



## **Mandating teaching approaches stifles innovation: a case against**

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### **Abstract**

The article discusses the primacy of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in research and pedagogy on second language (L2) writing in Indonesia. Indonesian academics use SFL theory as a shell to value arguments and observations in the methodological literature of L2 writing, demonstrating how the theory transforms into an "instrument reliable for scaffolding thinking, for propelling knowledge and ideas forward" (Thomas, 2007, p. 44) in their research and practice. The hijacking of an educational researcher's thought process and methodology by a linguistic paradigm serves only to reinforce the researchers' lack of confidence in challenging the established and recognized paradigm. Numerous articles from reputable local publications were gathered and analyzed. The paper concludes that researchers working in Indonesia should commit to conducting more thought experiments to learn and support critical reflection over and above imitating "what has been". Reflection and consideration of interdisciplinary evidence help make a unique contribution to educational theory and practice.

**Keywords:** Indonesian academics; innovation; interdisciplinary; L2 writing; Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

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## Introduction

Over the past three decades, with its considerable impact in numerous regions of the world (Burgos, 2016; Horverak, 2016; Min, 2014; Noreiga, 2016), the hegemony of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) remains unchallenged in the methodological literature of second language (L2) writing research in Indonesia (Agustien, 2006a; Fauziati, 2016). Despite growing demands for innovation in the field of education through an examination of ideas and concepts outside its own disciplinary or practice boundaries, the status of SFL theory in Indonesia reaches a level where different explanations on language education that contradict the theory are difficult to emerge, and their validity is questioned (Thomas, 1997).

In Indonesia, the theory of SFL and its derivatives, genre-based pedagogy with Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) concept of communicative competency, has been formally adopted as theoretical frameworks for developing the national curriculum (Agustien, 2006b; Fauziati, 2016). Thus, the curriculum is pedagogically, psychologically, politically, and economically responsible for at least 25 million students and 2.5 million teachers in an archipelagic country of 17,508 islands, 652 indigenous languages, and unequal quality of education widely spread from west Sumatra to east Papua. The use of SFL to aid students' literacy development and foreign language skills began with Indonesian educational reform policies in the early 2000s, with the 2004 curriculum, the 2006 curriculum, and the 2013 curriculum being implemented today (Agustien, 2006a; Fauziati, 2016). In 2016, the government even reestablished SFL as the theoretical framework for developing national literacy and foreign language learning programs (Informasiguru, 2016).

Great number of Indonesian well-known academics view SFL as a pedagogical mandate for resolving student issues in second language writing classes and further reinforce their adherence to its received wisdom (Agustien, 2016; Arianto et al., 2017; Aunurrahman et al., 2017; Cahyono, 2018; Dewi, 2016; Emilia, 2016; Emilia & Hamied, 2015; Kuswanto, 2015; Lestariningsih, 2020; Putra & Lukmana, 2017; Widodo, 2018). However, Indonesian researcher's lens obscures classroom reality and misses the perspective of students who are confronted with the task of learning to communicate competently in a foreign language and go through pedagogical process (Lian, 2000). The researcher's perspective does, indeed, make sense and "is useful in many contexts" (p. 9), but Indonesian classroom situation is not always confined to the analysis of expert-perceived problems.

Quantitative findings from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Program for International Student Assessment

(PISA) report (OECD, n.d) support Lian's (2000) argumentation. In 2009, Indonesian students were ranked 57th out of 65 countries in terms of literacy ability, with a score of 402 out of a possible 493. In the 2012 PISA testing, the literacy score declined to 396 among 492, ranking it 61st out of 65 countries. After implementing the 2013 curriculum, in the 2015 PISA edition the Indonesian students' aggregate literacy scored 397 points to remain lower than the average, ranking 67th out of 72 nations. In the most recent PISA assessment in 2018, the situation deteriorated further, with an average literacy scored 371 compared to the global average of 489, further emphasizing Indonesia's status as a country with poor literacy education (ranked 74th out of 79 countries). To pour salt in the wound, in 2021 Indonesia is placed 80th in the poorly proficient category among 112 nations as tested by English First, a world-renowned English course institution. Although achievement in the low proficiency category in 2021 has increased slightly from very low proficiency in the 2011 measurement, these findings should serve as a wake-up call for researchers, educators, and policymakers to look for alternative approaches that are more effective for students not only pleasing to researchers and theorists.

The abovementioned facts suggest that the bad results since 2009 have not necessarily prompted researchers, scholars, teachers, policymakers to seek alternative solutions to educational problems in Indonesia. The preoccupied theory amid facts and research findings are not in line with the beliefs written in the literature review. This paper comes with evidence on how Indonesian academics use the theory of SFL as a shell to give value to arguments and observations in the methodological literature of L2 writing in their research and practice.

## Method

Following Golonka et al. (2014), this review highlights the evidence regarding the lack use of SFL theory in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing learning and instruction. Therefore, research-based evidence demonstrating how Indonesian researchers used the theory in Indonesia context is emphasized and critically evaluated by the author. The author focuses exclusively on examining papers related to L2 writing research and pedagogical practice on systemic functional linguistics and a genre-based approach which are selected from reputable journals such as TEFLIN, IJAL (Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics), SIELE (Studies in English Language and Education), IJOLE (International Journal of Language Education). The selected research articles

belong to well-known EFL academics in Indonesia. Reflection on each article on the basis of interdisciplinary evidence is given to avoid conformity in mind and, instead, allows innovation and new thought in EFL writing research and practices.

Before illustrating how SFL theory and its developed variant is treated in the Indonesian L2 writing research context, the reflection of Gary Thomas, an education expert and editor of several international reputed journals is worth considering. Thomas (1997) in his provocative article "What's the use of Theory?" reveals the existence of "a collective inferiority complex about the epistemological pedigrees" among educational researchers, not daring to put one's thoughts against established theories that already have robust construction" (p. 84). Thomas (1997) indicates that inequity in how theories are applied exists in science and education. Thomas (1997) relates it to Newton's mechanical theory and Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. Isaac Newton's mechanical theory was relevantly employed in its day, when research equipment's and measurement tools were still rudimentary, but as contemporary times and more exact calculating modes developed, the mechanical theory was supplanted by Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. The Presence of Einstein's theory of relativity did not use mechanical theory as a shield for his argument against criticism. The theory of relativity is not a slave to the mechanical theory; rather, it is a development that represents a fresh leap through a process of investigation, observation, and more accurate experimentation. In the methodological literature of education, theory is addressed differently. Most educational researchers theorize to defend claims against critical examination (Bruner, 1986). Then there is an expectation, theory becomes a dependable tool for structuring thinking and advancing knowledge and ideas.

SFL theory as a framework for teaching reading and writing is so prevalent in L2 practice that the supporters assert and reassert the theory's relevance and dedicate themselves to the argument over its importance. Halliday (1992), the originator, stated that all texts are the consequence of linguistic choices made by the author in a specific context of time and place. He claimed that language changes depending on the context which is crucial to the whole process of meaning formation. Therefore, "variety of text features" play a major role in shaping comprehension (Beck et al., 1995, p. 220). Lian (2000) assesses that Halliday (1992) emphasized word strings and grammar at the expense of other factors that contribute to linguistic choices. On the contrary, Hyland (2007) argues that "understanding of the ways language is used to create meanings in writing empowers teachers by offering them ways to analyze texts, to reflect on

the workings of language, and to provide more robust and targeted support for learners" (p. 162). As the proponent of the theory, Hyland (1992) believes that meaning lies in the text and its surrounding contexts. This is a very abstract statement and tell L2-practitioners little about these textual and contextual factors. What are they? How can we tell? What evidence supports our hypotheses?

## Findings

The tendency to indulge in big theories like the SFL is very visible in L2 writing research and practice in Indonesia. Cahyono's (2018) study demonstrates how the educational researcher's thought process was hijacked by a linguistic paradigm and its methodology which initially aimed at boosting students' critical reaction to the text they composed. Cahyono (2018) adopts Halliday's (1992) notion of textual meaning and the SFL to deal with the majority of students who struggle with critical thinking enhancement when it comes to text production. He introduced the students to samples of hortatory texts and trained them to analyze the thematic patterns and grammatical cohesive devices. He believes that "to be critical, students need to understand well the texture of the texts they created" (Cahyono, 2018, p. 53). Cahyono (2018), like most linguists, is more interested in finding out how a text is organized than in seeing through the eyes of students who are having problems with their language skills. By imposing the theory's expectations that have structured and so confined his thought (Thomas, 1997), Cahyono's (2018) belief obscures the true learning needs of students who are obliged to concentrate on irrelevant "language of linguistics" (Lian, 2000, p. 4).

His SFL-imposed procedure emphasizes the following teacher's action: "teacher introduced students to...and students are trained to analyze..." which display how teachers and/or researchers might put students under pressure when they have to examine representations of language that could be out of their thoughts. The reality often comes fierce than expectation. First of all, consider EFL teachers who are not all competent lesson deliverers. Numerous research proved that teachers in Indonesia often lack the pedagogical expertise and abilities necessary to maintain the high levels of motivation typically seen in such settings (Lestariningsih et al., 2020; Munandar & Newton, 2021; Sulistiyo, 2016). In the hands of less capable teachers, L2 writing classroom commonly turned into grammar puzzlement that unknown linguistic issues only amplify stressful situations for students. Evidence from neuroscience show

that student's stressed brains create more cortisol, which has been shown to have a negative effect on synaptic plasticity and learning (Owens & Tanner, 2017). Students easily get frustrated of focusing on texts. Only a few students, the intelligent ones, were able to cope with such upsetting classroom conditions, leading the researcher to conclude that "most students were able to self-edit...adopted skills of using both strategies...and produced critical response..." (Cahyono, 2018, p. 53). Cahyono's (2018) research conclusion dismissed the students as the center of attention. Additionally, given the qualitative nature of the data, which consisted of twenty students' hortatory texts assessed using Butt's framework of textual meaning (Cahyono, 2018), the study's favorable findings illustrate how SFL theory constrained the researcher's thought within its boundaries.

Researchers lack confidence in challenging an established and recognized theory revealed in Emilia and Hamied's (2015) study. The researchers aspire to investigate whether systemic functional linguistic genre pedagogy (SFL GP) can help students develop their English writing abilities and explore their critical thinking capacity in academic writing. The researchers started vainly by "praising" the Indonesian government that has officially recognized the Australian genre-based pedagogy SFL through the enactment of the 2004 national curriculum. SFL GP as a theoretical foundation was devised to develop student literacy in addition to English language skills, following Macken-Horarik's (2002) outlook. Emilia and Hamied (2015) seek conformity to the archive, where they lose the courage to anarchy and radical in favor of adhering to the structure of SFL theory construction. Such a tradition has the potential to hinder progress, which would grow through the critique of "those who fight, those who refuse and resist what is. It comes through 'conflict and confrontation'" (Thomas, 2009, p. 31).

According to Emilia and Hamied's (2015), SFL GP bases its concept on three language learning principles. The first principle asserts that language is functional in the sense that genres (text kinds) and registers (field, mode, and tenor) all affect the linguistic features of a given text. In principle, the SFL GP paradigm views the text as the primary object, not the learner. Students are evaluated only on the basis of their brain output, yet, their learning needs are often unnoticed. Experts and teachers are occupied with texts they meticulously analyze to discover links between items from which they might deduce student learning situations. The second principle considers learning a social activity in which the teacher encourages students to collaborate with their peers and teacher. Emilia and Hamied (2015) believed the authoritative position of the language-awareness teacher influence students' language development, under

the umbrella of an apprenticeship model as proposed by Joyce and Feez (2012). The apprenticeship model is an educational process that was popular in the nineteenth century. The implementation of this apprenticeship model demonstrates that the theory learning model just recycled the learning process from hundreds of years ago (Thomas, 2007). The apprenticeship model is a sort of coercion that may have a detrimental effect on the development of certain students. When authoritative positions of experts (teachers) shape students' language development, a coercive process occurs, potentially dampening students' enthusiasm for learning. Not all students thrive under stress. The students' achievements and abilities may be shattered by the teacher's egoism, who believes it is correct and teacher becomes upset when contradicted. Keller (1987) suggests students be assisted in developing their interests and motivations for learning instead of Droga and Humphrey's (2003) argument that students' language development likely improves in social environments through interaction with more competent linguistic-knowledge teachers.

The third principle believes that pedagogy makes knowledge visible, under which teachers use explicit teaching in which students are required to grasp how language works to make meaning, how texts are organized, and how linguistic forms characterize various genres. Teachers control what to study and how it is learned (Droga & Humphrey, 2003; Joyce & Feez, 2012). As students develop their knowledge and skills, the teacher strategically hands over control to the students, varying the level of control and the visibility of the teaching in response to students' needs and capabilities (Joyce & Feez, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2008). This is what explicit teaching entails, that according to Rose and Martin (2012), "should be harmonized with students' experience, knowledge, and need." (p. 12). In the Indonesian context, teachers might belittle Martin and Rose's (2008) argument as the teachers' power is already too strong, to the point that they believe they do not have the opportunity or do not need to grasp students' experience, knowledge, and needs. Teacher's authoritative position limits students to think and reflect because of the considerably lengthy procedure if they do. Numerous studies in Indonesia validate how this critical function to be at the shoulders of students is being ignored, and text-oriented approaches that allow teacher's controlling power.

The following research by Nurlaelawati et al. (2020) is an illustration of how educational researchers have been lulled by theory and its development and a growing desire to always align with the theory applied is obvious. Nurlaelawati et al.'s (2020) case study focused on how two preservice teachers (male, aged between 25-27 years old) applied genre-based pedagogy in their teaching practicum. The genre-based pedagogy was devised to offer students explicit

and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts as to produce purposeful pieces of writing (Hyland, 2003). Adjusting the direction set by Christie and Derewianka (2010), the researchers believe that this pedagogy is solution for students to use language patterns to produce coherent, purposeful pieces of writing. They also looked so assured in the theory's effective application in several countries such as Chile (Burgos, 2016) Norway (Horverak, 2016), China (Min, 2014), and Colombia (Noreiga, 2016).

Explicitly, they supposed this theory would suit Indonesia educational system but unrealistic expectations about the limit of theory are increasingly felt when researchers theorizing and taking theories and methodologies from linguistic experts with little attempt of reflection. The article fails to offer dialogue of their thoughts and theories of genre-based pedagogy and systemic functional linguistics. The powerful figures in tandem with the dogma of theories easily structure researcher's thoughts and constrain their critical power, which is evident at the arrays of the arguments they develop throughout the article.

Moreover, too positive research conclusions are seemingly to be enhanced with the following reasons. First, the student teachers' knowledge of genre-based pedagogy was ill-assessed when based merely on their observations of teaching practicum. Malva et al. (2020) define knowledge of pedagogy as "the specialized knowledge of teachers in creating and facilitating effective teaching and learning environments for all students, independent of subject matter" and proposes the use of measuring tools in the form of surveys and direct assessment (testing) (p. 2), which were disregarded in this research. It was said from the outset that student-teachers' knowledge of genre-based pedagogy was very limited. Research participant Farhan learned genre-based pedagogy for the first time in one of the courses in his bachelor's degree, while Gilang had heard about the pedagogy but was not really sure what the pedagogy was and how to apply it. However, at the end of the article, the research claims that the knowledge of both student teachers on genre-based pedagogy is considerably good in although the argument seems unclear. Second, the research domain to be measured was not clearly defined. The referred definitions showed how researchers were overshadowed by the power nexus of genre theory (Nurlaelawati et al., 2020). The research conclusion was derived from texts produced by students and is confusing, given that there was no evidence such analysis of text might reflect the teacher's knowledge and pedagogical abilities.

Interestingly, out of nowhere, the researcher concluded that opportunity was key for the students to practice producing texts. The term opportunity which is related to the student's difficulties was not specified and unclear since



the main concern of researchers is texts, not students. Why did the focus shift from texts to students who were ignored from the start? Thomas (1997) suggests that excessive dependence on theory hinders thinking methods aiming to find solutions to an educational problem. Whereas "creativity and progress are the fruits of anarchy in thought" (p. 77).

Dewi's (2016) study is another example of how systemic functional linguistics is falsely devised to seek solution of student's writing problems. Dewi (2016) analyzed three expository texts used by three pre-service teachers as teaching materials. She believed that understanding the coherence of analytical exposition texts informed pre-service teachers' subject matter knowledge competence. Along with assessing the papers, the researchers interviewed them regarding their pedagogic challenges of adapting and developing exposition texts as teaching material. The research results were perplexing that the findings of the text analysis did not correspond to the experiences of pre-service teachers in class (Dewi, 2016). There were many challenges pre-service teachers faced, but the researcher marginalized them in favor of analyzing texts, which she vaguely praised pre-service teachers for "professionalism". There was nothing comprehensive this research had offered but confusing. The researcher was trapped in her naive mind by the theory she thought did not deserve debate and "must be" accepted as true.

The way the researcher analyzed and interpreted texts with the theory and theorized to build ideas towards a framework demonstrated that she had been trapped in a framework that constrains her thought but unaware. She ignored pre-service teachers' meaning-making mechanism in pedagogy as she was more interested in understanding texts modification for the teaching materials from existing sources rather than in exploring their internal logical and representational systems that are part of the meaning-making mechanism process without which pre-service teachers are unable of acting (Lian, 2018). To explore the definition of a door likely more fascinated her rather than investigating an infant understands to function a door despite knowledge lack of door definition. The guts are absent as the researcher didn't even have any assumptions and certainties to question in his mind. Rather than focusing on an infant's ability to function a door despite knowledge lack of door definition, exploring the door functionality more fascinated her. The researcher's guts are missing since he had no preconceptions or certainty to challenge his thoughts.

Emilia (2016) conducts a study to investigate student abilities and difficulties in academic writing. Based on her observation and experience, she recognized that students have academic writing issues. Explicitly, the researcher relied on, what she believed, 'main theories' such as the critical

thinking movement by McPeck (1990), the transitivity system of systemic functional linguistics by Halliday (1994) and academic writing text, and reassert the central of SFL theory. It is tough to make sense of students' abilities and difficulties when seen from the three theoretical viewpoints. The ontology of the researcher's method is suspect as the researcher incorporates the informants' concerns with his own interpretation. The researcher attempted to decipher three linguistic features of writing that beyond the reach of the addressee study, which is student. Latour (2004) once questioned the logic of this kind of thinking with the analogy of ant. "Would you think that ants would learn something from your study, if you were studying them instead of ANT?" Latour pondered. "No, of course not," he said. ... You and your informants have different concerns ... You explain what they do to yourself, for your own benefit, not for them ... What makes you think that a study was supposed to teach things to the people being studied? (Latour, 2004, p. 71).

Because each thesis has the parts of a standard thesis, Emilia praised students' good grasp on how a thesis be structured although she drew it solely from students' complete schematic elements of the thesis: the Abstract, Table of Contents, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology Data Presentation and Analysis, Conclusion and Suggestion. She claimed that students had demonstrated the theses' clarity and relevance based on critical thinking standards.

She analyzed in terms of linguistic features based on the Theme, Mood and Modality, and Transitivity systems of systemic functional grammar, which is flawed as it does not offer a tangible solution yet only to establish the theory's credibility. Assumption and certainties were beyond her inquiry, as Foucault suggests, researchers should attempt to "breach self-evidence....." (Thomas, 2007, p. 31). The completeness of schematic elements in a thesis is a matter of adhering to institutional rules instead of a knowledge entailment. At this point, the researcher was being in thrall to theory when she believed the theories only bear fact.

Furthermore, Emilia (2016) proposes a scaffolding technique in which, teachers design activities based on arbitrarily determined difficulty scales to increase students' ability and confidence in debating and expressing positions and ideas and making judgments (Cloonan, 2010; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Kalantzis & Cope, 2010). Lian and Norman (2007) label scaffolding as insufficient to offer a principled basis for accounting for students' subjective interpretations and enabling informed and critical engagement. Scaffolded activities privilege teachers' inquiries about the texts, transforming the text into an object built by such inquiries. In this teacher-led activity, the teacher

powerfully sets up goals for students' actions only on the basis of their own personal histories, which may differ from those of their students.

Aunurrahman et al. (2017) explored tertiary students' competency of English academic writing as well as critical thinking ability. Three texts were extracted after the students completed taking 16-session argumentative writing course and writing test. Researchers analyzed and categorized the texts by low, medium, and high proficient. During the course, teacher aka researcher implemented SFL genre-based approach with explicit teaching by encouraging students to produce academic writing. Explicit teaching refers to a method where teacher explicitly elaborates linguistic aspects of academic writing to the students prior to in-group and individual text construction. The explicit teaching can be reduced when the students are considered ready to work in an individual setting (Feez, 2002). The researchers concluded that the students had little control over the schematic structure and linguistic features, reflecting limitations of information-organizing skills and critical thinking capacity. Despite flawed methodology and rationality to draw conclusion, this study illustrated the definite bottleneck of systemic functional linguistics as grand theory.

Likewise, Ummah's (2019) observation and interview study investigates whether the genre-based approach effectively develop student's thinking skill in text comprehension. According to her classroom observation, the teacher, in general, complied with all stages of the genre-based approach, namely Building Knowledge of Field (BKOF), Modeling of Text (MOT), Joint Construction of Text (JOT), Individual Construction of Text (ICOT) and based on the interview to students after a summative text, their responses about the approach "was interesting, enjoyable, and more comprehensive". Ummu's study seems to have forced this approach as successful evidence to be applied despite its weak reasoning and methodology. Beside that her study justified teacher's dominant role under the systemic functional linguistic-oriented approach, students tend to be passive with them only answering the teacher's questions and not trying to actively participate in class. This fact negated the researcher's claim that students were "active and enjoying". The findings were clueless of its effectiveness on the development of critical thinking, which was unrecognizable by the students.

Samanhudi's (2011) case study theorized that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a means for understanding why a text is the way it is. By analyzing student writings and conducting interviews, Samanhudi (2011) discovered students' weakness on applying critical thinking from their "at one sitting" essay. He found that the texts produced by the students were less

sophisticated and less explicit, attributing their incapacity to their limited awareness of the subject matter and lack of expertise. The students' capacity to argue, to state opinions and stance explicitly and carefully were in need as well as exposing students to alternative approach with a view to improving their critical thinking. Samanhudi (2011) made no attempt to ascertain if students learn by analyzing the communicative impact of their texts in their own terms, i.e., by relying on their own semiotic sources, which are their own resources. His strong commitment to theory in systemic functional linguistics has led him to assume that texts are composed of words regulated by grammar and their "social" contexts. He makes the assumption that students' issues are mirrored in the text regardless of their operational historical significance. He tries to frame students' problems with the parameters he has set based on the theory he believes in Samanhudi (2011), a researcher and teacher, believes that there is a problem from the lense he brings in, but he disregards how each student makes meaning varies as well as perceiving problem.

Likely, Kuswanto's (2015) study exhibits how the theory of systemic functional linguistics or systemic functional grammar, which manifested itself in the genre-based approach, has significantly impacted how Indonesian researchers run L2 research. This case study investigates the students' use of social media in a genre-based approach and how students perceive social media as a tool for learning critical thinking skills in argumentative writing. However, social media as a learning tool becomes useless when students seem not to be allowed to act informed when the device does not help them review and analyze what others do, why, how, and when, from the standpoint of their questions (Lian & Norman, 2007). Thus, the availability of social media exists merely to legitimize the existence of the genre-based approach instead of providing students with a mechanism to help them explore and identify. Triangulation of data gathering procedures includes documentation of students' argumentative essays, observation, and interviews. The researcher shows the influence of social media on a genre-based approach through the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar to examine the students' works. This instrumentation increases confusion towards the results when it says that social media was beneficial for students when utilized effectively in a genre-based approach and that it was a "valuable learning tool for argument building." The genre-based approach, thus, plays a panacea for analyzing social media usage as a tool for improving students' argumentative writing abilities. Unfortunately, the theory's authority trumped the presence of students who were "compelled" to speak positively about the approach. Students' meaning-making mechanisms

were disregarded to pave ways for the interests of theories deemed "absolutely beneficial."

Reliance on SFL theory covers the conviction of the methodology or procedure accompanying the theory. The procedure of an accepted theory is initially justified before considering a pedagogical goal (Thomas, 2007). The pedagogical goals that do not conform the theory-imposed methodology and procedure may result in irrelevant research reflects in Putra and Lukmana's (2017) research that aimed to explore the language of textbooks which they considered the main learning tool to comprehend student's literacy development as the real pedagogical objective. Putra and Lukmana (2017) were concerned with the content complexity of the text as stating that "exploration of the lexicogrammatical features of the language, including text complexity, lexical density, and grammatical literacy used in textbooks is helpful for teachers and that awareness of the effect of text complexity on comprehension results in better texts for pedagogical purposes" (p. 442). They reasoned that researching on text complexity progression in the reading texts of English textbooks contained novelty. They analyzed reading texts chosen randomly from three consecutive textbooks issued by the Ministry of Education using the blade of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Yet, their assumption went beyond students learning needs and problems and thus scope of this educational research. The result found an inconsistent progression of text complexity within each textbook, and the text was considered too sophisticated for students' level of proficiency. This research does not offer a solution for developing students' literacy programs instead of pleasing text-oriented theorists.

## Discussion

Lian (2014, 2017) and Lian and Pertiwi (2017) criticize pedagogical models such as genre-based approach and systemic functional linguistics for their inability to offer students a way of thinking about text organization they already "know" innately. Instead, Lian emphasizes the importance of emotion as an alternative organizing factor in dealing with text that may contradict text-based pedagogy. Her argument is evidence from research conducted by neuroscientists Damasio and Immordino-Young (2007), who assert that the brain structures that organize human social behavior are built on emotional systems. For this reason, Lian suggests students are more likely to engage their L2-interaction by activating networks and schema that are already familiar to them because of their prior learning experiences (Grachev et al., 2001). As a result, it is necessary to reduce

the interference of competing information-processing demands, which generate interfering conflicts in perceptual attention, cognitive thinking, and long-term memory systems (Lian, 2018).

Her thought contrast Martin's (2009) belief that genres are made of meanings which are construed by grammar and lexis, combined to be called lexicogrammar. Comprehension of lexicogrammar regulates how to string appropriate words and structures in a text. Accordingly, students who fail to comprehend the functionality of lexicogrammar are likely unable to properly analyze the interpersonal meaning, textual meaning and ideational meaning of texts. The truth may be merely in the teacher and expert's logics so that students are forced to access the perspectives of them who have set up limitations on what and how students can read and analyze (Lian, 2017). Students cannot identify their own boundaries. Their weaknesses and disadvantages are ignored as they have to accomplish task in which meanings are imposed, not discovered. Proponents of the theory believe meaning rests in text and its context. Lian (2011) opposes it as stating meaning "is never found but constructed internally by each individual according to personal representational and logical systems which are the result of the individual's history". Students perceive the meaning of a word owing to interacting with the world, which is "constructed internally via a process of convergence from multi-channel experience and feedback". Something has a "meaning" only when it has several different ways to portray it - various viewpoints and varied associations (Misky, 1981).

Martin's (2009) arguments reflect a linguist's perspective which must not be conflated with a student's point: What the student sees or hears is not necessarily what the theory sees. Indonesian academics who replace the student's systems of perception with the SFL theory make a category mistake. The field needs more flexible alternatives, which are able to integrate evidence from a multitude of research, without yet reducing the students' meaning-making systems to that evidence.

The advancement of science and the growth of interdisciplinarity continue to demonstrate unequivocally that expanding one's understanding of knowledge beyond traditional boundaries inspires new thinking and broadens paradigms. For example, Boroditsky's (2011) research, a psychologist and researcher at Stanford University in the United States of America, argues that different languages may impart distinct cognitive abilities. Boroditsky (2011) is referring to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, who discovered in the 1930s that a person's native language has an effect on how they think and act, a hypothesis that linguists abandoned for decades, claiming that "language and

thought are universally muscled onto the scene" (p. 63). Decades of near-complete lack of evidence persisted until interdisciplinary evidence from neuroscience, perception studies, anthropology, and cognitive psychology emerged to support Sapir and Whorf's claim.

Additionally, Fausey et al. (2010) discovered that linguistic differences affect how people interpret events. This cognitive psychological finding transcended the boundaries of applied linguistics and education, yet is overlooked by Indonesian EFL researchers and academics who are prone to justify and "afraid" of deviating from grand theories like SFL, as demonstrated by the research discussed above. In Indonesia, proponents of SFL believe that meaning is hidden behind the text and its contexts; they seemingly neglect "anti-mainstream" findings and do not incorporate them into foreign language pedagogy because such kind of research considerably deviant from the well-known theories of second language acquisition and language pedagogy. Lian (1980) challenges this text-oriented mainstream with his postmodern thinking, arguing that meaning is derived from a process of personal/individual meaning-making based on their operational histories. He proposes that, rather than hijacking students' meaning-making mechanisms with the imposing of expert rules, teachers should provide opportunities for students to confront, contrast, and contest student's understandings with examples of the foreign language (Lian, 2004). However, for years, researchers and experts in foreign languages ignored this frontal thought.

Likewise, Boomer's (1965) study established a strong correlation between intonation and grammar, which went likely unnoticed for years by second language researchers in ELT pedagogy (Lewis, 1999) until modern instrumentation studies of the brain revealed that "the brain generates its sentence melody" (Herrmann et al., 2003, p. 396). Only that has it been proven that learning a new language is not just an intellectual endeavor but also a whole-body activity (Lian, 2011). In line with that, Guberina in 1972 and 1976 had worked on verbotonalism, or the verbotonal method, and demonstrated that integrating pronunciation, gesture, and movement (including dance) improves sound perception and pronunciation in contexts of foreign language learning (Lian, 2011). In the following years, researchers from China, Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia have experimented the verbotonal method and demonstrated its effectiveness on pronunciation (Lian, 1980) listening comprehension (Cai et al., 2021), speaking (Yang, 2016), reading (Alazard et al., 2012), and writing (Bumela, 2021).

## Conclusion

To conclude, L2 academics and researchers in Indonesia should commit to more thought experiments and diversity. Reflection and consideration of interdisciplinary evidence are necessary components of making a distinctive contribution to educational practice. While having theories provides a secure conceptualization, a container for experience and ideas, this does not mean that those theories are immune to criticism because anarchy of thought will stimulate creativity and innovation.

Being imprisoned by grand theory limits the possibilities for the emergence of novel ideas and innovations. SFL theory, being a well-established theory, should be seen as one of numerous building blocks. Commitment to this concept, which involves orderliness, cannot be made at the expense of idea fertility. According to Carr, theory is "reflection and thought." (Thomas, 1997, p. 101). The most acceptable course of action is to treat any theory as the reflection for a particular logic while allowing the mind to dare to be different rather than just conformity to avoid "academic attack".

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