



## AN ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING: FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Received: November 17, 2020

Accepted: November 27, 2020

Published: November 30, 2020

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of SFL theory in teaching academic writing. The present study was to find out what the change of genre awareness of students' writing. Twenty-two participants were recruited to engage in the process of deconstruction, join construction, and independent construction activities. The findings of study revealed two important aspect in teaching academic writing, thematic Progression in students' writing and appraisal concept in students' writing argumentation. Data sources were gathered through student assignments to write argumentative essay. Student assignments were written in 60 minutes with the IELTS and TOEFL writing. Questionnaire and interviews in argumentative writing were given to students. Data were collected from students' assignment and data were analysed through transitivity and appraisal system (Martin & White, 2015). This finding of the study implies to the language education particularly writing instruction.

**Keywords:** Argumentative writing, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Thematic Progression, Appraisal

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### INTRODUCTION

There has been much attention to the use SFL in learning and teaching academic writing as English for academic purposes (Sugiura, 2017; Nagao, 2018). The findings revealed that the students who have awareness of genre can shape their knowledge of insight. Furthermore, they need to have awareness of function in academic writing as well as purposes. This growing body of research showcase that SFL informed task has been developed by any practitioners and educators. For example, empirical evidence reported by scholars showed that SFL has benefit in terms of pedagogical design and assessment of language.

The fact that students' argumentative writing is not well structured in terms of language issue could be seen from students' writing thesis. It is true that academic writing might not be able to be employed in pedagogical issue. University students has no experience in writing based SFL pedagogy. This approach has special characteristic both pedagogical lens as well as instructional issue. For instance, in students' writing works, there has been much

miss component that is really needed such as research findings, expert voice, and paraphrasing (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

The studies reported that the contribution of SFL is to analyse the language as meaning making choice (Sugiura, 2017; Syarifah & Gunawan, 2015; Yasuda, 2015). Therefore, SFL framework enables students to write in more detail the use of lexical resources, theme and rheme, and grammaring appropriateness with contextual writing. For example, the clause “*The writer argued....*” and the clause “*The writer said that....*” The two verbs have weakness in argumentation so that the two verbs can be substituted with “reported and showed” in order to making more meaningful because of lexical choice.

It is generally accepted that argumentative writing has been used in the context of higher education and academic atmosphere. For example the study of Yasuda (2015) reported the use of SFL in investigating students' writing works. For this reason, this would be beneficial for students who have intention to enrol language test and language achievement (IELTS or TOEFL). From this case, students are required to have an ability to write academically in terms of argumentative writing with different prompts. Unfortunately, writing classroom has rarely instructed to have writing instruction with SFL-laden framework. In fact, anchored SFL framework, the writing classroom has not likely to engage students to bring students to the core of language theory. Thus, research gap of this study is the lack of writing classroom academic writing in higher education. This study aims to analyse the students' writing development in academic writing in particular to the moves of argumentative genre.

### Systematic functional linguistics and genre

Anchored SFL framework, the three main point of SFL categories play pivotal role in language analysis such as ideational (the content of what writer say), interpersonal (the relationship between the writer and reader), and textual (in what ways the writer express the idea) as can be seen in the table 1.

**Table 1** Context of the Situation and Linguistic Features

Layers	Categories		
	Field	Tenor	Mode
Register variables	What is going on in the text?	What is the relationship between writers and readers?	How is the text organized, in spoken text or written text?
Linguistic realization in metafunction	Ideational meaning: when, how, who, where, and what	Interpersonal learning: politeness, modality, and evaluative terms; attitudes, positions, and social roles	Textual meaning: Theme and Rheme as well as new and old information.
Lexicogrammatical features	Vocabulary, grammar, and tense	Mood, modalities	Theme; this, it, and that

Note. Information in the table is based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014)

In language education, the genre approach enable language learner to learn knowledge through language. This is true that the genre has procedure in scaffolding in language learning. In SFL concept, genre is social practice that oriented to culture (Bernstein's, 1990; Bhatia, 2004: Halliday's, 1975; Martin, 1999; Martin & White, 2005; Rose, 2008; Rose, 2013, p. 209). Relating to this, SFL based pedagogy helps students to decide what lexicogrammatical and semiotics resources appropriateness in students' academic writing. The writing is likely to have meaningful idea when the semiotic resources with context of situation. Besides that, lexical resource enables students to have meaning making choice.

A huge number of SFL praxis has provided a numerous of contribution to SFL theory. In this case, genre is the key player to achieve students' writing competence. The relationship of the context and goal is the awareness in genre specific language and genre. For this reason, students may acquire the awareness of genre may influence students writing in argumentative writing. Generally speaking, it is widely received that the contribution of SFL might have impact of writing genre (Eggs, 2004; Hassan, 2015; Martin, 1984, p. 25).

### Previous Study

There has been much attention to the study of SFL field. These studies involved students from any area and context, in particularly higher education. In higher education, students' writing can be an artefact of academic writing. Some of studies in SFL academic writing reveal that findings has a wide range of pedagogical design such as vocabulary, reading, writing, and all integrated language skills.

Table 1. The list of empirical evidence

No	Authors	Participant	Findings
1	Cornelius, S., & Cotsworth, B. (2015)	76 students	Vocabulary
2	Nagao, A. (2018)	97 Students	Writing Result
2	Rajagopalan, U. M., & Jie, S. (2016). In	64 Students	Argumentative Writing
4	Syarifah, E. F., & Gunawan, W. (2015)	31 University students	All language skills
5	Viriya, C., & Wasanasomsithi, P. (2017).	66 students	Reading comprehension
6	Yasuda, S. (2015).	110 university students	Increasing listening skills
7	Fakhrudin, W& Hassan, H. (2015).	Conceptual	Writing

### Genre based approach in teaching academic writing

Genre based approach has been begin since 1990 which is focus on discourse of language learning. This study was focused on the interplay of SFL in curriculum and materials area. However, few studies have been conducted in argumentative writing. Even though, the study of SFL in teaching materials has been investigated. The use of SFL in academic writing context has been investigated in any field. The study of SFL has major point in the context of SFL in curriculum and instruction. As reported by Syarifah & Gunawan (2015), this study showed that scaffolding process has possible contribution to the academic writing instruction. This study used analysis qualitative that reported the enhancement of micro and macro of writing performance in terms of social function, structure thematic, and language features. This study also highlighted the recommendation of further study to urgent need to examine in teaching practicum.

### METHOD

In this study, a case study was used as basic of analysis to investigate the phenomenon in writing classroom with SFL based pedagogy (Yin, 2015). The case in the classroom is the students' writing works in argumentative writing and essay writing. SFL was used to analyse the students' writing development. This study has been conducted in one semester in tertiary teacher education program. This design of study enable writers to investigate the writing pedagogy in university contexts.

### Participants

Participants in the study were students consisting of 11 men and 11 women who had an average TOEFL prediction of 400. Participants are English language students who are prepared to become English teachers (initial teacher education). Academic writing skills are prosecuted as part of the final assignment before they can graduate from university. All participants are ethically asked to fill in the agreement as a voluntary participant and may decide to withdraw a time when they do not want to be fully participated.

**Procedure**

SFL is used as the basis for deconstruction, join construction, and independent construction. The concept of Halliday (2014) is used in research in this genre based concept is also not separated from the research procedure and writing learning. The type of genre that is written for students here is an argumentative text that is written in a 4-weeks. The procedure in detail through Stage 1) analyses sample writing in argumentative with various themes. At this stage, participants do the coding in writing essays in terms of lexico-grammatical and lexical semiotic, 2) write argumentative text with a colleague to write argumentative text, 3) write a reflection of an argumentative writing activity. Participants are given the freedom to see the argumentative type of writing in order to know the social objectives and social functioning of the argumentative text.

**Source of data**

Data sources are acquired through student assignments in argumentative essay writing. Data were also taken from students' reflective writing. Student assignments are written in 60 minutes with the IELTS and TOEFL writing. Questionnaire and interviews in argumentative writing were adapted from Nagao (2017), Shi (2015, p. 263), and Yasuda (2015). Participants were given a reflection to find out how far their understanding in writing SFL based.

**Data Analysis**

In analysing data, the Burns, Joyco, and Gollin (1996) frameworks used as many as 12 criteria to explore lexico-grammatical and generic structure. The data analysis phase is also obtained through Halliday framework as shown in the table below.

**Table 2** Assessment Criteria

Categories	Sub-categories	Assessment Criteria
1 Generic Structure	Identifies sociocultural purpose of genre	(1) To identify the purpose of the discussion essay
	Identifies motivation of genre as interpersonal or pragmatic	(2) To describe the structure of the target genre: 1) Issue, 2) Argument for, 3) Argument against, and 4) Conclusion
2 Lexicogrammar	Makes appropriate lexicogrammatical ideational meaning choices (Field)	(3) To explain general personal nouns (4) To write about the uses of abstract nouns (5) To write about the uses of action verbs (6) To write about the uses of 'verbal verbs'
	Makes appropriate interpersonal meaning choices (Tenor)	(7) To write about modalities (8) To write about modality + adverbs (9) To write these fixed phrases to express the writer's opinion/modality: <i>it is possible that, I guess that, or it is certain that</i>
	Makes appropriate textual meaning choices (Mode)	(10) To explain construct conjunctions and signposts (11) To explain demonstrative pronouns such as <i>that</i> and <i>this</i> (12) To use appropriate thematic ties and referential links to extend genre

Note: Table adapted from Burns et al. (1996, p. 94); Nagao (2018)

This analysis enables writer to categorize the students writing into the concept of SFL based instruction since a wide range of perspective was used to analyse students' writing. In generic structure item, it can be identified that the purpose of the discussion essay was the

main point to evaluate students' writing. While the type of argumentative writing could also be identified by the criteria of interpersonal pragmatics such as argument for, argument against, and conclusion.

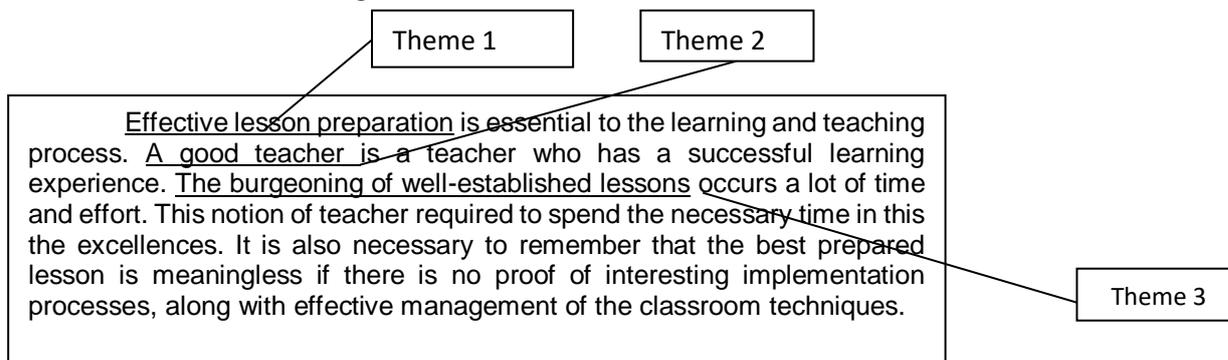
In terms of lexico-grammar, there are three important aspects such as ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In this sense, student as a writer need to take into account the personal pronouns, verbs, and conjunction. In addition, the terms of conjunction and thematic need to be mastered by students.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Thematic Progression in students' writing

Before the students are spearing the concept of Theme and Rheme, they are unaware of the genre concept. They write clause by clause without understanding the progression thematic concept. From this case, picture 1 shows that the student's writings still have a deficiency in the writings of argumentation.

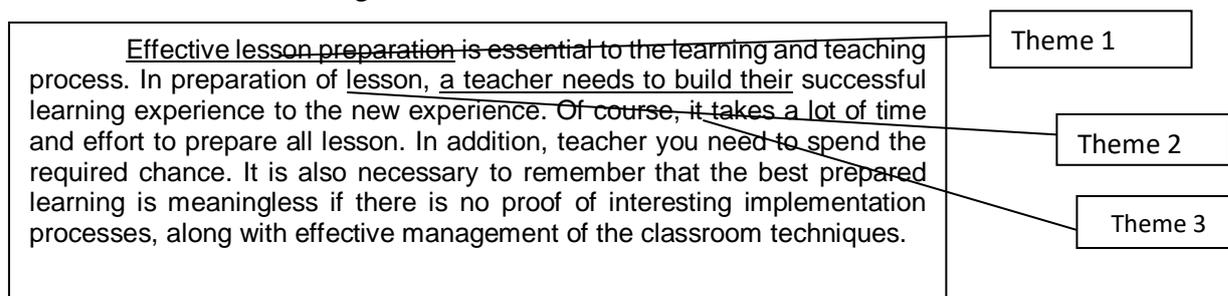
**Picture 1.** Students' writing before intervention



(Student's writing 3)

After learning with the genre-based approach approaches, the article shows the changes in the thematic progression aspects which are more visible on thematic "effective lesson preparation" in the first sentence and shown in the theme preposition "in preparation of lesson". Picture 2 shows a thematic progression pattern change on the student's writing. This showed that the students' writing has changed from the unstructured to the well-organized writing. Thus, the students' writing was more appropriate to argue one claim in academic writing.

**Picture 2.** Students' writing after intervention



(Student's writing 3)

Rhetorical moves give a very important role in composing the writing so that the student is biased to compose it like a flow of logic that is text soundtrack and easy to read. Rhetorical moves became an integral part of the teaching of writing argumentation because this was assessed as an arrangement in drafting arguments. Figure 3 shows the student's writing before the genre based approach teaching treatment.

**Picture 3.** Rhetorical moves in students' writing introduction. Moves in introduction part before learning SFL

<p>In this world language is an important part of social life. Language is also a communication tool for humans. Every human being has more than one language and is called multi-language. This includes the branch of applied linguistics where the second language is learned in a school.</p>	<p><i>Lack of establishing territory</i></p>
<p>In every country has more than one language especially in Indonesia. According to Wikipedia (2020) Indonesia has 718 languages. It means that every person can mix or switch one language into another language. For the example is one person can mix or switch Indonesian language into Local language. So it's common, if Indonesian people talk with their mother language and national language.</p>	<p><i>Lack of establishing niche</i></p>
<p>Rubén Chacón-Beltrán (2013) in An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, said that the pressure is set on language and it is job inside correspondence. Human science of language, be that as it may, fixates on the investigation of society and how we can comprehend it through the investigation of language.</p>	<p><i>Lack of research gap</i></p>
<p>Nilep (2010:2) characterizes code exchanging "as the utilization of language rotation or of code decision so as to contextualize an expression". It means that, we can switch the language to get an explanation from the speaker in a particular context. I have witnessed the fact that the speaker who use two language or more in conversation to be able to communicate well. And also the listener can understand what the meaning of these words. In addition, in the context of education the teacher can switch language in classroom so that students more easily understand the material presented. Furthermore, the students can be able to speak with target language.</p>	<p><i>Lack of present work</i></p>

In the writing of students there is a lack of participation in the sun writing stage of the type or background of research. It is a visible bias from the absence of claims of strong argument in the presence of scientific argumentation. In addition, in preliminary moves resulted in writing not easily readable by audience readers in terms of both flow and pattern. Figure 4 provides an evaluation of the student's work to revise the well-written form.

The moves of argumentative writing consists of establishing theory, establishing niche, and present work. This move enable students to know the genre of argumentative writing. For this reason, the students aware of genre of academic writing as well as rhetorical moves. From SFL perspective, rhetorical moves need to be enacted in each stages of writing process. Bearing in this mind, argumentative writing is the process of voicing argument idea into coherent and concise written form. For this reason, students need to understand the basic concept of rhetorical moves as well as the application in writing instruction. To do this, a set of writing instruction

To revise the students' writing work in more logic, deconstruction of writing was done to enhance the development of writing works. In picture 4, it can be seen the process of change before and after learning functional perspective. This notion of the writing instruction deploy a wide array of rhetorical moves. For example, the part of establishing territory moved from a different lexico-grammatical to more concise written expression. In terms of establishing

niche, it can be seen from the change of the ideational meaning of in the clauses. Furthermore, the change of writing the present work and research gap can be seen in the revised version of the new clauses.

**Picture 4. Moves after learning SFL**

In recent years, the issue of multilingual has much been discussed due to the development of language use and pedagogical use.	<i>Establishing territory</i>
According to Wikipedia (2020) Indonesia has 718 languages. It means that every person can mix or switch one language into another language. For example, one can use more than one language. It is generally accepted that Indonesia is the center of multilingualism.	<i>Establishing niche</i>
However, few studies have been investigated in terms of the students' perception and teacher in the use of multilingual perspective.	<i>Research gap</i>
This study aims to explore the students' experience in encounter multilingual pedagogy.	<i>Present work</i>

**Appraisal concept in Students' writing introduction**

Drawing appraisal theory (Martin and White, 2005), this analysis investigates the language appraisal from appraiser lens. Appraisal theory provides a clear investigation of difficult language. It is the prediction of material of academic writing. As it can be seen in the below texts.

The analysis uses the theory of Appraisal (Martin and White, 2005) of which the analysis examines how appraiser gives meaning to the choice of meaning. In the academic writings of students we can see on Figure 5. This data depicts that students' writing works can be defined as the language evaluation of the students' choice.

In some cases, students find it difficult to learn to memorize vocabulary [**No Dialogic**], and therefore there is a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) system that uses a lot of multimedia in the learning process [**No Dialogic**]. Learning through games **is another popular way of learning language** (Schultz & Fisher, 1988) [**Dialogic: Expansion: Highlighted**]. Such as games motivate players (to achieve goals), spark the players' creativity (to solve the game) and ratify the ego (when winning), is fun (through enjoyment and pleasure). Recent previous studies (Foreman et al., 2004) show the mode of learning has impacted on the use of interactive games [**Dialogic expansion: Possibility**]. That interactive games are a powerful environment for learning. The game curriculum has been extended to new topic areas and applications and games designed to teach more valuable lessons can also be effective [**No Dialogic**]. Research consistently finds that players learn new skills, insights, attitudes, knowledge and behavior. A game that challenges them to think, explore and respond. Interactive game challenges players to solve interesting problems. Players learn while doing, in a virtual environment that responds to every move and decision they make.

In line with the findings of Mori (2017), the student writing has an inanimate expression of external voice in the writing of argumentation. These findings become an important core in the process of learning argumentative writing in students. Argumentative-based learning of SFL can be seen in macro and micro analysis. Macro analysis includes a rhetorical move analysis conceptualized by Swales while micro-analysis focuses on thematic progression and appraisal analysis of Martin & White (2005) While Micro focuses on appraisal and theme and rheme analyses. Findings showed that rhetorical move, student still has not been able to put the rhetoric moves that should be written in the introduction. Some move is missing from the writing that must be in the introduction. This has an impact on the readability that is not logic because the author does not indicate where the importance of the study is being written and the research gap that is becoming the study material.

In the context of teaching academic writing, appraisal theory was required to examine the quality of students' voice of argument in academic writing. In this sense, appraisal can capture the development of students' writing in term of engagement aspect. Appraisal provided a myriad of students' voice in academic writing. For this reason, students' writing works need to be evaluated beyond a traditional rubric of writing assessment. For example, a study by Mori (2017) showed appraisal framework can portray students' writing development. In appraisal, writing can be regarded as dialogic engagement where students voice other writer voices to support their argument. Therefore, appraisal term can be used to evaluate as well as pedagogical task to enrich students' writing argument.

## CONCLUSION

The present study showed that learning argumentative writing enables student to gain skill that must be strengthened especially in the writing of scientific articles. In fact, this study has not much been reported in terms of innovation in learning related functional linguistics (SFL). This study implied to the language education instruction particularly in teaching academic writing. The students and teachers need to collaborate the mediated instruction in the core of language as meaning making process. In addition, this study contributes to the development of language instruction in two imperative ways. First, the learning of language provokes students to create language as semiotic resources to make meaning. Through thematic and appraisal lens, students are able to identify the strength of thematic progression concept in writing academically as well as the notion of appraisal in assessing writing. However, the present study has limitation in terms of pedagogical design and SFL analysis. From the pedagogical design, this study has similar steps with the other study but not involved how the instructional design was created to enable students as meaning makers. From SFL analysis, this study only took the two analysis of appraisal and thematic progression as meaning making analysis. Therefore, the further study needs to investigate the role of SFL based pedagogy in academic context such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and synthesizing academic source text.

## Funding

This research was funded by Research Department of Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati Grant 2020. The author would like to thank LEMLIT UGJ for their support.

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