



SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR (SFG) AS A PREFERRED METHOD FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching in Nigeria has developed within the frame-work of theory and practice which have been applied in countries where English is taught as a second language. As a matter of fact, English is a second language, an official language, a lingua-franca, and the medium of instruction in Nigeria. It is obvious that good education in Nigerian context depends on English which is taught not as first language but as second language. Therefore, teaching grammar to second language learners cannot be avoided. It is left for the teacher to select the methodology suitable for effective delivery. This paper will discuss the usefulness of systemic functional grammar (SFG) as a preferred method for teaching communicative skills in second language learners' (L2) classroom.

Keywords: *language, grammar, SFG, L2.*

Introduction

One of the important aspects of any language is its grammar; the reason is that this aspect makes it possible for human to have discussed about language. It is through grammar that every language is able to name the essential components of a sentence such as words and word groups. Human beings possess the innate ability to construct grammatical sentences right from childhood. However, errors and correctness are associated with people's grammar. But grammar rules enable us to distinguish between interested and precise sentences and paragraphs. Bloor and Bloor (2013) states that the most effective way of teaching grammar is analysing and investigating the real use of language, both written and spoken, instead of studying the individual and the abstract sentence

structure in order to enable the learner to appreciate the role played by grammar in creating meaning. Four tenets of modern language study have been proposed by Carter as a guideline. These principles have their root in systemic functional linguistics (1997; 14-17):

1. Should be rooted in texts and contexts;
2. Must be principled and systematic;
3. Should be intimately connected with a study of social and cultural change;
4. Must recognize that the study of literature is central;

Bloor and Bloor (2013).

It is apparent that the decision about a type of grammar is not just a question of 'functional' or 'traditional'. It is progressively a substance that is needed for the model to improve our students' situation. If the learners require just to learn the English sentence structures with an emphasis on syntactic exactness, drawing on commonplace (however fundamental) phrasing shared all through the system, at that point a traditional grammar will most likely be effective. Nowadays, in any case, there is impressive pressure on English teachers and subject teachers with the vast majority students of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in their classroom to go further than 'well-formed sentences' and to enable their students to work effectively within the context of discourse. In this situation systemic functional grammar (SFG) has distinguished itself amongst all the theories, in that it offers a more far reaching package, educating all territories of the language educational modules instead of it to be thought as a discrete subject. Derewianka and Jones (2010).

Classroom teachers often find it problematic to really help those learners who, regardless of their exact language, compose writings which barely ever create any impact on the reader; writings which say a great deal, but scarcely mean anything. This is where systemic functional linguistic (SFL) becomes a possible tool and the most important factor. I am persuaded of the plausibility of applying SFG in the L2/EFL classroom and of the educational convenience of influencing students to consider grammar to be a system of interrelated frameworks, each containing an arrangement of choices from which the speaker selects the intended meaning he/she desires to convey. It is worth considering, however, that at this level the student is in no way, anticipated that would be

fully understands SFG yet just to be conversant with the ideas of the theory. To suggest how educators should go about it, it would be wise to start by explaining the concepts of SFG. For example, Lock in "Functional English Grammar" states that the attention of this method is more often than not on the relevance of a form for a specific communicative reason in a precise context (1996). Remembering this idea will help learners not ever to forget the idea of language as a basis of meaning-making in a different context. Meehan (2007).

Grammar Teaching

The area of second language learning research has investigated the role of the language teacher and grammar teaching extensively, that lead to the definition of Grammar teaching as involvement of "any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it". The methodology that the teacher uses is referred to as instructional techniques in the above definition. However, teachers of grammar are often faced with the difficulties in decision making when it comes to selecting their method of teaching. Takala (2016).

Teaching grammar continues to generate a lot of argument especially in the area of English language teaching. Some researchers challenge the idea of teaching grammar at all, saying it should not be taught, because acquisition of language is possible without learning grammar. Derewianka and Jones (2010).

Most of the education systems agree on the teaching of grammar, and in doing so the debate is centred on the choice of grammar, for example, whether it is better to continue with the traditional grammar or to adopt the functional grammar. The best idea is to describe language in English-teaching as usual way of connecting the *form* and *function*. The *form* leads us to the traditional grammar where the *part of speech* and *syntax* are the main focus, while *function* is mainly concerned with the existing function of the component. Despite the fact that it is not commonly used now but its impact can still be noticed. In between these methods lies contemporary reference grammar, and the most prominent is the Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG). The relationship between grammatical forms and their functions is being described

and analysed. The descriptions of language explained above are all about both form and function, which is where the emphasis and orientation are placed. The traditional school grammar is oriented towards the structures and rules learning. The grammatical categories drawn under this school of thought are: the nouns, verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction, and preposition while meaning is given little recognition. Derewianka and Jones (2010).

When choosing a model grammar, the issue of *traditional* or *functional* should not be at the fore front but the notion of what the model would do to the teachers and the students should form the basis of our concern. For example, if there is a problem where the students are expected to learn the English sentence structure and its syntactic accuracy base on the familiar terminology that are distributed throughout the field, then the best way to think of is the traditional grammar. However, the present trend is for the English teachers and others who control a large number of L2 not to just teach structure of sentences while teaching but also encourage the students to discuss meaning in context. In doing so, they actively dwell on the areas of SFG which helps in providing a “comprehensive package” that leads to an understanding of the curriculum of language instead of learning the “topic” as a discrete entity. Derewianka and Jones (2010).

The orientation of functional grammar is sociological. Understanding the reason for which language is used in a different situation is the main concern, and also the purpose of communicative language learning is being served. The second language learners (L2) certainly need this. The Majority of L2 know a lot of grammar rules because they were taught traditional grammar. All they know and stored in their brains are the grammar rules. For the reason of communication purposes, their mind-set should be reset, in order to enable them to understand differently and to use language in different circumstances. This will go a long way in assisting them academically; if not they will not be able to comprehend academic texts. They would also be equipped with the knowledge so as to differentiate between genre and modes; between written English and spoken English. Feng 2013).

The expectations of educational language at the level of all the secondary schools require language teaching that is above the current educational level. This will be possible only if consideration is given to teachers’ proficiency in

the specific field. Lamentably, the attention given to language has not been the best in terms of content, which leads to the shift of attention to content ideas, while little consideration has been paid to how language is utilized to exhibit that content. Ripley (2015) in addition claims that numerous instructors, because of inadequate training or lack of understanding the linguistic resources do not effectively prepare for the task of teaching language skills within their subject. SFL offers a structure for preparing educators and learners equally to see the way language is utilized in meaning- making within the distinctive branches of knowledge. Ripley (2015).

Texts and Context

Traditional grammar and some others restrict themselves within the technical domain of grammar, the sentence, unlike SFG which looks beyond the sentence in order to study the whole texts through its patterns. Equally, this model goes further to interpret the context of use within the larger cultural context and the specific situation of a text. Similarly, the models goes ahead to define the way choices of language are influenced in context by particular factors. For example, “what’s going on?” (the **field** or the subject-matter), “who’s involved?” (the **tenor**), and what channel of communication?” (the **mode**)”. When these are put together they made up the **register**. Derewianka and Jones (2010).

Three aspects according to SFG influence the immediate context of situation of the language use. These aspects are: “the field of the discourse, the tenor of the discourse and the mode of the discourse.” The linguistic register of a text is constituted from these features. Cultural activity is referred to as the field; that means the entity that is talks about using the language. If the teacher decides to discuss the topic of nouns in a classroom, noun is the field. The relationship between teacher and students, or between speaker and listener or between writer and reader is known as the tenor. A number of factors are said to be influenced by the tenor of discourse, such as the participants` relative status (status), how affective are the participants, which means the way they feel at a time for each other (affect), and the way or manner they come to know each other (contact). The main concern of this paper is the relationship between students and teacher, and the most important dimensions of tenor here are status and affect. The channel of communication is what it is referred to as the mode of discourse. This includes both written and spoken. Gibbons (2006) claims that channel of communication involves two kinds of distances. These are: experiential distance and spatial distance. Spatial distance refers to the kind of distance between the two interacting facing each other while the experiential distance

means being away from the activities of the issue at hand, and in this kind of distance the language may be reflecting on action or accompanying it. Gibbons (2006).

Whenever speakers of a particular language speak, they put to use these three aspects of context; that is to say, the linguistic consequences are in display. Gibbons (2006) states that every text produced carries with it all along these aspects of context. The three metafunctions of language have a close similarity with the three register variables; the three metafunctions use the lexicogrammatical resources to derive three kinds of meaning. That explains the relationship that exists between the structure of language and the categories of register. Gibbons (2006).

The three kinds of meaning outline by Halliday are: experiential, interpersonal and textual.

Experiential meaning

The only way human beings talk about their experience of the world is by using language, this includes what is going on in peoples` mind. It enables us to understand and reflect on the ideas within and outside world. Experiential metafunction represent the world ideas in the form of the *context of use* and the *subject matter* of the text. Jennings (2009).

Interpersonal meaning

Another way to study meaning in communication is when human bring use language to interact among themselves for the purpose of establishing relationships, to influence one another`s` behaviours or as an avenue for expressing their views about the world, and can also be used on them to change or elicit behaviours. Jennings (2009). What the interpersonal meaning represents about the aspects of a text in terms of teacher/students are: status and affect. According to Gibbons (2006) the metafunction is concern with the way people participate and interact with one another on their surroundings. This kind of meaning is based on the personal relationship, because it exposed the relationship between *teacher/students* and also show the teachers attitudes the topic.

Textual meaning

In this metafunction the main concern is the way people use language in texts, that is to say meaning can be derived in the way we organize and shape our messages in other to fit in with the intended messages and with the context in which we communicate or write. *Interactivity, communicative distance and*

spontaneity are the area represented by the textual metafunction. Jennings (2009).

Evidence of a specific field, came from the language resources of the experiential function, evidence of a specific tenor, came from the language system of the interpersonal function and any evidence of specific mode of communication, and came from the language system of the textual resources. The systematic relationship that exist within language and between contexts and meaning make possible for one to guess the way a given choices are determined by context from the system of language, and also the way context itself is being constructed by the language system. Gibbons (2006).

SFG in the classrooms

This area endeavours to demonstrate why utilizing SFG principles in the L2 situation encourages students to better impart meaning properly in the target language. This advancement comes because of the viability of the plan of proper undertakings utilizing SFG standards, inside the system sketched out above, in the classroom. In the event that we take the previously mentioned Hallidayan foremost that all language is communication we should concentrate on this communication while handling our activities in classroom. What comes after is to assist students in order to communicate. A strong method to encourage communication is to give some motivation to communicate. Subsequently, suitable topics should appropriately considered for giving a purpose participating in communication; be utilized as a premise for lesson content. It is stated that ideas meant to be shared in class should be promptly expressible to be imparted in class companions would be most rousing for students. Notwithstanding, such exercises must be organized with the goal that they try not to wander excessively from the socio-social context of the students. As it were, be fitting in socio-cultural terms, as well as capacity level and intrigue. Jennings (2009).

However, another classroom that needs motivation is the EFL students. As a solution, it is recommended that real language should be used as a part of conjunction with EFL students so their negative elements should be moderated in order to influence their new take-up language in a lesson plan where language teaching is done through the communicative approach. It is, at that point, essential to utilize data in communicative contexts at a point between the existing knowledge of the students and what they are about to learn. This introduces an appropriate model and topics that would inspire and will alleviate factors that are negative and change students from unmotivated to motivate. Such appropriate level experiences with legitimate texts are suggested in

educational modules of lessons in view of standards analysis of SFG in connection to SLA hypothesis. The communication contexts show up as short filmed reactions to the questions of themed. Jennings (2009).

Conclusion

Teaching grammar using SFG theory is the best method. The second language learners certainly need to understand the reason for which language is use in a different situation, and also the purpose of communicative language learning is being served. The L2 were taught traditional grammar therefore, they know a lot of grammar rules. All they know and stored in their brains are the grammar rules which will not help in communicating effectively. For the reason of communication purposes, their mind-set should be reset, using SFG in order to enable them to understand differently and to use language in different circumstances.

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