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DISCOURSE COMPETENCE AND ITS PLACE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of the English language learning is that learners can use the language in an accepted level of appropriacy. To do so, they need to have an adequate discourse competence comprising its various elements that build it. It is with discourse competence that the learners, who are speakers and hearers or writers and readers of the language, are able to communicate with others. This paper will be concerned with how discourse competence is placed in the English language teaching. In particular, it will explore how English teachers can make use of discourse elements in teaching English where learners will not only be aware of the elements that make discourse “discourse”, but also produce a type of discourse in spoken and written versions.

1. Introduction

Learners of English are said to be successful when they are able to socially communicate with others in spoken and written modes. It means that they are able to use the language in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as prospective listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. In order that communication will take place, they are required to produce a type of discourse suitable for the reason why they communicate. A text they produce for communication serves as a means they share to achieve a goal, which is the social function of the text, by employing a particular type of grammar and text structure. Any ability to make efforts allowing them to produce such a text is basically discourse competence.

It will be argued that discourse competence is central to the English language teaching. The model of teaching to be offered in this paper is genre-based, from which the learners' discourse competence will take roots. Genre-based approach in the English language teaching has been long applied (Martin, 1985; Martin, Christy & Rothery, 1987), and the advantages of it have been obvious. In association with methodology, for example, Wiratno (1995) suggests that applying genre-based approach to teach English skills allows both teachers and students to play their roles with ease. Teachers can select materials directing the learners to the activities within a certain area of linguistic competence. Hyland (2004: 10-16), focusing on writing, also summarizes that genre-based teaching is advantageous in that it is explicit, systematic, needs-based, supportive, empowering, critical, and consciousness raising. In the case of Indonesia, it is an appropriate choice that the 2004 English Curriculum for SMP and SMA applies genre-based approach (Depdiknas, 2003a, 2003b), where mastery of discourse and its types becomes the emphasis.

2. Discourse and Discourse Competence

2.1 The Notion of Discourse

In this paper, the terms discourse and text are used interchangeably, even though some linguists differentiate one from the other (e.g. review by Nunan, 1993: 5-7, of the quotations from Cook, Crystal, and Brown & Yule). Text and discourse are differentiated only in that text is more

<p>Points of View: Arguments for</p>	<p>utilization of it because of its benefits. Some others, <i>however</i>, <u>disagree</u> because of its risks to environment. For the sake of the environmental safety, nuclear energy <i>should</i> be <u>avoided</u>.</p> <p>Those who <u>agree</u> with the operation of nuclear reactors usually <u>argue</u> that the energy produced from them can be <u>used</u> for multipurposes. The reactors can <u>produce</u> radioisotopes utilized in medical, industrial, and agricultural fields. They also <u>claim</u> that nuclear energy is the only feasible choice to answer the ever-increasing energy needs. According to them, the other sources of energy: oil, coal, and liquid natural gas are not renewable and safe, while nuclear energy can be sustainably <u>produced</u> in a safe way.</p> <p>Some government officials also <u>point out</u> that this kind of energy is the safest one in response to environment compared to the non-renewable ones mentioned above. They <u>claim</u> that the reactor <u>operates</u> on a “zero-release” basis, which means that waste materials are <u>processed</u> so that none will be <u>released</u> into the environment. In addition, they <u>believe</u>, nuclear energy will never cause pollution, but the others, especially oil and coal, really do.</p>	<p>2. employs conjunctions (<i>bold and italic type</i>) to show the contrast of the different points of view presented, e.g. <i>however, but, on the other hand</i>;</p> <p>3. employs general human or non-human participants;</p> <p>4. makes use of material (<u>underlined</u>), relational (bold type), and mental processes (<u>double underlined</u>) in proportion;</p> <p>5. employs modality (<i>italic type and underlined</i>), e.g. <i>should</i>), to build opinions or to put forwards recommendations.</p>
<p>Arguments against</p>	<p><i>However</i>, people disagreeing with the use of nuclear energy, <i>on the other hand</i>, <u>keep</u> criticizing that to choose it as the best alternative to overcome the growing energy needs is silly. The silliness can be <u>seen</u> from the question why they are <u>interested</u> in nuclear power when there is still an abundance of natural energy sources: oil, coal, hydroelectric, thermal, etc.</p> <p>In reaction to environment, they <u>add</u> that the operation of the nuclear reactors does not <u>make</u> any sense. Some NGOs specializing in efforts to save environment <u>argue</u> that their waste products completely <u>destroy</u> environment and human lives. <i>On the other hand</i>, it is true that the other kinds of energy like oil and coal <u>support</u> the environmental pollution, <i>but</i> their contributions can still be <u>tolerated</u>. It is also true that the nuclear reactors <u>provide</u> energy in great quantities, <i>but</i> their contributions to destroy environment and lives cannot be <u>avoided</u>. A meltdown in a reactor, for example, results in a contamination of soil and water under its core, making human lives impossible for miles around. The reactor is also dangerous to lives because of its radiation leaking. In this case, it is often <u>said</u> that under a good control no fission products are <u>allowed</u> to leak out from the reactor. <i>But</i> who can <u>guarantee</u> this?</p> <p>It is obvious that nuclear energy <i>should</i> be <u>avoided</u> because it endangers environment. If we <u>continue</u> using it, <i>while</i> the radiation is very poorly <u>controlled</u>, then it will <u>kill</u> ourselves sooner or later. The</p>	

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