

Scaffolding in the Indonesian classroom from theory and practise

J. A. Foley

Director of the Language Center

Southeast Bangkok College, Bangkok

Abstract

Too often descriptions of language learning have focused primarily on the language components or the structural features. However, there is an increasing recognition that patterns of discourse realised through text rather than a sentence based approach to language description is turning away from discrete form-based aspects of language learning to focus on the effectiveness of how learners get their messages and ideas across to others. This paper will take as an example the process of writing as it is probably the most difficult of the language skills required of our learners. The cultural context is that of the ASEAN classroom in general and how we can go about *scaffolding* the writing process to help prepare Indonesian students for their potential role in the ASEAN of the future.

Keywords: scaffolding, writing, genre, Indonesian classroom, socio-cultural theories, CLT.

Introduction

Many EFL/ESL textbooks in the past have been largely influenced by psychological views of language in spite of the claim that they are based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Structural behaviorists emphasised inductive learning of individual *sentences* one at a time. What was considered as ‘learned’ was in fact *form* but not the *function*.

Take the following example from a EFL textbook to illustrate what we mean.

Target Structure: “*If ___ were ___, ___ would ___*”

Lesson procedure:

1. Teacher draws the following substitution table on the board:
2. Teacher says the following example of the target structure and asks the whole class to repeat it after him:

If I were a rich man, I would buy a big house.

3. Teacher asks individual students to repeat the same example after him, correcting mistakes and making each student say the sentence until he gets it 100% correct.
4. Teacher repeats the process with the next example:

If he were the principal, he would give us a holiday.

5. Teacher points out the target structure, giving further examples.
6. Teacher gives the following prompts, and asks the whole class or individuals to substitute them into the target structure, correcting mistakes in the responses and making the students repeat the correct response:

<i>a famous movie star</i>	<i>sign a million autographs</i>
<i>a doctor</i>	<i>heal the sick for free</i>
<i>a magician</i>	<i>turn rice into chocolate</i>
<i>an engineer</i>	<i>build bridges for the village</i>
<i>a millionaire</i>	<i>give money to the poor</i>

The focus here is on the form of the *if clause* in the sentence. But what role does the *if clause* play? What is its function? The *if adverbial clause* is, normally, when placed at the beginning of a sentence, to foreground emphasis. In speech this would be done by putting the stress on the *if clause* in the speaker's intonation pattern.

What we have traditionally found in our textbooks can be summarise as follows:

- Modeling of all learning by the teacher
- The mother tongue was not to be used in the classroom, only the target language.
- New language points to be introduced and practiced 'situationally'.

- Minimizing of vocabulary but taught in context until all common grammatical structures had been learned
- Graded grammar structures expanded from simple to more complex forms.

However, one central deficiency in such approaches is that: they do not pay sufficient attention to the *social* aspects of language and learning. Both language and learning do not merely have psychological dimensions – they are very much social in nature. More socially and that means more *culturally* oriented explanations of language learning are needed for a complete account of how language learning takes place’.

Socio-cultural theories

In the early 60s saw the publication in English of the works of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934).

For Vygotsky ‘cultural development’ plays the following roles:

- *Object regulation*: the materials and cultural elements used for learning (textbooks, dictionaries and so on)
- *Other regulated*: teachers, parents, other students and the social environment
- *Self regulation*: to achieve a degree of mastery or control of whatever we are doing and most importantly language as a tool for thinking.

In this context Vygotsky saw *Scaffolding* as essential to attain *Self-regulation*.

Good teaching is about guidance through providing supporting ‘structures’ to help the students move from one stage of development to the next. For example, the process of *scaffolding* in terms of language teaching would provide structured outlines and lists of possible grammatical structures or vocabulary for students’ first attempts at writing. How much scaffolding is needed will depend on the level of the students and the nature of the task.

Within this theory, the concept of *object-regulation* stresses the importance of providing *model texts* so that the student starts learning how language is used to achieve a purpose. On the other hand, *co-operative learning* that is pair-work and group-work, for Vygotsky, was more about opportunities for the more able peer to help the less able. Consequently, tasks and activities should aim to provide for peer guidance in the use of language, rather than just provide for some form of simple oral practise in the language.

The Indonesian classroom

The emphasis in many Indonesian schools and indeed in many classrooms in the region tends to be on mechanical tasks, such as form based grammar drills, memorizing vocabulary and testing. For example, in too many writing programs, the typically writing assignment is a first and final draft, written in class. Students often receive instruction about writing only after the writing tasks have been completed, meaning that writing is more often *assessed than taught*. Teachers' feedback on student writing tends to focus on correction of errors at the sentence level or generalized comments.

The following are examples of first tertiary level students' writing in the first week and the last week of their course (duration 14 weeks) where there was limited *intervention* in terms of the structure of the text or 'scaffolding provided in the course.

Sample of Visuals

Picture 1 (Week One)



Picture 7 (Week Fourteen)

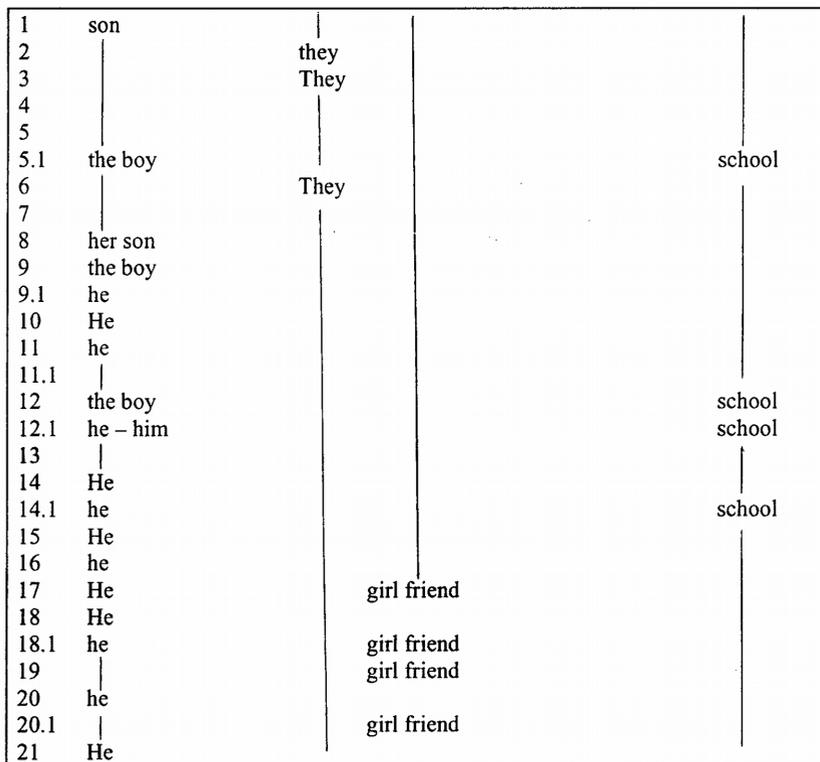


Student G

Analytical from Writing 1(week 1):

I¹ **In the picture**, I ^{Me pre} see one mother and one son.|| I² **They** ^{Me pre} love each other so much.|| I³ **They** ^{R pre} have a good relationship.|| I⁴ **And Their family** ^{R pre} is the family [[that be very happy.]]|| I⁵ **And in the picture** ^{R pre} may be in morning,|| I^{5.1} **the boy** ^{M future} will go to school.|| I⁶ **They** ^{M pre} have a breakfast.|| I⁷ **Breakfast** ^{R pre} have some milk, a cup of coffee, bread and other.|| I⁸ **The mother** ^{M pre} is pouring some milk into glass for her son.|| I⁹ **And the boy** ^{R pre} feels bored|| D^{9.1} **because** ^{M pre} he must drinks milk everyday.|| I¹⁰ **He** ^{M pre} wants to eat other breakfast [[that not be milk, bread.]]|| I¹¹ **But** ^{M pre} he must eats **it** || D^{11.1} **because** ^{R pre} it is only one [[that easy to eat.]]|| I¹² **And the boy** ^{M pre} is waiting to go to school|| I^{12.1} **but** ^{pre} he must waits his father ^M send him to school.|| I¹³ **But his father** ^{M pre} isn't getting dressed.|| I¹⁴ **He** ^{Me past} bored to wait || D^{14.1} **because** ^{M pre} he want to go to school.|| I¹⁵ **He** ^{M pre} want to play with his friends.|| I¹⁶ **And** ^{M pre} he is thinking to play the games with his friends.|| I¹⁷ **And** ^{Me pre} He is thinking about his girl friend.|| I¹⁸ **He** ^{Me pre} is thinking about [[what should he buy anything [[that the best gift to his girl friend.]]]|| D¹⁹ **Because tomorrow** ^{R pre} is his girl friend's birthday.|| I²⁰ **And** ^{Me pre} he is thinking [[how to surprise to his girl friend.]]|| I²¹ **He** ^{R pre} is having a poppy love.||

Lexical String 1:



There are several areas that could be discussed with this student but probably the most important is the use of the nominal group (NG). This is the grammatical unit which would allow the widest range of descriptive meanings to be expressed (Foley 2011). There are three possible parts to the structure of the NG: *Premodifier*, *Head* and *Postmodifier*. The ability to construct a complex NG is considered an indicator of developing control in a language. EFL learners tend to employ short NGs depending on how much control they have of the target language. In some languages, the NG is constructed differently as found in Thai where there is no pre-modification kao+pat+sorn+jam (fried+rice+two+plates).

In this example quoted above

The majority of the NGs in theme position are pronouns (*They, He*) or single nouns (*Breakfast*).

⊗ D+H (*Their family, the boy*) are less frequent

⊗ In complement position H+post-m [relative clause] is used but often the structure is incorrect: (*that be very happy*, that not be milk, bread*, that easy to eat*, that the best gift to his girl friend**).

⊗ The text structure is a description with little structure, very repetitive and few extended nominal groups showing limited control over the target language.

Analytical from Writing 7 (week 14):

I1 ^{E pre} **There are** many people in this picture.|| I2 ^{R pre} **Every one looks** hurry to go to works.|| I3 ^{R pre} **In this picture is** in morning.|| I4 ^{M future} **They will go to work** by BTS.|| I5 ^{Me pre} **They are waiting** for BTS.|| I6 ^{E pre} **There are** two line of BTS.|| I7 **One of BTS** ^{M future} **are going to final** station|| I7.1 **and another BTS** ^{M future} **will go back** the first station.|| I8 ^{R pre} **There is** one of BTS [[which arrived already.]]|| I9 **Two man** [[[who are waiting for BTS [[which not arrived yet.]]]|| I10 **A man** [[who is wearing hat,]] ^{M pre} **holding** bag|| I10.1 **and** ^{M pre} **put** his suit on his arm,|| I10.2 **he** just ^{M past} **lived** in Bangkok 2 day ago for

work.|| ^{M future} I11 He is going to work in first day,|| ^{Me pre} I11.1 he do not know the way to go to office [[which he works.]]|| ^{V pre} I12 So He go to ask with another man for some way [[that he can go to work by BTS.]]|| ^{V pre} I13 Another man tell him [[how to go to there.]]|| ^{Me pre} I13.2 but a man [[who is wearing hat]]do not understand.|| ^{Me pre} I14 Therefore A man [[who is not wearing hat]] ^{V pre} ask him|| ^{D14.1} what office [[that he work.]]|| ^{D15} When a man ^{V past} answered,|| ^{Me pre} I15.1 a man [[who is not wearing a hat]] ^{Me pre} know || ^{D15.2} that a man [[who is talking with him]] ^{M pre} work in same office.|| ^{V pre} I16 So he tell a man[[who is wearing hat]]|| ^{D16.1} that he ^{M future} are going to work in same office,|| ^{I16.2} a man [[who wearing hat]] ^{R pre} is very happy|| ^{D16.3} that he ^{R pre} has new friend in new office already.|| ^{I17} A man [[who is not wearing hat also]] ^{V pre} ask him about his home.|| ^{D18} When a man [[who is wearing hat]] ^{Me pre} know || ^{D18.1} that their homes ^{E pre} are nearly.|| ^{I19} Since that time, they ^{M future} will go to work || ^{I19.1} and ^{M pre} go back home together|| ^{I19.2} and they ^{R pre} become close friend.||

Lexical String 7:

1				
2				
3				
4	BTS			
5	BTS			
6	BTS			
7	BTS			
7.1	BTS			
8	BTS			
9	BTS			
10		wearing a hat	A man	
10.1				
10.2			he	
11			He	
11.1			he	
12	BTS		He-he	another man
13			him	another man
13.1				
13.2		wearing hat	a man	
14		wearing hat	him	a man
14.1			he	
15			a man	
15.1		wearing a hat		a man
15.2			a man	
16		wearing a hat	a man	he
16.1				he
16.2		wearing hat	a man	
16.3			he	
17		wearing hat	him	A man
18		wearing hat	a man	
18.1				
19				
19.1				
19.2				

Again, the majority of NGs are pronouns (*There, They*) or single nouns H or D+H (*another BTS, Another man*) or N+H (*One of BTS*).

⊛ D+H+post-m (relative clause) is used extensively:

- A man who is wearing a hat*
- A man who is not wearing a hat*
- A man who is talking with him*

⊛ The text structure is a description with little structure, very repetitive and again limited use of extended nominal groups. The use of the relative clause as embedded post modifier simply increases the repetitive effect.

What makes this writing unsatisfactory is principally because of the repetitive nature of the writing and the student's inability to develop the use of the descriptive power of the NG.

Theme

Theme is the starting point in English of what the speaker or writer is on about.

Speakers/writers use the first element of the clause to indicate the topic and is the way a text develops cohesion. There are three main types of Theme

Topical theme (TT) [often the subject]

Hamlet is considered Shakespeare's greatest play

Marked Topical theme (MTT) [adverbial]

For 30 years, Shakespeare worked in the theatre

Textual (T)

However, he moved to London later

The students development by Theme

In the picture (MTT)

They (TT)

They (TT)

Their family (TT)

The (TT)

The boy (TT)

They (TT)

They (TT)

Breakfast (TT)

The Mother (TT)

The boy. (TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

Because (T)

It (TT)

The boy (TT)

He(TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

He (TT)

His father (TT)

The overall use of either the simple pronoun or a single modified and Head is characteristic of immature writing

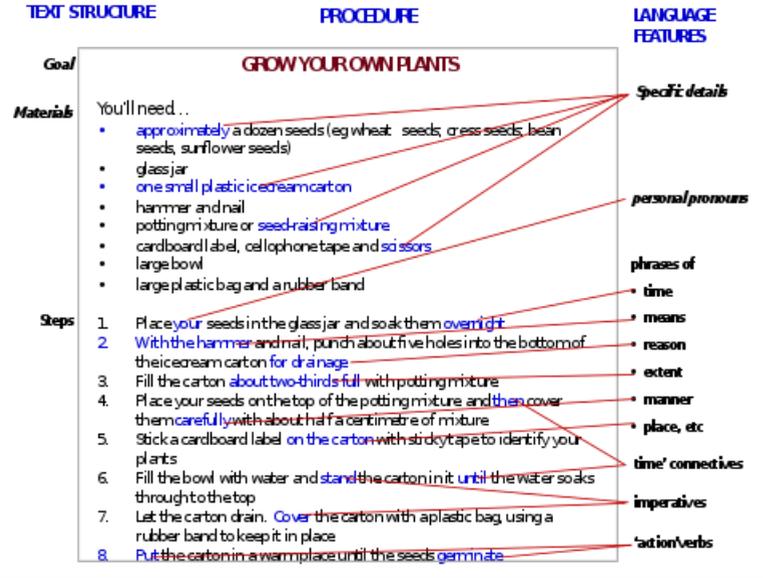
Scaffolding

Language is scaffolded through guidance and interaction in the context of shared experience. The teacher inducts learners into the linguistic demands of these genres that are important to participation in the school and wider community. Gradually responsibility is shifted to the learners as they gain control of the genre. However, before developing a genre- based programme, the teacher or institution will need to conduct an analysis of the teaching/learning context. At its broadest level, this should take in account the culture, history and tradition of the educational setting, English proficiency, learner expectations and assessment requirements.

To illustrate both the textual and common language features the following are examples of modeling as part of the *scaffolding* process (Derwianka, 1996).

TEXT STRUCTURE	RECOUNT	LANGUAGE FEATURES
	OUR SEEDLING DIARY	
Orientation	> Last week our class planted some bean seeds in ice-cream containers to watch how they grow.	time phrase
Record of Events	We watered the seeds well and then we put a plastic bag over them to keep them moist.	specific participants
	> After that we put the container on the window sill in the sun.	past tense
	> About five days later we observed that some of the seeds were beginning to germinate. We pulled a couple of seeds out of the dirt and noticed that they had started to grow roots.	'mental' verbs
	> In a couple of days the plants had started to sprout leaves and by the end of the week they were about 7 centimeters tall.	'action' verbs
	Then we dug a small garden outside our classroom and planted the seedlings so that we could watch them grow bigger.	

TEXT STRUCTURE	NARRATIVE	LANGUAGE FEATURES
	GORDON GREENTHUMB	
Orientation	Gordon Greenthumb loved flowers. Every winter he would plant his seeds - pansies, marigolds, nasturtiums, delphiniums and violets. And every spring he would watch lovingly as the seedlings wriggled through the warm soil and unfurled their crinkled leaves towards the sun.	feeling verbs time phrases 'manner' phrases 'place' phrases
	Gordon's garden was the pride of the village. Everyone would come to admire his flower and praise his skill. Everyone that is, except Stanley Stoneheart whose green eyes flashed with envy whenever he passed Gordon's house. "Why should Gordon always get all the glory?" he would mutter to himself.	named individuals saying verbs
Complication	One spring, in a jealous rage, Stanley decided he would destroy Gordon's garden. He threw back his head and pierced the sky with his evil green eyes. The sun turned pale and the rain clouds scattered and disappeared in flight.	'thinking' verbs 'action' verbs
Resolution	Without the heat of the sun and the moisture from the rain, the seedlings couldn't grow. The villagers were so distressed when they visited Gordon's garden that they started to weep. The splashing of their tears and the warmth of their breath revived the wilting seedlings.	emotive words specific participants
	Coda	The sun took heart at seeing compassion and started to burn more brightly. The wisps of cloud swirled together and formed a fluffy rain cloud. Stanley watched the rejoicing from afar as the droplets drenched the dry soil. He felt a strange sensation overcome him. His eyes had turned a warm earthy brown.



The Volvo Dimension [ad created by the Volvo team to sell the new S90

People see in Volvo cars lots of different things

Some see power and performance

Others strength

Still others advance technology

Each one of them is right

But, in fact, it is all these elements put together that make a Volvo

The S 90 engine illustrates just what we mean

It's not only powerful

It consumes power with precision and economy.

The S 90 has been hailed as a breakthrough in automotive technology.

The computerized v-6 engine includes among its many notable features the highly sophisticated ECCS or Electronic Concentrated Control System, which controls airfuel mix, fuel injection, ignition timing and other vital functions with extraordinary accuracy.

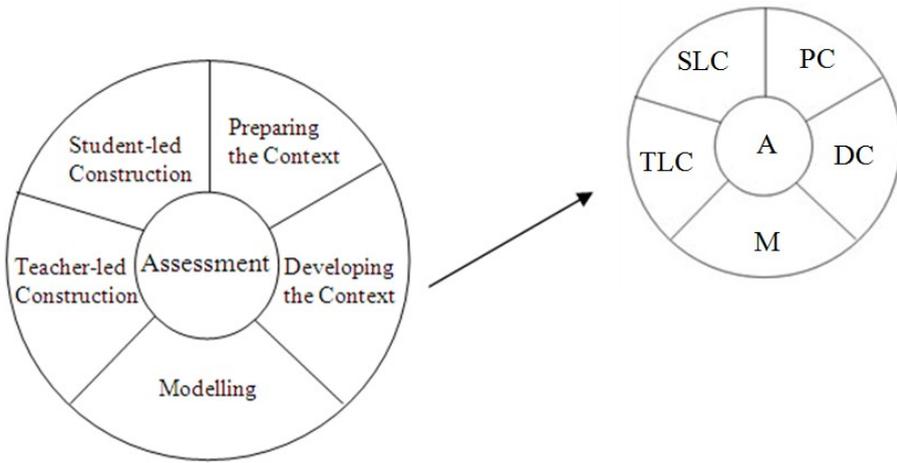
In short, the innovative design of the S90 doesn't come from a mere desire to impress you with power.

It's an innovation that literally brings you the best of everything.

And it succeeds because it has the intangible yet very real quality that makes Volvo what it is. The Volvo Dimension

The scaffolding cycle

In scaffolding the teaching/learning cycle is a process that would be expected to cover several classroom sessions. This is especially true in an EFL/ESL situation where language problems would be an additional focus. The starting point is always *Preparing the Context* and the following explanation of each stage is described below (Shape and Thompson, 1998).



PREPARING THE CONTEXT

In preparing the context of a unit of work teachers need to ask themselves the following questions:

- ☞ what is this topic about?
- ☞ what do students already know about this topic?
- ☞ what concepts and language should be focused on to allow students to comprehend the topic?

The second and third questions are important because students bring both their formal school knowledge (however limited) and their everyday knowledge to the topic

DEVELOPING THE CONTEXT

In developing the context, the teachers builds up knowledge of the topic (the field) through other related reading materials. This moves the students from an everyday understanding to a specialized understanding of the topic.

This part of the scaffolding will vary according to the amount of information students need. For example, students could research information from the library or watch video as part of information gathering

During this phase, students may have to engage with a lot of written language because of the level of technicality and abstraction with which some information is presented when it is written down. Consequently, students will need to be supported as they try to unpack the content.

They will need to explore the ideas orally and build up their understanding through talking about the information and issues presented.

Once students have actively engaged with the content through talking about it, they will need support to express what they have learnt in written language.

MODELING

In this stage in scaffolding the teacher provides model/models of text that approximate what will be required of students. For example, the text using *recount* or *procedure* illustrated above.

TEACHER-LED CONSTRUCTION

At this stage the teacher and the students jointly construct a piece of writing similar to the model previously discussed. The support of the teacher at this stage is critical in reinforcing linguistic features of the text by referring to the language activities as identified in the model.

STUDENT-LED CONSTRUCTION

Here the students independently construct texts of their own similar to the model. It is important that the teacher asks the students to write in the same genre and not ask them to write in a different way.

What often happens in classrooms is that teachers and students spend a considerable amount of time building up the field knowledge of the topic by engaging in a range of activities and looking at a variety of different texts. This culminates in an assignment or task which is a written text of some kind.

While students are working on their text they could be conferencing with other students or the teacher for guidance on both the content and language to be used in their writing.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment lies in the center of the model, with the teacher monitoring the ongoing progress of students at all stages. The teacher determines student understanding of both the content and language demands of the unit of work and focuses on areas of need or passes quickly through areas with which students are already familiar.

Pedagogical issues: scaffolding in the classroom.

As can be seen from the example of scaffolding illustrated here, all the major language skills of listening, speaking reading and writing are involved at the same time.

There is a danger, however, that scaffolding such genres may mean that they are taught as ‘items’ in a textbook. Rather, we should be asking our students: *what is my purpose in*

writing/ who are my audience? Students are often simply taught the name and stages of the genre. But by focusing first on the *social purpose*, students would then be able to understand why the text unfolds in this way, instead of simply following a recipe. Contemporary notions of genre emphasize the flexibility and rhetorical nature of genres rather than formulaic and static rules or conventions.

Teachers need to be aware of and explicitly teach the strategies they expect students to use in the classroom and in real life. This means helping students develop skills for questioning and discussion that enables them to develop the language capacities that display their knowledge. Scaffolding can help learners gain access to educational discourses (the sciences, economics and so on) that they may not otherwise be familiar in their daily lives. At the same time, this can provide them with conceptual tools for reflecting on language as they engage in activities that help them develop their new knowledge.

References

- Derewianka, B. 1996. *Exploring the Writing of Genres*. Nottingham: The United Kingdom Reading Association (UKRA)
- Foley, J.A. 2011. *Grammar, Meaning and Discourse*. Bangkok: Assumption University Press.
- Foley, J.A. 2012. *Unscrambling the Omelette: Second Language Acquisition: Social and Psychological Dimensions*. Bangkok: Assumption University Press.
- Johnson, K. and Johnson, H. 1998. Communicative methodology. In K. Johnson, and H. Johnson (eds.), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sharpe, T. and Thompson, J. 1998. *Assessing Learning*. Sydney: NSW Catholic Education Office.