

# A study of the implications of systemic linguistics in the teaching of English as a second language

**A B S T R A C T** Linguists have proposed and discussed a number of theories about the nature and functions of language. As yet, there is no agreement on which theory best describes language and which theory should be accepted and applied in second language teaching situations. Linguistic institutions the world over adopt and apply definitions and theories they think are appropriate for developing applied linguistics courses. These are chosen from schools of linguistic theories such as systemic functional grammar, transformational generative grammar, descriptive grammar, comparative grammar and others. Conceptions on the relevance of each of these theories in the teaching of English as a second language vary from one speech community to the other. Kilpert (2001), Van Rooy and Butler (2000) suggest that systemic functional grammar (SFG) should be studied in second language situations where communicative competence, as an aspect of 'Outcomes Based Education', is desired. This article supports this view and proceeds to highlight selected features of SFG which the writer believes enhance the development of communicative competence in English as a second language.

**Keywords:** theme systems, systemic linguistics, theme, rheme, new information, given information, topical, syntagmatic/paradigmatic, marked/unmarked, metafunction, discourse component

## 1. Introduction

The view that teaching a language should be motivated by clear objectives that refer to the intended functions of that language in specified situations necessitated this study. This view is echoed by Halliday (1985) who claims that language is used differentially in various contexts. Hengeveld (2005: 57) also proceeds to point out that, in communication, the following three components are involved: the **conceptual component**, the **textual component** and the **discourse component**. The **conceptual component** signifies the idea or ideas a speaker desires to communicate and the **textual component** refers to the field or area of discourse from which

the conceptual component is derived. The **output** or **discourse component** constitutes the linguistic structures selected as appropriate for communicating ideas in a given context or situation. These observations lead to the following important question that can be asked in second language teaching (ESL) situations: *what theory of language appropriately prepares students to communicate effectively in a second language?*

Discussion in this paper focuses on aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar that suggest that it is, perhaps, the most appropriate theory on which ESL teaching can be based. It offers reasons for making this assumption. According to Wattles and Radić Bojanić (2007) the Systemic Functional Grammar theory provides information about possible linguistic variations and appropriate language usable in different situations.

Because most ESL teaching and learning seem to be based on the Structural Theory of Language, some graduates from tertiary institutions display inadequate language **usage** skills. This observation supports the suggestion made by Burt and Dulay (1981: 186) that

optimal language learning environments can be (and have been) created by teachers in classrooms. One just has to be willing **to subordinate linguistic form to subject content for a major part of the curriculum** (own emphasis). One also has to be willing to explore materials that may not have been designed for language teaching purposes but can be adapted to meet those needs.

This observation suggests the need to link aspects of communicative language usage and conscious knowledge of rules that will lead, naturally, to the selection of realisation rules that help speakers communicate their messages appropriately. Because SFG is assumed, in this article, to provide a sound knowledge base for realisation rules that enhance effective communication, the writer decided to focus on SFG realisational rules that do not require detailed discussion of grammatical rules. Instead, he focussed his discussion upon those *realisation rules* that promote the construction of grammatically acceptable sentences/utterances that effectively communicate intended messages.

## 2. Theoretical issues

The major issues about systemic grammar which need to be born in mind include the following:

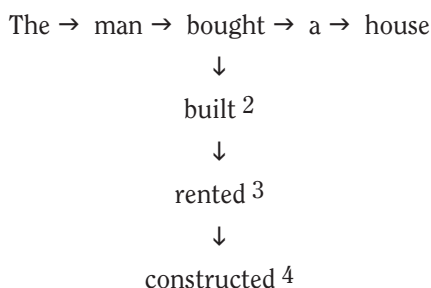
- Language is a system of sub-systems. When users of a language interact or communicate certain messages, they choose appropriate linguistic channels from the subsystems of a given language.
- Crystal (1991: 343) warns against “confusing the terms ‘systemic’ and ‘systematic’ since the former refers to a network of systems of relationships... which will account for all the semantically relevant choices in the language as a whole”. On the other hand, the term “systematic” refers to ways in which the relationships of language are organised.
- Systemic linguists define the systemic nature of language by focussing on its ‘**anatomy**’ and ‘**physiology**’. Linguistic anatomy, in this context, refers to the structure of language. Structure is defined in this context, to refer to patterns of language forms as they occur in syntagmatic relationships observable in linear form between the elements of a phrase or a clause as in the following example:

Example I: The → man → bought → a → house.

Firth (1957) observed that syntagmatic relationships arrange linguistic items “in an order of mutual expectancy”: that is, the occurrence of a word or unit presupposes a word or words of certain classes. For instance, in the sentence given above (i), the definite article *the* anticipates the use of a noun phrase subject (NPs) functioning as the headword of the NP. The occurrence of a NP in initial position anticipates the verb phrase *bought* to signify the action *performed against* or *by* the NP. The occurrence of the VP (*bought*) anticipates the occurrence of a noun phrase – NP – (*a house*), a phrase in which the indefinite article *a* anticipates the headword of the NP (*house*) which functions as its headword.

Firth went on to define *system* as a term that refers to linguistic items or units that are commutable or replaceable by other items in a language. Such items occur paradigmatically in language usage.

Using the sentence given above, we can illustrate the paradigmatic relationships between word units as follows:



The downward arrows indicate paradigmatic relationships of the verb phrase used in the sentence: VPs 2, 3 and 4 can be used to replace VP<sub>1</sub>. Units that appropriately replace other units paradigmatically need to belong to the same word class with those they replace or to perform the same functions with their replacements.

### 2.1 Realisation rules

Realisation rules can be defined as suggestions for selecting and combining units paradigmatically in order to obtain constructions that effectively communicate our ideas or messages. Different grammatical theories adopt different strategies for describing realisation rules observed in natural languages. For instance, linguists from the London School of Linguistics differed from the American structuralist linguists such as Bloomfield and Chomsky in that they focussed on the study of the *functions* of language as opposed to the American structuralist approach which focussed on linguistic *forms*. Systemic Functional Grammar is so-called because it focuses on detailed descriptions of system networks found within it and because of its focus on the descriptions of the **functions** of different groups of sentences in English.

From the preceding brief description of some features of SFG, we should proceed to state the focus of this study. This is stated in the context of a pedagogical problem that arises from the theories of language upon which the teaching of English in second language situations is based in our schools.

### 3. Developing communicative competence

In second language teaching contexts, as suggested in the preceding section, one of the aims is to develop **communicative competence** through a second language such as English. We can define communicative competence as a set of linguistic skills that enable the user of a language to acquire

- underlying knowledge of the linguistic system and the norms for the appropriate socio-cultural use of language in particular speech situations [and to apply these effectively in communication] (O'Grady *et al.*, 1996: 708).

It was implied above, that there is *no clear link* between linguistic theories such as the structural, transformational, generative, descriptive and comparative grammars and communicative competence. The problem for most ESL teachers is that because of the absence of that *clear link*, grammar or descriptive linguistics and communicative competence are viewed as aspects of language learning that need to be taught separately. What is needed, in fact, are teaching approaches that combine, to a certain extent, the development of the disciplines. In such situations language awareness should help develop communicative competence: a term which Richards *et al.* (1992: 65) define as

- The ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom.

The pedagogical question that arises from the problem stated above is: *which theory should be adopted for teaching both language awareness (grammar) and communicative competence?* The answer provided in this article is – **Systemic Functional Grammar**. Justifications for this response are given in the discussion that follows.

### 4. Research methodology

To collect data for this study, the researcher reviewed a number of books and articles on SFG in order to, critically, analyse information pertaining to the central thesis of the theory. The specific aim and procedure followed are explained in the subsections that follow.

#### 4.1 Aim

As stated above, the study involved analysis of the major components of the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar. In other words, it sought to establish what SFG informs us about the structures and functions of language. From the analysis carried out, the researcher observed that the major features related to oral and written communication fall into the following categories: "...describing *structures*, describing *systems* and ... describing *realisations*" Dodd (1996: 70). For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to focus upon "describing systems" within Systemic Functional Grammar. The reason for isolating this feature is to understand clearly the emphasis on

- the structural distribution of information in a sentence/utterance;
- the communicative features of each theme system and its variations if any.

It is not possible, however, to provide an exhaustive analysis of the systems that SFG indicates as its major constituents. The researcher selected those systems that were deemed to have

greater **communicative** rather than **theoretical** value. In other words, the focus was more on indicating how language functions as a communication medium in different situations rather than **provide definitional** or **conceptual information** on features of the systems. For instance, a clear illustration of these can be given as follows:

+ Communicative Value (Column A)	+ Descriptive Value (Column B)
– theme (as part of an utterance)	– metafunction = higher level function
– rheme (as part of an utterance)	– metacognition
– theme systems (communication structures)	– syntagmatic relationship
– mood	– paradigmatic relationship
– modality	– textual theme
– transitivity	– local theme
– polarity	– realisation rule
– given information (in a sentence)	– entry point
– new information (in a sentence)	

From the examples given above, the research focussed more closely on features in Column A, that is those that facilitated greater communicative value. These were gleaned from the following readings: Berry (1975), Dodd (1996), Halliday *et al.* (2004) Bloor *et al.* (1975), Halliday *et al.* (1981). The following systems were selected for study:

- Thematisation
- Theme/Rheme
- Given/New Information
- Polarity
- Mood
- Modality
- Transitivity

As stated above, data analysis in this research focussed more on items falling into Column A rather than Column B since the former inform and demonstrate how language is used for communicative purposes rather than simply provide definitions of SFG terms in the same way that grammatical terms do in structural or descriptive linguistics.

#### *4.2 Survey of theme systems in systemic functional grammar*

It was also claimed, above, that systemic linguistics lends itself well to the teaching and learning of English in second-language situations. The reason for making this claim is that the theory on which it is based focuses on **the use of language in communicative contexts** rather than on **the forms of language as other theories, such as the structural theory, do**. The distinction **between SFG and structuralist theories** is given in the Wikipedia, free online encyclopaedia, as follows:

The theory (i.e. SFG) sets out to explain how wordings make meanings. This is significantly different from Noam Chomsky's proposed view of grammar, namely "that is the finite rule system which generates all and only the grammatical sentences in a language" (2006:1).

It is clear from the preceding quotation that SFG is **couched in a meaning-based communicative theory**, whereas, Chomsky's generative theory is based on the **rules for producing grammatical sentences**. The adoption of outcomes-based learning and communicative language teaching strategies encourages the development of skills that enable students to communicate, to communicate using a second language. It is clear, therefore, that strategies that focus on selecting communicative language items/constructions from the linguistic systems of a given language are more appropriate for teaching in ESL situations. As a follow-up to these observations, examples drawn from systems and, or sub-systems of functional grammar will be discussed below to suggest how certain teaching approaches can be based on the SFG theory.

### 4.3 Description of selected theme systems

Communicative teaching strategies can be planned in such a way that communicative teaching and learning activities centre on learning how to use selected theme systems of the target language. The word exploitation can be used in this context to mean *use in order to become proficient in the use of the target language*. In the discussion that follows, some systems will be selected to demonstrate why SFG is considered one of the most effective theories for teaching second-language classes.

#### 4.3.1 Thematisation

Crystal (1980: 35) defines theme systems as a term that is used to refer "to the way a speaker identifies the relative importance of his subject matter". To thematise, literally means to treat a certain constituent in a sentence as the main subject or idea in that sentence. Systemic linguistics describes different ways in which **thematization** or **topicalisation** can be used in communication. *Theme categories* are subdivisible into *marked* and *unmarked* themes. In a declarative sentence, a marked thematic item is one that is used in a sentence or utterance position where it does not normally occur, as in the following expression:

Example I: Philip, Lucia is very fond of.

In this utterance, *Philip* which should normally occur in the final position as a complement is fronted to function as the theme of the utterance. For that reason, Philip, functions as a marked theme. On the other hand, the same message expressed in example I above, might be expressed as follows:

Example II: Lucia is very fond of Philip.

In this utterance, the theme Lucia, is, to use Halliday *et al.*'s phrase (1985), "conflated with the subject" which means the item functioning as the subject does at the same time function as the theme of an utterance. When this happens the theme is referred to as "unmarked".

The application of the theory of theme categories in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages requires that the focus of teaching and learning gets based on **the functions of language**. The functions implied in theme categories depend on structuring utterances/sentences in such a way that the speaker clarifies his/her theme and the listener is assisted to identify the theme of the speaker. Categories of thematic variation and usage of marked and unmarked theme categories, rather than the forms of language, would constitute the focus of teaching and learning. Examples of speech categories can be illustrated as follows:

- *Preposed themes vs. non-preposed themes.* In such instances, preposed themes are fronted and non-preposed ones are left in their usual environments in declarative expressions. In other words, preposed and non-preposed themes are synonymous with marked and unmarked themes. Berry (1975) observed that preposed themes are more commonly used in spoken than in written language. An illustration of this category, can be given as follows:

Example III: John is a prolific writer: in this utterance, John, functions as a non-preposed theme.

Example IV: A prolific writer John is: whereas in this example the subject, *John*, is a preposed theme.

The view that Systemic Functional Grammar has a functional base and that it focuses on systems within the system of language suggests that teaching and learning English should have a learning component in which the study of all theme categories such as the ones discussed above, and others, should be studied from a **functional point of view**: a view which emphasises **usage** rather than **form**.

- Since there are many other systemic categories in any natural language like English, the pedagogic approach towards studying them should, as Bloor *et al.* (1995:220) suggest, aim “to understand more about how human language is structured and to explain how **communication** takes place”. The general approach to this study should have a focus similar to that discussed by Wilkins (1976) on ‘Notional Syllabuses’. He suggests organising teaching material in clusters of “communicative competence” rather than on “grammatical competence”. A similar approach was adopted by SFG theorists such as Chappelle (2006: 1) who makes the following statement:

Systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) is a theory of language centred on the notion of language **function**. While SFL accounts for the syntactic structure of languages, **it places the function of language as central** (what language does and how it does it), in preference to more structural approaches, which place the elements of language and their combinations as central (own emphasis). SFL starts at social context and looks at how language both acts upon, and is constrained by, this social context.

Perhaps the most important point made in the preceding quotation is that “...SFG places the function of language as central (what language does, and how it does it”. In the sections that follow, illustrations of how some of these functions are achieved will be given.

#### 4.3.2 Theme/Rheme

SFG uses the terms theme/rheme, to refer to the possible order in which clauses can be linked. In other words, the linear occurrence of theme and rheme provides a paradigmatic sequence of clauses which, in a sentence, constitute the total message communicated. The *theme* is, generally, a clause or phrase that is placed at the beginning of a sentence. Its communicative function is to indicate the writer’s/speaker’s selection of an item or items that constitute the idea or thing that is being talked about in the clause. Halliday et al. (op.cit.: 64) say a theme “serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context”. In other words, knowing the theme of a clause is knowing what the speaker is focussing upon in the statement made.



Linked to the structure of theme is the notion of *rheme*. This is the part of a sentence that provides the comment or information about the theme. It was pointed out above that theme and rheme occur in a paradigmatic sequence. We can illustrate this as follows:

It should be emphasised that theme/rheme is not a grammatical but an information structure. It focuses on functional units irrespective of where they are placed in a sentence. For instance,

Theme or subject	Rheme or predicate
Richard	loves Maria.

the sentence given above can be analysed as follows to show the difference between its grammatical and functional units.

A study of the functions of the units, first, from a **Traditional Grammatical** perspective and, then from a Systemic Grammatical Function perspective, shows the following differences:

Traditional Grammatical Analysis (TGA)	Functional Grammatical Analysis (FGA)
<p><b>Active:</b> Richard loves Maria</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">↑            ↑</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Subject    Object</p>	<p><b>Active:</b> Richard loves Maria</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">↑            ▾</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Theme      Rheme</p>
Traditional Grammatical Analysis (TGA)	Functional Grammatical Analysis (FGA)
<p><b>Passive:</b> Maria is loved by Richard</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">↑            ↑</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Object      Subject</p>	<p><b>Passive:</b> Maria is loved by Richard</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">↑            ▴</p> <p style="margin-left: 100px;">Theme      Theme</p>

In TGA the subject and the predicate remain the same: – that is, (Richard), in the active and passive voice is labelled the sentence subject and, Maria, also remains the sentence object of the active and passive constructions. In SFGA the words which function as the theme change depending on whether it functions as the topic, or what is being talked about in the sentence. The rheme, that part which comments on or says something about the theme remains the same in the active and passive constructions because the analysis of parts of sentences in SFGA is based on sentence functions rather than on sentence parts.

#### 4.3.3 Given/New information

Richards *et al.* (1992) observe that the functional significance of theme/rheme is, in some cases, referred to as **given/new** information or **background – focus** information. Bloor *et al.* (1995:66) define given information as that information which a speaker assumes to be “shared or ‘mutual’ knowledge” between speakers. Such information is usually given at the beginning of



a sentence. But, why is shared knowledge necessary at all? Quirk *et al.* (1985:1360) observe that the provision of shared information is given in order “to provide the point of the message with enough context” for the listener to unambiguously understand the context of communication. The following utterances can be used to illustrate this point:

Student: Why should we study systemic functional grammar?

Lecturer: *We should study systemic functional grammar in order to learn how to communicate information appropriately and effectively.*

The italicised part of the lecturer’s response constitutes given information: it repeats part of the student’s question: ...*study systemic functional grammar*. It can be said that such repetition, as we find in the lecturer’s response, assures the listener that the response answers the question. It functions as an introduction to the **new information** which the student wishes to know, that is, that the study helps students *learn how to communicate information appropriately and effectively*.

#### 4.3.5 Transitivity

This theme system refers to linguistic ways of expressing ideas that signify relationships between participants or objects. The verb is significant in the communication of transitivity. It indicates ways in which one action implied by the verb is transmitted from the ‘doer’ to the ‘receiver, sufferer or beneficiary’ of the action. We can provide three transitivity processes, which can be illustrated as follows:

- i. *John bought a nice car.* In which the transitivity process – buying – is extended from ‘John’ to ‘a nice car’.
- ii. *Mary admires her teacher.* In this expression, transitivity extends from ‘Mary’ to ‘her teacher’. It is an example of what is generally referred to as **mental transitivity**.
- iii. *I find Jane loveable and friendly.* In this example, the subject ‘I’ expresses a **relational** process with Jane.

Grammatical notions of transitive and intransitive verbs are important features of the transitivity process.

#### 4.3.6 Mood

Mood, in SFG studies, is used to refer to different types of clauses or sentences. Differences between the sentences are generally indicated by types or forms of verbs contained in sentences. The types, according to Halliday and Mathieson (2004), are classifiable into the:

- indicative mood;
- imperative mood and;
- subjunctive mood.

The indicative mood can be briefly defined as a set of sentences/clauses that fall into either the **declarative** or **interrogative** sentence category. The declarative functions as a model of communication in which the speaker states a fact or an opinion as in the following example:

- i. I am studying the implications of SFG in the teaching of written English.
- ii. I am sure Jane will pass the examination.
- iii. I hope she will marry James.

These are sentences/utterances that people generally use to express their hopes, views and beliefs.

The other component of declaratives comprises interrogatives or questions. These vary depending on the context and communicative intention of the speaker.

The imperative mood is communicatively used to command or to order a listener to behave in a way desired by the speaker. In other words, expressions in the imperative category express commands. They can be used with or without a sentence subject as in:

- i. Attention (military command).
- ii. John, attend to what I am saying.

It should also be emphasised that the use of commands is situationally specific and is therefore easy to comprehend as command utterances depending on the situations in which they are used.

The other component of the indicative mood is the subjunctive. We can define it as a category that comprises sentences/utterances that express *hypothetical* constructions, or the speaker's attitude towards the content of what s/he says. Such attitudes could express certainty, uncertainty, doubt or, as indicated above, the subjunctive mood can be used to express hypothetical or non-factual ideas (Richards *et al.*: 236) as illustrated in the following expressions.

- i. If I **were** you I would not believe that.
- ii. It is required that we all **be present** at the meeting.

In most cases the subjunctive mood is marked by the form of verb used. In the preceding examples *were* is used in situations where *was* would be presumed to be the better lexical choice. In example ii. *should be present* reads more preferable to *be present*. What this suggests is that certain grammatical forms need to be emphasised when teaching a language from a communicative pedagogical stance even though the teaching of grammatical units should be de-emphasised.

The other component of declaratives comprises *interrogatives* or *questions*. These refer to certain grammatical classifications of sentences used in written or spoken discourse to elicit information. Two common types of questions include the inverted order of statements as in

- i. This is a good example of the subjunctive mood. (indicative)
- ii. Is this a good example of the subjunctive mood? (question)

Sentence ii demonstrates the inversion process as it is applied when structuring inversion questions. We can illustrate this process as follows:

This is a good example of the subjunctive mood.



Is this a good example of the subjunctive mood?

Other interrogative types are constructed by inserting interrogative words like *who*, *what*, *which*, *where*, *why*, *whose*, *to whom*. These are usually inserted in initial sentence positions as follows.

- i. This is the best book on the analysis of functional English. (statement)
- ii. **Which** is the best book on the analysis of functional English? (question)

In sentence ii. The word *this* is replaced by the word *which* in order to change sentence i. into a question.

#### 4.3.7 Polarity

This theme system is used to indicate sets of utterances that negate the views implied by unutterance. They are used to express negatives of the positive views expressed in positive statements.

It should be noted that key issues in polarity refer to notions of agreeing and disagreeing. There are generally two ways of expressing negative polarity in English. The first is effected through the use of negative particles such as *not*, *do not*, *does not* and other related grammatical forms. Expressions that contain such grammatical items are said to be syntactical utterances of negative polarity as illustrated in the following sentences:

- i. I enjoy studying English Linguistics. (positive polarity)
- ii. I **do not** enjoy studying English Linguistics (negative polarity)

Positive/negative polarity can also be expressed morphologically. In such cases the morphology of certain words is varied to express positive or negative polarity through a process of combining two or more morphemes or separating two or more combined morphs as in:

1. I find James uncooperative. (Negative polarity indicated by the bound morpheme -un.)
2. I find James cooperative. (Positive polarity expressed by removing the bound morpheme -un from the word uncooperative.)

In SFG-based teaching strategies, emphasis would focus more largely on the need for learners to express 'negative' or 'positive' polarity rather than focus on details of grammatical structure.

### 5. Implications of theme systems in the pedagogy of communication skills

A study of the key aspects of SFG makes one wonder why this theory is not given prominence in second-language learning situations. It seems educators in most African institutions have gone for a half-hearted approach towards studying it as a basis for English Language Teaching (ELT). One of the most important pay-offs of studying Systemic Functional Grammar is that it informs us about the major lexico-grammatical aspects of language and how these are related to the communication of the three major metafunctions of any natural language. Its focus on the **use** of language in functional contexts provides an informed base for ESL teaching and learning. Theories of learning English as a second language should, therefore, be based on SFG.

Bloor *et al.* (1995) note that the theory enables us to understand types and functions of clauses in language. For instance, a close study of **theme-rheme** and **given-new information** emphasises how speech participants use shared knowledge to communicate new information. To develop practical communicative English Language Teaching syllabi, notions from SFG should be defined as a theoretical basis on which such courses are founded. On this issue, Bloor *et al.* (op.cit.: 221) say:

Halliday (1994: xxix) describes a theory as 'a means of action'. By this he means that we should be able to use a theory, and the hypotheses related to it, as the basis for a very wide range of tasks, not only our grand aim of understanding the nature and

functions of language, but also more practical tasks like helping people to learn foreign languages, improving our writing skills or training interpreters.

SFG can also be more effectively applied when analysing texts in specialised disciplines such as science, education and law. In other words, it can be applied in what has come to be popularly know as English for Specific Purposes (ESP)/English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Such studies lead to descriptions of language used in scientific discourse and the selection of lexicogrammatical items at syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels. There are a number of suggestions that can be made for applying Systemic Functional Grammar in teaching and learning English as a Second Language. It might be informative and perhaps sharpen our interest in the study of this theory if we took note of the following advice:

SFG is suitable for this purpose because it can show how the social functions operate in grammar; in other words, it brings to light the grammatical resources available for explaining not only referential but also social meaning (Rooy & Butler, 2000: 197 quoted by Kilpert, 2001: 53).

## 6. Conclusion

If the arguments made in favour of using Systemic Functional Linguistics as the applied theory for teaching speaking and written communication in colleges and university departments of English and English Language Education were adopted, it would become necessary that teaching SFG takes centre stage in these institutions. The emphasis of such studies would be major components of English Language Teaching Syllabi and, detailed descriptions and functions of SFG systems and the realisation rules that need to be mastered in order to use each system effectively would need to be taught.

Opponents of SFG, who, if there are any, might argue that there is a rich collection of metalinguistic terminology that has been proposed and described by linguists who subscribe to other theories which can be effectively used in ESL situations, should be informed that descriptive metalanguage from other theoretical descriptions of language can always be accommodated or, where necessary, changed or modified. In fact, the SFG theory already uses a lot of such terminology in its classification and description of SFG systemic networks. The general aim for teaching English as a second language in ESL situations should be based on developing the ability to use English in its written and spoken form.

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