

# INTEGRATING SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS IN DESIGNING SYLLABUS FOR ELT CLASSROOM

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## Abstract

To communicate effectively language learners need to become proficient in using the semantic, syntactic, lexical, morphological and phonological elements of the language being learnt. They also need to understand its pragmatics use. Accounting those requirements, the focus of ELT should have tended on grammatical, thematic, and functional approaches to syllabus design. A theory of language that is in line with this is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL can support the communicative language teaching in some extents. Firstly, this theory focuses on meaning and how language operates to make meaning at text level. In other words, it goes beyond traditional approaches' learning of isolated rules of exemplified in decontextualized sentences. Another good point to take SFL in ELT is that this theory stresses how meanings are made or negotiated in actual communication with other people. It is focused on real language use in authentic situations. Thirdly, this theory is really 'communicative' in the extent that it explores language based on its use in context. It takes into account three factors that relate to the context in which the language is being used: FIELD (what is being talked), TENOR (who is talking, and what is the relationship between them), and MODE (mode: spoken or written). These three factors are the realization of what to do to be able to communicate well. What is also important is that it considers the social purpose of the language as well. It is mediated in the so called as GENRE. In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the primary objective is to provide language learners with the information practice and much of the experience needed to meet the communication needs in the second or foreign language. This article discusses the relation between SFL and CLT in the implementation of syllabus design for ELT classroom. It is doubtful whether anyone will ever come up with a perfect syllabus for ELT, the one that will ensure success with every kind of learner in every kind of context. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a nationally uniformed syllabus of ELT. Learning and teaching contexts are too varied in terms of class size, resources, exposure to the target language outside the classroom, and many others. The basic principle is that the materials should be presented gradually, given in a communicative context, in an integrative, not discrete, way.

**Key words:** *Systemic Functional Linguistics, Syllabus, Communicative Language Teaching*

## Introduction

The idea of competence in language teaching is not really new. This was initiated in the 1960's and 1970's when communicative approach occurred. Even,

writing in 1954, Hill (in Coleman, 1996) suggested that English teachers in should adopt the so-called communicative language teaching.

However, what happened in practice is still a kind of *ritual*. The activities remain the same, all the time. Observing English classrooms in Indonesia, Coleman (1996) even takes an analogy to *Wayang Kulit* performance where the teacher, like the *dalang*, speaks all the time, without any respect from the students or the audiences. That is to say, students may do anything they want (sometimes irrelevant to the material taught at that time), exactly like the audience in *wayang kulit* performance. They can chat with others, eat, or even sleep while the teacher or the *dalang* is presenting the story. Another parallel to this is *sambutan* (or public address), where the person delivering his speech always addresses his audience respectfully, while the audience may pay full attention, less attention, or even busily spend all the time of the speech by chatting with the person next to him or her.

To communicate effectively language learners need to become proficient in using the semantic, syntactic, lexical, morphological and phonological elements of the language being learnt. They also need to understand its pragmatics use. Accounting those requirements, the focus of ELT should have tended on grammatical, thematic, and functional approaches to syllabus design.

Many scholars have talked and written about communicative language teaching. Few, however, talk about the material. It is very difficult to create a syllabus and material that can be used together, nationally wide. This is partly because the material for English classroom is different from one context to another. Through this paper, I would like to share an idea on creating a communicative syllabus and selecting materials for English teaching, with the help of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

### **The rationale**

In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the primary objective is to provide language learners with the information practice and much of the experience needed to meet the communication needs in the second or foreign

language. In the context of Indonesia, it brings the learners to be able to use language to talk with foreigners, for work, for travel, or for other communications.

A theory of language that is in line with this is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL can support the communicative language teaching in some extents. Firstly, this theory focuses on meaning and how language operates to make meaning at text level. In other words, it goes beyond traditional approaches' learning of isolated rules of exemplified in decontextualized sentences. Another good point to take SFL in ELT is that this theory stresses how meanings are made or negotiated in actual communication with other people. It is focused on real language use in authentic situations. Thirdly, this theory is really 'communicative' in the extent that it explores language based on its use in context. It takes into account three factors that relate to the context in which the language is being used: FIELD (what is being talked), TENOR (who is talking, and what is the relationship between them), and MODE (mode: spoken or written). These three factors are the realization of what to do to be able to communicate well. What is also important is that it considers the social purpose of the language as well. It is mediated in the so called as GENRE.

In order to communicate well, we need to be able to do some activities. Firstly, we should be able to represent what we want to talk about and locate them in time, which means selecting appropriate expressions, participants, circumstances, and tenses. In SFL, the FIELD represents it. Secondly, we need to make the content interpersonally relevant and appropriate. SFL facilitates this through TENOR. Thirdly, we have to be able to make the whole message relevant to what has been said before, and to the situational context. Also we need to select the best media to communicate (Lock, 1996). In SFL, it is called MODE. All of these aspects should be taken into consideration when designing a syllabus for language teaching.

### **The place of grammar**

With its focus being placed on the interpretation, expression, and the negotiation of meaning, CLT leads language learners from the memorized patterns

monitored repetitions to the more meaningful interaction. However, it does not simply mean to stop teaching grammar. Learners need to learn grammar; they need to know how to talk about language, not only to use it. Teachers need to make ‘scaffolding’ for their learners to stand up by themselves. (We do not let our babies in an upright position and ask them to run right away!). However, teaching grammar will be much more fruitful if it also takes context of actual use of the grammatical patterns being taught. That is to say, grammar should be taught in the context of actual language use and is closely related to meaning. It is not enough to focus merely on the forms.

The interrelation among language function, grammatical form and context can produce different language realization. The adapted figure from Kranhke (Kranhke, 1987) below demonstrates that there is no one-to-one correspondence between function and form. One function can be expressed in several language form and vice versa.

<b>Function</b>	<b>Sentence form</b>	<b>Realization</b>
<b>Ordering</b>	<b>Imperative</b>	<b>Please, finish that letter Andy</b>
	<b>Conditional</b>	<b>Perhaps it would be best if you finished that letter</b>
	<b>Infinitive</b>	<b>We do expect you to finish that letter</b>
	<b>Modal</b>	<b>You must finish that letter</b>
	<b>Participial</b>	<b>You should have no difficulty in finishing that letter</b>

<b>Sentence form</b>	<b>Realization</b>	<b>Function</b>
<b>Imperative</b>	<b>Give me some water</b>	<b>Ordering</b>
	<b>Release me now</b>	<b>Pleading</b>
	<b>Buy Arrow</b>	<b>Advising</b>
	<b>Don't go in there</b>	<b>Warning</b>

	<b>Try this one on</b>	<b>Suggesting</b>
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It is worth noting that formal (or traditional) approach to grammar still plays its role in language teaching. At some times, functional approach also takes account of form. The following example will give clearer description on how we should teach grammar (taken from Lock, 1996).

*I had also been rejected by the law faculty.*

Rather than merely pointing out that it is an example of a passive voice sentence and how we can change it into the active one, it would be better to stress on how the communicative effect of the message will be different when it begins with *I* rather than with *the law faculty*. Also, it is essential to point out the effect of putting *the law faculty* at the end of the sentence. In addition, we also needs to explore what features of context may have led the writer to select passive rather than active voice.

Those aspects are mediated in SFL through three different grammatical meanings: experiential, interpersonal, and textual meaning. Experiential meaning refers to the ways language represents our experience. It is concerned with how we talk about actions, happenings, feelings beliefs, and so on; and the relevant circumstances of time, place, manner, and so on. Interpersonal meaning has to do with ways in which we act upon one another through language: asking, giving, requesting, instructing, confirming, and so on. Textual meaning has to do with the ways in which a stretch of language is organized in relation to its context. When designing the syllabus and selecting the materials, language teachers, should be able to cover how language is organized to enable speakers (or writers) to express these different kinds of meaning.

### **The starting point**

Actually, learning to communicate in a second language involves gaining progressive control over the systems of options in the new language. In this case,

learners select the options to make a meaning in a context, and map the configurations of grammatical functions realizing the options. The word 'progressive' here is so essential that we should be aware that the materials are arranged in such a way from the easiest to the most complicated.

It is worth noted that the production of utterance may be analysed in four steps, namely, conceptualising a message to be conveyed, formulating it into linguistic plan, articulating (implementing the plan), and self monitoring. This imply the communication process inside the speakers mind before novel utterances are produced (Caroll, 1999: 197)

Before designing a syllabus, there some other points to consider. As stated before, learners do need to learn grammar. However, it should presented in such a way that learners are aware in what context they can apply the pattern. Secondly, the material presented should be only slightly beyond the existing competence of the learners. This will make the learners find fewer difficulties. It is also important to bear in mind that the materials should be well graded. In addition, it is necessary to have a kind of needs-based assessment in terms of what the learners need to learn, genres they have to master, and also the expectation of the curriculum. A student majoring in biology probably needs explanation genre more than the one majoring in history, who probably more often comes across with recount genre. What we should have in mind is that each genre has different social purpose; and therefore each has different parts of grammar from each other.

We should make the scaffolding for the students by presenting simple grammar at the beginning. The most basic grammatical functions are Subject and Finite. That is why it is suggested to present these functions at the very beginning level. This will cover the discussion of nominal group and verbal group. The discussion in this range is about countability, and how to make nominal groups with pre- and post-modifiers. The next grammatical constituent to introduce is verbs of being, doing, and sensing. Then, tense and temporal systems are introduced in the next stage. This is covered in the discussion about Object, Complement, Adjunct, and Predicator. To be able to realize the interpersonal meaning well, learners should also learn about speech act and mood, covering the

discussion on modal and modality. Then, students are guided to present their idea in varied expressions. After being able to use these functions in simple context, learners then can be introduced to the more complex clause in complex context. Finally, at the most advanced level, learners should be able to accumulate all the grammatical functions in a more complicated, real context of communication.

As a learner develops greater control over the systems of the grammar, he/she is able to make more delicate distinctions of meaning appropriate for different contexts, for example to: use *wh*- question and tag questions to request different kinds of information or use various forms of thematic organization (passive, inverted, and so on), or to foreground and background information, and make longer stretches of text coherent (Lock, 1996).

It is important to mention here that learners do need to label the grammatical constituents. What they have to do is selecting the best option to realize the meaning they want to express.

Below is a mini syllabus arranged around language function integrating grammar and context adapted from Kranhke

<b>Title and function</b>	<b>Apologising</b>	<b>Requesting direction</b>	<b>Expressing frustration</b>
<b>Situation</b>	<b>Department Store (returning something)</b>	<b>At the bus stop</b>	<b>Home (dinner guest late)</b>
<b>Communicative expression or formulae</b>	<b>I am sorry, would it be possible.....?</b>	<b>I beg your pardon, could you tell me....?</b>	<b>How inconsiderate! Why couldn't they have telephoned?</b>
<b>Structures</b>	<b>Simple past, present perfect</b>	<b>Interrogative (simple present) modal-<i>must</i></b>	<b>Be+Ved It's (time)</b>
<b>Nouns</b>	<b>shirt</b>	<b>Name of places</b>	<b>Food, dessert, roast</b>
<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Buy, wear</b>	<b>Must get to, get off, take</b>	<b>Ruin, spoil, serve, \</b>
<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Small</b>		<b>Late</b>
<b>Adverbs</b>	<b>Too</b>	<b>How, where</b>	<b>So</b>
<b>Structure words</b>	<b>you</b>	<b>Us</b>	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>numbers</b>	<b>Time, numbers</b>
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Aural</b>	<b>Reading questions</b>	<b>Role play, aural</b>

	<b>comprehension, indirect speech, changing register</b>	<b>and answers, close-procedure, dictation</b>	<b>comprehension; dicto-comp</b>
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### **The genre**

As mentioned before, a text has a social purpose that can be realized through certain genre with special language structure. For the beginner learning nominal group and verbal group, a simple text of description or recount genre is a good stuff to introduce. Description consists of mainly nominal sentences, and report genre consists of both nominal and verbal sentences; both mainly in present tense. The material can range from identifying the nominal groups and verbal groups to writing (or presenting) a simple description of a familiar thing or person. These two genres can be given to students from all majors.

The students majoring in exact sciences (biology, physics, math, chemistry, engineering, and the likes) are probably better to learn more on explanation, report, or procedure. Each of these genres has different language features. In these genres, there are also many technical terms which students should master in relation to their major. On the other hand, the students majoring in social sciences (like history, arts, politics, economics, and so on) will need to learn more on recount, description, exposition and discussion; of course, each with the technical terms in each field. It is worth remembering, however, that this distribution of genre is very flexible. In some contexts, a student of biology probably needs to learn exposition; for example when he/she has to present what she/has done in the lab when doing experiments. On the other hand, a student coming from a graphic design department sometimes needs to use procedure genre when he/she has to present how to design a poster, for example.

It is also important to stress here that there should be adequate information of what objectives should be reached for each lesson. This information will benefit both the teacher and the students. The teacher will know what language feature should be given, and at the end of the lesson, teacher will be able to see whether the objectives have been accomplished or not. On the other hand,



students will also know what to do to gain the objectives. Besides, they will be aware of what is being learned.

Since the main objective of English lesson in university is to enable the students to understand English textbooks, it is recommended to select the materials (for the models) from the related field. This is grounded on at least three reasons. Firstly, it will meet Krashen's suggestion that the material given to the students should be slightly beyond their present or existing knowledge. Being exposed to a topic they are familiar with, they will learn the language features more easily, with lower affective filter. Besides, the material in English class will also benefit them in terms of understanding the content. Thirdly, students will be aware that English is really used in their world, so that they will have extra motivation to learn English. What should be underlined in this case is that it does not mean all the materials are taken from the academic textbooks. For some extents, they can be given the materials taken from the authentic texts. For example, an advertisement cut from a magazine can be a good model of describing a thing; an extract from news can be an ideal model for recount, and so on. A manual book can also be brought into the classroom to make them aware of procedure.

There are some points to consider when determining what material to give to the students. First, the materials should be able to facilitate the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation. Secondly, materials should focus on understandable and relevant communication rather than on grammatical form. Next, materials will attract learners' interests and involve their intelligence and creativity. Finally, materials should involve different types of text, and different media, which the participants can use to develop their competence through a variety of activities (Richards, 1985).

### **The action**

It is doubtful whether anyone will ever come up with a perfect syllabus for ELT, the one that will ensure success with every kind of learner in every kind of context. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a nationally uniformed syllabus of

ELT. Learning and teaching contexts are too varied in terms of class size, resources, exposure to the target language outside the classroom, and many others. The basic principle is that the materials should be presented gradually, given in a communicative context, in an integrative, not discrete, way.

As the closure of my paper, I would like to share how SFL principles (that are in line with CLT approach) are applicable in language classroom. This is what I have done in my English class for students majoring in accounting. I am of the teachers who like teaching writing. Following the stages of teaching suggested by researches, linguists and also teachers who have developed communicative approach (in Gibbons, 2002), I usually take these four stages. (The learning objective is that the students should be able to write an exposition about banking service).

**Stage 1.**

Students become familiar with the field (subject matter) or they will write about. At this stage, I brainstorm them with new ideas about bank, including kinds of bank, employee, account, services, etc.

**Stage 2**

Students take a look at a model of exposition. Now, usually I discuss the purpose of writing, the text structure, and relevant grammatical features. I usually give them an exposition about the employees in a bank.

**Stage 3**

Students do similar piece of writing, in groups or in the whole class, with my help. Students give the ideas, I write on the board. We discuss the expression grammar, vocabulary, and so on.

**Stage 4**

Students individually do their own writing, using what they have learned through stages 1,2,3.

It is important to remember that all the stages are not all covered in the same lesson. I usually take one lesson for at least one or two stages, depending on

the students' level of understanding the materials should be learned in each stage. Also, students can learn all skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To introduce the learners to the topic, I usually play a cassette or give them a text of similar topic, then we discuss together.

### **Conclusion**

In line with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Systemic Functional Linguistics gives us opportunity to teach language based on its use in real context of situation. The traditional approach on ELT has proved not so successful, if it is not failed. Many undergraduates cannot speak English, even only to describe themselves. This is not to blame the traditional approach. Of course, there are still many other influencing factors. Neither is it to say that the traditional approach now should be abandoned. However, rather than only focusing on forms, the language teaching now is better to focus on how forms make meaning in real use of language.

Therefore, the language curriculum and syllabus should focus not on sentence grammar, but on text and discourse. Besides, the syllabus also should enable the students to actively use the language through interaction with others for their specific purpose.

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