A RETURN OF GRAMMAR INTO MALAYSIAN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS?
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR TO LITERACY A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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A RETURN OF GRAMMAR INTO MALAYSIAN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS? THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR TO LITERACY
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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It is hereby confirmed that the student has done all the necessary amendments of the project for acceptance

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(Mr. Peter F. Cullip)

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ABSTRACT

A Return Of Grammar Into Malaysian Second Language Classrooms? The Significance Of Systemic Functional Grammar To Literacy
A Review Of Literature

Lucilla Chin Na

This is a literature review in an attempt to argue for a return of grammar into Malaysian second language classrooms, in the form of systemic functional grammar, as taught in the genre-based approach. A brief background into grammar teaching in Malaysian secondary language classrooms is first given followed by a brief theoretical perspective according to M.A.K. Halliday’s social-semiotic perspective on language.

This argument is presented in two major sections, with the first section attempting to argue that there is a need to teach grammar. Firstly, this section deals with arguments against grammar teaching, such as naturalistic views of language learning and Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition Theory. This will be followed by more recent views forwarded by linguists to support grammar teaching, which include criticisms for Krashen’s theory. The second section of the review argues for systemic functional grammar to be taught in Malaysian language classrooms. This section starts off with a discussion of the unsuitability of other grammars for literacy development, such as traditional and formal grammars. Then, reasons to support systemic functional grammar, such as how it helps students to learn language and to learn about language will be given. A brief description of how functional grammar can taught in the genre-based approach will also be presented.

After a recapitulation of the arguments presented in the review, it is the conclusion of this review that a return of grammar into Malaysian second language classrooms in the form of systemic functional grammar as taught in the genre-based approach should be considered.
ABSTRAK


Lucilla Chin Na


Setelah meneiki semula alasan-alasan yang diberikan dalam ulasan ini, satu kesimpulan telah dapat dikenalpasti, iaitu untuk menyeru supaya pertimbangan diberikan untuk pengajaran tatabahasa dalam kelas bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia dalam bentuk systemic functional grammar yang diajar dalam genre-based approach.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This literature review attempts to argue for the return of grammar, specifically systemic functional grammar into Malaysian classrooms, which is to be taught in the genre-based approach. The functional grammar pursued here is Michael Halliday's functional grammar (1985a; 1994), developed in the framework of systemic functional linguistics. A brief theoretical perspective into systemic functional linguistics will first be given in the next chapter before the argument itself is presented. The argument will be divided into two major parts. The first part will look at the reasons for bringing grammar back into the second language classroom, and the second part will argue that it is functional grammar that should be introduced into the classrooms.

In the first part of the argument, a brief look into the previous research and theory on second language acquisition (SLA) will first be given, as they shed light into why the role of grammar in the second language classroom has diminished. The research and theory include naturalistic SLA and Krashen's SLA theory. However, as more research into the role of formal learning and grammar teaching is conducted, many scholars and researchers begin to see the importance of grammar in the classroom. Criticisms against Krashen's SLA theory, growing insights into the benefits of instruction and explicit grammar
teaching and the changing view of the role of grammar in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach are supportive for a return of grammar teaching in the second language classroom.

The second part of the argument contains reasons for introducing functional grammar into the classroom. The argument will begin with a comparison of functional grammar with other grammars, in the hope to clarify why functional grammar is the more appropriate grammar for promoting language learning. Then, other arguments regarding the benefits of functional grammar will be given. These arguments include how functional grammar can help students to use written language appropriately, how functional grammar includes and gives access to powerful genres in society and how it can help students to uncover buried ideologies in texts, hence leading to critical literacy.

Lastly, based on some criticisms, it will also be discussed why the progressivist approach to literacy is unsuitable in the context of Malaysia, even though the Malaysian education system is slowly moving towards the approach (Cullip, 1997) by introducing process writing (refer "Compendium, Vol. 3, 1991"). The argument against the progressivist approach will centre on its failure to include all students, instead of only students from literate, print-rich families in the processes of literacy development. It will be argued that functional grammar is more suitable to help all students to achieve higher literacy levels.

A recommendation of how functional grammar can be taught in the classroom will
be presented in the framework of the genre-based approach, as developed by Martin and Rothery. In this last section of the argument, a brief look into how functional grammar is taught in the approach is seen through the teaching and learning cycle (Burns & Joyce, 1991 as adapted by Callaghan & Rothery, 1998 in Hammond, 1992).

The significance of this review lies in the suggestion for curriculum development, teacher-training institutions and teachers of Malaysia to consider the possibility of bringing grammar back to the language classroom in the form of functional grammar, and taking relevant steps afterwards.

It should be noted that I am a novice learner of functional grammar and the genre-based approach. Also, I do not have any experience teaching with the genre-based approach. Therefore, I can only hope to scratch the surface of the many issues and arguments mentioned in this review.

1.1 Background

Before proceeding to the next section, a brief description of previous and current teaching practices for grammar in Malaysia is presented here. First, a description of traditional grammar is given, and then the current place of grammar in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach will be described.

Traditional grammar, which was taught under the traditional approach to literacy, basically constituted tasks such as memorising spelling lists, learning the grammatical
rules of a "standard" variety of English, parsing sentences and correcting sentences (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993b; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). The focus was on writing "correct" sentences based on the conventions of "standard" English (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). It was believed that learning traditional grammar, which would lead to "correct" sentences was enough for students to gain literacy (Tonkyn, 1994; also see Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1988a).

However, the central role of traditional grammar in literacy began to diminish with the development of the Malaysian communicational syllabus in 1975 (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) as the direct implication of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The approach grew out of criticisms against structural theories of language, to a need to focus on "communicative proficiency rather than the mere mastery of structures" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Instead of building the syllabus around grammar, a CLT syllabus is "content-based, meaningful, contextualised and discourse-based" (Chen, 1999, p 7). And instead of the explicit teaching of grammar, role-playing and problem-solving tasks are used to help students acquire language forms and functions (Chen, 1999). However, there is debate in the CLT circle about whether to teach grammar, and about the extent and type of grammar instruction that will be appropriate in a communicative classroom (Chen, 1999). In fact, most scholars in the CLT circle agree that grammatical competence is an important element in the achievement of communicative competence (refer to Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1988). Many scholars, such as Scarcella and Oxford (1992), Widdowson (1990) and Lado (1988) have advocated the teaching of grammar in the second language classroom in order to achieve communicative
competence.

It seems that after a move away from the explicit teaching of grammar to a more communicative classroom, the role of grammar in the classroom has slowly diminished. But with recent insights regarding the importance of grammar and what the right grammar can do to achieve higher levels of literacy proficiency, it is time for the general education system in Malaysia to consider a return of grammar into Malaysian second language classrooms.

1.2 Major Technical Terms

**Literacy**

Literacy here means the ability to read and write, in which there are several levels. The first level can be thought of as the ability to recognize the symbols (alphabets) used in written language. The second level is the ability to decode (read) and code (write) written texts using the symbols. Next is the ability to understand and use the elements of written language, such as grammatical metaphor and lexical density in crafting a written text. Then, there is the understanding that written texts have social purposes, and therefore literacy also means the ability to use written texts for different purposes, such as work (e.g., reading to keep up with latest approaches in a particular field), leisure (reading novels) and governmental matters (filling tax forms). The last level is the understanding that as a writer constructs a text, he or she brings in his or her ideas and ideologies. Therefore, literacy also means the ability to uncover these ideologies and develop an awareness of how the reader is positioned in the written text (refer to Hammond, 1992; Halliday, 1996).


**Text**

A broader definition of text is used in this review, instead of referring only to written language; text can also mean spoken language unless mentioned otherwise. Text can refer to any stretch of meaningful language, whether spoken or written (refer Cusworth, 1995; Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

**Genre**

Genre as used in this review, can be thought of as text with particular structure and language features created by particular members of a culture to fulfil a specific social purpose. A genre contains specific purposes, a schematic structure (a distinctive beginning, middle and end) and language features (refer Martin, 1993a; Gerot & Wignell, 1994).
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.0 Language as a social-semiotic

In the last chapter, an overview, the background and the major technical terms of the review were given. In this chapter, the theoretical perspective behind functional grammar will be briefly presented. This review attempts to follow Michael Halliday’s social semiotic perspective on language (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). He defines language as a kind of semiotic, as a system of meaning. And by saying that language is a social semiotic, he suggests that language is primarily about meaning made within a social structure.

There are two important notions in this perspective. The first one is that language is a semiotic. This means that language has a system, or different levels of meaning. And it is these different levels of meaning that determine different language choices. These meanings or language choices are also useful; they help language users to achieve different purposes. To say that language is useful also implies that language is functional. And because there are different levels of meaning in language, there must also be different functions in language. In other words, language functions are the meanings in language or that the meaning is in the use (Halliday & Hasan, 1989; Thompson, 1996).
The second notion is that language is also a social process. Halliday suggests further that the meaning that is made in language is connected to our social system through context (in Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Therefore the language that is created as text (spoken or written) is intimately related to its context. Text, as defined by Halliday is both a product and a process (in Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Text as product is the object in a certain environment as produced by the speaker as speech or a writer as a piece of writing, which we can physically hear or see. Text as process represents the continuous process of making choices in meaning where each choice constitutes the environment. Hence, text as both process and product can be thought of as occurring and revealing itself in the context. Context as defined by Halliday is the immediate social or cultural setting of a particular text (in Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

Halliday (1985a; 1994) identifies three variables that will determine the social context. These three variables, which are field, tenor and mode, are collectively called register. Field is the social activity that is taking place, or happenings and events in a certain social setting, such as football, a functional grammar lecture, medicine or economics (Hammond, 1992). Tenor refers to the relationship between the participants within the social activity. The relationship can be defined in terms of power (equal and unequal power), contact (the frequency of contact between the participants), or affect (attitudes and feelings between the participants) (Hammond, 1992). Mode is defined as the channel of linguistics communication where there are two perspectives on distance. One is the spatial and temporal distance between the participants, and the other is in the degree of distance between the text and the events. For example, whether you are watching a football
match with a friend while talking about it, or whether you are writing a report about the football match that you saw. The second perspective on distance is often related to the transition from spoken to written language (Hammond, 1992).

According to Halliday (1985a; 1994) again, language is related to its social context through the three variables, or register. Therefore, it can be presumed that language also contains three levels of meaning for the variables of the context. As mentioned before, the meanings made in language are also its functions. Hence, there must also be three language functions for the three contextual variables. These three language functions, or metafunctions that construe the context with three levels of meaning are ideational (experiential), interpersonal and textual functions. A figure to show the relation between genre and register with language is presented in the next page; where it is clearly seen that the context of culture and situation determine language choices as meanings, which are construed in the lexicogrammar and realised physically through the system of phonology (sounds) and graphology (spelling).

The ideational or experiential function codes the field. Thus it is used to construe the speaker’s or writer’s experiences or happenings of a social activity. This function is realised in the grammar by the system of transitivity, which in its heart, constitutes processes such as material, mental, relational and others to construct the doings, happenings, feelings and beings in the social environments (Foley, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). The interpersonal function codes the tenor and expresses personal and social relationships and contact among the participants within the social event. This function is
encoded in the grammar as the system of mood and modality, which allows the speaker/writer to select a speech role and also to simultaneously choose a speech role for the addressee while the system of modality allows the speaker or writer to make judgements and predictions (Foley, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). The last function, the textual expresses the mode. As such, this function determines how information can be

![Genre and register in relation to language](image)

**Key:**
- T/V: Transitivity
- I/P: Interpersonal
- T&C: Theme and Cohesion
- L: Language
  - L/G: Lexicogrammar
  - P/G: Phonology and Graphology

* Shaded area = Language

Figure 2:1 Genre and register in relation to language

Source: Adapted from Eggins, 1994: 34
structured. This function also distinguishes text in terms of spoken and written language, and the difference in time and space between the speaker/writer and the addressee. It is coded in the grammar as theme and cohesion, which provide for structure both within the clause and the whole text (Foley, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994). (For more information on the metafunctions, refer to T. Bloor and M. Bloor, 1995; Butt et al., 1995; Eggin, 1994; Foley, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Halliday, 1985a; 1994; Martin, 1993b; Martin et al., 1997; Thompson, 1996). An example of how these three metafunctions actually code three levels of meaning in the grammar is demonstrated in the clause below (the example was adapted from Butt et al., 1995):

**Penelope ate the apple.**

The clause, if analysed using the three metafunctions, can be represented this way:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Penelope</th>
<th>ate</th>
<th>the apple</th>
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<td><em>Transitivity</em> (coding experiential meaning)</td>
<td>Participant: Actor</td>
<td>Process: Material</td>
<td>Participant: Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mood</em> (coding interpersonal meaning)</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Finite</td>
<td>Predicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Theme</em> (coding textual meaning)</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rheme</td>
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If a speaker chooses to say this clause to someone, then he or she is actually using the system of transitivity to represent what Penelope *did* do to the apple. As the speaker is interacting with someone, namely the listener, the speaker is also choosing to give information while simultaneously choosing a speech role for the listener to receive the information through the system of mood. And in deciding how to organize the clause, the speaker uses the system of theme and rheme to structure the flow of information, starting
off with common information shared by the speaker and listener (in this case, their common friend, Penelope) to new information (that Penelope ate the apple). Therefore, the speaker is actually choosing different options presented in the systems of grammar, to represent the three levels of meaning. The basic information, involving Penelope and the apple can be represented in many different ways, demonstrating how grammar is indeed a resource to make different meanings. Below are three clauses that can be constructed from the basic information with the first clause representing a different kind of process or a different reality in our world of experience; the second clause demanding information instead of giving information, and with the last clause exemplifying a different way of structuring the information.

1) Penelope enjoys apples
   or

2) Did Penelope eat the apple?
   or

3) The apple was eaten by Penelope.

Functional grammar will make these functions and the systems of grammar clear to the students as they go through the language features in each genre in the genre-based approach. By learning functional grammar, students learn how to make meaning in context and understand why specific features are used in certain ways in its particular social and cultural context. Another important note is that functional grammar deals with clauses and not sentences, as a clause can be considered as the smallest unit of meaning, or the building block for a text. Again, the emphasis of functional grammar is in the meaning of
language, and that is what makes it functional.

2.1 Conclusion

The notion of language as a social-semiotic was briefly explained in this chapter. This notion explains the function of language as essentially a meaning-making process in a particular social context. The three metafunctions of language that construe the social context are ideational, interpersonal and textual functions and these metafunctions are realised in the grammar through the system of transitivity, mood and modality, and theme and cohesion. Functional grammar explains these systems of grammar to students, so that students can use and understand the different resources in the system of grammar to make the appropriate levels of meaning in a certain social context.

In the next chapter, the arguments for bringing grammar back into the Malaysian language classroom will be presented. This will be followed by the arguments to bring functional grammar into the language classrooms as taught in the genre-based approach. A brief look into how functional grammar can be taught in the genre-based approach will also be given.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the brief theoretical perspective of language as a social-semiotic and how language is seen as functional due to its meaning-making potential in certain social contexts were given. In this chapter, the arguments for bringing grammar, specifically systemic functional grammar back into Malaysian classrooms will be given in two major sections. The first section deals with the general arguments for bringing grammar back into the language classrooms. This section will first look at the arguments against the teaching of grammar, and then move on to argue why these arguments against grammar teaching are no longer as staunch as before. It is only in the second section of the review, that the arguments for a specific grammar, systemic functional grammar will be given.

3.1 Why teach grammar?

Although there was previously a growing body of SLA research, which claimed that the teaching of grammar had no effect on SLA and was even to be potentially harmful to writing (see Dulay et al, 1982; Krashen, 1985; 1987); many now hold this otherwise. There is simply not enough evidence to support the claim that grammar teaching should be taken altogether. In fact, many linguists now hold that grammar teaching may be quite