

Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Its Implication in Foreign Language Teaching

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Introduction

Applied-linguists study language use in context such as the contexts associated with specialized registers (e.g., business or academic), contexts for language learning (e.g., classrooms and study abroad programs), and contexts for language assessment (e.g., speaking and writing tests). As a result, many of them are interested in linguistic theory that takes into account the contextual dimensions of language. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a social semiotic resource people use to accomplish their purposes by expressing meanings in context (Halliday, 1985). This perspective is refreshing to applied linguists since it offers a framework for their work. In SFL, language must be studied in contexts such as professional settings, classrooms, and language tests.

This paper is particularly meant to present the role of systemic functional linguistic theory in language teaching in Indonesia. Three topics have been chosen for discussion, namely an overview of systemic functional linguistics, pedagogical implication, and SFL Genre-Based Approach in Language Education in Indonesian schools.

An Overview of Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic-Functional Linguistics also called critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1992; Pennycook, 2001) is an approach to language developed by Halliday (1985). While many of the linguistic theories today are concerned with language as a mental process (see Chomsky), SFL is closely related to with sociology; it explores how language is used in social contexts to achieve particular goals. SFL does not address how language is processed or represented within the brain, but rather looks at the text produced (whether spoken or written) and its contexts. As it concerns with language use, SFL places more emphasis on language function (what it is used for) than on language structure (how it is composed). SFL starts at social context, looks at how language acts upon it and is constrained by it (O'Donnell, 2011: 2). A

central notion in SFL is stratification in which language is analyzed based on four strata: context, semantics, lexico-grammar, and phonology-graphology.

Context: From SFL point of view, language can only be understood in relation to its environment of use. The environment of language seen as texts and their component parts is called the context of situation, whereas the environment of language seen as a system (its lexical items and grammatical categories) is the context of culture (Halliday, 1978). As Halliday (1978: 10) points out, “the context of situation is a theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located”. Context of situation consists of field, tenor, and mode.

First, Field refers to what the talk or the text is about. Examples of typical field are science, education, war, medicine, sports and specific fields are biology, microbiology, language education, English language education, etc. Second, Tenor refers the people involved in the communication and the relationships between them. This includes: Power relations (e.g. unequal: doctor/patient, teacher/student, equal: friend/friend, student/student), formality (formal/informal), closeness (distant/neutral/close). Third, Mode refers to what part the language is playing in the interaction and what form does it take (spoken or written). It includes Role (Ancillary: language accompanying nonverbal activity, as when we talk as we cook together or constitutive: the event is defined by the language, as in a speech), Channel: written vs. spoken, or some mix, directionality: uni-directional channel or bi-directional (unidirectional allows only monologue, while a bi-directional channel allows dialogue), Media: +/-visual contact (e.g., -visual for a telephone conversation); use of multimedia (video, powerpoint, etc.), Preparation: spontaneous vs. prepared; rushed vs. time for reflection (O’Donnell, 2011).

Semantics: Semantics in SLF includes pragmatics. Halliday (1985) developed a theory of the fundamental functions of language. The SFL semantic component is construed of three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. First, ideational metafunction (the propositional content) is about the natural world in the broadest sense. In informal terms it refers to the content of the message. It is concerned with the processes involved (i.e. actions, events or states, entities) and the circumstances within which they take place. Second, interpersonal metafunction is about the social world, especially the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, and is concerned with clauses as exchange. It includes speech-function, exchange structure, expression of attitude, etc.). Third, textual metafunction is about

the verbal world, especially the flow of information in a text, and is concerned with clauses as messages. It deals with how the text is structured as a message, involving thematic structure, information structure, and cohesion (Halliday (1985). Fifth, lexicogrammar is a term peculiar to FLF to describe the continuity between grammar and lexis. For many linguists, these phenomena are discrete. But Halliday brings them together with this term, he describes the relation of grammar to lexis as one of a cline and delicacy. He states 'The grammarian's dream is...to turn the whole of linguistic form into grammar, hoping to show that lexis can be defined as "most delicate grammar" (1961). The term lexicogrammar has two distinct but related notions: (1) the typical lexical and grammatical environment of a sign as it is habitually used in naturally occurring texts or 'discourse', and (2) the core stratum of 'wording' in Halliday's model of language, which serves to mediate between the lower stratum of 'sounding' (graphology/phonology) and higher 'meaning' (semantics/discourse) (Halliday, 1961, Fries et al. 2002, Halliday & Matthiessen 2004).

The Role of SFL in Language Education

SFL has had much influence in education in various parts of the world (Connor, 1996) and its influence is most prominent in teaching writing (Wells, 1999) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Its contribution to language education is centred on its relevance to the explanation and interpretation of texts. It is therefore the primary 'learning outcome' of courses in SFL will be an awareness of the role of lexicogrammar (the integrated system of grammar and lexis) in the production and negotiation of the social meanings that are realized in both spoken and written texts.

Systemic Functional Linguistics highlights the relationship between language, text and context. SFL is both a theory of language and a methodology for analysing texts and their contexts of use. Due to its dual nature, SFL aims to explain how individuals use language and how language is structured for its different usages (Eggins, 1994).

With regards to language education, Lock (1996: 1) states "systemic functional perspective does not focus on the distinction between grammatical and ungrammatical linguistic forms, but rather on the appropriateness of each lexico-grammatical choice for a particular communicative purpose in a particular social context". In learning a foreign language the learners are expected to develop the ability to communicate effectively with other speakers or writers of the new language. To do so, they need a grammatical description

of the language that goes beyond listing forms and structures and includes a description of the available linguistic resources and of how they are used in social interactions.

Systemic functional linguistics is particularly adequate for the task since it conceives: “The grammar of a language as a resource for making and exchanging meanings. A functional grammar is therefore the kind of grammar most likely to have useful things to say to language learners and teachers” (Lock, 1996: 3). Since SFL is interested in explaining how people use language in everyday life and how language is structured according to its different forms of usage, the notion of context is central in this approach.

From a systemic point of view, language can only be understood in relation to its environment of use, and this premise is particularly evident in the language classroom, where both spoken and written texts should not be interpreted in isolation from their contexts of production and circulation. According to SFL, the environment of language seen as texts is the context of situation, whereas the environment of language seen as a system is the context of culture (Halliday, 1978).

Halliday (1978) argues for the importance of the context in language education based on the unique role played by language in the learning process. Here language functions as substance, instrument, and object. A substance means learning a language, be it a native language or foreign language. An instrument means learning through language, which applies to all fields of knowledge and to all educational levels. And an object means learning about language such as its grammar, genres, registers, word formation, etc.

If all kinds of learning are mediated through language, what is the specific role of language in language education? The answer comes from Halliday is that in the environment of language teaching/learning there is an inseparable relationship between language as medium of learning (as in developing oral proficiency, for instance), and language as the substance of what is being taught/learned, as in the process of teaching/learning second or foreign languages, the mother tongue, reading and writing, grammar, etc. In a functional level, what is distinctive about language education is its permanent focus in the context, a context which is outside of language itself (Halliday, 1978).

Language plays a three-fold role in language education: (1) in linguistic terms, it is the substance of what is being learned; it is what we have to master in order to perform; (2) in extra-linguistic terms, it is the ‘instrument’ through which we learn, and in that sense it constitutes a resource for learning; and (3) in ‘metalinguistic’ terms it is the object of learning,

the content we have to learn about. According to Halliday (1978), what unites these aspects of language education is that learners are expected to create a system, a meaning potential, from the instantiations of language (texts) they are exposed to. And the key to this transformation is the context of situation, that is, “the coherent pattern of activities from which the discourse gains its relevance” (Halliday, 1978: 22). And it is also from the context of situation that the language learner will be able to construe a higher level system—the context of culture. In language education, learners have to make predictions in two ways: to predict the text from the context, and to predict the context from the text, and this poses a particular difficulty to second or foreign language learners who are still unfamiliar with the total pattern of the new language: they have to learn from texts produced in a language they have little experience of.

In Halliday’s (1978: 23) words, in language education “The learner has to (1) process and produce text; (2) relate it to, and construe from it, the context of situation; (3) build up the potential that lies behind this text and others like it; and (4) relate it to, and construe from it, the context of culture that lies behind that situation and others like it. These are not different components of the process, with separate activities attached to them; they are different perspectives on a single, unitary process.”

Considerable emphasis in teaching is therefore given to the exploration of how the functional elements of language structure realise available options from the three general areas of meaning referred to above. Texts may then be analysed in terms of the range and nature of such options. In the teaching and learning environment this clearly requires a constant alternation between the development of descriptive and analytical skills and their application to a range of text types. A typical exercise might involve, for example, the comparative analysis of lexicogrammatical features in different types of texts.

SFL-Genre-Based Approach in Language Education in Indonesian Schools

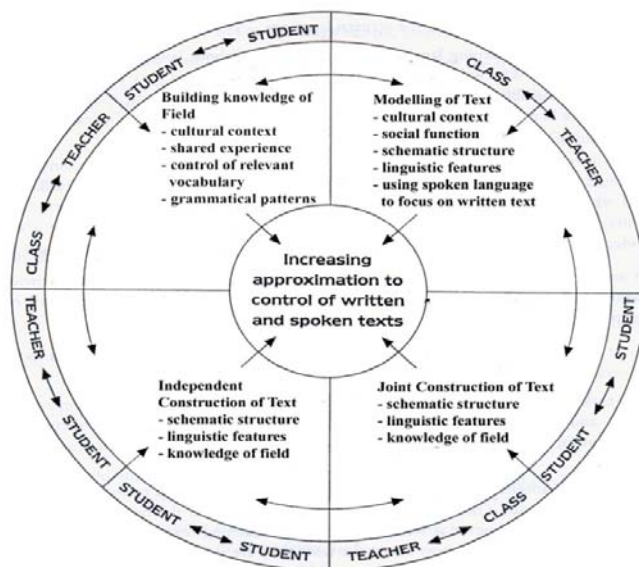
SFL-Genre-based approach has been implemented in EFL teaching since the enactment of curriculum 2004 (and it is implemented in Indonesian teaching in Curriculum 2013). The 2004 English curriculum is designed based on the government regulation stating that the language education (including English) is meant to develop reading and writing culture (Chapter III, Article 21, Point 2); and that the competence for language subjects should emphasize the ability to read and write (Chapter III, Article 25, Point 3) suitable for the levels of education. The competency standard for secondary education is aimed at improving the learners’ intelligence, knowledge, personality, integrity, and life skills in order to live

independently and to pursue further education (Chapter III, Article 26, point 2). This regulation explicitly indicates that Indonesian government has a great commitment to improve the nation's literacy level since it is the key to learning any other subjects. It implied that language education is expected to develop communicative competence or the ability to communicate in spoken or written language so that learners will possess the so called social skills. That is why the 2004 English curriculum is designed based competence in which learners are expected to be able to communicate (written and oral) in English as life skills. The concept of competence adopted in this curriculum is the one developed by Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) since it is pedagogically motivated or developed for language learning purposes. This model states that the ultimate competence is communicative competence or discourse competence which includes four sub-competences, namely: linguistic, actional, socio-cultural, and strategic. (see Agustien, 2006)

At the practical level, the goal of language education is to facilitate learners' ability to create or produce texts (written and oral). The types of text (genres) developed in this curriculum include transactional conversations (to get something done), interpersonal conversations (to establish and maintain social relations), short functional texts (announcements, greeting cards etc.), monologues and essays of certain genres. In other words, these are the communicative competence to be developed. With regards to the literacy levels, senior high school graduates are expected handle the university level of text or are able to access knowledge typically obtained at tertiary education. For this reason, the text types given for junior high school level are procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report and for senior high school level are descriptive, report, news item, narrative, discussion, explanation, exposition, and review. Based on Well's taxonomy (1987), the junior high school literacy level is the functional level (using English for life survival such as carrying out transactional exchanges, reading for fun, reading popular science or teenagers' encyclopedia, etc. and the literacy level for senior high school is the informational level (using English to carry out more extended and interpersonal conversations, to deal with texts to access knowledge at university level, for self study. (see Agustien, 2006)

The National Curriculum Board determines to implement SFL-GBA for classroom procedure since this is the most suitable approach to handle competency-based curriculum. GBA as discussed previously is materialized in the two learning cycles and four in which

joint construction and scaffolding talk play important roles. The first cycle integrates the development of speaking and listening skills whereas the second cycle is aimed at developing the ability to use written language. The cycles are depicted in the diagram below.



(Hammond 1992: 17)

In planning the lessons, teachers need to go around the cycle twice. In the first cycle, they start with Building Knowledge of the Field (BKF) where teachers and students build cultural context, share experiences, discuss vocabulary, grammatical patterns and so on. All of these are geared around the types of spoken texts and topics they are going to deal with at the second stage. The second stage is Modeling of Text (MT) where students listen to statements of short functional texts, conversations, and monologues that are geared around a certain communicative purpose. The third stage is Joint Construction of Text (JCT). At this stage they try to develop spoken texts with their peers and with the help from the teachers. They need to demonstrate their speaking ability and to show confidence to speak. The final stage is Independent Construction of Text (ICT). At this stage, students are expected to be able to speak spontaneously or to carry out monologues that are aimed at giving directions or showing ways to do things such as how to make a kite, how to make a paper cap, and so on. Thus, the first cycle integrates the development of speaking and listening skills.

The second cycle is aimed at developing the ability to use written language. The teachers and students go through all the four stages once more. However, at the stage of MT students are exposed to written texts. Here students develop reading skills, followed by joint construction in writing texts, and finally they write texts independently. Like the strategies employed in the first cycle, activities in this cycle are also geared around the same communicative purpose. Students read short functional texts and procedural texts, and then they write texts similar to what they have read. In this way, the integration of the four skills is created by the communicative purpose(s) of texts. Students speak what they have heard, read what they have talked about, and write what they have read.

To carry out activities at all stages, teachers can use some ingredients from various teaching methods/techniques popularized in foreign language teaching methodology such as Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Reading Method, Situational Language Teaching, Community Language Learning, Communicative Language Teaching, and other types of active, collaborative learning as proposed by Mel Silberman (1999). These are still applicable and relevant to SFL-GBA. The most important thing is that every classroom activity has to be aimed at providing learning experiences to use language in order to achieve communicative competence.

Conclusion

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a theory of language which highlights the relationship between language, text and context. Its scope is wide in that it sets out to explain how humans make meaning through language and other semiotic resources, and to understand the relationship between language and society. The contribution of SFL to language education is centred predominantly on its relevance to the explanation and interpretation of texts. It is therefore a general assumption about the learning outcome of SFL courses is an awareness of the role of lexicogrammar in the production and negotiation of the social meanings that are realised in both spoken and written texts.

SFL-GBA where teaching and learning is based on the result of genre analysis and which focuses on the understanding and production of selected genres of texts has been around with us since 1970s and was first popularized as teaching technique for writing skill (the modification of process approach). Currently, this model has become increasingly

influential in mainstream ELT in Indonesia since the implementation of curriculum 2004. The classroom implementation of SFL-GBA consists of four stages: building knowledge of field, modeling of text, joint construction of text, and individual construction of text.

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