

# Analyzing Students' Problems in Writing Narrative Text through SFL Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Among four basic skills of English, writing is considered as one of the most challenging skills since it demands writer's complex ability from word to text level. In Indonesian classrooms, classical problems regarding writing English text such as the lack of vocabulary and grammar mastery and inability to develop the main idea still appear. Based on previous research, these problems are caused by monotonous teaching strategy, the absence of instructional media, and teachers' lack of creativity. Thus, this study aimed to identify the recurring problems found in a student narrative text of grade eleven in Central Java and proposing ideal pedagogical plan to solve the problems. This study employed qualitative research and the data were analysed by using three metafunctions in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspectives in order to identify whether the sample has met the ideal criteria of narrative text. The results show that the recurring problems found were the misuse of past participle, the word choice, the use of modality, the absence of relational process, and the employment of proper conjunctions. Moreover, these problems might be solved by employing a set of pedagogical plans which adopts the principle of discovery learning combined with cooperative learning.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Texts hold a very essential role when talking about teaching and learning English in Indonesian schools, especially in secondary level. Text has become major attention since the main approach used in 2006 Curriculum (KTSP) and Curriculum 2013 is Genre-Based Approach (GBA). Furthermore, in regards to genre and text, Knapp and Watkins (2005) describe genre as language processes entangled in doing things with language. These processes are later revealed to be different each other, processes such as narrating and describing obviously bring different structure and grammatical features. Moreover, Knapp and Watkins (2005) define text as the cohesive organization of language as a system of communication. In short, they state that text contains acts of communication.

GBA was firstly introduced in Indonesia in 2004 when Competence-Based Curriculum (KBK) implemented (Ningsih, 2016). This curriculum adopted a model of genre pedagogy. Although there have been two curriculum changings from 2004 to 2013, but they still adapt the concept of GBA. It is proved by the 4 steps used in GBA: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of The

Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT) can either be accommodated in Scientific Approach which becomes the core of English subject in 2013 curriculum (Ningsih, 2015).

As cited in Kemendikbud (2016) about Permendikbud No. 24 Tahun 2016 which is related to *Kompetensi Inti* (Core Competence) and *Kompetensi Dasar* (Basic Competence) in K-13, there are various kinds of genres which are provided for students in Senior High School. Furthermore, there is a kind of text which is firstly given to students in grade ten, narrative text. Anderson (1997) defines narrative is a piece of texts which tells a story and also entertains the readers at the same time. Moreover, Derewianka (1990) also states that the purpose of narrative text is not merely to entertain, but also to deliver the writer's reflection on an experience and the most important one is to attract readers' imagination. In Indonesian schools, narrative texts are recognized by students in forms of fable, legend, and myth. This genre of text is one of the most familiar genres among many types since Indonesian children have been introduced to this genre as their bed time stories.

However, students might have some problems in writing especially in relation to English as Foreign

Language. Megawati and Anugerahwati (2012) break down major problems faced by students in writing such as students' low interest in English which is caused by teachers' monotonous teaching strategy, students' limited vocabulary and grammar mastery, and the absence of instructional media. Another research conducted by Eliya (2015) shows that although students ever read the stories in Bahasa Indonesia, they still have some difficulties such as in developing the main idea, their limited ability to organize a good text, and the last is teacher's creativity in delivering the materials. To summarize, all of the problems might come from two sides, students or teachers. Based on the elaboration, this research attempted to identify students' narrative text from SFL perspectives and also to propose a set of pedagogical plan to solve the problems found in the student's text.

There have been some related researches conducted on analysing students' writing by using SFL perspective. The first research was conducted by Correa and Dominguez (2014) about using SFL as a tool for analysing students' narratives. This research employed qualitative research in which it analysed one of the EFL instructors of a Teacher Education Program in Medellin about his knowledge on narrative text. The result of his writing suggested that it is important to select appropriate approach to teach university students, especially the EFL pre-service teachers. It is based on assumption that when EFL instructors have sufficient knowledge about SFL theories and approaches, it will be beneficial for university students as they can improve their writing skill. The last suggestion is the importance of creating study groups for EFL instructors. It can be actualized through providing professional development programs provided by the institution.

The second research was conducted by Arancon (2013) focused on the use of SFL genre theory for the analysis of students' writing skills in ESP. This research analysed a corpus of Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia (UNED) students who were taking Business course. There were 30 texts which were analysed in this research. The results revealed that there were some lexico-grammatical errors found in their writing. Those errors corresponded with the three metafunctions in SFL. It claimed that a genre-based approach (GBA) could help highlight the difficulties that students faced. Furthermore, explicit modelling of the text genre with scaffolding of generic structure could help the writers to produce more accurate texts in the future.

This research employed qualitative study as its main approach which aims to identify the recurring

problems found in the student's writing and proposing appropriate pedagogical plan to solve the problems. The object of this study was a student's narrative writing which was taken from 8 available samples in grade eleven of a Private Islamic High School in Central Java. The consideration of choosing the writing sample was due to the portrayal of common problems that the class might encounter. So, the data which was used in this study was clauses composed the narrative text. The data was analysed from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspectives by employing three metafunctions to identify whether the student's writing has met the criteria of ideal narrative text.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

SFL views language as semiotic system which includes phonological, lexicogrammatical, discourse, semantic, situation, culture, and ideology (Halliday in Sipayung et al., 2016). Furthermore, based on SFL point of view, the realization of meaning also deals with metafunction. Metafunction operates in three levels named clause, sentence, and phrase. Moreover, Thompson (2014) mentions that metafunction includes three types of meaning which can be found inside grammatical structure of the clause. Thus, narrative text in the following sections will be analyzed by using three perspectives; those are Interpersonal (Tenor), Experiential (Field), and Textual (Mode). These three metafunctions are described as follows.

Interpersonal metafunction deals with how we interact or do the communication or to exchange information with other people. Furthermore, there are 3 ways to gain information: through questioning (interrogative), through stating (declarative), and through demanding (imperative). Furthermore, in narrative texts, interrogative form is the most found clause. Based on Interpersonal metafunction, declarative clause consists of Subject, Finite, Predicator, Adjunct, Complement, and Residue.

Meanwhile, experiential metafunction is related to transitivity analysis which involves processes, participants, and circumstances. The term processes is typically marked by the presence of a verb, while the term participants relates to nominal group in a clause and one clause might have more than one participant. The third term is circumstance which is marked by the presence of adverbial phrases or prepositional phrases. Furthermore, in Transitivity there are some kinds of processes happen named material processes, mental processes, relational

processes, verbal processes, behavioural processes, and existential processes. Furthermore, related to narrative texts, there are three processes that usually happen: material, mental, verbal, and relational.

The last is textual metafunction relates to how the composer or the writer of the texts organizes the text. When one wants to have deep understanding about the text, he/she needs to see the clauses from its context and language around it. Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe the theme has role as the point of departure of the message. It means that theme determines the location of the clause in its context. Meanwhile, the rest of the message where Theme is evolved is called as Rhyme. In relation with narrative text, Actors and Circumstances are the two most used Theme. The reason behind this is related to the use of Personal pronoun such as They, She, He, It, Clarabelle, Bob, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, etc. Moreover, the use of Temporal Circumstances such as a few minutes later, first, then, etc. also becomes the reason of the use of Circumstances as Theme.

## 2.1 Discovery Learning and Cooperative Learning

In the real teaching and learning of English, it is extremely essential for teachers to employ proper teaching methodology, strategy, technique, or learning model in order to create positive atmosphere so that both teacher and students can maximize their roles in the classroom. As Kemendikbud (2014) describes that in 2013 curriculum the teachers make use of scientific approach in teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Mulyana further (2016) employs 3 learning models that might be used by the teachers: discovery learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. These models promote scientific approach which demands students to be more active in the classroom.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century education demands students to be independent. However, the classical problems that students face in writing aforementioned might be caused by the teaching and learning process which is so teacher-centered (Trianto, 2007). This will result on students who tend to be passive. Therefore, one of learning models which promote students' independence might be properly employed in the classroom. The learning model is called discovery learning. Discovery learning focuses on students to gain idea in order to acquire meaning. Budiningsih in Mulyana (2016) further defines discovery learning as the way to understand the concept, meaning, and relation through intuitive process to reach the

conclusion. Furthermore, Mulyana (2016) proposes five components of discovery learning namely stimulating and problem identification, collecting information, information processing, verification of the results, and generalization. If teachers are able to instil these components into teaching and learning process, they will make better outcome later on.

Teachers also have to consider learners' characteristics whether they are categorized as high achiever or low achiever learners. Suprijono (2009) proposes that cooperative learning might create interdependence among students with various abilities. This effort might decrease the dependency of the use of the book as the only resources of knowledge. In fact, students' insight can be resources for the other students. Killen (1998) further states that cooperative learning might encourage students to gain their maximum learning either individually or cooperatively. In cooperative learning, some teachers consider it is effective when three to four students are put in one group.

In short, combining discovery learning and cooperative learning model might be beneficial as both of them promote chance for students especially when they face difficulties. Setiyadi (2006) also proposes that when students are working in group, they will feel more secure. Working individually might cause students to be worried that may lead to inability to produce good writing.

## 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Students' Problems based on SFL Perspectives

The text consists of 56 clauses in which 33 (59%) of them are in form of declarative clause. Meanwhile, the rest of them are in form of indirect speech. It means that this sample has met the ideal criteria of narrative text which employs more declarative clause because narrative tends to tell the story. Furthermore, the two main characters employ in the text, the lion and the mouse dominate all the parts of the text. Thus, it indicates that the most use pronoun found in the text such as the lion, the mouse, and he. This means that the text has met the ideal model in interpersonal metafunction. There is no significant problem found here except the grammatical mistakes as stated in the previous section. Related to modulation or the way the author express ability and probability (Thompson, 2014), it is important to note that if the clause is in form of declarative, then the verb that follows the

modal must be in form of bare infinitive (base), Unfortunately, there is an error appears in the text as follows:

Table 1: analysis of interpersonal metafunction.

At first	he can't	climbed	the tree
<b>Adjunct</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Modulation</b>	<b>Adjunct</b>

Furthermore, when it is analyzed from experiential metafunction, it is found that material, mental, and verbal processes are employed as well. Moreover, verbal processes are dominantly employed due to the indirect speeches found in the text. For example:

Table 2: analysis of experiential metafunction.

"You are hungry? I am hungry too",	said	The Lion
	<b>Process: verbal</b>	<b>Sayer</b>
<i>Projected</i>	<i>Projecting</i>	

After analysing the text, it is found that the processes that are dominantly employed are material, mental and verbal in which the amount of each is 30 (54%), 11 (20%), and 15 (26%) respectively. It is indicated that the casts or characters involved in narrative text mostly do the action as the material process employed. It is proved by the use of verbs such as took, climbed, made, smiled, answered, etc. Meanwhile the percentage of the use of mental is 20% which are indicated by the employing of stative verbs such as wanted, felt, heard, etc. For verbal, it is higher than which in mental. It is caused by the employment of addressing the saying (indirect speeches). Unfortunately, the employment of relational process could not be found. However, it should have been written in orientation where the characters or setting are introduced.

Meanwhile, from the textual metafunction, it can be said that the employment of proper tenses, thematic progression, and clauses complexes are the ideal things that should be involved in the text. However, there are some errors, although they are not major errors, but it might give such interference that will lead to the cohesion and coherence matters. The two matters related to tenses and complex clauses can be seen in the following sentence:

"Second, when he found the rambutan that *fellen*, some elephants passed and made the rambutans *rolled* around *and* crushed , and even *wanna* crushed him too if a lion didn't pull him."

After seeing this sentence, it can be concluded that if the writer separates these too complex clauses by employing proper grammar and also conjunctions

or temporal connectors, it will ease the readers to understand it.

In regards to theme in textual metafunction, Gerot and Wignell (1995) state that theme can be divided into three major categories namely ideational, textual, and interpersonal. Moreover, when seeing the text from the most frequent kind of themes used, the most employed theme found in the text sample is Ideational or Topical theme. Topical employs not only the first nominal group appears as the theme, but also noun phrase, adverbial groups, or prepositional phrases. Moreover, the theme is divided into two namely unmarked and marked. It is called unmarked if the topical theme becomes the subject, however, it is called as marked if the subject is not the theme. In addition, the most employed themes found in the text are Marked Topical themes. It is caused by the use of temporal connectors, prepositional phrases and adverbial as the theme. It can be seen in the following paragraph:

One day in the jungle, a Mouse took a walk and felt so hungry. After a few times, he saw a rambutan's tree. He wanted to eat the rambutan. But he faced any problems. At first, he can't climbed the tree. Second, when he found the rambutan that fellen, some elephants passed and made the rambutans rolled around and crushed, and even wanna crushed him too if a lion didn't pull him.

Dealing with cohesion and coherence, it is also important to talk about thematic progression. According to Thompson (2004), he divides thematic progression into three namely constant, linear, and derived progressions. After analysing the text, it is found that there are two kinds of progressions applied here, but the most applied is the linear progression. In constant progression, the theme in the following clause relates to the theme in the preceding clause. Meanwhile in the linear progression, the theme in the following clause relates to the rheme in the previous clause. As the example above shows that it happens because of the use of connectors, prepositional phrases, and adverbial as the theme, so the following clause will relates its theme to the rheme in the previous clause.

Moreover, there are some problems found in the use of proper conjunction and temporal connectors. It seems that she has not understood yet the way to use either conjunction such as *but*, *and*, *or* temporal connectors such as *however*, *therefore*, *meanwhile*. It is proved by the presence of both in some clauses below:



Table 3: example of the misuse of connector.

And	the Lion	can free from the trap
<i>Textual</i>	<i>Experiential</i>	
<b>Theme</b>		<b>Rheme</b>

Table 4: example of the misuse of connector

But	He	Faced any problems
<i>Textual</i>	<i>Experiential</i>	
<b>Theme</b>		<b>Rheme</b>

The employment of conjunctions such as “and” and “but” at the beginning of the clause has intention to indicate how important the content around it (Thompson, 2004). When seeing if there is another element appears preceding the theme, then it also becomes the part of the theme. In short, Thompson stated this in terms of multiple themes. So, this writing sample employs multiple themes in which it is not properly applied in the real context. It is better if the writer employs temporal connectors that give effect to the following clauses. These matters should be the concern of the writer in order to create a good text which is meaningful and understandable.

### 3.2 Pedagogical Plan

Teachers have to seek appropriate learning model to be used in the classroom. Regarding to today's phenomenon, most teachers still demand the teacher-centered approach which is different from today's education demand, student-centered. This approach provides chances for students to explore knowledge by themselves. As Trianto (2007) explains that cooperative learning model gives human beings chance to search knowledge independently. However, regarding the patterned problems that students still encounter such as the lack of grammar and vocabulary, it might be beneficial if students also learn to write cooperatively. Working in group can create interdependence among students which may lead to the feeling of secure (Setiyadi, 2006). When students are not feeling secure, it might affect the quality of their writing product.

Based on the elaboration, pedagogical plan on how to teach narrative text writing is proposed in the following table:

Table 5: Pedagogical plan for students.

No	Step and Activities
1	Observing (BKOF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading the text displayed on the projector</li> <li>• Observing the text (this activity aims to make students recalling their prior knowledge about the text).</li> </ul>
2	Questioning (BKOF) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing questions related to common features of the text to students</li> <li>• Grouping students into small group consisting 4 to 5 students.</li> <li>• Filling the blank mind map of common features of the text.</li> <li>• Asking questions related to the text while students doing the task.</li> <li>• Making use of dictionary.</li> </ul>
3	Experimenting (MOT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing narrative text (first draft).</li> <li>• Providing picture series to help students create well-structured text.</li> <li>• Taking role as observer and help when it is necessary.</li> </ul>
4	Associating (JCOT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting their first draft with the ideal text provided by teacher.</li> <li>• Emphasizing the importance of creating coherent and cohesive paragraphs.</li> </ul>
5	Communicating (ICOT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing the final draft.</li> <li>• Sharing problems found during writing.</li> <li>• Presenting the text in front of the class.</li> <li>• Discussing the problems together and planning on what should be done in the following session.</li> </ul>

Based on the recurring problems aforementioned, it is essential for teachers to propose pedagogical plan to solve them. According to Kemendikbud (2014), it is said that the main approach used in the current curriculum is scientific approach. Furthermore, Kemendikbud (2014) states that scientific approach is based on the process of gaining knowledge. Moreover, the process is identified into five steps namely (1) observing, (2) questioning, (3) experimenting, (4) associating, and (5) communicating. Furthermore, these steps have similarity to which in genre-based approach which consists of four steps: building knowledge of the field (BKOF), modelling of the text (MOT), joint construction of the text (JCOT), and independent construction of the text (ICOT). This similarity might become benefit for teachers who had been using GBA as the main approach in teaching English for years.

It can be seen from a series of activities in the pedagogical plan that students are given chance to

work by themselves (independent). They are also encouraged by the teacher to search the common features of narrative text indirectly. This activity promotes the discovery learning. Meanwhile, students' activity working in group during questioning portrays the principle of cooperative learning. It might promote their interdependence among one another (Suprijono, 2009). Students may take this chance to clear their doubt about few vague things in their mind. Moreover, the use of picture series by the teacher aims to provide guidance so that students might have chance to create coherent text.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize, the common problems found in the student's writing are the misuse of past participle as influenced by the regular verb, the word choice related to word formation, issues of modality related to bare infinitive, the absence of relational process, and the employment of proper conjunctions to create meaningful and connected sentences of paragraph. Moreover, these problems might be solved by employing a set of pedagogical plan which adopts the principle of one of the learning models in the 2013 curriculum namely discovery learning. Discovery learning is combined with cooperative learning since a class consists of students with different level of proficiency. It might help the low achievers when they are working together with the high achiever in a group. It is expected that the combination of discovery learning and cooperative learning can solve the problems.

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