

**Bridging the Gap between Formal Grammar and Functional
Grammar for Practical Purposes**

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Abstract

To linguists and language practitioners, there is gap between Formal Grammar (rule-based study) and Functional Grammar (social context-based study) due to the distinction between the approaches implemented by the two schools of grammars. Despite the distinction, to some extent, the ideas underlying the grammars are conflated or mapped on each other. Having strengths and weaknesses, the two grammars, in collaboration, can create a better and more comprehensive approach of language for scientific and practical objectives by combining rule and context of which co-existence is inevitable in study and actual use of language, for they can strengthen each other.

Key Words: gap, rule, context, and collaboration

1. Introduction

Because the gap between Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar is an extremely wide and consequential question and there is no single uniform Formal Grammar nor Functional Grammar, it is virtually insufficient to deal with the issue without referring to all theoretical models and citing all works in each grammar.

Mclaughlin (2011) states, “Formal, or technical, and Functional Grammar are difficult of definition because it includes a body of knowledge, or content, and a method of teaching that content.”

In this article, Functional Grammar refers to any school of grammar that approaches language through sets of rules and Functional Grammar is a school of grammar that approaches language through social context (see the table in the following part). On the basis of it, this article covers only an overview of the approaches of the two grammars, instead of a thorough and exhaustive work, meaning to have practical ends. However, it can lead to general but novel understanding on what makes the gap among the proponents of the two grammars, how the

conceptions of the two grammars are conflated or mapped on each other, strengths and weaknesses of the grammars, and how they can collaborate.

Functional Grammar has been playing key role in and contributing to determining standard languages throughout the universe for centuries. However, its undoubted standing is subject to challenge that all sciences, including linguistics, are dynamic meaning that there is no rule or theory is static. In term of language's dynamism, rule of language underpinning Functional Grammar is nor static and should give room to Functional Grammar based on social function of language and novel approaches of linguistic phenomena.

Up to the present, throughout the universe, phoneme is defined as the smallest distinctive unit of a given language. At least the definitions proposed by (Bloomfield 1933, p.79) that *a phoneme is a minimum unit of distinctive sound-feature* and by Hartmann & Stork that *phoneme is the smallest unit of phonology* are strongly held. As linguistic theory develops, the definitions need extending or improving, for they neglect the fact that even native speakers of a language do not produce exactly the same phonemes, that tone which is note phoneme is distinctive, etc. In terms of meaning change, for instance, in Indonesian language, the term *millioner* 'millionaire' used to refers to a very rich man. But as Indonesian currency value gradually drops against other currencies, the term no longer refers to a rich man.

With this in mind, Functional Grammar approaching language with social context by filling the slot that Functional Grammar does not deal with is inevitable. However, it should not be confronted with Formal Grammar as it is now going on in different hemispheres of the world, for each of them is vital to science dynamism and meets human's need to bring about cultural content and development to pursue better understanding among language users. Since Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar have both strengths and weaknesses, they need to collaborate.

2. Natures of Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar

Despite that Function Grammar was introduced by Halliday in 1961, it dominantly raises issue of differences between it and its predecessors, Traditional Grammar or Formal Grammar. Linguists and language practitioners tent to be split in two schools of theory each of which has proponents. The differences can be summed up in the following table.

Two Schools of Grammar

Grammars	Formal Grammar	Function Grammar
1. Aspects	Logical-Philosophical	Ethnographic-Descriptive
2. Approach	Form-meaning (formal) Phonology, Morphology, Syntax-meaning	Meaning-form (functional) Meaning-Phonology, Morphology, Syntax

3. Assumption	Language as rules	Language as resources
4. Closely related to	Thought (Neurology, Psychology)	Social Phenomenon and context (Sociology, Anthropology, Social context)
5. Linguistics studies	Sentence Idealization of data	Text Natural data
6. Proponents	Modistae, Bloomfield, Chomsky, Pike....	Hjelmslev, Matesius, Firth, Halliday, Martin...
7. Method	Science, almost no consideration to social context of language use	Semiotics, emphasizing social context use of language
8. Tradition	<u>USA</u>	Europe

Glance over the table shows outstanding distinction between the two approaches resulting in dissenting standings of linguist and language practitioners. Thanks to it. Those advocating Formal Grammar would rather concentrate on the differences between it and Functional Grammar rather than taking advantages of it to facilitate human and practical approach of language and vice versa. In fact, the differences do not necessarily build gap between the two grammars for the dividing line lies in that Formal Grammar focuses on objective and practical end and Functional Grammar on human one each of which is mutually complementary and equally strategic in creating better study and understanding of language.

There are grounds to be considered as why it is important that linguists and language practitioners be aware that all theories of language, inclusive of the two approaches, are mutually complementary.

Just the way Latin-based Traditional Grammar contributes to Formal Grammar, the latter contributes to Functional Grammar. Morphology and Syntax in Functional Grammar, despite that they are approached on the basis of contextualized meaning, are not markedly different from those of in Functional Grammar. For instance, the conception of Group composed of Nominal Group, Adjective Group, Adverbial Group, Verbal Group, and Prepositional Group in Functional Grammar corresponds with that of Phrase in Formal Grammar

Take for instance, the conception of Nominal Group and Noun Phrase. In Functional Grammar, as stated by (Dawning & Locke , p.15, 1992),

Nominal Group is primarily composed of a head (h) as in *paintings*, preceded by a modifier (m) as in *beautiful paintings*, and followed by a qualifier (q) as in *beautiful paintings by Goya* and can be extended by adding determiner (d) before modifier as in *those/beautiful/paintings by Goya*

In Traditional Grammar, Noun Phrase structure rule as proposed by (Finegan & Besnier, 1989, p.141) is realized by

(a) NP → N as in *oracle*

(b) NP → Det N as in *an oracle*

(c) NP → Det ADJ N as in *an ancient oracle*

That conception of Group in Functional Grammar is devoted to structural element analysis of Theme in relation to Theme and Rheme and Phrase to sentence constituent analysis in Formal Grammar does not bear gap.

Similarly, there is hardly gap between Clause in Functional Grammar and Sentence in Formal Grammar but elaboration of syntactic element in Functional Grammar. It could be understood that both clause and sentence refer to the same referent namely a structured sequence of words. However, Functional Grammar proposes new insight in to basic sentence structure by introducing Ideational Function, Experiential Function, Logical Functional, Interpersonal Function, and Textual Function in the sense of how experience is represented, related, exchanged, and organized (lexicogrammar).

Formally established rule of sentence is Subject plus Verbal (S-V) or Subject plus Predicate plus or minus Object (S-P-O). Experiential Function treats sentence as aptly called Clause from specific view point on the conception of Participant, Process, and Circumstance. For the type of Process constituting Material, Mental, Relational (Identification, Attribution, and Possession), Behavioral, Verbal, and Existential, is the core of whole Clause, it determines the type of Participant (Actor, Sensor, Token, Carrier or Possessor). Indeed, the conception is not novel, for it stems from semantic, pragmatic, and semiotic theories.

Despite the fact, what is held by Formal Grammar such as Subject and Predicate is preserved on the basis of almost the same logic by Functional Grammar in Interpersonal Function analysis. It means to say that to some extent, core ideas of the two grammars are conflated or mapped on to each other.

Another ground of how Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar are mutually complementary is the fact that how the opinion, theory, and conception in the three-edition *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* by Halliday and its accompanying sources are designed, introduced, disseminated, and written is solely dependent on the rules of language of Formal Grammar. It is out of the question that Hilliday's books are on sale for years without formal rule-based grammatical English he uses as a means of putting forward his ideas on functional approach of language.

3. Strength and weaknesses

3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Formal Grammar

Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar have both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of Formal Grammar are its sustainability to cope with human's need of standard

language and its agreement with three theories of truth, correspondence theory and coherence or consistency theory, and pragmatic or utility theory. It is said that Formal Grammar abides by correspondence theory of truth, for the truth of rule of language corresponds with empirical fact based on what is uttered and written by native speakers of languages. For instance, the truth of rule that in present tense sentence, when verb directly following the third person singular, the verb must be in –s/es ending as in *He smiles* and *He goes*, may be proved by the same patterns of sentence uttered and written by native speakers of English. Though the implementation of the rule is deductive, the rule formulation is inductive, for it stems from the way normal individual English native speakers use English. Meanwhile, it is said that the grammar has agreement with coherence or constancy theory of truth, for the rule, say the above rule, is coherent or consistent with what that has been acknowledged to be true. Language rule has also agreement with pragmatic or utility theory of truth because it works to meet language users' need. For hundreds of years, the rule Formal Grammar is coherent or consistent with empirical data and meet language users' need. Since the nature of rule-data of language is scientific (inevitably, the study of language is scientific), no doubt that rule-based Formal Grammar is strong.

Strength of Formal Grammar is too indicated by its capacity to deal with various intricate grammatical issues such as subjective and conditional which are not covered by other grammars.

Such strengths have opened room for practical use of language, making it possible for language users to speak communicatively as well as to write manuscripts, books, novels, newspapers, laws, memorandums, and the like. Besides, it contributes completely to the evaluation of level of language proficiency, particularly writing proficiency. Section structure and Section Reading of TOEFL currently widely used is a concrete evidence of how significant Formal Grammar is. Practically speaking, why this article is worth publishing is primarily due to the implementation of language rule in organizing and expressing its ideas. With this in mind, language users owe Formal Grammar.

As said previously, Formal Grammar has weaknesses. Centered on rule, form, logic, and psychology (almost no consideration to social context of language use), Formal Grammar tends to create artificial or made-up speech. Sentence *My pen is pregnant* which does not exist in real world and *I kicked the ball with my feet* that is pleonasm are grammatically true because they correspond with rules applicable, for instance, in *My pen is expensive* and *I John chewed it with his teeth* is an example of pleonasm because his gives a feeling of redundancy, for no one else chews something if not John's teeth.

The artificial speech can be clearly observed in dialogue materials of English teaching and learning made up by authors in accordance with formalized rules of language. Consider the following dialogues quoted from (Cornelius, 199, p.31 and Sharpe, 1997, p.591-592)

Dialogue (1)

Jenny: What they is it?

Helen: Today's Wednesday, March the twenty-fifth.

Speaking of dates, when are you leaving?

Jenny: I'm leaving on the sixteenth of April.

Helen: Isn't the sixteenth a Wednesday?

Jenny: No. it's a Thursday.

Helen: So you're leaving three weeks from tomorrow....

Jenny: Right

Dialogue (2)

Man : Hi, Margaret. This is Gary.

Woman: Oh, Hi, Gary. Where have you been? I've missed you in lab

Man: I've been sick.

Woman: Nothing serious, I hope.

Man: Well, I stayed out of the hospital, but to tell the truth, I was in pretty bad shape.

Some kind of flu.

Woman: Let's see, how many labs have missed?

Man: Margaret, I got sick three weeks ago, so I am really behind.

Woman: Let me look at my notebook. I've got it right here.

Man: Oh, great. I was hoping you'd let me make a copy of your notes.

Woman: Sure. You can do that, Gary....

The sentence in the two dialogues that almost do not miss even a single piece of information sound exactly the same as written forms being dependent on strict rule. It occurs because the dialogues designs ignore relations between Jenny and Helen and between Man and Woman as well as their understanding of the issues of the dialogues called co-text or context on Functional Grammar. Such complete mentions and absolutely true grammar as shown do not occur in social communication. That means that the dialogues meant to be thought and learned in context of genuine or natural speech are not genuine or natural at all.

This inhibits the process of how language is learned by its native speakers from babyhood through adulthood. In conjunction with difference between spoken and written text, it is important to notice what (Finegan and Besnier, 1989, p.376) state, Though it is commonly said writing is speech written down or that writing is visual language as distinct from audible language, writing and speaking ordinarily serve different purposes and have somewhat different linguistic characteristics.

In actual communication, the following type of spoken speech quoted from (Levinson, 1983, p.97) frequently arises.

Dialogue (3)

A: can you tell me the tome?

B: Well, the milkman has come.

Pragmatically speaking, the dialogue can be paraphrased as followed:

A: Do you have the ability to tell me the time?

B: [pragmatically interpreted particle] the milkman came at some time prior to the time of speaking

Besides, the following model of dialogue that is unique in Formal Grammar for there are hardly direct links between A's utterances and that of B's is naturally functional in the viewpoint of Functional Grammar.

Dialogue (4)

k2 A: When did you have the room painted?

ch B: It's none of your business.

rch A: What? It's my responsibility.

k1 A: Two days ago..

k2f A: Behave yourself.

The uniqueness of the dialogue takes place because of conversation dynamism in the dialogue between the knower 2 or secondary knower (k2) and knower 1 or primary knower (k1) realised by challenge (ch) of B (k1) and rechalance (rch) of A (k2).

In addition to the weakness, Formal Grammar neglects that language keeps changing. In today's English, *your health we care* derived from *We care for you health* is regarded to be grammatical. There should be modification of rule to accommodate the dynamism. In terms of variants of English, new variants appear since English is not only the language of American and British people but also of almost all inhabitants of the universe. The variants automatically results in need of variants of rules. However, standardization of all of the variants is determined on the basis of formalized standard of American and British English amidst the fact that the variants which do not abide by standard of English as in TOEFL are effective to convey thoughts of the users. Thus, rule of standard English based on Formal Grammar needs modifying.

3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Function Grammar

Like Formal Grammar, Functional Grammar has strengths some of which are its ability to present genuine language or natural speech via contextualization and to accommodate cultural, social, and ideological contents of language based on which the meaning of language is created.

In teaching and learning process, genuine language, particularly language in dialogues, is of great help for the learners to face actual human language. Consider the following natural dialogues quoted from (Halliday, 2004, p.169 and p.4)

Dialogue (5)

Dano: I don't want a shower; I had one yesterday.

Father: Oh, I have one every day, Dano, every single day.

Dano: Every single day?

Father: Yeah. So does Mum. Don't you?

Mother: Usually.

Dano: Usually? See, Dad?

Father: Well, usually means mostly, doesn't it, Mary?

Mother: It means more than not.

Dialogue (6)

‘Oh I’ve heard about this.’

‘Have you heard about it.’

‘friends have been there.’

‘It is the most wonderful wonderful place. Fabulous.’

Two the dialogues are natural speeches which are loosely structured from the viewpoint of Formal Grammar. In Dialogue (3), *Yeah, So does Mum. Don’t you?* Is not grammatical, for *Don’t you?* Is not based on the main clause, *You have shower every day* and nor addressed to the questioner. Nor is *Usually? See, Dad?* Is not grammatical, for they don’t have subjects. Besides, in the dialogue, some pieces of information are missing. *Usually* lacks of explicit information that the mother usually has shower.

In dialogue(4), though the sentences, but *It is the most wonderful wonderful place*, are grammatical from the viewpoint of Formal Grammar, the question, *Have you heard about it?* Does not have to do with the answer *Friends have been there* and *It is the most wonderful wonderful place. Fabulous.* There seems to be digressions in the dialogue.

However, from the viewpoint Functional Grammar, all speeches in the dialogues are grammatical thanks to the fact that they are functional and their lacking of elements has been covered by the contexts of speeches. In Dialogue (3), the text involves Dano, Father, and Mother (Mary) in a family dialogue. In Dialogue (4), there is context understood by the speakers namely a place called Surai in East Bali. Since there are mutual intelligibilities in the texts, the speeches are undoubtedly grammatical.

The models of the above texts when introduced to English learners, especially the beginners, will facilitate and encourage them to learn the language the way the native speakers do. Being used to the model, they are not bound by fear of making grammatical mistakes. It is important to understand that native speakers learn and acquire their language in natural context without learning grammar cognitively.

In journalistic field, the approach may apply, for contextualization of text is of great importance to maintain the genuineness of ideational functional of the language of news sources.

The other strength of Functional Grammars is its applying approaches of sciences such as Sociology, Anthropology, Pragmatic, Semantic, and Semiotics all of which play role in creating meaning. Its vast coverage of sciences shows richness of human language, meaning that language can be approached from various angles of view just like the other studies can be.

Like Formal Grammar, Functional Grammar has weaknesses. The most striking weakness is the awfully large number of terms used in it. In ideational function alone, there are around one hundred terms. In other parts of the grammar, there another hundreds of terms (some are merely substitutes of the terms in Formal Grammar) which are not known by computer or dictionary. The fact makes the learners find it difficult to understand and memorize the terms.

Another weakness is that its analysis turns simple analysis into intricate one. Sentence pattern in Formal Grammar, S-V or S-P-O, for instance, becomes very complex in Functional Grammar, for sentence is approached from metafunctional viewpoint.

The other one is that, due to its complexity, its application tends to be theoretical instead of practical. Functional Grammar can not cope with tests of language proficiency and grammaticality of spoken and written texts for practical purposes, say for university admission and recruitment of workers.

4. Collaboration of Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar

Provided the strengths of Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar are combined, the weaknesses of both of the grammars can be averted to create a human, objective, and practical approach of language covering all human's traits. That Formal Grammar proves to have been applying and playing key role in approaching language for scientific and practical objectives for centuries is a fact. But along with the fact, it tends to be authoritarian by approaching language from the rule of the language itself. The contra-productive nature may be dealt with by the strength of Functional Grammar proposing that language can be approached by how experience is represented, related, exchanged, and organized.

Such collaboration will prevent Formal Grammar proponents from boldly pointing to grammatical mistakes of natural speeches based on the context Functional Grammar proponents introduce, say the relations among the speakers as well as grammatical mistakes made by users of variants of English. However, contextualization itself may lead language users to use language just the way they want in the absence guide or standard. When it takes place, there will be no grammatical correction on the ground that that is how language users' experiences are represented, related, exchanged, and organized.

Though contextualization must be considered in very text, in formal events, grammatically of speech based on rule of Formal Grammar is chiefly phrases, clauses, and sentences. On the basis of this, contextualization of Functional Grammar needs to be contextualization by considering role of Formal Grammar. Nevertheless, most of social events are not completely formal and nor are texts. It means that Formal Grammar and Functional Grammar are two sides of a coin. Formal Grammar provides guide to speech formation and Functional Grammar drives the guide in accordance with context of speech.

In terms of teaching and learning process, the materials of texts in text books, especially those of dialogues, need modifying by giving weight to both context and standard of language. Incomplete and loosely structured speeches may be introduced along with complete and strictly grammatical ones in condition that there must be explanations on the natures of the two types of speech and how important to know the natures. Second language learners need to understand that why loosely structured or ungrammatical texts are uttered by native speakers of the language is not due to their unknowing how to utter the complete and grammatical ones rather to context accompanying the texts. The proposal is to bridge the gap between learning language relying completely on context without considering rule and learning language relying completely on rule without considering context.

5. Conclusion

Formal Grammar is confronted with Function Grammar on the basis of different approaches they apply. Indeed, despite the distinction, the perceptions of the two approaches, on subject and predicate, group or phrase, and clause or sentence, for instance, are conflated on each other and mutually complementary in creating a more human, comprehensive, and scientific approaches of language.

Two grammars have strengths and weaknesses. Formal Grammar has agreement with theories of truth as well as capacity to standardize language, meet practical objectives of language study, measure level of language proficiency, and cope with various issues of grammar with easy approach. However, Formal Grammar approaches language on the basis of formalized rule paying almost no attention to social context and giving no room to study of how language is naturally learned and acquired. On the other hand, Functional Grammar concentrates on social and cultural values of natural language by adopting semantic, pragmatic, and semiotic approaches in relation to context, providing natural speeches and extending approaches of language.

Meanwhile, Formal Grammar does not accommodate linguistic dynamism and change and variety of language whereas Functional Grammar is too complex and permits ungrammaticality of speech of speech viewed from rule of Formal Grammar that proves to have been contributing to acceptable use of language for centuries.

Collaboration of the two grammars is of great importance to bring about better study of language by combining rule and context of which co-existence is inevitable in actual world. Such collaboration prompts revision of extremely and completely rule-centered and context-centered materials of language text books for the sake of teaching and learning language process as well as understanding formal and informal events where language is used.

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