

UNLOCKING MULTILINGUAL POTENTIAL: SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE DESCRIPTIVE WRITING INSTRUCTION

(Menyingkap Potensi Multibahasa: Strategi Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional
dalam Pembelajaran Menulis Teks Deskripsi)

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Abstract

The use of the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach as an instructional tool has been implemented to help English Foreign Language (EFL) students acquire and analyze common disciplinary discourses. However, many teacher preparation programs have not adequately integrated an SFL-guided curriculum to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. International assessment frameworks such as ACTFL and CEFR lack distinctive features that emphasize the functional and linguistic characteristics of spoken and written genres necessary for students to acquire competencies at various levels. This article reviews how the researcher used SFL to teach descriptive writing about hometowns to EFL students. The study highlights the potential benefits of incorporating SFL into foreign English teachers' curricula, using the Expanded Teaching Learning Cycle (ETLC) for teaching, data collection, and analysis. The researcher examined descriptive texts from three EFL students categorized by academic performance. The students showed different levels of progress in composing descriptive texts that accurately reflected genre phases and register characteristics.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, Multilingualism, SFL

Abstrak

Penggunaan pendekatan Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional (LSF) sebagai pendekatan instruksional telah diimplementasikan untuk membantu pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) dalam memperoleh dan menganalisis teks wacana pada disiplin ilmu umum. Namun, banyak program persiapan guru yang belum mengintegrasikan kurikulum berdasarkan teori LSF secara memadai untuk memenuhi kebutuhan siswa yang beragam secara budaya dan bahasa. Standar penilaian internasional seperti ACTFL dan CEFR tidak memiliki fitur khusus yang menekankan karakteristik fungsional dan linguistik dari genre lisan dan tulisan yang diperlukan siswa untuk memperoleh kompetensi di berbagai tingkatan. Penelitian ini mengulas bagaimana peneliti menggunakan LSF untuk mengajar menulis teks deskripsi tentang kampung halaman kepada siswa EFL. Penelitian ini menyoroti manfaat potensial dari penggunaan LSF ke dalam kurikulum pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa asing, dengan menggunakan Expanded Teaching Learning Cycle (ETLC) untuk pengajaran, pengumpulan data, dan analisis. Peneliti meneliti teks deskripsi dari tiga siswa EFL yang dikategorikan berdasarkan penilaian akademik. Hasilnya, para siswa menunjukkan tingkat

kemajuan yang berbeda dalam menyusun teks deskripsi yang mencerminkan fase genre dan karakteristik register.

Kata-kata kunci: Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing, Multibahasa, LSF

INTRODUCTION

The Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach has been utilized as an instructional strategy to aid English Foreign Language (EFL) students in acquiring and analyzing prevalent disciplinary discourses. This approach has been discussed in various scholarly works including Harman (2018), Troyan, Sembianti, & King (2019), Accurso & Gebhard (2021), Troyan, Herazo & Ryshina-Pankova (2022), and Graham (2023). However, the implementation of a curriculum informed by SFL to address cultural and linguistic diversity has been lacking in many teacher education programs, as noted by de Oliveira and Avalos (2017). Thus, this article provides a retrospective analysis of how the researcher, as an EFL teacher, utilized SFL in instructing EFL students on descriptive writing, to illuminate the potential benefits of incorporating SFL into foreign English teacher education.

The ACTFL and CEFR sources, serving as international assessment frameworks, do not possess distinctive characteristics regarding the importance of the functional and linguistic features of spoken and written genres that students must learn to acquire the competencies described across the levels of these frameworks (Troyan, Sembianti & King 2019). To put it another way, (Troyan, 2020) suggests that world language instructors must provide students with evaluation and teaching examples that demonstrate the use of language in real-world texts that reflect cultural contexts and meaning-making. Thus, the concept of genre is highly significant in SFL. Given the growing emphasis on fostering academic literacy across a range of genres in a world language, teachers require clear guidance on addressing genre-specific features in writing.

A significant notion in SFL is the register, which refers to the linguistic features utilized to construct a text that is suitable for a particular situation or set by the use of field, tenor, and mode. For instance, Sugiarto (2015)

investigated the tenor of learning activities in a textbook using SFL mood analysis to examine the learning tasks in an English textbook. The analysis revealed a lack of balance between the indicative and imperative mood in the conducted activities. Hadiyati, Said, & Sugiarto (2018) conducted a field study to investigate the ideational meaning of male and female responses to critical response paragraphs. The results indicate that despite the categorization of the texts into those produced by male and female students, a majority of the students demonstrated an understanding of transitivity as conveyed through the clauses that comprise the meaning of all of the text. Sugiarto & Siregar (2023) investigated the mode of the textual meaning in post-editing machine-translation output. The findings indicate that it is crucial to employ lexical cohesion principles that facilitate comprehension and acceptance of the intended meaning in the translated rendition of the source text. As a result, the register plays an important role in analyzing textual meaning within specific contexts..

EFL students can develop their writing skills and engage in critical debate about the various types of written discourse they frequently encounter by including SFL in writing classes. However, Noprianto (2017) and Potradinata (2018) found the challenges encountered by students in composing descriptive texts were attributed to their limited capacity to identify the social function of the text, their struggles with schematic structures, and their difficulty in incorporating relevant language features. Hence, determining appropriate pedagogical approaches employed in the writing process holds significant importance in the context of the SFL model of teaching a written text.

Despite the extensive research on SFL in language processes, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the explicit exploration of how SFL can inform the teaching of writing

through an analysis of social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the function of SFL in the teaching of writing among Indonesian EFL students. Specifically, in composing a

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between SFL concepts: Genre, register, and SFL in Descriptive Writing is discussed in this part.

Genre

The notion of genre carries significant importance in SFL. It denotes a discrete form of communication that is acknowledged within a specific sociocultural context. Scholars in the field of SFL have incorporated the use of genre as a means to comprehend how social and cultural contexts influence the composition of a given text. According to Martin and Rose (2008), genres are influenced by the cultural values, beliefs, and expectations of a particular society. These components have an impact on the linguistic choices that are chosen.

A prominent scholar in SFL, Halliday & Hasan (1985) emphasized the social and cultural aspects of the genre, arguing that genres are not simply linguistic structures, but rather social practices that are recognized and valued by particular communities of language users. In addition, Martin (2009), an influential scholar in SFL, claims that genres can be described as social processes that have undergone a gradual transformation across diverse ideological, cultural, and disciplinary frameworks to accomplish specific objectives in predetermined manners. As a result, genres are a key idea in SFL, providing a framework for comprehending how language is used in social and cultural contexts to accomplish particular goals or purposes.

Register

Another important concept in SFL is a register, which pertains to the linguistic

descriptive text about their hometowns. This present study was guided by the subsequent research question: "How is SFL applied in teaching English descriptive writing to EFL students?"

characteristics employed to compose a text that is appropriate for a given circumstance or context. Scholars have employed the notion of the register as a means to comprehend how they utilize language to formulate written works that are suitable for diverse readerships and objectives. Halliday & Martin (2003) argued the concept of register entails the act of selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures based on the prevailing social context in which the text is being produced. Thus, the concept of the register is considered a crucial element in the utilization of language within social settings and is believed to have a profound relationship with social and cultural influences.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) classified field, tenor, and mode as situational factors that affect language meaning. An ideational meaning (field), an interpersonal meaning (tenor), and a textual meaning (mode) are all realized simultaneously in the linguistics register. The three registers are manifested concurrently in a given text using a sequence of semantic selections, which are implemented through lexico-grammatical tools such as transitivity and processes, modality and mood, and cohesive devices (Harman, 2018). Therefore, these three meanings are the key variables for register analysis.

SFL in Writing Descriptive Text

Writing is a very important way to communicate, and it plays a substantial part when acquiring a second language. Even though almost everyone grows up speaking their native language, writing abilities remain required to be taught. For a child, learning to speak comes naturally as a consequence of exposure, but learning to write requires conscious learning (Harmer,

2006). Therefore, a study of the writing process particularly in the context of evolving communication technologies is a topic of scholarly relevance. This also bears significance for the pedagogical methods employed in the writing process.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) views language as a social semiotic system, that is a system of signs used to convey meaning within a social context. SFL's primary focus is on the systematic ways in which languages operate to convey meaning and accomplish tasks within the social contexts in which they are utilized, developed, and transformed over time (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The aforementioned functions encompass the creation of concepts, navigating interpersonal relationships, and regulating the exchange of information, contingent upon whether communication occurs verbally in interpersonal settings, in written form, or via various modes of technology-mediated communication (Gebhard & Accurso 2023). Thus, SFL examines how information is processed across different forms of communication, including writing, in order to better understand how languages operate and interact in society.

Incorporating SFL into writing class can help students improve their writing abilities and engage in critical discussion about the various forms of written discourse that they commonly encounter. Halliday's SFL theory provides teachers working in various contexts with an approach that emphasizes meaning. Graham (2023) emphasized that novice SFL teachers need not attain mastery of all SFL facets to commence their teaching practice. He emphasized to educators that they can delve further and establish fresh objectives for both teachers and their students as they gain greater familiarity with SFL and its associated teaching methodology.

The student's difficulties in writing descriptive texts were related to their incapacity to adapt to the social function of the text, their struggle to write the text in a chronological framework, and their

struggle to include appropriate linguistic features, such as the use of the inaccurate particular participant and the inappropriate tense (Potradinata, 2018). In line with this, Noprianto (2017) found that the three main areas in which students struggled when writing descriptive texts were their inability to recognize the social function of the text, their difficulty with schematic structures, and their difficulty including relevant language features, including the use of the inaccurate particular participant. Therefore, the pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies used during the writing process are crucial to an SFL model of teaching and assessing a descriptive text.

METHODOLOGY

The method of teaching descriptive writing, data collection, and data analysis in this study is guided by the Expanded Teaching Learning Cycle (ETLC) approach to teacher action research using SFL (Gebhard, 2019). Table 1 shows the outline of the ETLC phases for teaching descriptive Text writing. Then, investigated three descriptive texts produced by three EFL learners who are in their fourth semester of study. The written texts are produced by the students who are classified into three distinct groups based on their academic performance: high, middle, and low achievers. The participants consented to participate in the study voluntarily. The utilization of pseudonyms in the data presentation of the research report ensured the participants' anonymity.

Table 1. Outline of ETLC teaching Descriptive Text

Goals: Provide an instructional space in which students can discuss aspects of their linguistic and cultural identities while learning to write a descriptive text.
Genre and register focus: descriptive text
Length: Four 2-hour lessons
Phases of the ETLC
Phase 1. Exploring a problem of practice and introducing the genre (lesson 1)
Phase 2. Deconstructing and Jointly constructing a model text to notice and name language choices of a descriptive text (lesson 2)
Phase 3. Independently constructing a descriptive text (lesson3)
Phase 4. Presenting texts (lesson 4)

The first phase of the ETLC is the exploration of a practice problem and the introduction of genre. The practice problem underlying this study is how to develop students' linguistic and cultural resources and use these resources to teach them how to create texts while also allowing them to explore different facets of their identities. As a result, this phase concentrated on the staging of the descriptive text and the scaffolding of the specific register features. The second phase is deconstructing a model text to notice and name language choices. In this phase, students re-read the model text to annotate and discuss other specific register choices. The third phase is jointly constructing descriptive text. In this phase, the class was guided in jointly reading the model text and discussing the text's specific register choices. The fourth phase is independently constructing a descriptive text about their hometown. In this phase, students write a revised text and discuss the identity of their text. The fifth phase is presenting the texts. In this phase, students share their final project with their peers.

DISCUSSION

Phase 1: Exploring a Problem of Practice and Introducing the Genre

This phase entails an examination of a practical issue and the introduction of a particular genre. The fundamental issue addressed in this study pertains to the pedagogical challenge of enhancing students' linguistic and cultural proficiencies and leveraging these proficiencies to facilitate their acquisition of text creation skills, while also providing them with opportunities to investigate diverse aspects of their identities.

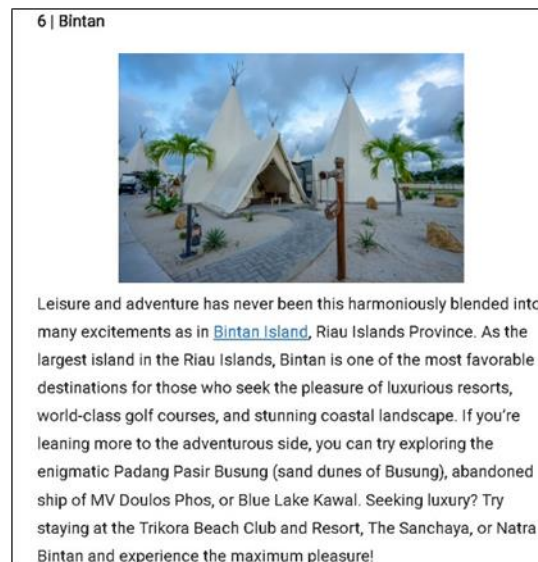


Figure 1. Example of Authentic Descriptive Text

I prepared my classroom for the first day of instruction. I displayed a descriptive text about a specific place in Indonesia (Figure 1), and then asked students to give feedback on the text based on how it related to how they would describe their hometown. One student asked about the formality of the written style of the text. Another student argued that the text was written in a casual style. I then asked them how they define the text as casual or formal, which will lead to the understanding of the tenor in the register of the text. They mentioned the use of an interrogative sentence and the use of an exclamation mark in the text as the reasons for their feedback. Finally, I requested that they be allowed to write a descriptive text about their hometown formally or informally in the context to whose audience they intended the text to be read.

Phase 2: Deconstructing and Jointly Constructing A Model Text to Notice and Name Language Choices of A Descriptive Text

This phase involves the process of analyzing a model text to identify and label the language selections made. During this lesson, students engage in a process of re-reading the model text with the aim of annotating and discussing register choices (field, tenor, mode) that are specific to the

text. entails an examination of a practical issue and the introduction of a particular genre (*Figure 2*).

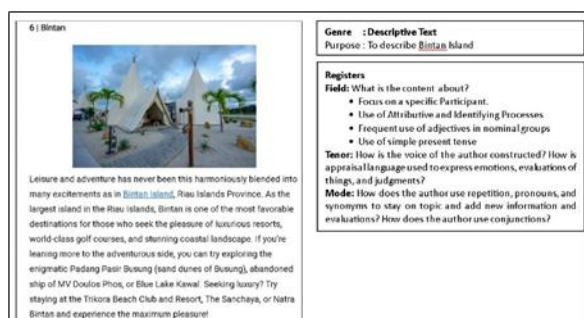


Figure 2. Deconstructing and Jointly constructing the model text

In this phase, the initial emphasis was placed on the organization of the written material. To enhance students' understanding of the descriptive writing genre, the text was analyzed to identify its stages, such as identification (*Bintan Island*) and its description (e.g., *the largest Island in Riau, the most favorable destination*). Then, I reinforced the students' register knowledge by discussing the topic or the field of the text (*Bintan Island*), the use of attributive and identifying processes (e.g., *has never been...*), the use of adjectives in nominal groups (e.g., *the largest island, the most convenient island*), and the use of simple present tense (e.g., *Bintan is the most convenient island*). Then, I advanced the students' focus to the use of appraisal language on the text to identify the tenor of the text (e.g., *harmoniously blended, seeking luxury?, the maximum pleasure!*) and then focus on the mode of the text of repetition, pronouns, and synonyms (e.g., *Bintan, the largest island*). The author's language choices in composing the text were analyzed through highlighting, review notes, and discussion.

Phase 3: Independently constructing a descriptive text

In this phase, students discuss the field, tenor, and mode of their descriptive text. Students first discussed the field of

their texts. One student argued that his text was too general, he asked whether he could specify the field by choosing a specific place in his hometown. They then discussed the tenor of their texts. Some students informed the class that they had chosen to use the formal style in describing their hometown while others chose to use the casual written format. Finally, they discussed the mode of the text. They evaluated the use of repetition, pronouns, synonyms, and conjunctions to stay on the topic which will make their text coherent. The students demonstrated a conscientious approach to incorporating feedback by revising their language choices in a manner that reflected their investment in their written work.

Phase 4: Presenting texts

To explicate the aforementioned finding in greater detail, a genre and register analysis of the pre-and post-writing samples of three concentrated students (Indah, Budi, and Rani) is presented. They were chosen because they represented different writing achievement levels—high, middle, and low. The primary lecturer for the writing course makes recommendations for determining the student's writing skill level.

Indah

Indah was identified as a student with high-level achievement in writing class. She was not as involved in the class discussion as other students were, but the application of SFL to Indah's pre- and post-texts reveals a noteworthy array of patterns in her writing skills, that indicate her proficiency in certain areas and potential for further improvement. Indah's text shows significant strength in terms of field, tenor, and mode resources, as she has effectively established a lexical chain that serves to maintain the coherence of her discourse on the subject of her hometown identities. Indah incorporated a depiction of her hometown in both written works and made no modifications in the post-writing phase.

Budi

Budi has been identified as a student with middle-level achievement in writing class. He demonstrates active participation in class discussions and provides constructive feedback to his peers. An SFL analysis of Budi's pre- and post-texts reveals that his writing abilities exhibit a number of compelling set of patterns that highlight both areas of proficiency and potential for further development. Budi included a description of his hometown in both written compositions, and he made many changes in his post-writing. Budi's written works exhibit significant improvements in the utilization of field, tenor, and mode of the text.

Rani

Rani was classified as a student exhibiting low proficiency in writing. However, she exhibits proactive engagement during classroom discourse. An SFL analysis conducted on Rani's pre- and post-texts indicates that her writing skills demonstrate a progression of patterns for potential growth. Rani incorporated a depiction of her hometown in both written compositions and subsequently made certain modifications in her post-writing. Rani's written works demonstrate noteworthy improvements in the application of field, tenor, and mode of the text.

The ETLC project presents a valuable opportunity to explore the SFL approach to instructional design and to analyze the differences in students pre- and post-descriptive writing samples of the students. Students engage in a process of studying the model text to annotate and analyze register choices (field, tenor, mode) that are specific to the text after the considering a practical issue and introducing the genre of the descriptive writing.

According to James Martin, genres can be defined as social processes that are staged and goal-oriented (Martin, 2009). Genres are considered to be "goal-oriented" due to their development over time within

various ideological, cultural, and disciplinary frameworks, to achieve expected outcomes in a given context (Gebhard & Accurso, 2023). Indah staged the genre by providing the identification (*the city of Tasikmalaya*) and description (*its location, icons, and tourism sites*). Budi staged the genre by stating the identification (*Padaherang*) and description (*its views, landscapes, and cuisine*). Rani staged the genre by giving the identification (*Ciamis*) and description (*its location, cuisine, and relation to her personal feelings*). In light of this, genres are social since they allow people to utilize different linguistic forms in specific social contexts such as describing one's hometown.

The features of the register are indicative of three dimensions inherent in any given situation (Halliday in Gebhard, & Accurso, 2023). The choice of fields choices is crucial in determining the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the activity's content. For instance, the students' use of precise and appropriate nouns, verbs, adjectives, and conjunctions is necessary to effectively classify and describe a particular place. Tenor choices construct different voices or situational roles. For example, Indah situated her writing voice formally in describing her text by using academic words in her text. Budi situated his writing semi-formally by using the pronouns '*my, myself, and I*' in his text. Meanwhile, Rani used the word '*hehe...*' as a happy expression word to situate her writing casually. Finally, mode choices manage the flow of the text coherently. For example, the use of repetition, pronouns, and synonyms in the students' texts. In Indah's and Budi's texts, they made good advancements in the mode they used. In Rani's text, although there are some advancements, the text still needs to focus on its field to make it more coherent.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings, it is found that the students, regardless of the degree,

showed improvement in their ability to write a descriptive text that indicated the expected genre stages and register features of describing their hometown. Despite the constraints imposed by this brief inquiry focuses on a single unit of instruction, it provides insights into the application of SFL in the teaching of English writing to EFL students. In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge and accept the reality that in any classroom there will always be students who possess varying degrees of background knowledge and levels of investment.

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