

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND GRAMMAR IN DISCOURSE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH AND ITS IMPLICATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to unpack briefly the concept of grammar according to discourse functional approach, which is different from that advocated by the followers of formal or autonomist approach. The advocates of former approach are strongly confident that grammar originates from discourse. Those following the latter consider that the existence of grammar does not depend on its communicative uses. Referring to the perspective of discourse-functional approach, the discussion of grammar should take into account various aspects of discourse, such as: conceptual tools, discourse structure, speaker attitude, interactional factors, and the nature of analytical categories. The implication of functional grammar in language teaching is also highlighted in this discussion.

Key words: grammar, discourse, discourse functional approach, and autonomist approach.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bermaksud untuk mengungkapkan secara singkat konsep gramatika menurut pendekatan fungsional yang berlandaskan pada wacana (diskos). Konsep gramatika menurut pendekatan fungsional sangat berbeda dengan konsep grammar seperti yang diperkenalkan oleh pendekatan formal atau otonomis. Para tokoh dari pada pendekatan fungsional sangat yakin bahwa gramatika bermula dari wacana. Para pengikut pendekatan formal meyakini bahwa keberadaan gramatika tidak tergantung pada penggunaan secara komunikatif gramatika itu. Dengan mengacu kepada pandangan penganut pendekatan fungsional, pembicaraan tentang gramatika hendaknya memperhitungkan berbagai aspek wacana, seperti : struktur wacana, sikap pembicara, faktor-faktor interaksi, dan hakikat kategori analisis. Pembahasan tentang gramatika fungsional dalam tulisan ini disertai dengan implikasi dari pendekatan gramatika fungsional dalam pengajaran bahasa.

Kata kunci: grammar, wacana, pendekatan fungsional, dan pendekatan otonomis.

1. Rationale

People dealing with languages might have different opinions about the fact whether discourse is closely linked to grammar. These differences are likely triggered by the types of the grammatical approaches that they are in favor with. In relation to this point, there are two approaches to grammar that need considering, namely **discourse-functional approach** and **autonomist approach**. The followers of discourse-functional approach believe that discourse, which is defined as spoken, signed or written language used by people to communicate in natural settings, is the primary focus for the grammars of the languages in the world (Hopper, 1988 in Van Dijk, 1997a: 112). In this case, discourse is not only considered as the place for the manifestation of grammar, but it is also considered as the source for the formation of grammar. This is in accordance with the functional concept of language, in which language is explained as deriving from the universal features of language uses in societies (Leech, 1983: 47). The advocates of the formal or autonomist approach to grammar consider that grammar stands on its own right. This signifies that the existence of grammar is independent of its communicative uses. This is quite in contrary to the nature of grammar advocated by the discourse-functional grammarians. The autonomist grammarians, in this respect, do not view that grammar is originated from discourse, but they strongly believe that grammar derives from a common genetic linguistic inheritance of the human species (Leech, 1983:46).

There are two basic goals that discourse-functional approach to grammar attempts to highlight, namely **descriptive goal** and **explanatory goal**. The descriptive goal refers to the fact that languages have grammatical resources, which can be used to express the same content. This is the task of the language users to determine the basis for the selection of the types of grammatical resources appropriate for communication purposes. With regard to this point, it can be said that there must be social rules governing the way the speakers choose the grammatical resources for expressing the same

meaning. The explanatory goal attempts to reveal the logical reasons for the existence of particular grammatical resources of language. This includes such things as the reason for the availability of pronouns in all languages and the choice of certain kinds of grammatical forms for expressing certain functions. In English, it is obviously exemplified by the use of various structural patterns to express the same function. Asking for direction, for example, can be expressed as follows, ranging from formal to informal use:

- a. Where is the post office?
- b. Can you tell me where the post office is?
- c. It's very kind of you if you can tell me where the post office is.

There are three kinds of explanations becoming the concern of the linguists interested in the link between discourse and grammar. These three explanations include: (a) Cognitive explanations; (b) Social or interactional explanations; (c) and diachronic explanations (Cumming and Ono in Van Dijk, 1997a: 112). Cognitive explanations refer to the cognitive resources and processes that the interactants use in producing and understanding language. Social or interactional explanations have something to do with the nature of interactional situations, in which language, especially its spoken form, is produced or consumed. These types of explanations can easily be understood as being related to the social or cultural norms and resources, and the goals of the people who are involved in the interaction. Diachronic explanations refer to the relationship between discourse functional pressures on grammars and grammatical change, which is known as grammaticalisation.

It should be noted that these three sources of explanation are not mutually exclusive. This means that they are interrelated to each other in expressing language functions. It is believed that the various formal resources among the world's languages are generally derived from the

interaction of different functional uses, in which language users are obliged to make a choice between two or more ways of expressing a particular function, making use of very general or even universal patterns of language structure.

2. Discussion

The school of linguistics which asserts that grammar is derived from discourse is originated from the work of functional linguists in the USA in 1970s. The functional linguists at that time began to realize that they needed to exclude their concern with those dealing with formal forms of language, autonomist linguists. It should also be realized that this new branch of linguistics has its origin from the work of European social and communicative approach, especially the approach advocated by J.R. Firth, which is known as Firthian Approach. This approach is then developed by M.A.K. Halliday and his followers, like Jim Martin, Suzanne Eggins, and others, whose theory of linguistic approach is widely labelled Systemic Functional Linguistics with its discourse analysis referred to as Discourse Semantics Analysis. The Prague School tradition developed functional linguistics under the name “Functional Sentence Perspective” by Firbas (1966), Matheus (1975), and others (in Van Dijk 1997a, 113).

These varieties of functional linguistics have something in common. They are basically concerned with the relationship between language and social context, in the sense that they take into account such things as the social setting of language, the communicative function of language, and the management of information in discourse, which is considered central to the understanding of grammar.

There have been quite a number of researches on discourse or functional linguistics. Among the American linguists having conducted researches on discourse were as follows. Dwight Bollinger conducted a number of studies in 1952, 1986, 1989, which revealed the importance of understanding language as it is used in natural setting, and the special characteristics of spoken language, particularly intonation. The researches done by Pike (1954), Longacre (1972), and Grimes (1975), basically attempted to strengthen that discourse was central to understanding language (Cumming and Ono in Van Dijk, 1997a: 113).

There was another aspect of linguistics becoming the concern of the mid 1970s functionalism. This aspect was concerned with the typology of linguistics focusing on universal properties of human language. The typological studies on linguistics by Greenberg (1966 in Van Dijk 1997a: 113) and his followers covered observation about statistical tendencies in the languages of the world, and also the correlations between characters of different syntactic subsystems, such as word order in a noun phrase and a clause. It was, however, realized that the observations of these sub-syntactic aspects of linguistics, required explanations provided by discourse functional approaches.

There is one more thing that needs to be given attention in relation to functional approaches. Discourse functional approaches are closely linked to other disciplines. These disciplines have influenced and been influenced by the discourse functional approach in terms of grammar. It has been noted before that discourse functional approach involves cognitive factors. Therefore, knowledge on psycholinguistics and cognitive science should be considered in coping with problems of grammar in discourse. It should also be realized that discourse functional approach is also influenced by the fields of anthropology and sociology. This can

be seen from the fact that social aspects like social relationship or status determine the choice of certain lexico-grammatical items in using language.

From what has been presented before, it can be said that discourse-functional linguists agree that the organizations of language are largely based on the use of language for communication in natural settings. In this case, grammar becomes primarily an object of description and a source of explanation for those interested in the study of the grammar of discourse. In analyzing the grammar of discourse, discourse grammarians are largely different from autonomist grammarians. Discourse grammarians analyze the grammar of discourse based on naturally occurring data, but autonomist grammarians may mostly rely on invented examples. This signifies that discourse functional linguists have included the context in which the discourse takes place in their data about linguistic analysis. The context in this case includes: (a) Linguistic context; (b) Ethnographic context; (c) and Extra-linguistic context, which includes both its social and physical aspects.

Another concern of discourse grammarians is that the issue of text frequency has an important role in analyzing discourse grammar. This means that many functional discourse linguists believe that text frequency is very important for the understanding of particular grammatical constructions of discourse grammar. It is believed that the grammars of discourse code best what speakers do most (Susanna Cumming and Tsuyoshi Ono in van Dijk 1997: 114). This idea of text frequency has two significant consequences for methodology of discourse approaches to grammar. The first consequence is that many discourse grammarians have adopted a quantitative methodology, and have been very concerned with statistical correlations between particular grammatical forms and aspects of the linguistic and non-linguistic context. The second consequence is that many discourse grammarians have recently

begun to focus increasingly on the form of language occupying most of the time and attention of most language users.

2.1 Conceptual Tools

There are a number of explanatory themes or conceptual tool, which are important in discourse functional work. In the following section, the most central themes will briefly be presented. The central themes, in this case, include *Information Flow*, *Discourse Structure*, *Speaker Attitude*, *Interactional factors*, and *The Nature of Analytical Categories*.

Information flow refers to the way information is distributed within and across clauses. It is admitted that information flow is possibly the part of conceptual tools, which is possibly best known and most widely studied by discourse-functional grammarians. The significance of the information flow in the analysis of a text in terms of functional grammar is related to the primary function of language, that is, to convey information from the speaker to the addressee. From the speaker's point of view, information can be thought of in terms of the information which is in or out of attention or the focus of consciousness. From the addressee's point of view, information can be referred to as the one which is more or less expected or predictable in relation to the given setting and the previous discourse. People usually expect information, which is relatively accessible or predictable to be coded with less linguistic work. While the information which is relatively inaccessible or surprising, should be coded with special, heavy or marked linguistic mechanism. It is quite possible that predictability may have several different sources which may be distinguished by linguistic coding devices.

Information flow is generally assumed to be a cognitive matter, in the sense that it can be understood in terms of the dynamic mental states of the speaker and addressee during discourse production and consumption. It should be realized that it is speakers who make

linguistic decisions and that it is also the task of speakers to take addressee's needs into account in producing discourse. Therefore, discourse grammarians are primarily interested in the speaker's mental states and the mental state of the addressee or the speaker's model of the addressee's mental states.

The factors of information flow have been identified by means of a very wide range of grammatical phenomenon, such as the number of information in a unit (in noun phrase form) and its arrangement, which is realized in the order of the elements and their roles in argument structure. In relation to the use of noun phrase as the factor of information flow, discourse functional linguists, in their investigation, make use of referential forms such as full nounphrases, pronoun, and zero anaphora, and also the use of articles and other determiners in English. It has been found out that there is a correlation between the degree of explicitness of a referential form and the speaker's judgement on the accessibility of the referent in the hearer's mind. Full noun phrases are associated with referents which the speakers judges are not active in the hearer's consciousness. The use of pronouns is associated with active concepts. The use of articles is associated with an information status factor as being identifiable, that is, the speaker's assumption that a hearer can identify a referent, on the basis of either prior mention in discourse or on knowledge obtained from other sources. The use of the definite article 'the' is associated with identifiable referents, and the use of the indefinite article 'a' or 'an' is associated with non-identifiable referents.

Constituent order has an important role in determining information flow. This is the order of elements in the clause, especially the relative positions of the verb, subject, and object, helping the recognition of information status. It is acknowledged that, particularly in languages with flexible constituent order, there is a tendency that given information comes

earlier in the clause than the new information. This can be illustrated by means of existential process in Indonesian.

Ada dua murid di dalam kelas

Be two student at in class

There are two students in the classroom

Dua murid ada di dalam kelas

Two student be at in class

There are two students in the classroom

Preferred argument structure

Argument structure is another area showing the significance of information flow factors to linguistic coding. Argument structure refers to syntactic and semantic roles of noun phrases in a clause. In relation to this point, it can be said that subjects usually represent a given referent. This means that subjects, especially of transitive verbs, tend to be agents, and agents tend to be human, and humans tend to be discourse topics. This analysis can be extended to show that new information also has preferences. This signifies that new referents are much likely to be introduced as objects of transitive verbs or as subjects of intransitive verbs in many different languages.

Examples: They got three new friends

This saw this group of elephants

These two examples illustrate the use of transitive verbs to introduce new information in object position. It can be said that the objects of transitive verbs tend to bear new information, and the subjects of transitive verbs tend to constitute given information. Intransitive subjects are sometimes given and sometimes new.

2.2 Discourse structure

Discourse structure can be used as a means of explaining the distribution of grammatical patterns in discourse. This signifies that grammar serves as the creation and the reflection of the higher level organization of text in a number of ways. The use of certain grammatical points such as preverbal adverbial clauses and full noun phrases may serve as a signal of text-structure unit boundaries. Other use of grammatical items like pronouns and clause chaining morphology is possibly related to unit-internal locations. There is also a possibility that particular kinds of grammatical points are associated with particular kinds of text structure units. The use of simple past verbs, for example, is associated with narrative clauses, and the use of intensifiers is associated with evaluative clauses. It should also be noted that the use of certain kinds of subordination and subordinating conjunctions may create the relationship between units in discourse. Adverbial clauses, for example, are clauses, which are subordinate to a main clause. They may be placed either before or after the clause they modify. Such adverbial clauses in English are commonly introduced with subordinating conjunctions like *before*, *because*, and *although*. This is a fact in English that adverbial clauses of these types can appear more than one position. It is, therefore, of relevance to find out the factors determining when they actually occur. There have been a number of researches on discourse functional factors attempting to determine the relative position of adverbial clauses to the main clauses. These kinds of studies were done by different scholars like Chafe (1984) and Thompson (1987) on narrative, Matthiessen and Thompson (1988) on expository discourse, and Ford on conversation. Their studies basically reveal that the most general function for the initial positioning of adverbial clauses is to create and reflect discourse structure by signaling shifts in time, place or orientation.

It should be kept in mind that the use of certain grammatical points in relation to text structure needs to be based on discourse – structure theory. Discourse grammarians have derived discourse theories from different sources such as anthropology, sociology, and artificial intelligence. This theory of discourse structure strongly holds that different kinds of structure bear different discourse genres. This means that folkloric narrative, personal narrative, written narrative, conversation, and written expository discourse, each has its own schematic or discourse structure.

2.3 Speaker Attitude

It has been acknowledged that speaker attitude has great influence to aspects of linguistic form. Speaker attitude, which is also called *stance*, *perspective*, *empathy*, *subjectivity*, and *interpersonal metafunction* in discourse reflects how the person views or assesses the state of affairs being described or how they wish to be seen by their interlocutor. The influence of speaker attitude can be seen from the use of noun phrase and argument structure. There have been studies showing that attitudinal factors influence referential choice. It is found out that there is a correlation between the explicitness of referential forms to the degree of empathy – the more empathy the speaker feels towards the referent, the less explicit the form used. It is, however, possible that the fuller form is used to indicate lack of empathy.

It has been investigated that there is a direct relationship between the stance taken by a speaker and the mapping of event participants onto case roles in discourse. In this case, agents or subjects are generally held to have a special syntactic status. This is due to the fact that the speaker takes their point of view or they are held socially responsible for the event.

2.4 Interactional Factors

It has been elaborated that pressures from the demands of conversational interaction have been linked to a wide range of grammatical choices. The use of various aspects of syntax is triggered by the goals that interactants would like to achieve. However, interactional pressures seem to have significant influence on two areas of syntactic choice, that is, *left dislocation* and *final adverbial clauses*. Both of these syntactic areas are concerned with the intention for presenting information in a particular sequence.

Left dislocation refers to a construction in which a noun phrase is fronted and replaced with a pronoun, such as in the construction *Mary, she prefers western food*. This construction is traditionally viewed as a simple monoclausual construction. However, it has then been realized that this construction is likely to be interactionally complex, involving more than one interactant. More over, such a construction seems to be designed to fulfill interactional goals.

Initial positioning of adverbial clauses, as it is presented before, is related to the function of text-structuring consideration. There is a possibility to locate adverbial clauses in other positions in conversation. The production of an adverbial clause in final position, which is followed by a falling intonation contour is intended for interactional purposes or factors.

2.4 The Nature of Analytical Categories

There is one fundamental difference between discourse-functional linguistics and autonomist linguistics. This difference can be seen from its treatment of the basic categories of analysis. Transitivity, for example, is traditionally viewed as consisting of transitive and intransitive verbs. In traditional grammar, the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs is mainly associated with the fact that whether the verbs can be followed by objects or not. In discourse-functional linguistics, transitivity referred to as discourse transitivity, is not

confined to the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs as suggested by traditional grammarians. But the distinction is more emphasized on establishing the relationship between the argument structure of a verb and various grammatical characteristics, like the use of the terms Agent/Actor, Process Types, and Goal/Phenomenon.

Examples: Traditional grammar:	He	lifted	the table
	Subject	Verb	Object
Functional grammar:	He	lifted	the table
	Actor	Process:	Goal
		Material	

3. Conclusion

From what has been discussed before, it can be concluded that discourse and grammar are closely related in discourse functional linguistics. This close relationship can be seen from the use of various grammatical aspects as discourse markers, such as information flow, discourse structure, speaker attitude, and interactional factors. The existence of systemic functional linguistics has made the availability of functional grammars which are practically used in teaching (Geoff Williams: 1993, 199 in Len Unsworth:1933). These particular types of grammars provide language users with the description of language for genuine social purposes. The development of functional grammars is very important for the field of language teaching since these grammar are organized to explain how meanings are conveyed in texts, rather than dealing with language structure which is not linked with meaning. The most significant part of functional grammar is that this grammar makes it possible for language users to relate grammatical structure to the ways the language users express meanings when they use language in context. Systemic functional grammar can, therefore, be

considered as a comprehensive theory of language being able to relate descriptions of grammatical structure to social structure by describing types of situation in a culture.

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