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THE TERM “COMPLEMENT” IN THE SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR THEORY: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Various kinds of text analyses which apply Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) have grown more than ever before for the last ten years. SFG offers a model of grammatical analysis which is directly related to the functional use of language. Despite the wide-range application of SFG for various kinds of text analyses, SFG theory poses a significant syntactic/grammatical problem which has not been touched much at the theoretical level. In fact, the analysis of functional grammar constitutes the heart of a text analysis. Any text analysis applying SFL has to deal with this formal syntactic analysis at the beginning of the analysis prior to coming to the interpretation of the content of the text. This paper highlights the syntactic and semantic problem, i.e. the label “Complement” which appears in Mood system. Refine-tuning theoretically-inadequate parts of SFG will certainly, on the one hand, improve the reliability of the social and cultural interpretation of any text analysis applying SFG and, on the other hand, overcome any confusion in the syntactic analysis which to some extent affects the teaching of English syntactic operation and other languages like English as well.

Keywords: Complement, mood system, SFG, syntactic function.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the wide-range application of Systemic Functional Grammar (henceforth, SFG) for various kinds of text analyses, the theoretical construct of the functional grammar itself has not been discussed much. Most of text studies which have been conducted upon the basis of this approach, particularly in Indonesia, do not result in a significant feedback concerning with the development of the formal theory of SFG itself. Mostly they are sort of “copy and paste” models of text analyses. Meanwhile, there are few – if any – advocates of SFG who focus on studying the functional grammar theory. In fact, the study of functional grammar theory also constitutes a significant part of the SFG study on the basis of which text analyses are conducted. The more rigorous a grammatical construct to be applied in a text analysis is, the more reliable the findings of the analysis are. Unfortunately, someone – particularly a language student – cannot carry it out unless s/he has had a sufficient basic training in general linguistics.

This paper is prepared to address an issue – amongst many others – in SFG which, I think, is still open to reconstructing. It deals with the label “Complement” in one of syntactic analysis in SFG. It is particularly concerned with the analysis of syntactic function, one out of two terms which are very well known in the syntactic analysis (Aarts, 2001; Verhaar, 1996, Sudaryanto, 1983). Different terms may be used by different authors and that type of analysis seems to match respectively with Mood system in SFL.

The discussion of this paper is mainly based on the book written by Eggins (2004) and by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). Those two books are the latest editions after the first editions have been in the market for almost 10 years and 20 years respectively. They have been widely used everywhere as a standard book of SFG upon which a lot of text analyses have been carried out. Hopefully, the theory of SFG presented in those two books is representatively 'official' enough; so that the theoretical issue discussed in this paper is also beneficial for the development of SFG theory.

SYNTACTIC FUNCTION VS SEMANTIC ROLE IN SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

Syntactic function is the most abstract level in syntactic analysis (Sudaryanto, 1983, p. 13). It deals with the assignment of syntactic functions such as Subject, Predicate, and Object in a clause. They are sort of formally-predetermined rooms in the linear syntactic organization of a clause. It is a matter of logical representation in language; and languages across the world may linguistically realize them in a different way. A clause may have many rooms just like the number of possible rooms we can build in a house. But, of course, some rooms are essential and obligatory and some others seem to be only non-essential and optional. As it deals with the notion of proposition in Logics, a clause must have two minimal rooms which are functioned as Subject and Predicate.

Every language theory has a certain way to identify them. Often it involves both semantic and syntactic analysis, but it mainly relies on syntactic operation. For instance, we may have an opinion that pragmatically every piece of information which is available in a clause is essential. But if it can be dropped off and the clause still represents a logical proposition, that information is considered to be syntactically non-essential and optional. Dropping off an element from a clause is then one of syntactic techniques to identify whether or not a piece of information is essential.

When a Predicate has two essential Arguments, every language theory has its own way to identify which Argument syntactically functions as Subject. Because both have different syntactic relation to the Predicate, the other Argument must not function as Subject and must have a different syntactic function in the clause. It creates asymmetry between Arguments in relation to the Predicate (DiSciullo, 2003). If the other Argument being investigated can function as Subject after undergoing a certain syntactic operation, for instance active voice into passive voice, this Argument is usually assigned as Object in the previous construction. Thus, an Argument which functions syntactically as Object in a certain clausal construction may function as Subject in another clausal construction as the syntactic relation in the clause changes. Though it is true that they are semantic in origin (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 112); Subject, Predicate, and Object are still formal category. It reduces much the semantic content of the Argument in relation to Predicate. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) still recognize them as formal categories though in a weak statement as "not purely formal category". Even, in other place, they (2004, p. 56) have introduced that the term Subject in relation to Subject – Predicate construction was "thought of as purely formal grammatical relationship". It is rather inconsistent description though.

On the contrary to syntactic function, semantic role is the least abstract level in syntactic analysis (Sudaryanto, 1983, p. 13). However, it is just like syntactic function in terms that semantic role is also about the relation between Predicate and Argument(s). The syntactic unit of analysis is precisely the same with the analysis of syntactic function. Because it is concerned with the wider semantic type of Predicate, the role played by the Argument(s) is somewhat inherently embedded. When an Argument is assigned a semantic role as Patient in relation to a certain Predicate, it will remain as Patient though its syntactic function has changed as the result of a certain syntactic operation. This can be illustrated in (1).

(1) a.

Level of analysis	Fulan	kicks	the ball
Syntactic Function	S	P	O
Semantic Role	ACTOR	Active	Patient
	Transitive		

b.

Level of analysis	The ball	is kicked	(by Fulan)
Syntactic Function	S	P	Adjunct
Semantic Role	Patient	Passive	ACTOR
	Transitive		

Since both syntactic and semantic factors are involved in the two analyses, one may unconsciously assign a semantic role to an Argument in a way a syntactic function is assigned. S/he may also assign a syntactic function to an Argument in a way a semantic role is assigned. In short, the analysis of syntactic function and the analysis of semantic role are often mixed up. This is what the paper is going to discuss in relation to Mood system in SFG.

THEORETICAL PROBLEM OF SYNTACTIC LABEL “COMPLEMENT”

It is a standard theory in SFL that there are four syntactic functions in Mood system. They are Subject, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct (Fawcett, 2000, Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Eggins (2004, p. 157) defines Complement as “a non-essential participant in the clause, a participant somehow affected by the main argument of the proposition”. This is a semantically based definition and immediately leads to a misunderstanding. What does ‘non-essential’ really mean? How do we assess the characteristic of being ‘non-essential’ in the clause? Syntactically an element is said to be non-essential in a clause when it can be dropped off. However, I am convinced that this is not what she means by “non-essential participant” for Complement. Complement – as also understood in SFG – constitutes a core and essential Argument in transitive Predicator.

Eggins’ definition of Complement is also intertwined with her definition of Adjunct as “clause elements which contribute some additional (but non-essential) information to the clause” (Eggins, 2004, p. 158). She differentiates the term ‘additional’ from ‘non-essential’ without any clear-cut explanation. When something is said to be additional, it is most probably non-essential. By such definition, both Complement and Adjunct bear the same syntactic function in a clause. In fact, they must function as two different syntactic functions since she labels those constituents with two different labels, i.e. Complement and Adjunct. Hence, Eggins’ definition of Complement and Adjunct is really confusing. It is because, once again, she merely defines both of them in terms of their role in the meaning-making of the clause. We will see later how these definitions are against their own syntactic behavior as the discussion proceeds.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 122) define Complement as “an element within the Residue that has the potential of being Subject but is not; in other words, it is an element that has the potential for being given the interpersonally elevated status of modal responsibility — something that can be the nub of the argument”. Similar definition is also proposed in Matthiessen, *et.al.* (2010) and it is certainly syntactic in nature. We can identify and test it in a syntactic operation whether the element being investigated can function as Subject. Based on active-passive operation, we can identify that the nominal group *the ball* in sentence (1.a) is really Complement because it can function as Subject as in (1.b).

Surprisingly, Eggins (2004, p. 157) also applies this definition for Complement, i.e. “an element within the Residue that has the potential of being Subject but is not”. She further explains that a complement can get to be Subject through the process of making the clause passive as I have presented in sentence (1). This operation is also what makes Complement different from Adjunct (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 124). Thus, it is clear that this syntactic definition absolutely disqualifies Eggins’ previous definition. And it indicates that the analysis of syntactic function and semantic role is mixed up in Eggins’ definition of Compliment.

The other problem arises when Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 123) say that “any nominal group not functioning as Subject will be a Complement”. Thus, the term Complement “covers what are ‘objects’ as well as what are ‘complements’ in the traditional school grammar.....it is imported from the experiential analysis, that of transitivity” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 123). The use of term Complement is more comprehensive than what is understood by that term in traditional grammar (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p. 48). It is of course very interesting. On the one hand, SFG provides a new perspective on how a clause is grammatically analyzed which is said to be on the basis of a

semantic perspective (Egins, 2004, p. 144). But, on the other hand, this perspective raises questions on how the semantic content of a clause is related to and projected into a syntactic operation in a clause.

The problems are, firstly, the distinction between Object and Complement is not really imported from the experience analysis if the term 'transitivity' in SFG, in fact, does refer to the analysis of semantic role. We have to understand that both syntactic function and semantic role relates to the term 'transitivity' as both deal with the relation between Argument and Predicate in a clause. The difference lies in the level of abstraction and in the approach in labeling the Arguments as explained previously. The analysis of syntactic function labels the Arguments with certain functions in a formal and abstract way as a syntactic relation to the logic of the Predicate. Meanwhile, the analysis of semantic role labels the Arguments with certain roles in a less abstract way as a semantic relation to the semantic type of the Predicate. Two different Arguments may have the same syntactic function but have different semantic roles.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 57) say that Subject is grammatical Subject and ACTOR is logical Subject. This is confusing as grammatical Subject is not said to deal with logical relation. It has to be noted that both Subject and ACTOR deal with logical relation. The logic in syntactic function is more abstract than the logic in semantic role. The former reduces much the semantic type of the Predicate, while the latter takes much the semantic type of the Predicate into account. In the other place, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 112) state that "Subject like other grammatical functions... is semantic in nature". Here they clearly mention Subject as grammatical function. But, the term 'grammatical function' also refers to the label of the nominal group *the notice* in '*The notice tells you to quiet*' as SAYER (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 253), which, as a matter of fact, is a semantic role. In other words, both labels applied in Mood system and labels applied in Transitivity system constitute the analysis of grammatical function. If that is the case, it is very clear that there is confusion in SFG in distinguishing which is syntactic function and which is semantic role. It is also found in McCarthy (2008) when the term "ACTOR" and "AGENT" are applied differently for the same semantic role.

Secondly, it is true that the distinction between Object and Complement has no place in the interpersonal structure. It seems that, because of this, SFG underestimates their differences. However, this statement raises an ironic question: why do we bother ourselves to describe the structure of Residue then. We have to bear in our mind that the distinction between Object and Complement (Direct Object and Indirect Object respectively) does have to do with a different syntactic operation and, therefore, should be kept differentiated. If not, there will be an oversimplification in the syntactic function of Argument(s), confusion in the syntactic analysis, and to some extent, it affects the teaching of English syntactic operation and other languages like English as well.

Egins (2004, p. 157) provides an example as in (2).

(2)

Simon	Gave	George	a book
Subject	Finite	Predicator	Compliment

If Complement is defined as an element which has the potential of being Subject, apparently there are two Subject candidates from the sentence (2) based on SFG theory, i.e. *George* and *a book*. We will see whether or not both really have the same status as Complement in the sentence (2) by making it into passive voice (3).

- (3) a. $George_{Subj}$ was given_{Pred} a book_? by $Simon_{Adjunct}$.
 b. *A book_{Subj} was given_{Pred} George_? by $Simon_{Adjunct}$.

It still bears a problem with the labeling, but it is very clear that *George* and *a book* have a different status in relation to Predicate *give* in sentence (2). If they have the same status, they will have the same syntactic operation. One may argue that (3.b) should be the sentence (4).

- (4) A book_{Subj} was given_{Pred} to George_{Adjunct} by Simon_{Adjunct}.

The sentence (4), in fact, is not from the sentence (3) but from the sentence (5) instead.

- (5) Simon_{Subj} gave_{Pred} a book_{Comp} to George_{Adjunct}.

We can see, then, that it is only the nominal group directly identified after the Predicate that has the potential of being Subject. The other nominal group, then, does not have the potential of being Subject and it must not be Complement by the aforesaid definition.

It is quite different from Indonesian where the construction (2) and (5) are marked by different affixes which are attached to the Predicate as presented in (6) and (7). This is a kind of cross-reference mechanism which syntactically marks which nominal group is the element that really has the potential of being Subject and which one is not.

- (6) a. Simon_{Subj} memberi_{Pred} George_{Obj} sebuah buku_{Comp}.
Simon give me-/i act. George a book.
'Simon gives George a book'
b. George_{Subj} diberi_{Pred} sebuah buku_{Comp} oleh Simon_{Adjunct}.
George di-/i pass. a book by Simon
'George is given a book by Simon'
c. *Sebuah buku diberi George oleh Simon
- (7) a. Simon_{Subj} memberikan_{Pred} sebuah buku_{Obj} kepada George_{Adjunct}.
Simon give me/-kan act. a book to George
'Simon gives a book to Simon'
b. Sebuah buku_{Subj} diberikan_{Pred} kepada George_{Adjunct} oleh Simon_{Adjunct}.
A book give di-/kan pass to George by Simon
'A book is given to George by Simon'
c. *Sebuah buku diberi kepada George oleh Simon.

Affix *me-/i*¹ in (6.a) syntactically marks 'George' as the only element which is assigned by the Predicate to have the potential of being Subject. Meanwhile, affix *me/-kan* in (7) is the counterpart of the affix *me-/i* in (6). Therefore, the label Complement for both *George* and *a book* in (2) by SFG is certainly in question as it clearly creates syntactic problems.

CONCLUSION

Assigning the same label to both nominal groups in the same clause indicates that they have the same syntactic status in relation to the Predicate. If they have the same status in relation to the Predicate, they must have the same syntactic operation towards the Predicate. But we have already seen that both have a different status in relation to the Predicate. If we want to keep the aforesaid definition of Complement in SFG, we have to assign a different function to the other Complement.

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¹ It is not *memberi* because of the phonological constraint. This affix type "me-/i" similarly applies to *menawari* in *Simon menawari George buku baru* 'Simon offers George a new book' which syntactically marks the closest nominal group as the only element which has the potential of being Subject. Detail discussion should be referred to the study of Indonesian syntax.

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