1. Functional Grammar and Its Implications for English Teaching and Learning

2. What is Functional Grammar?

Functional grammar, based on systemic linguistics, emphasizes the way spoken and written language operate in different social situations.

In his classic book An Introduction to Functional Grammar, Halliday (1994) points out that functional grammar is so-called because its conceptual framework is a functional one rather than a formal one. It is functional in three distinct senses: in its interpretation of texts, of the system, and of the elements of linguistic structures.

3. Therefore, "A functional grammar is essentially a 'natural' grammar, in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used" (Halliday, 1994, p. xiii).

Combined with these two is a third component, the 'textual', which breathes relevance into the other two. These three components are called metafunctions in the terminology of FG theory.

Accordingly, "a functional grammar is one that construes all the units of a language – its clauses, phrases and so on. In other words, each part is interpreted as functional with respect to the whole" (Halliday, 1994, p. xiv).

4. Based on Halliday's model, Thompson (1996) explains the three metafunctions of functional grammar in an informal way as follows:

1) we use language to talk about our experience of the world, including the world in our minds, to describe events and states and the entities involved in them.

2) We also use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relation with them, to influence their behavior, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs.

3) Finally, in using language, we organize our messages in ways which indicate how they fit in with the other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing.

Similarly, Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (1997) define functional grammar as a way of looking at grammar in terms of how grammar is used.

5. Functional grammar is not genetically oriented to our neurophysiology in this way. Rather, it focuses on the development of grammatical systems as a means for people to interact with each other – functional grammar sees grammar as shaped by, and as playing a significant role in shaping, the way we get on with our lives. Its orientation is social, in other words, rather than biological (Martin, Matthiessen & Painter, 1997, p. 1).

Functional grammar, based on cultural and social contexts, is very useful for describing and evaluating how language can be used to write and speak more appropriately and effectively. Using functional grammar can help us to read more carefully and critically.

6. Implications of Functional Grammar for English Teaching and Learning

7. Functional grammar is more sociological in orientation. It is concerned with understanding the ways in which language is used for different purposes and in different situations, serving a communicative purpose of language learning.

Students know a lot of grammar rules, for them a language it is a set of rules, but it should be changed. They need to know how to use language in different situations.

In order to achieve academic success in school, they must be familiar with school-based texts. They should know the differences of modes and genres between spoken English and written English.

Through text analysis, functional grammar can offer EFL students "a way of seeing how meaning and form are related in the different options available in the grammatical systems of the English language, and know how knowledge is construed in school" (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 1).

It is necessary for EFL students to know how language works in texts.

8. When writing his classic book, Halliday (1994) says that the aim of his book is to construct a grammar for purposes of text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken and written, in modern English.

Moreover, some projects about functional grammar are welcomed by students and teachers in some schools. In reality, integrating functional grammar in practical language teaching and learning is possible.

9. Beikoff (1996): "Functional grammar is not just a new type of jargon but another way of understanding sentences. It does not break a sentence up into discrete parts but links words that shape a purpose."

Chen Jing (2010) (comparative study to examine the feasibility and efficacy of teaching functional grammar to college students)

Results: experimental group, who were taught functional grammar to analyze texts, achieved greater progress in writing than the control group who continued with traditional grammar at the general level. At the specific levels of register, discourse and grammar, students in the experimental group made significant improvements.

Research shows that "Functional grammar, the meaning resources for constructing discourse and the metalanguage employed by teachers and students to talk about written texts, can help students master English grammar from a semantic perspective based upon their former knowledge of traditional grammar, and apply it to language tasks to realize meanings in various structures"(p. 59) .

10. Functional Grammar in the EFL Classroom, Lock & Jones (2010) - six general procedures for language learners to notice, explore and practice grammar in context.

Each procedure, Lock and Jones provided language teachers and learners two sample lesson plans together with sample texts. The procedures designed purposely illustrate how grammar can be taught through texts.

The author of this paper thinks that it may be more successful when functional grammar is used to teach intermediate and advanced literacy.

11. When EFL teachers use functional grammar in their teaching, here are three suggestions: One is to make text analysis around clauses and word groups (noun groups, verb groups, adjective group, and prepositional group).

Try to avoid some functional labels. It`s not a good idea to teach all the functional labels to students. The main purpose is to let students know how language works that way.

The second suggestion is to let students deeply realize that grammar is a resource of making meaning and a subsystem of language.

Last, making a comparison between functional grammar and traditional grammar would reinforce the understanding of functional concepts because most EFL students have been taught traditional grammar.

That is all, thank you!