



Systemic Functional Grammar Fostering Critical Thinking in Teaching and Learning Language

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Abstract

The crucial role of language in man's life in this era of globalization, multiculturalism, knowledge explosion, or modern technology prodded several professionals, academicians, and graduate-school students to conduct research studies on language teaching and learning, specifically, on language theories and pedagogical practices related to communicative approach and functional grammar.[9] One modern grammar theory this study assumed as the theoretical underpinning of any language teaching and learning methodology that zeroes in on critical thinking, a higher-order thinking strategy that every nation in this contemporary world needs to progress economically and politically, is the SFG or Systemic Functional Grammar. Several research studies have been conducted about the strong link between these two major topics of this paper. One study showed the use of systemic functional grammar in criticizing or evaluating intellectual and emotional traits of people in society.[4] Another revealed the development of critical thinking through collaborative or interactive language activities, such as pair work, small or large group work for accomplishing or carrying out language-learning tasks [18]

Based on these previous research studies, this study had its goal or main objective of investigating or examining the role of SFG in developing critical thinking in teaching and learning language. Likewise, it aimed at obtaining thorough or in-depth knowledge or understanding of the concepts, features, and components of systemic functional grammar and critical thinking. Description, qualitative approach to data, and analysis or survey of existing Literature such as books, research studies, journals, and other reading materials with comprehensive and detailed discussions of the nature of SFG and critical thinking were the research methods and data-gathering technique used by this study. The results showed that the ideas behind the Systemic Functional Grammar were likewise the ones applied in language teaching and learning activities or exercises infusing critical thinking. The SFG concepts like multi-functionality of clauses, grammar structures linked with communicative functions, interactive activities, contextualized exercises, among others would trigger off critical-thinking acts like: comparing, classifying, patterning, planning, critiquing, speculating, defining and the like. [2], [5].

In conclusion, Systemic Functional Grammar or SFG is the language theory to underlie any language teaching and learning method or technique to develop students' communicative competence and critical thinking. The results of this study are significant to language teachers in their acts of making decisions or choices on which language-teaching methodology to use in helping their students develop their critical thinking and language proficiency. In addition, this study finds itself timely and relevant to the present set up of the world in which people, in general, deal with all kinds of characters,, products, knowledge, services, technology, and so on. To make people evaluate or judge the genuineness, essence, appropriateness or quality of diverse people or things in their environment is another significance of this study. Validating the impact of the SFG theory on critical thinking for developing excellent communicators and reasonable or logical thinkers for the progress of not only local but also international community is the contribution of this paper to the field of language teaching and learning.

1. Introduction

A person thinking critically employs care in assessing the merits of a thing, based on some criteria or standards. The results of his assessment serve as the basis of his judgment on the validity, worthiness, or acceptability of such subject. However, criticizing something requires substantial knowledge about the topic. [16]. Knowledge about the subject alone is not enough. "What a person knows and how he thinks of what he knows" are the two essential requisites of critical thinking." [6]. Studies show that these two modes of world understanding, declarative and procedural knowledge, operate under the influence of



society. Societal influence is likewise a part and parcel of this contemporary language theory called Systemic Functional Grammar or SFG, that involves language features whose meanings result from interactions of people in society.[14] Given such background on the analogous features of SFG and Critical Thinking, this study wanted to discover the impact of SFG on the development of critical thinking. In addition, it aimed at obtaining thorough knowledge of SFG and critical thinking, specifically, of their nature and similarities with each other.

This study is significant for it gives language teachers an awareness and deeper understanding of the concepts and capacity of SFG to develop or enhance a person's critical thinking, a higher-order thinking strategy.

2. Methodology

Description through analysis, qualitative approach to the data, and analysis or survey of existing reading materials on SFG and critical thinking were the research methods used by this study. The following then are the graphically presented results of this study.

3. Results/Discussions

SFG	Critical Thinking	SFG vs. Critical Thinking
<p>3.1 Multi-functionality of clauses</p> <p>A clause has three interactive systems of language features: transitivity system for ideational function; mood system for interpersonal function, and theme system for textual function. [12]</p>	<p>Consistency of thoughts</p> <p>Critical thinking involves logical thinking or sequential reasoning to prove the validity or falsity of something. [6]</p>	<p>The success of critical thinking depends on the unity, coherence, or consistency of people's arguments. The interconnectedness or words, clauses, or sentences is necessary for a clear expression of people's reasons or arguments to support their claims or choices</p>
<p>3.2 Ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language</p> <p>The Ideational function, is for world understanding: Interpersonal function; for human relationship development; and textual function for coherent expression of ideas. [11]</p>	<p>Evaluation based on morally and professionally determined views or ideas of a person and of other people.</p> <p>Critical thinking deals with "dispositional knowledge" that makes one weigh the value or merits of something based on his schemata, on other's views, and standards [16]</p>	<p>SFG deals with varied language features to express the multiple functions of language. This is also true for critical thinking that requires the thinker to listen, analyze, and evaluate diverse views on the basis of some criteria before he gives his final judgment on which of the varied ideas is the best to prove his point.</p>



<p>3.3 Connection of language features or structures with the macro-functions of language</p> <p>SFG deals with language features to make a person acquire knowledge, do a systematic expression of such knowledge, relate himself with others, and devise a strategy, or technique to express ideas. [1], [5]</p>	<p>Necessity of declarative and procedural knowledge</p> <p>Critical thinking requires things to think of and ways to think of these things. This kind of thinking does not only stock in a person's brain varied views, knowledge or reasons, but also tells him the manner of determining or measuring the quality, essence, or value of these ideas as the basis of his intelligent judgment or decisions about something. [17], [19]</p>	<p>SFG has language features or like clauses or modes of discourse to express meanings of language that mirror societal events and constitute a person's reasons to support his point. However, to acquire and evaluate these ideas expressed by language structures, he has to perform things requiring procedural knowledge like defining, analyzing, comparing, and other top-level thinking acts that are crucial to critical thinking.</p>
<p>3.4 Language activities encouraging social interactions</p> <p>The mood system has language features to initiate interpersonal relationships. Used in a social context, the language features make up a text with a dialogical or conversational nature that allows explorations of varied worldviews and performance of specific roles that may put one in the same or different rank or standing with respect to other members in the group. [2]</p>	<p>Critical thinking as a social activity.</p> <p>To think critically is to judge the quality of something based not only on a person's schemata, but also on others' views that conform to some standards. Resulting from varied people's ideas, or reasons influenced by cultural, social, or institutional factors, a person's decision reflects his own knowledge, plus other peoples' ideas. [3] and [8]</p>	<p>SFG, encouraging dialogical or conversational activities, give participants in a speech community much opportunity to listen to different ideas or views that they can use in analyzing a problem and in evaluating things for the purpose of arriving at better decisions, or choices.</p>
<p>3.5 Use of contextualized language exercises</p> <p>Language as a social activity involves arbitrary communication system that mirrors a cultural group's understanding of things existing or taking place in society. Exercises for language mastery necessarily involves a context of situation referring to who, what, where, when, and to other non-linguistic factors affecting the entire communication setting. [12] and [13]</p>	<p>Critical thinking embedded in society</p> <p>Critical thinking depends greatly on a person's own disposition or judgment about the quality, value, or worth of something. It is a fact, though, that any forms of knowledge emanate from his experiences influenced by sociological, cultural, and other environmental factors. In a way, It is an "egocentric and socio-centric" kind of thinking. [8]</p>	<p>Language exercises simulating social events open the minds of communicators to realities in life. Their awareness of facts or truths in society by means of contextualized activities that resemble real-life situations in society, enables them to create plausible reasons or arguments to support their stance, judgments, or decisions.</p>



<p>3.6 Dominant use of discourse</p> <p>Discourse is a text composed of sentences coherently expressing the three macro-functions of language plus cultural, sociological, and institutional factors affecting language. Made up of a set of sentences following a certain organizational pattern with the help of cohesive devices, a discourse is able to present bigger amount of related ideas and more extensive discussions of the subject. [10]</p>	<p>Consistency of ideas, reasons, or arguments to justify one's claim.</p> <p>Critical thinking makes one discern or decide on the worth or value of something based on facts or reasons related with one another. The strength of one's conclusion or decision lies in the consistency or coherence of his ideas or reasons to justify his point. [15]</p>	<p>SFG involves systems of language features to express multiple meanings of language. It is through the use of bigger language structures like the discourse modes of narration, exposition, description, and argumentation that one increases or deepens his or her knowledge of something. Also, in critical thinking, presenting reasons to justify one's point in a coherent, or sequential manner, rather than in an isolated or discrete manner, facilitates one's choice of the best reason to defend his stance.</p>
<p>3.7 Freedom of choice</p> <p>SFG uses language features with meanings resulting from their uses in society. Language features and the language user are influenced by sociological, cultural, institutional, and other environmental factors. Hence, with schemata influenced by many factors, one views things differently; thereby, he needs freedom to choose the language features he thinks are the right ones to express his worldviews. [5]</p>	<p>Dispositions based on free will</p> <p>Critical thinking leads a person to an independent act of choosing the best reason among several major alternatives. Based on his personal knowledge, other people's ideas, and some ethical societal norms, he deals with things at his own disposal; that is, he independently chooses what he thinks suits his taste or plans. [20] and [7]</p>	<p>Influenced by varied factors, language features have no fixed meanings. Depending on a person's schemata and other factors, language features convey meanings based on his disposition or determination. Like in critical thinking, a person, though influenced by others' ideas, has his own thoughts on things vis-a-vis alternatives from which he can choose the most appropriate reason to justify his judgment.</p>

4. Conclusions

Systemic Functional Grammar involves systems or networks of interactive language features that express three kinds of meanings: ideational for acquiring and expressing knowledge; interpersonal, for developing human relationships, and textual, for devising strategies to coherently express meanings. The interlacing nature of multiple meanings of language as well as its systems of language features is also true for critical thinking, a higher-order thinking strategy that involves varieties of ideas, reasons, or arguments. Both SFG and critical thinking require choosing. Guided by SFG concepts, a person chooses from systems of language features the right language items to express what he wants to say or do; by critical-thinking principles, he selects from varied alternative ideas or arguments the most appropriate reason to support his conclusion or claim about something.

A strong resemblance also exists between SFG and critical thinking as regards the origin, source, or basis of language features and ideas involved in their operations. Society under the influence of varied cultures, institutions, and ideologies, lays the foundation or basis of all language features, knowledge, or reasons dealt with by communicators governed by SFG and by critical-thinking concepts.



In conclusion, having many similarities with critical thinking in terms of concepts, components, and resources, SFG is a language theory that can meet the requirements of critical thinking, which are: thorough knowledge of one's world, independent thinking, and considerate appraisal of others' ideas. In addition, proper adherence to some evaluation criteria such as: moral perceptions, professional standards, intellectual integrity, among others, is necessary in this kind of thinking, for one has to evaluate things and to come out with a judgment or decision on this object, not only to elevate his thinking powers, but also to intelligently or logically produce the right or best solutions to problems affecting the entire society.

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