

# Introducing Discourse to Elementary School Students

By  
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**Abstract:** English teaching in Indonesia has been improved and developed several times, starting from teaching learning process under the framework of structural approach to the genre-based approach in recent years. The newest teaching trend, genre-based teaching, open both teachers and students' mind to the varieties of texts and their meanings and how to recognize and use them properly. Recognizing and using varieties of texts can also be understood as recognizing and using language discourse.

On the other hand, the function of English as a foreign language in Indonesia does not support the teaching because both teachers and students have limited exposure to the target language. The same problem is also experienced by English teachers of Elementary Schools (ES), especially on the task of introducing discourse to their students.

This short paper shares how to introduce discourse to ES students. The proposal of introducing discourse to ES students is created on the basis of David's (2004), Byram's (2004), and Fairclough's (1995) idea: Providing Extended sample of texts, helping the students to articulate and push them to practice by imitating or reproducing the texts they have learned, and memorizing the texts.

**Key Words:** *Genre based teaching, Discourse, Elementary School Students*

Genre- based materials have been chosen as the core of English teaching materials in Indonesia for the recent years. Both the teacher and students are busy in surfing the world of texts and trying to understand the meanings which are realized in the texts. They study hard, not only to cope with text types, but also to investigate the world of discourse. That is why the atmosphere of working with discourse, then, colors the teaching and learning activities in English classes in almost all schools, including English classes at Elementary Schools (ES), in Indonesia. Most of the teachers believe that discourse is also important for ES students, with the reason that discourse will help students to develop their literacy.

However, the fact that English classes in Indonesian schools are classes of foreign language, dealing with the above phenomenon, creates some problems of how to realize the belief into the classroom. Firstly, as a foreign language in Indonesia, English is not spoken for daily communication, meaning that learners of English do not get sufficient support of exposure to the target language. Experts agree with the important of language exposure because of the fact that it can increase the learners' communicative competence.

Secondly, the learners' communicative competence in such minimal support of exposure to the teaching and learning atmosphere is difficult to afford. The fact that there is almost no people speak English outside the class of English does not give sufficient practice to the learners. And thirdly, dealing with lack of practice using the target language, learners have difficulties in understanding the contextual meanings of the expression, In other words, the discourse of the target language is something strange to the students since the understanding on discourse should be embedded in the everyday use of the language.

## Discourse

The definition of ‘discourse’ is not as simple as the term itself. Sometimes it has various and broad meanings because it can be understood as a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence and often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative (Crystal, 1992: 25). But sometimes it shows a very simple concept because novels, short conversations, or even groans can also be named discourse (Cook, 1990: 7).

According to Fairclough (1995: 3), discourse is difficult to be conceptualized because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints. The original word of discourse comes from Latin word “discursus” which denotes “conversation, speech” (Wiśniewski, 2006). That is why, in linguistics, the term discourse is sometimes used to refer to extended samples of spoken dialogue. However, more commonly, this term is used in linguistics to refer to extended samples of either spoken or written language (Fairclough, 1995: 3).

The idea of using the term discourse to refer to both spoken and written language is also stated by Bathia (2004). He states that the term discourse in general term refers to language use in institutional, professional or more general social contexts (Bathia, 2004: 3). Almost similarly, Fairclough (1995) also uses “discourse” in social theory and analysis, referring to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. The discussion on language use, structuring areas of knowledge and social practice may concerns with spoken or written form of language.

The interesting thing of the discussion on discourse is proposed by Widdowson (2007). He started the discussion by defining the term a text as an actual use of language which is produced for a communicative purpose (p.4). In other words, all texts are uses of language which are produced with the intention to refer to something for some purpose and a stretch of language can only be identified as a text when this intention is recognized (Widdowson, 2007: 6). It means that a text is produced to get a message across, to express ideas and beliefs, to explain something, to get other people to do certain things or to think in a certain way, and so on. In this sense, according to Widdowson (2007:6-7), what the text means to the reader will generally match up with what the producer of the text meant by it. Discourse, then, related with the discussion on text, according to Widdowson (2007: 7) refer to both to what a text producer meant by a text and what a text means to the receiver.

The discussion above may lead us to a confusing concept of discourse. That is why Dakowska (2001: 81) suggests us to use term ‘text’ to refer to the linguistic product and ‘discourse’ to refer to the dynamical process of the text production. To qualify whether a written or spoken text as a discourse, Renkema (2004:49), cited Beaugrande, suggests to criticize seven criteria. They are cohesion (the grammatical relationship between part of a sentence essential for its interpretation), coherence (the order of statements relates one another by sense), intentionality (the message which is conveyed deliberately and consciously), acceptability (the approval of the audiences), informativeness (a discourse implies a new information), situationality (the circumstances in which the written or spoken text occur), and the intertextuality (the reference to the world outside the text or the interpreters' schemata).

In this paper, the term discourse is understood as what Fairclough (1995: 3) states as extended samples of spoken language with the reason that the scope of the discussion of discourse in this paper is limited to how to introduce it to the ES students.

## Introducing Discourse to ES Students

There are at least three challenges of the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia (Madjidi, 2010: 350-351). The first is how to provide students with significant language exposures which enable them to use the target language sufficiently. The second is how to build or arouse their desire to communicate (spoken or written). And the third is how to facilitate them significant competence to select appropriate language form in realizing their communicative purpose.

Those three challenges, especially the first, are not easy to do because there is almost no English speaking community in Indonesia. However, it does not mean that it is difficult for English teacher to provide extended samples of spoken language as proposed by Fairclough (1995). In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, text-based teaching (genre approach) is a good solution to introduce discourse to ES students. This kind of teaching will help students to learn new genres (discourse) with a better understanding of their rhetorical purposes and contextual meanings (David, 2004: 198).

The keys of genre approach teaching is, first, on providing as many samples of text as possible to build better understanding of the students on the rhetorical purposes and contextual meanings (David, 2004: 198). Second, helping the students to articulate and push them to practice by imitating or reproducing the texts they have exposed.

Having almost the same idea as David, Byram (2004: 234) states that the genre approach is seen as a framework for language instruction based on examples of a particular genre. It means that imitation and exploration of different kinds of models are the bases of the learning activity under the genre approach. It can be easily understood that in the genre approach, the knowledge of language is attached to a certain communicative purpose found in the examples of various genres.

On the basis of David's (2004), Byram's (2004), and Fairclough's (1995) proposal described above, the writer proposes idea of introducing discourse to ES students as the following:

1. Providing Extended samples of Text:

In this step, the teacher provides varieties sample of discourse, for example:

Sample I:

A: Hi / Hello/ Good morning/ Good afternoon/ Good evening

B: Hi /Hello/ Good morning/ Good afternoon/ Good evening

A: How are you? /How is thing? What is up?

B: Fine/All right/ Not too bad/ Bad news

A: See you/ Nice to see you/ Good bye/ see you later

B: See you/ Nice to see you/ Good bye/ see you later

Sample II:

- My name is Hilal/ I am Hilal

- My hobby is eating bakso/ I like to eat bakso very much/ I like eating bakso very much

- Thank you/ Thank you very much. Thanks for your help

- Can I help you? / May I help you?/ what can I do for you?

Sample III:

- Open the window please/Why don't you open the window? It's very hot in here...

- I'm sorry, I can't help you/ I wish I could help you

2. Helping the students to articulate and push them to practice by imitating or reproducing the texts they have learned:

In this step, the teacher creates several activities to make the students practice either individually or in group. The practice is done in the framework of imitating or reproducing the texts they have learned.

3. Memorizing the texts:

In the teaching of English as a foreign language to ES students, asking to memorize the texts being learned is necessary. Memorizing helps students to articulate the texts they have learned and provides them exposure to the target language. However, the memorization should be done after they understand and reproduce the texts.

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