

## INTERRELATION OF DISCOURSE AND GRAMMAR IN EFL CLASSROOM SETTING

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### **Abstract**

This article describes relation between grammar and discourse in teaching perspectives. The concept basically examines that grammar and discourse are interrelated and coherence. In the interaction practices, the role of grammar is prominent to interpret meaning from which contexts are based. Meaning is contextual and interpretation comes from the surrounding context. Four dimensions proposed in this article appear to relate grammar and discourse: (1) three dimension grammar of language exist in terms of form, meaning, and function, (2) variations of words structure appear in sentences having direct and indirect objects (dative), (3) modality from which certainty is referred, and (4) verbs indicating future actions e.g. be going to and will are present.

**Keywords:** discourse, grammar, dan context.

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper discusses about grammar teaching in discourse perspective. This is under the consideration that compared to other language courses—vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology—grammar has the maximum credits in the English teaching in Indonesia. In it, the number of credits for morphology, syntax, and phonology does not exceed from two credits for each. Meanwhile, vocabulary course gets higher proportion than those three courses: four credits. By contrast, grammar is offered in six credits plus four credits for integrated course in which grammar is still very dominant. On the basis of this empirical fact, I come to the conclusion that grammar teaching can be utilized as an effective means in increasing the students' discourse competence. To start with, this writing proceeds from the nature of discourse, followed by interconnecting competencies in language teaching, then discourse in grammar teaching, and conclusion will end this discussion.

## 2. THE NATURE OF DISCOURSE

To understand what discourse is, pay much attention to the two pieces of language:

(1) . The results have been astonishing. Fiction, as Philip Roth pointed out many years ago, can't compete with the outrageousness of reality. You went through for years of film school and never once used a moving camera. (**Newsweek** published on May 9, 2005: from several different pages).

(2). A: An' I was wondering if you would let me use your gun.

B: My gun?

A: Yeach.

B: What gun?

A: Don't you have a beebie gun?

B: Yeach.

A: Oh, it's...

B: Oh, I have a lot of guns.

A: You do?

B: Yeach. What I meant was WHICH gun.

(Adopted from Kim in Celce-Murcia, 2000:59).

Concerning the first piece, despite how well those sentences are formed and how appropriate the dictions are, does not show any unity. As such, the piece of language is not meaningful for the readers. Different from the first piece, the second one is very understandable and meaningful for the readers even though it consists of mostly ungrammatical sentences. The sentences, including the incomplete and ungrammatical ones, hang each other so that it has the quality of unity-the quality that is imperative for a successful communication. A piece of language having the quality of unity as illustrated in the first piece is called discourse.

This concept, however, does not imply that a discourse necessarily consists of ungrammatical sentences. A discourse may be built up by either grammatical or ungrammatical sentences. The unity existing in it is the determinant factor in judging whether a piece of language is a discourse or not.

Dealing with the roles of grammar in reinforcing the unity of a discourse, Halliday and Hasan as quoted by Celce-Murcia et al. (2000) propose four types of cohesive ties in English:

a. Ties of reference (pronouns, possessive forms, demonstrative, and the like).  
Example: While **they** were in the White House, **the Clintons** were never considered warmly within the U.S. military. Here, "they" refers to "the Clintons" and they form cohesive tie in the text.

b. Ties of Substitution (e.g. nominal ones, verbal do, clausal so).

(3)

X : Dou you like that thick book?

Y : No, I like the thin one.

One in the above extract refers to book, and they form a structural and lexical ties.

c. Ties of ellipsis (or substitution by zero).

(4)

X : Who locked the door?

Y : Rany.

In the above extract, Rany –standing alone without a predicate– functions elliptically to express the entire proposition, Rany locked the door.

d. Ties of conjunction

We were not the first, but I am sure we will not be the last. Here the conjunction but signals a tie between the first clause and the one following it.

In summary, a stretch of language can be unified by the reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Those devices, however, are not the only means to construct the unity. In some cases, their absence does not automatically make a stretch of language meaningless, and their presence does not necessarily reinforce the unity of it.

Context is another dominant factor contributing to the unity of a discourse. Context is something referring to all the factors and elements that are nonlinguistic and non-textual but which affect spoken or written communicative interaction (Celce-Murcia, 2000:11). Further, Hymes in Brown & Yule (1996:38) states that context covers four elements; addressee, addressor, topic, and setting. Addressor is the person producing the message, and addressee is the recipient of it. Topic is something being talked about, while setting refers to where and when the communication takes place. The knowledge about the addressee and addressor confines us to the sort of language probably used. Thus, if we encounter a mother as an addressor and her son as the addressee, the produced utterances will necessarily be different from the ones produced by, let's say, a shop-assistance and a customer. Likewise, if we are knowledgeable about the topic, our expectation toward the language used by the speakers will be limited. If then we have enough information about the setting, our expectation will be much more limited. To put in a simpler way, the information about the addressor, addressee, topic, and setting enables us to predict what sort of language probably used.

The following short exchange might prove how context is truly crucial in obtaining the unity of a discourse.

(5)

A : The door is open.

B : Go back to sleep, will you?

(source: Cook, 1989:23)

If we know that speaker X is a son, Y is his mother, the topic is about the son's complaint with the door, and it happens at night, then we can conclude that those two exchanges are unified in spite of the absence of the cohesive devices.

### 3. INTERCONNECTING COMPETENCIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The main goal of learning any language, including English, is to obtain the communicative competence. In general, communicative competence can be interpreted as the ability to communicate in the target language appropriately and effectively. Communicative competence was firstly coined by Dell Hymes, arguing that language competence does not merely cover the grammatical competence as believed by Chomsky (1962), but also sociolinguistic or pragmatic competence (in Celce-murcia, 2000:16).

Furthermore, Canale and Swain (1980) in Celce-Murcia at al. (1995) mention that language competence touches upon the four points: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Linguistic competence is referring to sentence pattern (structure), morphological inflections (morphology), lexical resources (vocabulary), and phonological systems (phonology). Sociolinguistic competence touches on the social and cultural aspects required to use a certain language, covering formality, informality, and politeness. Strategic competence includes the strategies and procedures relevant to the language learning, language processing, and language production. It also deals with how we cope with the gaps and obstacles that probably come up when we communicate. Discourse competence is related to selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, phrases, and sentences to achieve a unified and meaningful message. Discourse competence is also the combination among the other three competencies. It is in this competence the linguistic competence is realized, and in this competence sociolinguistic and strategic competencies are performed.

Among those four points, discourse competence is the central, in the sense that in this competence the other three competencies come together. In and through discourse all the competencies can be realized. Also, in and through discourse the other competencies are observable and assessable. To put in other words, discourse competence is the culmination of language competence since when we have obtained this competence, it means that we have been able to communicate in correct sentences or utterances, effective strategies, and acceptable manners.

Something should be kept in mind is that all the competencies are interconnected. Obtaining discourse competence requires us comprehend the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Besides, when we set the students' communicative competence as the main goal of English teaching, the language areas—sentence pattern, morphological inflections, lexical resources, and phonological systems—are not merely language systems to be learned. Instead, they are the language resources for creating and interpreting discourse in context when they are used for

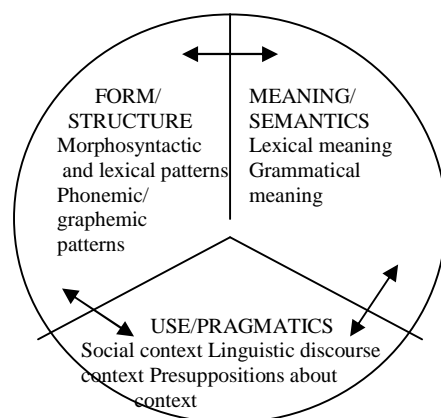
communication (Celce-murcia, 2000:3). One of the pedagogical implications of this is that all courses related to those language areas should be taught in discourse perspective, not is sentence level.

#### 4. DISCOURSE IN GRAMMAR TEACHING

In the past, most English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers clung to the opinion saying that grammar is related to how words are put together to construct correct sentences. As the awareness of the students' competence significantly increases, this tenet is superseded by the new one arguing that grammar is not merely dealing with forms and rules, but context as well (Freeman-Larsen, 2001:251). On the basis of this, grammar should not be taught in isolated sentences, but in the context of discourse. This opinion is on the basis of the interrelatedness between grammar and context which can be seen through the three-dimensions of grammar, word order variations in dative alternation, modality showing certainty, and the tense suggesting future actions.

As cited in the previous sub heading, the main goal of learning any language, including English, is to obtain the communicative competence. As such, all courses, including grammar, should be geared to reach the goal. The implication of this is that grammar should not be considered as a discrete set of meaningless, decontextulized, and static structure. It is because grammatical structures, in fact, do not only have morpho-syntactic forms, but rather they are also used for expressing meaning in a certain context. Hence, form, meaning, and use are not separated in grammar.

Dealing with this, Larsen-Freeman describes those three dimensions in a chart of pie.



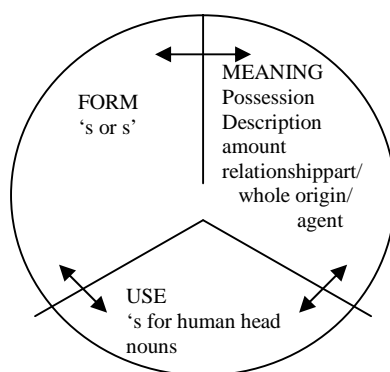
(Adopted from Larsen-Freeman, 2001:253)

The chart indicates that in talking about grammar, the three dimensions—forms, meanings, and use—should be concerned. Form refers to with how a certain structure is constructed and how it is sequenced with other structure. Meaning touches upon the

meaning of a certain structure, covering lexical and grammatical meaning. Meanwhile, use is closely related with the acceptability of a certain structure based on social and cultural outlook. Example, why should we use a yes-no question rather than an imperative to make a request for information, e.g do you know the way Matahari department store versus Please tell me the way to Matahari department store?

The arrows existing in the chart imply that the three dimensions constitute an equal importance; none is more superior to the other. Thus, to gear the students obtain the communicative competence, they should be empowered with sufficient knowledge about how to construct a certain structure and how to interpret the meaning. Moreover, they also should be knowledgeable about when the structure is socially and culturally accepted.

To make it more concrete, let me show you one example of structure commonly to be taught to the English learners: **'s possessive form**. To form the possessive form, we just add 's at the end of the regular singular nouns and irregular plural nouns not ending /s/ sound as in my father's book, and my children's dictionaries. Only apostrophe (') is needed for the regular plural nouns and singular nouns ending in the sound /s/ as in the students' score and Azis' notebook. Besides possession, the possessive can indicate description (the doctor's room), amount (a week's holiday), and relationship (John's kid). The 's possessive is generally used with human head nouns such as John's wife. The explanation can be summarized in the following chart of pie.



(Adopted from Larsen-Freeman, 2001:253)

Thus, by using such scheme, a grammar teacher can classify the facts that affect the forms, meaning, and use of a certain structure. With the same spirit, a grammar teacher may apply this way to teach other structure.

In sum, grammar, in fact, covers three dimensions: form, meaning, and use, all of which are interconnected. In constructing a sentence, we not only concern with the rules of how to form, but also what the form means, and how the form and the meaning

are performed appropriately. On the basis of this, it can be inferred that grammar is not fully context-free, but in many cases it is context-sensitive.

Moving to word order in English, it can be cited that in general, English is syntactically determined (Thompson in Celce-Murcia, 2000:56). In spite of this, it can be found empirically that there are many word order variations motivated by pragmatic consideration, and context is needed in interpretation. One of the word order variations is word order in dative alternation (Celce-Murcia, 2000:56), that is the word order in sentences having two subjects at once: direct and indirect objects. Notice the following two sentences:

- (6)
- a. I send the letter to Ary.
  - b. I send Ary the letter.

Structurally, those two sentences are equivalent, in the sense that there is no difference in meaning, because both of them put I as the agent, Ary as the recipient, and the letter as the object being transferred.

From discourse perspective, however, they have two different contexts. As such, they are not equivalent. The verb send is directly followed by the direct object—the letter—in (a), and indirect object—Ary—in (b). Such word ordering, of course, has different usage. If there is someone approaching me and asks: “where is the letter?” I will answer: “I send the letter (it) to Ary, because what she/he wants to know is about the letter. However, if someone asks me: “what do you do to Ary?,” I will answer: “I send Ary/him the letter.” It is unlikely for me to answer “I send the letter to Ary” because what he/she wants to know is about Ary, the verb send should be directly followed by Ary/him, instead of the letter. On the basis of this demonstration, it can be concluded that the word order variations in dative are very much determined by the order of the information occurrence; the new information generally occurs closer to the end of the sentence. The implication of this is that in ordering the words in dative alternations, knowing the context is a necessity.

Modality showing the degree of certainty is another area of grammar that is context-sensitive.

- (7). John must be sick.
- (8). John could be sick.
- (9). John might be sick.
- (10). John maybe sick.

Despite the same construction, those sentences are different in meaning. If, for example, John is a very diligent student, he is never absent in class, and I knew that he was not feeling good yesterday, so I will answer as in (7) when there is someone asking me where he is. In contrast with this, if John is seldom present in class, and he looked truly fit last night, so I will answer as in (8), (9), or (10) when someone asks me where he is.

The inference of this is that modality may function as predicate in a sentence. The choice of it, however, is pragmatically determined. If we have a very strong degree of certainty of a certain case, we can use **must**. By contrast, if the certainty is less than 50%, **could**, **may**, or **might** are more appropriate.

Tense indicating future, *be going to* and *will*, is often perplexing unless we know much about the context. Read the following conversation between Mark and Joe carefully.

- (11)
- M : Have you got a holiday planned?  
J : Ruth has asked me to visit her in Kenya.  
M : Kenya! Sound brilliant. You'll (a) have a great time.  
J : How about you?  
M : Well, I expect I **will** (b) go away if I can spare the time, but my boss **won't** (c) be very happy if I take off more than a few days. Imagine that my parents **will** (d) probably go to Mexico again, to see their friends there, but I don't think I **will** (e) be able to go with them. They have told me they **are going to** (f) learn Spanish before they go this time.... Look, I'm sorry, Joe, but someone is at the door. I **will** (g) call you back tomorrow morning.  
J : Okay, I'll (h) speak to you then.

(Adopted from Hewings, 2001:23)

Even though both *be going to* and *will* indicate a future actions, or *akan* in Indonesian, the use of each indicates different context. **Will** is used in the context when we make a prediction on the basis of our own experience. In the context of conversation extract in (11) such prediction is illustrated in (a) and (e). In (a), Mark's prediction about the great time Joe probably has if he goes to Kenya indicates that Mark himself has experienced going to Kenya. Likewise, (e) implies that Mark predicts that it is unlikely for him to go to Mexico together with his parents to see their friends, because as he has experienced, seeing his parents' friends necessarily needs a lot of time. Besides, **will** also suggests conditional sentences as in (b) and (c). The conditions in both (b) and (c) may happen if the conditions in the sub clause are fulfilled. In addition, **will** also reveals a decision made at the moment speaking as in (g) and (h). In other words, **will** is used for expressing a spontaneous planning. Meanwhile, **be going to** is for talking about an intention about the future that was made some time as in (f). In (f), the intention of learning Spanish has been made before the moment of speaking.

The above conversation extract and its explanation imply that **be going to** and **will** are not merely the marker of future. Instead, their presence suggests the condition of the speaker, when an action happens, and when a decision to do something is made. Hence, choosing either **be going to** or **will** requires us to understand much about the context.



## 5. SUMMARY

Grammar is interrelated with context. The interrelatedness of them can be seen from the three-dimensions of grammar, modality showing certainty: must, may, might, and could, word order variations in dative alternations, and the tense indicating future actions: **be going to** and **will**. To enhance the students' communicative competence, grammar should not be taught in sentence level, but rather in discourse level.

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