

## SFL GENRE-BASED PEDAGOGY AND STUDENT EMPOWERMENT

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**Abstract:** This paper reports on the results of a study, aiming to investigate whether systemic functional linguistic genre pedagogy (SFL GP) can empower students. This study was conducted with a class of students (17 students) in semester 3, learning academic writing, in the English Department of a state university in Indonesia. The study used the model of SFL GP offered by Derewianka (in Hertzberg, 2012); Derewianka & Jones (2012) and the concept of empowerment related to the context of literacy (Stromquist, 2009), released by UNESCO. The concept of empowerment used in the study refers to the set of feelings, knowledge, and skills that produce the ability to participate in one's social environment and affect the political system and this ability comprises four dimensions, the cognitive dimension, the economic dimension, the political dimension, and the psychological dimension. The study used a case study research design and the data were obtained from participant classroom observations for 16 meetings, in which SFL GP was implemented, analyses of students' proposals using systemic functional linguistics, and a questionnaire. In the interest of space, the paper will present a small part of the data from the students' proposals and questionnaire. The data show that SFL GP can empower the students, allowing them to gain the ability especially related to cognitive and psychological dimensions. The students' proposals show their good control of the structure and linguistic features of a research proposal and their quite strong knowledge of the field and research methodology. Moreover, the questionnaire data indicate their consciousness of improvement in reading and writing competence and positive attitude to the program. All these are expected to lead to the empowerment in terms of the other two dimensions, the economic and political dimensions in the future.

### **Introduction**

A research proposal is a most important document university students have to submit over their course of study in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, especially in Indonesia. However, based on my observation in the research site in particular, many students, especially in undergraduate program, find it difficult to write a research proposal. Many of them cannot write a clear research proposal and do not seem to be aware of the structure and elements of each part of the proposal, writing a research proposal without a clear description of the theory and research methodology. This can create the students' powerlessness in the proposal examination.

This situation has led to the writer's awareness of urgency to empower students, to help them develop their capacity in writing a research proposal in particular. As writing cannot be separated from reading, students' reading skills should also be improved. Based on the writer's previous research (Emilia, 2005, 2010, 2011; Emilia et al., 2008), SFL GP can improve students' literacy skills and because literacy is a tool for empowerment, SFL GP can empower students, especially personally and cognitively. Some teachers who have applied SFL GP appropriately in secondary schools have also been empowered personally (psychologically), cognitively, economically and politically. Some of them managed to become the winner in a competition involving their capacity in writing in different levels.

However, compared to the studies on SFL GP at the secondary level, studies on the implementation of SFL GP at the tertiary level are quite limited. Thus, this research was concerned with investigating whether SFL GP can empower university students.

The study was given shape by three broad theories, SFL GP, empowerment, and academic writing, especially research proposal. The model of SFL GP used in this study drew on the work of Derewianka (2007, cited in Hertzberg (2012) (see also Derewianka & Jones, 2012). The model can be described below.

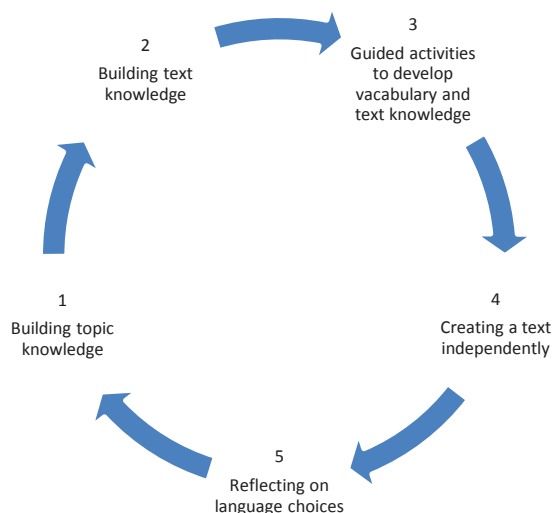


Figure 1: A Model of the SFL GP used in the study  
(adapted from Derewianka, 2007, in Hertzberg, 2012, p. 115)

The model consists of five steps, including building topic knowledge, building text knowledge (modeling the genre), guided activities to develop vocabularies and text knowledge (joint construction), creating a text independently (independent construction) and reflection on students' writing. Activities in each stage will be briefly discussed below in the methodology section and a detailed description on activities in each stage SFL GP in Indonesian context can actually be seen in Emilia (2005, 2010, 2011).

As to the concept of empowerment, as mentioned above, the study drew on the work of Stromquist (1995, in Stromquist, 2009, p. 2) in a paper released by UNESCO, to do with literacy debate, that is:

... empowerment must mean the set of feelings, knowledge, and skills that produce the ability to participate in one's social environment and affect the political system. This ability can be seen as comprising four dimensions: the cognitive dimension, or the knowledge of one's social reality and the mechanisms that make it function the way it does; the economic dimension, or access to independent means of support, which help make individuals more autonomous in their decisions; the political dimension, or the skills to participate in and modify institutions and policies of one's community or nation; and the psychological dimension, or feelings that individuals are competent, worthy of better conditions, and capable of taking action on their own behalf (Stromquist, 1995, in Stromquist, 2009, p. 2).

While no linear sequence can be stated about the four dimensions of empowerment above, to Stromquist, it would seem that the psychological dimension – operating at the personal level – often functions as a fundamental prerequisite for the other three dimensions (2009, p. 2).

Finally, the theory of academic writing, particularly research proposal, followed Glatthorn & Joyner (2005), that a research proposal consists of three main elements: introduction, consisting of background, research questions, purpose of the study and significance of the study, the literature review and research methodology (see also Paltridge & Stairfield, 2007, and Swales & Feak, 1994, 2004).

## Methodology

The study used a qualitative case study design, involving 17 students in semester three, taking the subject Writing III in the research site, about academic writing. There was an assumption that students had better learn to write a research proposal after getting the subject research methodology. However, as the data will show, students could learn to write a research proposal and produce a good research proposal although they had not learnt research methodology.

The study took place in one semester, 16 meetings, with the researcher teaching how to write a research proposal, using SFL GP. The teaching learning cycle consisted of "building topic knowledge", when the students read different references about the topic, "building text knowledge" when the teacher showed the students each element of the proposal including their rhetorical moves, "guided reading and writing", "independent writing", and "reflection" on what the students had written. The students wrote each element of the proposal in several drafts, getting feedback and guidance from the teacher. Over the process, the students were also taught about

referencing, quoting, and “making the voice of the writer clear through making statements which are not literature dominant, but the researcher or the writer dominant” (Clare, 2003, p. 26). For example:

Literature Dominant: Emilia (2005) in a study examining .... demonstrated that SFL GP ...

Researcher Dominant: Empirical evidence from recent research (Emilia, 2013) demonstrated that SFL GP... .

At the end of the semester the students submitted the final draft of the research proposal and completed a questionnaire to do with their opinions about the program. 9 (nine) proposals, representing different levels of achievements, based on the students’ GPA, were analysed in terms of the structure and language characteristics, using systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). The structure of each element of the proposal was also analysed in terms of its rhetorical moves, following Paltridge and Stairfield (2007). In the interest of space, this paper will present only a small part of the results of the study, to do with the structure and some characteristics of the research proposals and a small part of the data from the questionnaire, focusing on students’ consciousness of their improvement in reading and writing and attitude toward the program. All names presented in this paper are pseudonyms.

## Results

The results show that all the research proposals contain all elements required in a research proposal, including introduction, literature review and research methodology. Each element also has an appropriate structure. The introduction section, for example, has all required elements, including background, aims of the study, research questions, and significance of the study, as stipulated in the guidelines of academic writing released by the university. Moreover, the background section in all proposals has an appropriate structure as suggested by Paltridge & Stairfield (2007, p. 92-97) and Swales & Feak (1994, 2004). This can be seen in an example in Table 1.

Table 1. Elements of the background section in a sample of student research proposals (by Sandra)

No	Elements	Proposal 6
1	Establishing a research territory/setting up the context	Motivation is the force that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behavior. Students need something important to motivate them in learning English. In this context, one of the ways to motivate the students is by giving them reward ... .
2	Establishing a niche (gap)	However, research on the use of rewards to motivate the elementary students in learning English is not elaborated by many resources especially in research site.
3	Occupying a niche (Filling the gap)	Thus, this study will find out the value of giving rewards to motivate elementary students in learning English. This study also will examine students’ responses to the teaching program using reward to motivate the students.

Moreover, regarding the literature review, all proposals reflect the students’ quite strong knowledge of the topic to investigate. The literature review covers descriptive and explanatory theories (topic and methodological literatures), as suggested by Hart (2005, p. 3). This can be seen in Table 2, an example of the coverage of the literature review from a proposal on the use of songs in teaching English to young learners.

Table 2. Types and coverage of theories discussed in the literature review section (by Andri)

Topic Literatures (Descriptive Theory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Definition of Young Learners</li> <li>• The Characteristics of Young Learners</li> <li>• The Importance of Teaching English for Young Learners</li> <li>• The Basic Principles in Teaching English for Young Learners</li> <li>• The Definition of Song</li> <li>• The Benefits of Using English Songs as the Media in Teaching English for Young Learners</li> </ul>
Methodological Literatures (Explanatory theory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting English Songs for Teaching English Young Learners</li> <li>• The Use of English Songs as the Media in Teaching English for Young Learners</li> <li>• Review of the Previous Study</li> </ul>

Table 2 shows the writer’s strong “knowledge of the field” (Pearce, 2005:57) which will become “the basis for the research” (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005:171). Finally, the methodology section also consists of all obligatory elements, including research site and participants, research design, data collection and analysis. The methodology section also uses references to justify

All proposals also use citations in all elements, including introduction, literature review and methodology. Examples of citations will be presented below.

In the background section : "... Regarding this, Tsai & Lin (2001) cited in Putri (2012:p5) said song can be employed in an EFL classroom ..." (Andri); "... A study conducted by Clark (2000) highlighted that cartoons ..." (Sinta)

In the literature review : "To implement the use of English songs in teaching English for young learner, Millington (2011, p. 138-139), to follow Cameron (2001, p. 32), suggests ... the three stages in "task" for young learners' scheme ..." (Andri).

In the methodology section : "This research will be conducted by employing a case-study method. However, even though a case-study method can use both qualitative and quantitative approach, (Yin, 1994, p. 1) this research will only be focused on using a qualitative approach. A case study method has been chosen because it allows deep examination of observations for purposes of investigation, the development of theory and testing, (Shields, 2009, p.3) ... which are to get deep information and comprehension about the use of English songs as the media in teaching English for young learners and to investigate the students' responses toward English songs" (Andri).

The presence of citations plays a very significant role in collaborative construction of new knowledge between the writer and the reader (Hyland, 2002, p. 21). Citations, in argumentative writing like a research proposal "are tools of persuasion; writers use citations to give their statements greater authority" (Swales & Feak, 1994, p. 180). Citations also indicate that the text is analytical and the arguments are critical (Emilia, 2005, 2010). All these indicate that at this stage the students were empowered to some extent, especially in terms of cognitive dimension, to do with the capacity and skills to write a research proposal.

As to the psychological dimension, the data from the questionnaire reveal the students' consciousness of gaining competence in reading and writing, and awareness of the importance of hard work, and that the capacity gained can be used in the future. This is represented by Sandy, saying "... I think this course is very helpful, making us work hard to do our proposal, so we felt the effect. It made us understand how important reading is" and Sari "... I know how to write a good proposal for the future."

Other students' verbalisations reflect a change in attitude toward the course and writing subject.

At first, I thought this course was too difficult ...I had to make a research proposal while I didn't have enough knowledge about it. But then after some class meetings I started to like this course. I think it's not just about writing a research proposal, I could make my research proposal while enjoying my work ... (Sinta);

Actually, in the previous semesters I didn't like writing, I always got a C. ... . I think now I've made a lot of progress. ... . I'm so enthusiastic to learn to write ... (Rudi)

The comments above show the development in psychological aspect, really important as a fundamental prerequisite for the other three dimensions of empowerment (Stromquist, 2009, p. 2).

## Conclusions

This paper has presented a small part the results of a study investigating the values of SFL GP in empowering the students. The data show that SFL GP can help empower students, especially in terms of cognitive and psychological dimensions. The data show students' capacity and skills to write a research proposal and quite strong knowledge of the field to investigate. The data also reveal the students' consciousness of this capacity and positive attitude toward the teaching program and the subject of writing and writing activities. These are expected to allow their empowerment in the future, especially to do with the other two dimensions, the economic and political dimensions. The results cannot justify the assumption that students should learn to write a research proposal after learning research methodology. The most important thing is appropriate guidance and feedback provided by the teacher in each stage of the teaching learning process. It is recommended that SFL GP be implemented in different contexts in Indonesia to empower the students – to improve their literacy skills and help accelerate the completion of their study.

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