

# A Systemic Functional Linguistic Study on Language Use of Indonesian Students in Writing

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## ABSTRACT

*Language is a form of cultural wealth of a nation. Analysis of the use of a language is an interesting topic to study. The current manuscript implement Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) theory which focuses on exploring the social and cultural context of language use in a piece of writing. SFL it self is an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system which focuses on the function of language in social contexts and the choices that language users make. This paper is intended to analyze students' recount text writing in SFL perspectives, and how teachers can assist students in solving writing problems. Specifically this study hopefully can identify in what aspects that Indonesian students usually made some errors, based on three metafunctions from SFL perspective. The finding shows that most of the students did errors in the use of tense, generic structure, and grammatical errors. Thus, Transition-Action-Details (TAD) could be used as one of the strategies in teaching writing, especially writing recount text in Indonesian context.*

**Keywords:** *recount text, STAD strategy, systemic functional linguistic, task-based learning*

## 1. Introduction

Systemic functional linguistics is the study of the relationship between language and its functions in social settings. Also known as SFL, systemic functional grammar, Hallidayan linguistics, and systemic linguistics. Systemic functional linguistics treats grammar as a meaning-making resource and

insists on the interrelation of form and meaning. This field of study was developed in the 1960s by British linguist M.A.K. Halliday (b. 1925), who had been influenced by the work of the Prague School and British linguist J.R. Firth (1890-1960).

Nordquist (2021) mentioned that according to Halliday (1975), language has developed in

response to three kinds of social-functional 'needs.' The first is to be able to construe experience in terms of what is going on around us and inside us. The second is to interact with the social world by negotiating social roles and attitudes. The third and final need is to be able to create messages with which we can package our meanings in terms of what is New or Given, and in terms of what the starting point for our message is, commonly referred to as the Theme. Halliday (1978) calls these language functions metafunctions and refers to them as ideational, interpersonal and textual respectively.

"Halliday's point is that any piece of language calls into play all three metafunctions simultaneously." (Muntigl & Ventola, 2010). One of the SFL object which can be analyse as a part of language wealth is genre-based approach usage in certain context which focuses on exploring the social and cultural context of language use in a piece of writing.

Since the genre-based approach is used in the process of learning activities, many students are required to understand some of the text that is usually provided in the genre-based approach. They are descriptive text, recount text, procedure text, and exposition text. This genre is viewed as a staged, objective social process achieved primarily through language in systemic functional linguistics. Curriculum activities such as explaining, describing, arguing, reviewing, recounting, and storytelling are proposed to engage students in using language for social purposes (Cakrawati, 2018).

The main goal of this approach is to help teachers direct students, in understanding the text not only as a group of sentences but also as a tool for achieving communication goals. As stated by Martin (1990) and Swales (1990) That genre is a goal-oriented communication activity. Thus, the genre could be defined as either verbally or in writing text which depicts the relation

between language and its social function. 2016 (Dirgeyasa). It also corresponds to Martin's (1993) definition of genre as "a staged, goal-oriented social process that integrates field (the subject-matter of the text), mode (the channel of communication being used - whether written or spoken), and tenor (participants) choices in predictable ways."

Associated with a genre in EFL classrooms, there will be term genre pedagogies or genre-based approaches faced by the educators. According to Hyon (1996) and Najmi (2015), a genre-based approach focuses on the relationship between text genres and their contexts. Since the benefit of a genre-based approach is to help them understand the ways structural and language features of written text can influence meaning-making. Genre pedagogies could have a special role in implementing the goals of a genre-based approach. According to Tardy (2011), genre pedagogies can assist teachers in providing targeted instruction to

meet student's needs related to language and writing in second language contexts.

Recount text is one of the texts that are usually provided. Recount, according to Derewianka (1990), is a development of a sequence of events in which writers recreate an experience. Meanwhile, we could say that personal and historical recounts are products of the process of writing the story through the process of sequencing people and events in time and space, according to Knapp's genre model (Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

In general, a recount will focus on specific participants, the use of time sequence, the use of simple past tense, the use of action verbs (material process), the presence of time (circumstances of time), and also the use of third-person pronouns and passive voice. Since recount text required several aspects and is not easy to be implemented. Thus, educators have an important role in scaffolding which relate to the pedagogies.

This paper is intended to analyze students' recount text writing in SFL perspectives, and how teachers can assist students in solving writing problems through a pedagogical plan. This study was supposed to provide detailed insights into students' writing problems. Teachers are expected to design a pedagogical plan that will effectively help students overcome the recurring problem found in writing recount text after diagnosing their problems.

### **1.1. Genre-based approach**

A genre-based approach prioritized the relationship between text genres and their contexts (Hyon, 1996). It also aimed to assist a student in participants in their academic, professional, and broader communities (Hammond and Derewianka, 2001). The genre-based approach has the following characteristics.

The genre-based approach focuses on exploring the social and cultural context of language

use in a piece of writing. The context determines the purpose of a text, its overall structure in terms of language features, and text features, which are frequently in the form of linguistic conventions (Hammond and Derewianka, 2001; Hyon, 1996).

This method emphasizes the importance of readers and the linguistic norms that a piece of writing must adhere to in order to be accepted by its audience (Muncie, 2002). Based on this approach, every student is required to be able to produce a text with good grammar and content, in reaching successful communication in the English language.

In this approach, the teacher's role is seen as authoritative instead of authoritarian (Rothery, 1996). Through a variety of activities, the teacher provides systematic guidance and careful support to students, allowing them to eventually take control of written genres. Simultaneously, he or she values the contributions

of students to the teaching-learning process.

For second language novice student writers, the genre-based approach emphasizes explicit teaching of the genre's linguistic conventions (Christie, 1990). It is stated that students are impossible to create a text unless they have already been taught clearly about the linguistic aspects regarding language features and schematic structure.

### **1.2. Recount Text**

According to Derewianka (1990) and Gerot & Wignell (1995), the purpose of recount text is to inform and entertain by telling what happened or retelling events. Similarly, Butt et al. (2006) stated that the function of recount text is to tell what happened, written statement the series of events, and assess their relevance in some way.

Derewianka (1990) classified recount text into three different types: personal, factual, and imaginative. The first type's specific purpose is to recount an

activity in which the writer/speaker was personally involved.

In terms of generic structure, the personal experience recount is divided into three stages: Orientation, Event Series, and Re-orientation/CODA functionally organized in the generic structure stages listed below (Martin, 1993): Orientation the Order of Events Re-orientation (optional element) indicates the sequence of structural elements. In a personal anecdote recount, the past tense is the language feature used to describe activities (Martin & Rose, 2008; Christie, 2005; Martin & White, 2005).

In this study, writing instruction was organized into six stages based on the framework of the SFL genre-based approach, which is widely used in language teaching writing and linguistic analysis of students' work at school. (Thompson, 2014). Six stages were designed for the 'teaching cycle' applied innovation: 1) Developing Field Knowledge, 2) Text Modeling, 3)

Text De-contextualization and Organization, 4) Joint Construction, 5) Text Independent Construction and 6) Text Linking (Christie & Maton, 2011).

### **1.3. Recount Text in Metafunction Perspective**

The interpersonal metafunction, the ideational or experiential metafunction, and the textual metafunction are the three general functions of language, according to SFL theory. Thompson (2014), sees language as a function that works in clauses in a text to realize meaning in three types of meaning: ideational or experiential, Interpersonal, and textual.

#### **1.3.1. Interpersonal Metafunction**

Interpersonal metafunction deals with social relationships. Users of language establish, negotiate, and assume their position in social relationships

through the Interpersonal Metafunction, according to Halliday (1994:68), and it is concerned with clauses as exchange. According to Eggins (2004), is a meaning strand that emerges in a text and is the realization of the speaker's utterance of his relationship with the readers or speakers, as well as his attitude toward the subject matter.

The overall structure of each text will differ due to the purpose of the text, and the language features of the text will differ due to the text's different registers. It means that the tenor, field, and mode of the text differed depending on the situation (Derewianka, 1990). Referring to the recount text that was produced by the students whose friends are the target readers, personal pronouns and personal feelings will be seen in the text. The field of text will refer to the circumstance where they are taking place. The mode will be referring to the way of

communication used by the participants.

### **1.3.2. Experiential Metafunction**

Experiential metafunction refers to the language that explained the experience. Meanwhile, experiential metafunction views language as a collection of resources organized into elements, as well as the aspects in which those units interact with one another (Thompson, 2014). By analyzing a text through experiential metafunction, the readers will get the intended message of the writers.

Transitivity is one of the ways to analyze the experiential metafunction by referring to a system in describing the clause. Material, mental, relational, and verbal processes are the four main types of processes. Behavioral and existential processes are following two types of processes.

### **1.3.3. Textual Metafunction**

Textual metafunction refers to the language used in the context and the role of language in creating coherent discourse. The other words it is linking with the structure of the theme and rheme. The theme is an aspect that provides a starting point; it's what the clause will be about. In addition, the theme is recognized in declarative and non-declarative clauses, expounding the subject is not always the theme of every clause.

Language performs a textual purpose and has textual definitions. The distinction of two elements of textual metafunction emerges in order to analyze textual definitions. Theme is the first aspect, and Rheme is the rest of the clause (Butt, 2003). According to Butt (2003), there are three types of themes:

#### **a. Topical Theme**

Every clause, according to Eggins (2004), has a single topical theme. Topical theme is referred to as a simple theme by Butt (2003) because it only

contains an experiential element. Unmarked and marked topical themes are the two types of topical themes. A subject is usually an unmarked theme, whereas a prepositional phrase or an adverb is usually a marked theme.

**b. Textual Theme**

The textual theme is experiential interpretations with a collective whose purpose is to connect our message to the previous text, and conjunctions are usually found at the start of clauses.

**c. Interpersonal Theme**

The interpersonal theme denotes the type of interaction that is occurring among speakers, and it is normally used in interrogative clauses.

**2. Method**

A qualitative research approach was used to conduct this

study. Qualitative research, according to Fraenkel (2012), has the following characteristics:

1. The researcher is the key instrument, and the natural setting is a direct source of data.
2. Information is gathered through the use of words and images.
3. Both the process and the product are important to the researchers.
4. Researchers have a proclivity for deductive analysis of their data.

A case study was used as the design for this project. A case study, according to Yin (1994), is an empirical investigation which is used to examine a current phenomenon in real-life events and the non-distinguishable limits among phenomena and contexts. The main goal of a case study is to gain a thorough understanding of a situation, and it can also be used to answer descriptive and explanatory questions (Hamied, 2017).

As a result, the purpose of this study was to look into an 11th



grade student's difficulty writing a recount text. This research was carried out in one of Cimahi's vocational schools. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspectives were used to analyze student writing. In order to solve the problem, solutions were also proposed.

### **3. Results of the Research and Discussion**

According to the findings, there are a number of issues that students are facing. Systemic Functional Linguistics analysis, generic structure, writing mechanics, and grammar were used in the analysis.

#### **a. Interpersonal Metafunction**

Interpersonal metafunction deals with social relationships. It could be found in the Mood and Modality structure. Mood type, Subject and Finite, and modality analysis are all part of the mood analysis.

There are three types of moods that can be found in a text: declarative, interrogative, and

imperative mood. According to students writing, there was only declarative mood that used, to tell his holiday experience. It implies that the pupil is attempting to convey information about their experiences to the readers in the form of a recount text. It corresponds to the most common type of recount text, which is written in declarative sentences.

There are 10 clause founded in the students writing text. The pronoun 'We' was frequently used as the subject by the students. The pronoun 'I' is the other subject in the text, and it is only used in one clause. There are, however, clauses in the text that have no subject like: (5) *Unfortunately bad weather cause a dark view.* Conjunctions link the clauses in the preceding phrases. It could be deduced that the student is still having difficulty organising compound or complex sentences in subject aspects.

The Finite Element Method is another component of mood analysis. The term "finite" can refer to a point in time when an

event occurred. As previously stated, because a recount text is intended to recount a past experience, the text's characteristics must be in the past tense. There are four clauses that used present tense by the student, as follows:

- (2) *We **use** the train to go there*
- (5) *Unfortunately bad weather **cause** a **dark** view*
- (8) *Because we can see a beautiful beach and **buy** some merchandise*

The clause above, shows that some of students still confused in using past tense to their writing consistently.

### **b. Experiential Metafunction**

The role of language in communication to convey insights and perspectives to portray what is occurring is the subject of experiential or ideational metafunction analysis. To determine experiential meaning in the text, transitivity analysis is used, which consists of three components: participant, process, and circumstance.

There are 2 clauses that use material process in students writing. This process used by the students to inform the readers about the activities in the event. The examples of material process found in the text are:

- (1) Last week my friend and I went to Batukaras
- (4) When we arrived, We immediately went to beach to see sunset

The clause went and arrived can be used to identify material processes. The readers are able to tell what kind of activities the author engaged in during his vacation based on the example.

### **C. Textual Metafunction**

In a text, the textual metafunction provides information about the writer's notion. It could be decoded by looking for patterns of repetition, conjunction, and thematization (Thompson, 2014). Theme and Rheme analysis can be used to create thematicization in a text. Topical, textual, and interpersonal themes are the

three types of themes. In the table below, Theme's findings in the student's recount text can be seen.

Types of Them	
Unmarked Topical Theme	4 cluase
Marked Topical Theme	6 clause
Textual Theme	-
Interpersonal Theme	-

Table 1

	We	used	train	To go there
Textual	Unmarked Topical Theme	Rheme		

Table 2

	Last week	My friend and I	Went to batukaras
Textual	THEME: Marked Topical	Rheme	

Table 3

We can reach the conclusion from the findings and examples above that the majority of themes in the text are labeled as topical themes. A topical theme that is not the subject of the clauses is referred to as a marked topical theme.

The student appears to be having trouble in connecting the sentence. The repetition did not exist in the text in order to keep readers' attention on the main idea in the text. As a result, it can be concluded that the text's still need to develop. Furthermore, the text still suffers from a lack of coherence and cohesion.

### 3.1. Analysis Based on the Structure of the Text, Mechanics of Writing, and Grammatical Errors

#### a. Generic Structures of Recount Text

Orientation, series of events, and re-orientation are the three parts of a recount text.

##### -Orientation

(1) Last week, my friend and i went to batukaras

(2) We use the train to go there

(3) It takes 4 hours to get there

##### -Series of event

(1) when we arrived

(2) We immediately went to the beach to see sun set

(3) Unfortunately bad weather cause a dark view, so we cant see the sun set

(4) Although we failed to see sun set

(5) We still happy because we can see a beautiful beach and buy some merchandise

(6) We really enjoyed he holiday

(7) It makes our mind fresh

The clauses in the text are listed in the table above. The orientation chapter starts with the participants' introductions and the event's setting. The author wrote about several events that occurred during his vacation in the second part. The sequences in the event, was well-organized but there is not well transition in clause 3 to 4 in the serires of event section. At the end of the text there was also re-orientation.

### **b. Mechanics of Writing**

The phrase "writing mechanics" refers to the technical aspects of writing like spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

There are also some errors in the aspects of writing in the recount text written by the student. Capitalization and punctuation were the aspects that contains some erorr.

(1) Last week, my friend and i went to batukaras

(3) Unfortunately bad weather cause a dark view, so we cant see the sun set

The student did not use capital letters to write the word I and the name of the place, such as "Batukaras," as shown in the clauses above. The writer also did not write the comma (,) to indicate a break between some parts of the sentences.

### **c. Grammatical Errors**

A very well text with proper grammar will aid the writer in conveying the message to the audience. It also aids readers' comprehension of the text. The grammartical errors found in the form of tenses. Some of the sentence used present tense, instead of past tense.

(2) We use the train to go there

(3) Unfortunately bad weather cause a dark view, so we cant see the sun set

(5) We still happy because we can see a beautiful beach and buy some merchandise

The clause above shows some grammatical erros that appeared in the text by students.

#### **d. Pedagogical Implication**

Educators need to understand strategies and techniques that will improve students' writing competence to find solutions with students' writing. Based on the blunder that arised in the stundents writing product, good strategy is required. Teachers have to find good approach to avoid some blunders. Transition-Action-Details (TAD) could be used as one of the strategy in teaching writing, especially writing recount text, the students' writing skills in Recount Text can be effectively facilitated through TAD strategy (Oshima & Hogue, 1997).

The first stage of TAD strategy is transition. Transition, according to Peha (2003), is a short phrase such as "Then," "After a while," or "In the Beginning" that helps introduce each new action in these sequences. This step can aid in the smooth flow of writing from one paragraph to the next. As we know that from the student writing, the flow not really smooth from one sentence to another. Thus this step could be applied in the process of teaching recount text.

The next stage is action. Action, according to Peha (2003), is a list of true events (what happened) in the order of events. As a result, the writer in this scene requires the event to define the action in order to figure out what is going on. This approach could help students to get their purpose of the text, and also could help them consistency in the use of past tense.

Details is the last stage of this strategy. Muhsin (2016) defines detail as "the way to support data

and an activity in one sentence or more in order to be completed." This stage is really important, since the students having trouble in connecting the sentence. Moreover, this approach could help students to write Recount Text by engaging their imagination or experience.

#### 4. Conclusion

Writing is one of the skills that required skills that could help the readers enjoy in reading our text. Cohesive and coherent is a must, and to reach that aspects need hard work. Reading articles about writing could be one of solutions in order to rich our knowledge.

Following a thorough examination of the text, it is clear that the student may have difficulty writing a text. Especially in the use of tenses and the connection between the paragrah. As a result, teachers would then play an essential part in the teaching and learning process by offering quality text references for students, directing those through text

deconstruction, and teaching them how to construct their own writing not just to share information but also to meet the expectation of specific texts in the suitable context and situation.

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