LITERACY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM
by
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Abstract

(English) language teaching has so far shifted to a more discourse-oriented paradigm, resulting in genre-based approaches to the teaching of the four language skills with the development of competency-based curriculum.
This paper highlights how literacy should be incorporated in the language classroom in such a way that the primary aim of language teaching is to make the students <u>literate</u> in the socio-cultural settings of the target language. Discussed prior to the curriculum design and program planning is the theoretical principles which deal with (1) the model of language, (2) relationship between spoken and written language, (3) the term 'literacy' and (4) implication of the model of language. Meanwhile, in the curriculum design and program planning this paper addresses three major issues, such as (1) the point of departure for program planning, (2) the teaching-learning cycle, and (3) the teaching-learning cycle and classroom planning.

INTRODUCTION

Halliday's systemic functional grammar (1994: Revised edition) apparently becomes the starting point from which the teaching of language changes its philosophical basis, leading to a new paradigm—discourse. In this paradigm, language is viewed as a total entity in which its use is to make meanings (ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings). The ideational (experiential) meanings refer to the realization of language with respect to the <u>field</u> of language use. Interpersonal meanings are realized through the use of transitivity, mood and modality, that is the tenor use of langauge. Finally textual meanings focuses on the type of text, be it written or spoken (the modes use of language).

The realization of the three types of meanings is very much influenced by both cultural and situational (social) contexts in which language use consist of semiotic process—a process of making meanings by choosing (Eggins, 1994:2). This has imposed the term 'lexico-grammar'—a system of vocabulary use which depends on the subject matter (field), and another system of how language is structured to make meanings in such a way to create the tenor and mode of the texts of particular socio-cultural constexts.

MODEL OF LANGUAGE

In the systemic functional theory, language (text) is developed on the basis of <u>genre</u>, and <u>register</u>. **Genre** is represented in (1) the context of culture which constitutes the attitudes, values and shared

experiences, expectation, and ways of getting things done, and (2) types of exchanges, such as transactional, directional, recounting and argumentative uses of language.

Register refers to the context of situation which determines (1) the choice of **field** (vocabulary items) which suitably expresses the ideational (experiential) meanings (2) **tenor** which constitutes the use of modality, modulation, and choice of personal pronouns, and (3) **mode** which refer to the cohesive devices operating in spoken or written texts.

Genre and register are incorporated to represent texts of particular contexts of culture and situation. Genre characterizes the context of culture while register represents the use of language in particular contexts of situations (NCELTR, 1992:2)

SPOKEN OR WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Prior to the design of language teaching, it is important to differentiate spoken language from written one. Spoken language is characterized as that accompanying action, representing the least physical distance between participants, such as the language used in tennis matches, basketball games, etc. Meanwhile, written language is characterized as reflection with reference to the maximal distance between participants. Such texts include abstract reflections on causes and effects of distant events—history, economics, theoretical arguments, and where an author writes for unknown future audience (NCELTR, 1992:5).

Since there is no clear dividing line between spoken and written language, it should be noted that it is not appropriate to have spoken texts written down and written texts spoken out. One characteristic of a written text, however, is that it has more lexical density. The mastery of genre and register will help to cope up with this problem.

LITERACY

The term 'literacy' should not be regarded solely as the ability to read and write. Rather, it refers to the ability to participate in activities within the principles of literacy that involve (1) interpretation, (2) collaboration, (3) conventions, (4) cultural knowledge, (5) problem solving, (6) reflection and self-reflection, and (7) language use as described by Kern, (2000:16-17) as follows:

1. Literacy involves *interpretation*. Writer and readers participate in double acts of interpretation—the writer interprets the world (events, experiences, ideas and so on) and the reader then interprets the writer's interpretation in terms of his or her own conception of the world.
2. Literacy involves *collaboration*. Writers write for an audience, even if they write for themselves, their decision about what must be said, and what can go without saying, are based on their understanding of their audience. Readers in turn must contribute their motivation, knowledge, and experience in order to make the writer's text meaningful.

3. Literacy involves *conventions.* How people read and write texts is not universal, but governed by cultural conventions that evolve through use and are modified for individual purposes.
4. Literacy involves *cultural knowledge.* Reading and writing function within particular systems of attitudes, beliefs, customs, ideals and values. Readers and writers operating from outside a given culture system risk misunderstanding or being misunderstood by those operating on the inside of the cultural system.
5. Literacy involves *problem solving*. Because words are always embedded in linguistic and situational contexts, reading and writing involve figuring out relationship between words, between larger units of meaning, an between tets and real or imagined worlds.
6. Literacy involves *reflection* and *self reflection*. Readers and writers think about language and its relations to the world and themselves.
7. Literacy involves *language use.* Literacy is not just abut writing systems, nor just about lexical and grammatical knowledge; it requires knowledge of how language is used in spoken and written contexts to cerate discourse.

Thus, one is labeled as 'literate' if he or she can survive linguistically in any linguistic exchange be it spoken—such as buying something, or written—reading text-books on a particular science, all under the 7 principles outlined above. Most importantly, he or she should know his or her level of literacy—whether **performative**, **functional informational** or **epistemic** levels of literacy as elaborated by Wells (1991), Grant (1986) and Freebody and Luke (1990) as follows:

…*performative.*
The emphasis at this level is on the code as code. Becoming literate, according to this perspective, is simply a matter of acquiring those skills that allow a written message to be decoded into speech in order to ascertain its meaning and those skills that allow a spoken message to be decoded in writing, according to the conventions of letter formation, spelling and punctuation. At the performative level it is tacitly assumed that written messages differ from spoken messages only in the medium emploed for communication.

…*functional.*
This perspective emphasizes the uses that are made of literacy in interpersonal communication. To be literate, according to this perspective, is to be able as a member of that particular society to cope with the demandsof everyday life that involve written language.

…*informational.*
At this level, then, the curricular emphasis on reading and writing—but particularly reading is on the student's use for assessing the accumulated knowledge that is seen as the function of the school to transmit.

…*epistemic*.
At each of the preceding levels, but particularly at the second and third, the concern is with literacy as mode of communication. However, to focus only on interpersonal communicative functions of literacy is to fail to recognize the changes that reading and writing can make in the mental lives of individuals, and by extension, of the societies to which those individual belong. To be literate, according to this fourth perspective is to have available ways of acting upion and transforming knowledge and experience that are in general unavailable to those who have never learned to read and write.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL OF LANGUAGE

On the basis of the above discussion, there are 5 (five) pedagogical implications that need considering prior to curriculum design and program planning if competencies are targeted as one sole goal of language education. **Firstly**, language should be viewed at the level of whole texts rather than at the level of sentences. That is, literacy program (competency-based curriculum) always introduces students to the whole written texts within an appropriate context of situation, to discuss their purposes and to take account of the schematic structure of the text so as to create a framework for a focus on particular features o sentence construction, spelling and punctuation.

Secondly, the teaching of grammar should be functionally motivated, that is learning the features of sentence construction upon developing control of different genre through implication 1. Thus, grammatical features are learned in terms of how they contribute to the overall meaning of the text.

Thirdly, through the concepts of genre and register, it is possible to assess language according to level of mastery of language use. The ability to analyze language demands an language use contribute to the development of effective teaching programs that facilitate spoken and written language development. Therefore, **fourthly,** it is also of primary importance to distinguish spoken from written language. Spoken language, being flexible and dynamic, lends itself to discussion, hypothesizing, negotiating, questioning and clarifying. Thus, the role of spoken language in educational context is to enable students to interact with the teacher and other students to clarify ideas, thoughts, and arguments. Written language, on the other hand, is lexically dense and fixed; and therefore plays a different role in education—to consolidate, to record, to pass on information , to summarize known facts on particular topics.

Fifthly, as has been previously touched upon, writing is not speech written down. It is not sufficient by simply asking students to write on a topic what they have been talking. Literacy program need to incorporate a focus on the structure and language patterns of written text so that students learn to move from talking to writing (NCELTR, 1992:13).

POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR PROGRAM PLANNING

Program planning is developed on the basis of **topic** and **type of text**. Here are the steps in planning the program from topic, adopted from NCELTR, 1992:16

PLANNING	1. Select topic
	2. Decide which genres emerge from the study of this topic.
	3. Analyze genres for structure and significant patterns of language.
	4. Select and plan the sequence of appropriate spoken and written language task / activities.
TEACHING	- Begin teaching the program

ASSESSMENT	- Modify and adapt in the light of ongoing formal and informal assessment
EVALUATION	- Evaluate the overall program (to feed into the planning of next program

Here are the steps in planning the program from the type of text, adopted from NCELTR, 1992:16.

PLANNING	1. Select text type / genre 2. Analyze genre for schematic structure and significant patterns 3. Locate genres within appropriate context (i.e. field) 4. Select and plan the sequence of spoken and written language task / activities.
TEACHING	- Begin teaching the program
ASSESSMENT	- Modify and adapt in the light of ongoing formal and informal assessment
EVALUATION	- Evaluate the overall program (to feed into the planning of next program

TEACHING AND LEARNING CYLE

The four stages in the Teaching –Learning Cycle are:

Stage One   : Building the context or field of the topic or text type

Stage Two   : Modeling the genre under focus

Stage Three   : Joint Construction of the genre

Stage Four   : Independent construction of the genre

The above stages (cycle) can be illustrated in boxes of four below:

Stage One	*Stage Two*
Building knowledge of the field	Modeling of text
▪ Cultural context ▪ Shared experience ▪ Control of relevant vocabulary ▪ Grammatical patterns	▪ Cultural context ▪ Social function ▪ Schematic structure ▪ Linguistic features ▪ Using spoken language to focus on written text
(Class-Teacher) (Student-Student)	(Class- Teacher) (Student- Student)

Stage Four	Stage Three
Independent Construction of Text ▪ Schematic structure ▪ Linguistic features ▪ Knowledge of field (Teacher – Student) (Student-Student)	Joint Construction of Text ▪ Schematic structure ▪ Linguistic features ▪ Knowledge of field (Teacher – Class) (Student – Student)

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING-LEARNING CYCLE

Stage One   : Building knowledge of the field

Activities / Tasks include   :

- use of visual –photographs, filmstrips, videos—to build context
- 'hands-on' activities, such as making bread, going on excursion, listening to guest speaker
- reconstructing and discussing 'hands-on' activities.
- a range of communicative activities designed to enable students to share, discuss and argue about aspect of the topic
- language lesson focused on vocabulary and grammatical patterns
- introducing learners to a broad range of written texts related to the topic, such as school brochures, notes, newsletters and enrollment forms.
- developing reading strategies appropriate to the txts, including predicting, skimming, scanning, or identifying the logo

Stage Two   : Modeling the Text

Activities / Tasks include   :

- teacher reading model to students
- shared reading of text between students
- discussion of who writes this genre, why and where they are likely to be found.
- exchanging class experience of similar texts and the purpose of these texts.
- analysis, based on example of the schematic structure of the genre.
- practice in distinguishing and labeling stages within the schematic of the genre.
- pointing out significant grammatical patterns within the genre (e.g. use of tense, technical language, specific or generic participants)
- discussion of the function of major grammatical patterns in the genre.

Stage Three   : Joint Construction of the text

Activities / Tasks include   :

- revision and further discussion of purpose, context and structure of genre
- further field building activities where necessary
- summarizing in note form (on board or overhead projector) what students know about the topic of the shared text
- negotiation between teacher and students, and between students, regarding appropriate beginning, middle and end construction of text, drawing on shared knowledge about the genre
- shared re-drafting and editing of text, drawing on shared knowledge about the genre.

Stage Four   **: Independent Construction of Text**

Activities / Tasks include   **:**

- building and developing knowledge of the field through activities such as reading, information gathering, and note-taking
- writing own text, approximating appropriate schematic structure and grammatical patterns
- consulting with other students or with the teacher, regarding the appropriateness of the text
- re-drafting and editing where necessary
- class discussion of any difficulties experienced by learners in writing their texts
- focused language lessons (such as spelling, punctuation, layout of text, nad-writing) for class or groups of learners where necessary.

CONCLUSION

I have so far described the contribution of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics in pedagogy. It is the origin of literacy and competency-based curriculum which is now in its heyday in Indonesia. I have also discussed the working mechanism of language—used to make meanings influenced by a diverse range of socio-cultural contexts.

With respect to pedagogical practice, I have also talked at some length about the concepts of literacy, language model, spoken and written forms of language and implication of the model of language. Teaching – learning cycle and planning have also be presented as part of the discussion in order for the theory to be put into practice. Stages of teaching – learning cycle have been discussed to give a clear picture of the whole business of language pedagogy, especially in support of CBC (Competency-Based Curriculum)

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