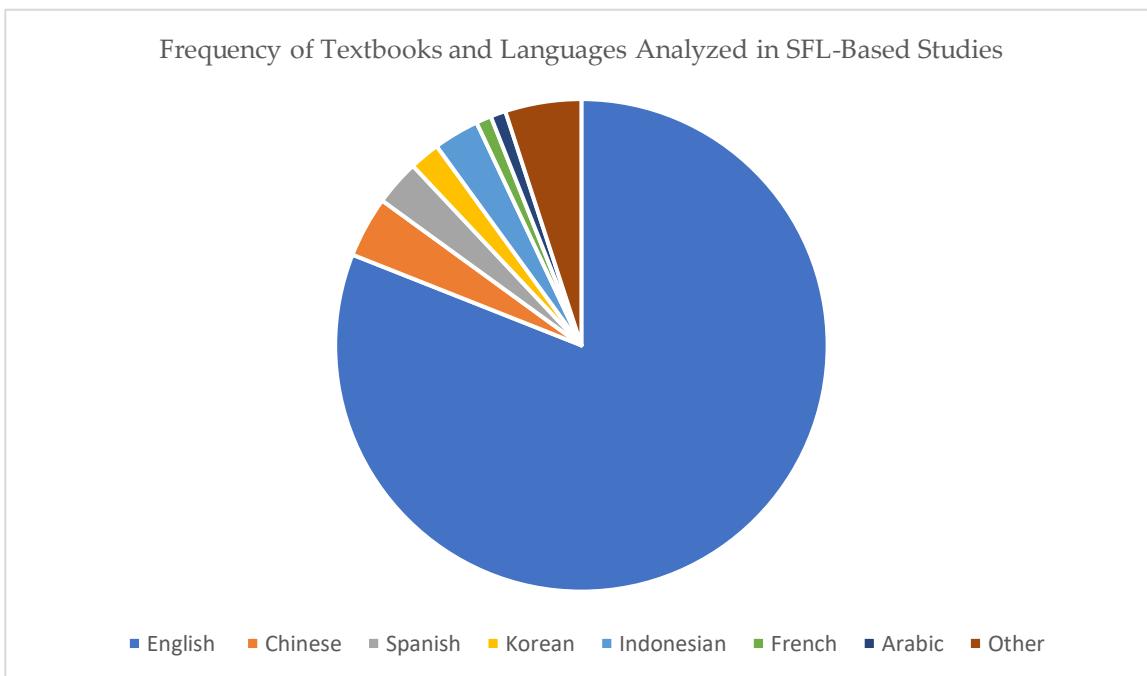
Discussion

Regarding the research questions, the screening of 151 articles that met the criteria for RQ1 and RQ2 on SFL-based research on language textbooks during 2020–2025 reveals clear trends in bibliometric and contextual characteristics. The majority of studies focus on English language textbooks (EFL/ELT) used across primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels. In addition to language textbooks, several studies also examine textbooks from interdisciplinary fields such as history, science, economics, and civic education, as long as language remains the primary object of analysis. Among the languages examined, English overwhelmingly dominates, followed by Chinese, Spanish, Korean, and others.

Table 3. Classification and Frequency of Textbooks and Languages Analysed

Textbook Language Analyzed	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Description
English (EFL/ELT/ESP/EAP)	122	81	English language textbooks dominate the dataset, covering all educational levels (primary to university) and used in contexts such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Tunisia, Vietnam, China, Kenya, and others.
Chinese (Mandarin / CFL)	6	4	Chinese language textbooks and Mandarin-medium science textbooks, with a focus on environmental themes and ideological content.
Spanish (ELE / Spanish as a Foreign Language)	4	3	Spanish language textbooks (ELE) and Spanish history textbooks.
Korean / Japanese	3	2	Korean and Japanese language textbooks typically address historical and cultural themes.
Indonesian (BIPA & English for Nusantara)	5	3	Indonesian language textbooks or Indonesian contexts where Indonesian is taught as a second language (BIPA).
French (FLE)	2	1	French language textbooks for A2 proficiency.
Arabic	2	1	Islamic law and religious education textbooks were analysed using an SFL genre-based framework.
Other (Mathematics, Science, History, General Multimodal)	7	5	Non-language textbooks, such as science, world history, and biology textbooks.

 Texts)

Figure 1. Language Frequency Diagram (2020–2025)


In contrast, studies focusing on Arabic language textbooks are almost absent from reputable literature, both in the Scopus database and in nationally indexed journals listed in SINTA 1–3. This indicates a clear imbalance in the distribution of language in SFL-based textbook research. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that SFL research remains centred on English-language textbooks, with a significant absence of studies on Arabic-language textbooks. This gap represents a substantial research opportunity for further exploration in applied linguistics and SFL-based language education.

From a methodological and analytical framework perspective (RQ2), the majority of studies explicitly employ the SFL framework, with a strong emphasis on the ideational metafunction, particularly the transitivity system, encompassing processes, participants, and circumstances. This type of analysis is widely used to uncover meaning representation, social actors, and ideological values embedded in textbooks. In addition, textual metafunctions such as theme–rheme structure, thematic progression, cohesion, and coherence are frequently applied, especially in studies examining text readability and complexity. Meanwhile, the interpersonal metafunction, including mood, modality, and appraisal, has received increasing attention during the period 2022–2025, although it remains less prominent than ideational analysis. Several studies also integrate SFL with

related approaches, such as genre-based analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and sociasemiotics, signalling a shift toward more integrative analytical frameworks. Table X and the accompanying pie chart present the frequency of SFL aspects identified across the 151 articles that passed the screening process.

Figure 2. Frequency of SFL Aspects (2020–2025)

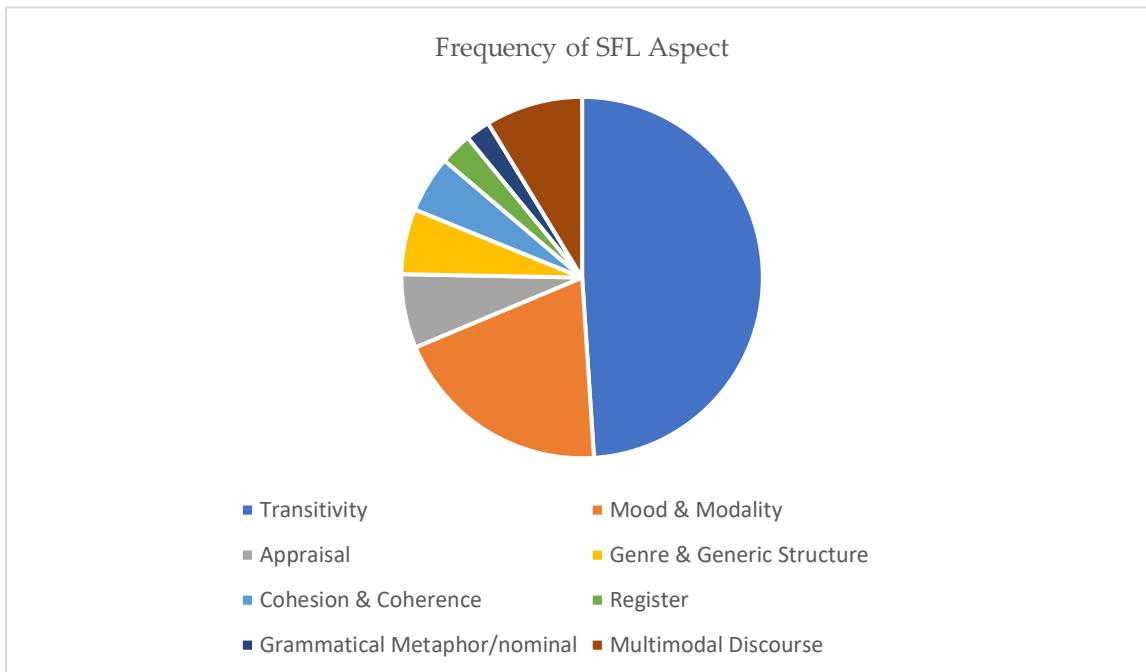


Table 4. Frequency of SFL Aspects

No	SFL Aspect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Transitivity/Ideational Metafunction	67	44,4
2	Mood & Modality/Interpersonal Metafunction	27	17,9
3	Appraisal (subkategorisierte interpersonal)	9	6
4	Genre & Generic Structure	8	5,3
5	Cohesion & Coherence	7	4,6
6	Register (Field, Tenor, Mode)	4	2,6
7	Grammatical Metaphor/Nominal	3	2
8	Multimodal Discourse (Visual-Verbal Integration)	12	7,9

Accordingly, although SFL-based research on textbooks has expanded, it remains predominantly centred on transitivity within the ideational metafunction. Future studies need to broaden their analytical focus to include the interpersonal metafunction (particularly the appraisal system), the textual metafunction (including genre, cohesion, and register), and multimodal analysis to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed and communicated in textbooks. From the perspective of thematic focus and main findings (RQ3), SFL-based studies of

language textbooks can be classified into three major trends. First, studies that concentrate on analysing meaning structures and discourse representation, including the construction of identity, gender, moral values, and ideology through transitivity and appraisal systems. Second, research that emphasises evaluating text quality, such as readability, cohesion, linguistic complexity, and discourse organisation in terms of theme–rheme patterns. Third, studies that link SFL analysis to pedagogical implications, particularly in the development of genre-based, critical, and multimodal literacy. Overall, cross-study findings indicate that many textbooks have not yet fully presented a contextual discourse, communication, and an ideologically balanced perspective.

The majority of studies examine English language textbooks (EFL/ELT) at the secondary education level, aiming to uncover representations of gender, ideological values, and environmental issues. However, significant research gaps persist, including the dominance of English-language contexts, the lack of comprehensive multimodal analyses, and the limited exploration of Arabic-language textbooks and those grounded in religious or local cultural values. This situation highlights the need for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural SFL research, particularly on Arabic language textbooks, to broaden the global representation of SFL applications in language education.

Although the number of studies increased during the period 2022–2025, this classification also reveals substantial research gaps, especially the scarcity of SFL-based studies on Arabic language textbooks. In addition, longitudinal studies, cross-linguistic comparative research, and the integration of SFL with corpus-based text analysis and artificial intelligence technologies remain limited. These gaps underscore the high academic urgency of SFL research on Arabic language textbooks and its strong potential to make significant theoretical and pedagogical contributions to the development of discourse-based teaching materials. Discussion is the most essential part of writing a journal article. At this stage, the author must present the thesis and research findings systematically, scientifically, and factually. Explain the impact of research findings. Then the writer must compare the results with previous studies relevant to the topic of discussion.

CONCLUSION

The systematic review of 151 articles published between 2020 and 2025 indicates that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-based research on language textbook analysis has developed significantly, with a strong dominance of English language learning contexts (EFL/ELT textbooks). The most frequently employed analytical focus is the ideational metafunction, particularly the

transitivity system, which is used to examine representations of gender, ideology, social values, and environmental issues. Interpersonal and textual analyses have also expanded, although they remain proportionally limited. In contrast, genre-based approaches and multimodal discourse analysis have begun to signal a broadening of research directions toward more comprehensive discourse-based literacy. Publication trends show a sharp increase during the period 2022–2025, reflecting the growing prominence of SFL as a leading framework for textbook evaluation and literacy-oriented curriculum development. Nevertheless, several research gaps persist, including the overwhelming focus on English-language contexts, the scarcity of studies on Arabic and other non-Western language textbooks, and the limited integration of SFL with multimodal analysis, corpus-based approaches, and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.

Accordingly, this study confirms that the trajectory of SFL research in textbook studies is moving toward a more integrative, multimodal, and cross-linguistic paradigm. These findings open strategic opportunities for expanding SFL-based research on Arabic language textbooks, both in theoretical terms and in pedagogical applications, as well as in curriculum development oriented toward meaning-making and social context. Future research is recommended to broaden the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to Arabic-language textbooks and other non-Western languages, thereby addressing the persistent imbalance in the search results, which remain dominated by EFL contexts. Further studies should also integrate multimodal analysis, corpus linguistics, and AI-based technologies to enable deeper and more objective discourse analysis. In addition, longitudinal and cross-curricular comparative studies are needed to map changes in ideological representation, social values, and literacy practices in textbooks over time. Through these efforts, future research can contribute to the development of more contextual, critical, and inclusive models for textbook evaluation in language education.

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