

Systemic Functional Linguistics as an Extension of Prague School in Competency-Based Language Learning and Literacy Education

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Abstract

This article presents Systemic Functional Linguistics as an extension of Prague School in competency-based language learning and literacy education. Unlike Bloomfield who considers that utterances are elements and Chomsky who considers utterances as rules, the Prague School of Linguistics considers utterances as function (motor). Utterances are means of expressing meanings which, by Halliday, are described in three domains: *Ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual*. Most educational practitioners have taken up Halliday's principles in developing competency-based language learning and literacy education.

Key words: *Prague School, Systemic Functional Linguistics, competency-based language learning, literacy education.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is one of the linguistics schools. It is relatively new mainstream of linguistics in Indonesia especially with the emergence of models of language learning, approached to at discourse level. The approach is then well-known as 'Discourse Approach' or sometimes 'Communicative Approach'. We all observed around 2003-4 how school teachers, who had, when they were at college, given linguistic doctrines, such as Traditional Grammar, Generative Transformational Grammar were forced to learn (get in touch) with new concepts of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in response to the emergence of Curriculum 2003, claimed to be 'competency-based. It is thereafter called Competency-Based Curriculum or CBC for short.

It was M A K Halliday, a distinctive figure in linguistics (Prague linguist), who expanded Prague schools of linguistics to become another schools of linguistics labeled as Systemic Functional Linguistics through his mater piece "Functional Grammar" (an influential reference textbook on the subject) which has been quite well-known among the followers of communicative mainstream of language teaching with Hymes' **communicative competence**, as an elaborated theory of Chomsky that stopped at **linguistic competence** (that implies language systems: sounds, grammar, and meaning) to be confirmed as '*communicative competence*—consisting of linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence, actional competence and strategic competence. The counterpart of communicative competence is *communicative performance*—the real communication practice)

Discussed in this article is the Prague school of linguistics as the point of departure to the emergence of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

B. DISCUSSION

a. Prague School of Linguistics

The distinctive feature of Prague School is that language is viewed from its functions in which it can be synchronically analyzed in terms of functions ... 'they analyzed a given language with a view to showing the respective functions played by the various structural components in the use of the entire language' (Sampson, 1980:103).

It is argued that the Prague school of linguistics is not similar to Bloomfield's and Chomsky's views of language. In Bloomfield's views, grammar is a range of elements (-emes) while, in Chomsky's views, language is a set of rules. In the Prague school, on the other hand, language is a motor: '...seeking to understand what jobs the various components were doing and how the nature of component determined the nature of others' (Sampson, 1980:104). In other words, not only is language viewed as 'what' but also why 'what' becomes 'what' and behaves like 'what'; thus does not stop at the descriptive level, but goes beyond higher levels, namely why and how. The Prague school of linguistics also touches 'theme-rheme structure on the basis of the perspective of functional sentences in which theme is the initial information that has been understood, for example **Yesterday**, and then followed by the rheme **it rained heavily** as new information. Thus, the sentence '**Yesterday it rained hard.**', consist of *theme* (yesterday) and *rheme* (it rained).

One of the Prague school's distinctive stance is that language is a choice of system, register and style. This is the basic starting point on which functionalists worked out the systemic functionalist.

b. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday managed to develop the principles of the Prague school of linguistics into a considerable mainstream of linguistics among linguists. Even, the analytical framework has become one of analytical tools for traditional discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (Young and Harrison, 2004). This may be due to the fact that SFL offers consistency in the analysis and description of language function, something that Chomsky missed. In Generative Transformational Grammar, one theory may be nullified by the next theory which thereby representing inconsistent analysis.

In SFL, when an individual uses a language, he or she uses three simultaneous metafunction of language as stated by Eggins (1994) sbb:

language is structured to make three main kinds of meanings simultaneously. This semantic complexity, which allows **experiential**, **interpersonal**, and **textual** meanings to be fused together in linguistic units, is possible because language is a semiotic system: a conventionalized coding system, organized as sets of choices (Eggins 1997:3).

In the above quotation, it is clear that once a language is used, it expresses three simultaneous meanings, namely (1) *experiential*, or Halliday (1994) calls *ideational* (2) *interpersonal* and (3) *textual* that is the type of text being used, be it spoken or written. The three domains of meanings as described above are united in one single semiotic system, that is a system organized in a range of diction, as shown in the phrases below:

- (1) Don't smoke, you asshole !!
- (2) Excuse me, Sir. Could you please extinguish your cigarette?
- (3) No Smoking

From the domain of *ideational* or *experiential* meaning, the above three utterances have the same meaning, that is ‘to remind other people of smoking prohibition’. Because the action is concrete, and can be observed, the type of verbal process is called material (*material process*).

However, based on the interpersonal domain of meaning, the above three utterances have completely **different** effects on the interlocutors. Utterance (1), for example, will carry a negative effect on the *interpersonal* relation between the speaker and the hearer. Meanwhile, Utterance (2) will carry a positive effect on the interpersonal relation.

When Utterance (1) is put in context, it is very likely that there will be a dialogue of anger as shown below:

- (1a) A : Don’t smoke, you asshole!!
B : Who the hell cares!, My own butt!!
A : Air-conditioned, you fool !!
B : You bet! Stupid fucker... YES!

In this context, it is possible for B to extinguish his or her cigarette in anger and very likely that A and B would stop talking any further. Still another possibility is that they will have a real physical fight, later outside.

Compare the above dialogue with the following dialogue, employing Utterance (2) in a context.

- (2a)
A : Excuse me, Sir. Could you please extinguish your cigarette?
B : Sorry, I didn’t know that it is a non-smoking area.
No non-smoking sign... hehehe..
A : Air conditioned, I suppose. No need to display such a sign.
B : Right, thanks, anyway.
A : That’s OK.

Here the difference between the two fragments lies in prohibition of smoking but with different interpersonal meanings, resulting in different interpersonal impacts though with the same behavioural impacts, that is to extinguish the cigarette

Example 3 is normally written with *big font* and attached on a wall, or put inside lighted *neon box* which can be seen at night

In lexico-semantics, SFL cannot be separated from contexts, either context of situation or that of culture. Context of situation, for example will generate special registers which can only be known with the same speech communities. Meanwhile, context of culture will generate special genre. The term ‘*register*’ should not be confused with the study of sociolinguistics, meaning particular words for particular discipline of science.

Register in SFL belongs to a variable of domain. For example, in the third meaning of the above ideational, interpersonal and textual, there are registers respectively. Ideational meaning with its transitivity analysis will examine the verb (verb processes) are finally finding Field of the Discourse, as a register variable (contents of discourse). While interpersonal meaning with its mood analysis will assess the mood and the residue that will generate tenor of the discourse as a variable registers (language users). Last meaning of textual analysis and rheme theme, will be known

types of languages spoken, written, or oral, argumentative, dialogue etc. Variable is the mode registers of the discourse.

In contrast to traditional grammar analysis is limited to [verb + object] for each process verbs, LFS distinguish any participant. A [verb] could have been followed by the [goal, beneficiary, token] depending on its type verbs. Likewise, the study of the modes and modalities, LFS detail in analyzing an adverbial, whether including modulised or modulation (Egins, 1997).In context of culture, SFL studies several *genres* through the analysis of the generic *structure* to finally find out the types of text, such as narratives, exposition, , *argumentative*, etc.

The difference between Traditional Grammar (TG) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is that TG focuses on *linguistic form* with all those many syntactic rules while SFL focuses on meaning with all varieties of forms (*linguistic forms*) without losing the syntactic rules. Therefore, in SFL, lexical and grammatical; meanings are well treated and known as (Halliday 1994).

c. **Competency-Based Language Learning-Teaching**

It has been somehow touched upon that the emergence of SFL in Indonesia in 2000s encouraged a total reform of language teaching from Content-Based Curriculum to Competency-Based Curriculum. At the same time, as previously mentioned, there was also a shift of paradigm in teaching and learning EFL, from the focus on reading ability to equal treatments of the four language skills.

Language mastery is measured in terms of competencies (skills) toward one unified whole of competence called ‘communicative competence’ or ‘discourse competence’ supported by other competences as described below:



From Figure 1 (Celce-Murcia, 1995: 10) above, it is clear that language teaching and learning must be oriented toward the mastery of communicative competence or discourse competence, supported by linguistic competence (the language systems of sounds, grammar and meaning), socio-cultural competence, and actional competence, all of which are under the guidance of strategic competence—knowing when, where and how to speak with whom.

In other words, an individual can be said to be able to communicate (in this case, being able to actively use English) when he or she has the linguistic competence in the sense that he or she has the knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax and

semantics (of English) that can be seen from the following indicators of achievements:

- (1) Phonologically being able to pronounce words correctly in terms of acceptable pronunciation and intonation either per words or in phrases / sentences
- (2) Morphologically being able to recognize parts of speech, including the possibility of inflectional and derivational processes.
- (3) Syntactically being able to compose phrases and sentences without grammatical mistakes which may violate meanings.
- (4) Semantically being able to construe utterances, select diction to create such utterances, to avoid ambiguity (both structural or lexical).

Besides mastering linguistic competence above, he also had to master the socio-cultural kompetensi in the sense he can adapt to the user community in a culturally appropriate language native speakers, so it can be spared the cultural schoks (cultural awkwardness). Subsequently to be dominated actional competence, ie, capable of performing speech acts in accordance with the language used. Third competencies are summarized in the competence of strategic competence, it means being able to use the language thanks to misunderstandings that may occur from the linguistic aspects, social, cultural and speech act when communicating with native speakers can be avoided. Thus forming a discourse competence (discourse competence), which means can participate in the community with a variety of discourse according to the literacy level.

The practical implication is that literacy education should be given along with the four learning language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) so that one can communicate in oral and written form without any errors that may disturb the communication.

Therefore, the individual development in each competence will be maximally achieved when at the level of planning the learning goals, the teaching strategies and learning or teaching materials they are related to the development of literacy. It is highly recommended that English even as a foreign language be relevant in Indonesia in the global era of wide economic and social spectra beside individual development as currently required. (Agustien, 1997: 2).

d. Literacy Education

Language education (teaching and learning) cannot be separated from literacy education. An individual can be labeled as 'literate' when he or she can participate in any social and discursive practices in a particular language at least at survival levels.

The development of paradigm of literacy education at the global level of critical literacy (Purwanto 2007; Holme 2001) has caused a drastic paradigmatic change in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, which at first stressed on the reading skills (1995) to become a model of learning with equal treatments for the four language skills oriented at the discourse competence. In this respect, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia through the National Education Department positively responded to this urgent need by the emergence of CBC (Competency-Based Curriculum) 2004 (Depdiknas 2003) followed by KTSP (School-Based Curriculum) 2006 as further elaboration of CBC 2004, and now further completed as 'Independent Education Unit (SPM) although it is still limited

to special schools where those schools are authorized to independently determine the the students' competencies that would be developed, including how the determined competencies can be achieved.

This is consistent with the Kern (2000) which suggests that learning a language should have focused on the four language skills are integrated and consistent with the literacy education. Therefore, a new paradigm of teaching English as a foreign language in the context of Indonesia changed from the teaching of language skills separately integrated into learning the language skills as one that is directed in line with the education kewicaraan

Some kewicaraan level concepts in the use of language to express the meaning of good ideas, interpersonal and textual, has been widely discussed and there is a similarity to one another (Wells 1991; Grant 1986; Freebody and Luke, 1990). They agreed their classification as described kewicaraan level as follows:

(1) *Performative*

This performative level of literacy has actuallyn become a myth (Grant 1986), namely reading and writing skills, as stated by Freebody and Luke (1990) as a level of literacy limited to phonologizing written symbols, and writing symbols. In other words, the skills are around correct spelling and pronunciation and can respond physically to simple instruction or direction in a certain language.

(2) **Functional**

Literacy on the functional level represents the ability of communication, and therefore can linguistically function in social discursive practices (Wells 1991). An individual with this functional level can respond to a job want ads, and write application letters. Besides, he or she can respond behaviorally correct to signs such as "No Smoking".

(3) **Informative**

The indicator of the informative level of literacy can be seen that a particular individual can access information from certain media according to the discipline of science. Concretely speaking (Freebody and Luke 1990) at this level, an individual can relate the contents of a text to his or her background knowledge. In other words, when an individual is confronted with a text, he or she know the main idea and the supporting details, also can answer the comprehension questions.

(4) **Epistemic**

On this particular level, not only can an individual access information from various madia but also express the accessed information in both spoken or written. The indicator is that he or she can write scientific articles, papers, a thesis or even a dissertation. Besides, he or she must be able to present orally a topic of interest. This Epistemic level is closely related to the mastery of a particular language. In English, there are levels of proficiency such as *beginner*, *elementary*, *intermediate* and *advanced*, and the *epistemic* level is probably at the advanced level of proficiency. Despite the fact that leveling is relatively measured according to the type of proficiency test.

The above levels of literacy can of course be integrated in the lesson plan that should be made by the classroom teachers in accordance with competencies the students should achieve.

C. CONCLUSION

As previously discussed at some length, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is one of linguistics schools developed by M A K Halliday through his master piece 'Functional Grammar' first published in 1985, and got reprinted several times. The reference textbook 'Functional Grammar' 2nd edition was published in 1994. The school is actually originated from the Prague School of Linguistics.

In practice or implementation, SFL, according to Halliday (1994:xxix) can be used to help people to learn foreign languages. Therefore, language educational practitioners can make a competency-based curriculum with the final goal of teaching—achieving the discourse or communicative competence at a particular level of literacy.

D. REFERENCES

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