

# Maximizing SFL Contribution to ELT in Indonesia

*Agus Dwi Priyanto*  
*Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta*

## *Abstract*

Since the use of Competency-Based Curriculum, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has gained its reputable position in the context of English Language Teaching in Indonesia. The syllabus for English lesson at the levels of Junior Senior High School and Senior High School is now adopting the concept originated from this theory. The adoption, however, is still partial in terms that the materials are designed in such a way to meet the features of the genres. Moreover, the genre-based materials are only for the reading and writing skills only.

This paper discusses the results of a critical review on two English course books approved by Pusat Perbukuan (Pusbuk – Depdiknas) as the core materials for Year VII students of Senior High School. The discussion also covers how the books can be revised so that learners are aware of the context of culture and context of situation where they use the language. To discuss this, the importance of introducing the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meaning of a text is also elaborated. In addition, how the English grammar should be incorporated to the materials is also offered. This paper will benefit English teachers as well as English learning material developers.

Key word: *context of situation, field, tenor, mode, genre-based approach, scaffolding*

## INTRODUCTION

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has recently gained its better reputation among other theories. Not only is it now much used as the framework in discourse analysis (Djatmika 2007; Santosa 2003; Wiratno 2003, Priyanto 2003), this theory is also much adopted in translation studies (Manfredi, 2008) as well as in English Language Teaching (Wiratno 2003, 2006). SFL has proved effective in these areas.

Since the adoption of Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC -- *KBK*) – then moved to School-Based Curriculum (SBC – *KTSP*), the standard objectives of English Language Teaching at the secondary schools in Indonesia are determined as follows:

1. Developing communication ability both in oral and in written media. The ability covers listening, speaking, reading and writing.
2. Raising awareness of the nature of language, either English as a foreign language or Bahasa Indonesia as a mother tongue, by comparing those two languages.
3. Developing comprehension about the relation between language and culture then enlarging culture horizon.

The idea of competence in language teaching is not really new. It got its first popularity in the 1960s and 1970s when communicative approach was initially adopted. Even, writing in 1954, Hill (in Coleman, 1996) suggested us, the English teachers in Indonesia, to adopt the so called communicative language teaching. The core of this method is the proficiency of the learners to communicate orally or in written.

Puskur, Depdiknas then arranges the standard of the contents of learning materials. It is clearly seen that this standard adopts genre-based approach, originated actually from Systemic Functional Linguistics pioneered by M.A.K Halliday, Ruqaiya Hasan, and Jim. R.

Martin. The standard is then used as the main guidance in the material development process. Pusat Perbukuan (Pusbuk) then disseminates the standard and invites authors to develop English course books for secondary schools (SMP & SMA). Linguists as well as language teachers are invited to review and select the drafts to publish. Finally, pusbuk publishes the books in the electronic versions, known as Buku Sekolah Elektronik (BSE).

Despite many seminars and workshops conducted nationally, regionally, or even locally, few scholars have talked about the currently-used e-book in terms of the content. Although the drafts has gone through a tight selection and review, they are not free from drawbacks. The books are indeed better than the previous course books; there are some aspects that need further reviews. This paper presents a critical review on one of the English electronic books as published in <http://bse.depdikbud.go.id/>. Before the discussion on the findings, the next part of this paper is discussing the SFL view to language and language learning.

### **SFL VIEW TO LANGUAGE**

This part will briefly elaborate how language exists in a form of text and how it is much influenced by context of situation and context of culture. The discussion aims at understanding the significance of the context where language is used.

In SFL tradition, language is viewed as a reality, both social reality and semiotic reality (Santosa 2003). Language is a social phenomenon employed by the speakers to interact and communicate in certain context of situation and context of culture. As a semiotic reality, language is a symbol that represents the social realities taking place in the context of situation and context of culture. In other words, SFL views language as a social semiotics, where the meaning is derived from the systemic network of socio-cultural relation between the society and the system of signs they use in common. The socio-cultural system of the society is the meaning system resource, while the language is the semiotic resources. Hasan (1989) maintains earlier that language should be understood in its relationship to social structure. In short, language is the realization of the social process taking place in the society. The meaning of the language is much determined by the immediate environment where the discussion takes place, the participants, the problems being discussed, as well as the social value working in that group of people. All these factors simultaneously determine the contextual configuration that influences the choice of the use of the language.

The immediate context that directly influences or surrounds the social process realized by the language is then called the context of situation, while the language that is playing its role to express the social process is called text. That is to say, language always takes a form of text, and text always exists in a context of situation. Language, in a form of text, always bears the social functions of each process social it realizes. In that situation, text also contains the cultural norms and values adopted by the society. In other words, there is a wider context where text occurs, that is the context of culture. In Halliday's words (1989, p.6), "involved in any kind of linguistic interaction...were not only the immediate sights and sounds surrounding the event, but also the whole cultural history behind the participants, and behind the kind of practices that they were engaging in...". More elaborate discussion on the relation between text and both context of situation and context of culture is given by Halliday & Hasan (1989), Martin (1992), Martin & Rose (2003).

Context of situation is much related to the concept of register, defined as a configuration of meaning that is typically associated with a particular configuration of field, tenor, and mode. These three variables simultaneously construct the configuration of meaning.

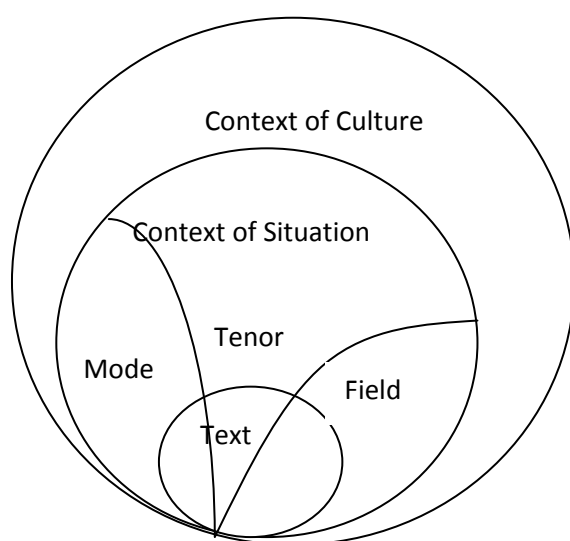
As an element of register, field represents the physical reality by referring to what is happening; including what, when, where, and how the social activity takes place. It is a set of activity sequences oriented to some global institution purposes (Martin 1992). The second element, tenor projects the participants taking part in the text; their status and roles, and their

kind of relationship. Tenor represents the social reality referring to the negotiation of social relation among the participants. The participants here include the speakers (or writers), other people involved in the text, and the hearer (or readers). The last element of register, mode refers to the role which is played by language in realizing social action. Halliday & Hasan (1985) define mode as the particular functions that are assigned to language in that situation and the rhetorical channel. So to speak, mode is much concerned with the role the language is playing in a certain situation and the nature of channel used by the users of the language. The term channel in this context refers to whether the text uses spoken or written language. Also important in this aspect is the media in which the language is expressed. The language used in a printed medium will be different from the one used using audio-video media, for example.

These three variables of register also simultaneously realize three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. (Halliday 1985, Martin 1992, Martin & Rose 2003). Referring to similar point, Halliday calls ideational metafunction as experiential metafunction. SFL recognizes three general social functions that we use language for:

1. To represent our experience to each other: ideational function,
2. To enact our social relationships: interpersonal function, and
3. To organize our representations as a meaningful text: textual function.

The following diagram shows how text exists as the realization of social process.

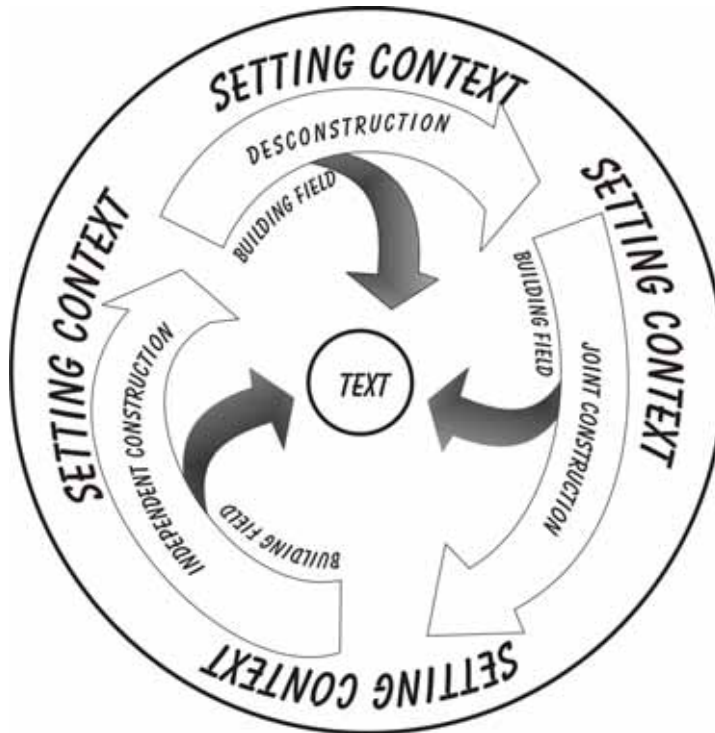


### SFL VIEW ON (LANGUAGE) LEARNING

Since language is the realization of social process, language learning should be viewed as a social process as well. The environment in which educational learning takes place is the environment of a social institution, whether in the form of classrooms and school, other social institutions, or even in the more abstract sense of the educational process as it is conceived in the society. Hasan (1985) asserts that knowledge – including language proficiency – is transmitted in social contexts through relationships, like those of parent and child, of teacher and pupil, or classmates; that are defined in the value systems and ideology of the culture. The words that are exchanged in these contexts get their meaning from activities in which they are embedded which are social activities.

Martin (2000) and Butt et al (2001) then develop a teaching/learning cycle. The cycle comprises three stages: text deconstruction, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. In this model, setting up social context and building knowledge of the

field are generalized across all stages. The point of the cycle is to emphasize the instrumentality of shared understandings about the disciplines/institutions in their cultural contexts so that scaffolding can proceed effectively.



(Adapted from Martin 2000, and Butt et al, 2001)

The model is then applied in the so-called genre-based approach. This approach begins with the whole text as the unit in focus, rather than the sentence. So to speak, there is a higher level of order and patterning in language rather than just the sentence. That is not to say, however, that sentence-level grammar is not important. Rather, the discussion should be focused on how the grammar plays important role in the overall patterning of the whole text (e.g. what sorts of sentence patterns dominate a particular genre). Again, text here refers to a piece of language in use, which is a “harmony of meanings appropriate to the context”. Halliday & Hasan (1985) define genre as the language doing the job appropriate to that class of social happening. It has certain function and meaning produced through a particular social process. Therefore, genre-based approach is much concerned with social macro-purposes of language.

From this point, we can see a silver line of Halliday’s and Martin’s as well as Butt’s views with that of Vygotsky with his socio-constructivism theory. To Vygotsky, learning takes place more effectively in a zone of proximal development (ZPD), that is the zone between actual development (what learners can achieve independently) and potential development (what learners can do in the future, with the help of others now). In order to establish effective ZPD, the knowledge that teachers (or more expert peers) and learners can all assume is vital.

Working for secondary school students in Australia, Martin (2000) designs a pathway beginning with various recount genres designed to reconstruct personal and vicarious experience, moving on through genres concerned with explaining cause and effect, arguments, and finally culminating with Foucauldian genealogy. Meanwhile, at the university level in Japan, Lin (2006) starts with information reports, factual recounts, instructions,

explanation, and exposition. Both Martin and Lin find that students' achievement is impressive, being able to adapt the features exposed for their own communicative purposes.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***How Genre-Based Approach is Adopted in English Course Books for SMP in Indonesia***

This part of the paper presents some findings on how genre-based approach is adopted in the e-books of English learning materials as approved by Pusbuk. The books reviewed for this paper are *Scaffolding* (henceforth referred as Book 1) and *English in Focus* (Book 2). The discussion will start with the failure of the book to adopt the SFL view on language; then it continues with how the learning cycle as proposed by Martin and Butt is not well facilitated by the book. Prior to the discussion, however, it is worth noting here the content standard as required by Pusbuk covers diverse genres. Therefore, to meet this requirement, the books have to cover all these. They are greeting, introducing oneself, introducing others, apologizing, commanding & responding to commands, expressing politeness, asking for & giving information, thanking, prohibiting, asking for & giving something, expressing likes and dislikes, asking for & giving clarification, asking for & giving opinion, asking about & giving facts, offering something & accepting an offer. All these are much exposed in the spoken cycle. For the written cycle, the book covers descriptive and procedure texts.

### ***Failure of the Book in Adopting SFL View on Language***

For all the genres required, Book 1 has 10 units, while Book 2 has 8 units. Book 1 even has extra materials including writing announcements, short letters, birthday cards, signs and short messages. Meanwhile, Book 2 has advertisement and short messages. The books are also different in sequencing the types of genres to learn.

After a brief observation, I find that Book 1 and Book 2 share the common shortages in terms of how language learning material is presented as proposed by Systemic Functional Linguistics point of view.

As mentioned earlier, language is the realization of a social process that always has a social purpose. It is based on the purpose then the types of genre are then classified. Both Book 1 and Book 2, however, do not give clear points on this. They tend to focus on the form, without giving any further information on why and for what purpose learners should use those forms. When presenting materials on commanding, for example, since the very beginning, Book 2 exposes the learners to examples of commands, both written in the book and spoken by teachers. Learners are not supplied with enough information about in what context they can use those forms, for what purpose, to whom. In other words, learners are not introduced to the immediate environments where they can use the forms of the expressions. In the sample dialogs, for instance, there is no background information about the participants, and where, when, and in what situation the dialog takes place. Sometimes, the dialogs are presented in a form of a comic, but again, there is no caption to inform the learners about the context where the dialog occurs. The only assistance to guess the context is the pictures that sometimes accompany the dialogs. The pictures, however, do not always help. A picture on page 42 of Book 2, for example, fails to expose the learners to the context. It is a picture of a teacher in front of her students sitting and listening attentively to her. In that picture, the speech balloon of the teacher shows "Don't be noisy". In this case, it is very hard for the learners to guess why the teacher in the pictures says so, when all the students are listening to her attentively. No clear indication in the picture shows that there is crowd that makes a noise. In short, the social function of the text is not ignored in both Book 1 and Book 2. This happens to almost all genres or texts presented in the books.

Secondly, grammar is presented separately, not to support the learners to achieve the social goals of using the language. When discussing commands, for instance, the grammar

discussed in Book 2 is the one on affirmative, negative, and question. Book 1 does not explicitly discuss the grammar. Even when discussing the use of complex clause to ask for information, learners are left to infer how to use the grammar.

The next point worth discussing is that the spoken language sometimes is taken as the same as the written one. When learning announcement, for example, learners are exposed to a spoken announcement, but the linguistic features and other resources of meaning are more appropriate for a written announcement like a pamphlet. This problem arises, again, because of the lack of attention to the three variables of register that simultaneously should construct the text.

Similarly, since the absence of the context, the learners may misuse the language with different interlocutors. Again, this is because the books do not give clear information that the language used between friends is different from the one used between children and parents, between students and teachers, or between policemen and drivers.

### ***How the Books Fail in Facilitating the Learning Cycle***

Rooted from the failure of including the context of situation and the social purpose of the text, the books also fail in facilitating the learners going through the learning cycle. Both books, however, have tried to sequence the materials and the learning activities from deconstruction, joint construction, and independent construction of the text. The scaffolding given for the students, however, is not so strong enough that it is hard for learners to reach the competency as expected.

First, again the context is now well since the very beginning until the end of the materials. In terms of context building, Book 1 has better strategy by giving questions to elicit learners ideas and to lead learners to the topic of the discussion. The questions however, do not cover all the aspects of context of situation. They are merely rhetorical questions the objective of which is to introduce the learners to the topic of discussion, not to introduce them to the context where the target language form is used. This strategy could have been followed with the introduction and maintenance of the context throughout the stages of the learning cycle, not ending just at the early stage. Book 2 starts each unit with a listen-and-repeat activity. This is probably aiming at giving the students initial introduction to the language form they will use in that unit. However, the book does not give sufficient information on which context the form is appropriately used.

At the deconstruction stage (or modeling stage), that is the key phase in the learning cycle, the books should have given a good model text. The books unfortunately do not give learners enough opportunities to observe the text structure, the grammar, and other linguistic features employed in the text. One reason for this is the absence of the focus. For instance, while trying to activate learners' skills, Book 2 has wrongly designed the activity. When introducing the language to ask for and give something, for example, this book has students listen to their teacher supposedly reading a dialog, and fill in a cloze activity taken from the script of the dialog. The blanks, however, are not at the language that is being learned – that is that of asking for and giving something, but on the goods or the things. This gives less exposure to the learners to what they should be aware of. The tasks should have aimed to highlight the salient lexical and grammatical features. For the written text, however, the case is different. Both books have tried to presents what learners should be aware of when producing the text in that a particular genre.

Although the modeling stage is not that perfect, the joint construction and independent construction stages are much better. Both books have presented the learners a set of well-sequenced activities. They usually start with classical activities, then continue with group or pair works. The only addition required is the context for each activity. Almost all the activities directly go with instructions, without any information about the context in which situation the learning activities resemble the real use of the language. As far as writing skills

are concerned, the activities should go through a few rounds of brainstorming, drafting, writing, editing, re-drafting. The activities suggested in the books are still linear, even sometimes going directly to the writing stage and stopping there without any edition. Peer-editing can be a good activity so that learners can learn from their peers. In addition, the activities should cover the discussion about using the language and focused on a collaborative effort to learn to accomplish the purpose of the language. When students have successfully gained a good achievement in the joint construction stage, they will be able to produce the text.

## CONCLUSION

One point that can be underlined is that SFL is not comprehensively adopted in the English course books of Junior High Schools in Indonesia. While it is true that the system has adopted genre-based approach, it is not enacted comprehensively either. According to SFL, each text (genre) – whether spoken or written – has its social objective that is unique from one text to another. To obtain the objective, the speaker then chooses the appropriate linguistic phenomena, and goes through stages so that the social process can take place effectively and the objective is gained. The issue of social objective of text is not much explored in the books.

Another issue that needs further exploration is the one of the context of situation, because all texts exist with context. When information about the three variables constructing the configuration of context of situation (field, tenor, and mode) is adequately available, learners will be able to identify the reasons why they should use the language. When they understand the context of situation, they will be able to make a choice of meaning resources to use so that they can obtain the social objective of producing the text.

In terms of scaffolding, both books have actually tried to provide it. The only problem occurs because the activities presented sometimes give less contribution to the mastery of the language/text being discussed. Included in this case is the discussion of the grammar which sometimes goes beyond what is needed to reach the social objective.

Finally, the materials that are covered in the books are rather diversely extensive. This may be one of the answers to the questions about the absence of focus on certain type of text. This is also the source of problems of organizing the materials. It is advisable that the number of genre that should be covered in the book is reduced so that each stage of learning can give contribution to the next stage. Learners, for example, do not need to learn how to apologize while they are struggling to produce a descriptive text.

## References:

- Djarmika (2007). *What Makes Legal Contracts Difficult to Understand: A Systemic Discourse Analysis.*, Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Kajian Amerika Vol. X, No.11 , Juli.
- Halliday, M.A.K & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective.* Burwood: Deaking University Press
- Halliday, M.A.K & Facett, R.P. (1987). *New Developments in Systemic Linguistics.* London: Frances Pinter
- Ihsan, D. (2003). How CBC Should be Enacted in S-1 ELT: Some Alternatives. *NUESP International Conference.* Jember: Jember University Press
- Lin, B. (2006). Genre-based Teaching and Vygotskyan Principles in EFL: The case of a University Writing Course. *Asian EFL Journal.* Vol 8 No. 3. 226-248

- Manfredi, M. (2008). *Translating Text and Context: Translation Studies and Systemic Functional Linguistics (Vol. 1)*. Bologna: CeSLIC.
- Martin, J.R. (1992). *English Text: System and Structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Martin, J.R. (2000). Design and Practice: Enacting Functional Linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. 20. 116-126. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, J.R. & Rose, D. (2003). *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause*. London: Continuum
- Santosa, R. (2003). *Semiotika Sosial: Pandangan Terhadap Bahasa*. Surabaya: JP Press
- Thompson, G. (2000). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Priyanto, A.D. (2003). Integrating SFL in Designing Syllabus for EFL Classroom. *NUESP International Conference*. Jember: Jember University Press
- Wiratno, T. (2002). *Mecerna Buku Teks Bahasa Inggris melalui Pemahaman Gramatika*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar
- Wiratno, T. (2003). Text Deconstruction in English Language Teaching. *The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Seminar on English Language Studies*, Universitas Sanata Dharma, Yogyakarta
- Wiratno, T. (2006). Discourse Competence and its Place in the English Language Teaching. *The Sixth International Conference on Competency-Based English Teaching: Theory and Reality*, ITB Bandung

Please cite as:

Priyanto, A. D. (2009). Maximizing SFL Contribution to ELT in Indonesia. *UAD TEFL Conference*. Yogyakarta: UAD Press.