

TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF “A TALE OF TWO CITIES”

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1. INTRODUCTION

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a model developed by Michael Halliday in which the transitivity system is an important part used for Discourse Analysis. The experiential meta-function is realized through the transitivity system and it organizes our experience and the grammar of the clause as the representation of the world. “Reality is made up of processes of going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming.” (Halliday, 1994, p.106). Transitivity focuses on each clause in the text to determine who is the actor, who are the acted upon, and what processes are involved in that action. This study investigates the relationship between the linguistic structure and meaning in “A Tale of Two Cities” which is one of the best-selling novels of all time by Charles Dickens (1859). By focusing on the analysis of the verbs according to the different process types in the experiential meta-function, this study attempts to reveal some aspects of the story and its relationship with the process types of the verbs, which can help learners apply to understand other novels as well as English literature better in general.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper uses the transitivity analysis of the verbs according to the different process types in the experiential meta-function to unveil the characteristics and themes in “A Tale of Two Cities” and uncover the characters’ destiny and situation in the story. To get the baseline data for the further analysis and discussion, the text is counted for the number of words, and then it is analyzed for the number of clauses in terms

of clause simplexes, clause complexes, and embedded clauses. To be more convenient for the data analysis, I shall use the following notional conventions: three vertical strokes ||| is the boundary of the clause complex; two vertical strokes || is the boundary of the clause (clause simplex); and square brackets [] to indicate the boundary of the embedded clause.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In systemic functional grammar, there are three “meta-functions” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004): ideational, interpersonal and textual. These structures serve to express three sets of semantic choices and determine the structural frame of the clause. Transitivity, which belongs to the ideational meta-function, explains what the clause is about and types of processes with relevant participants and circumstances. This kind of structure expresses the representational or experiential meaning. Halliday (1994, p.106) says “Our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of ‘going-on’–happening, doing, sensing, meaning, and being and becoming.” Thus the mode of reflection allows the clauses to produce the innumerable variations of events, feelings and experience. Language enables us to build a mental picture of reality, and the principles we use to build that are made up of processes. There are six types of process in the transitivity system, they are material, mental, relational, behavioral, existential and verbal.

The language in the novel “A Tale of Two Cities” is a vast register, and it consists of about 400 pages and 15,000 words. Then within the scope of the study, the data for analysis should be limited to “Book The

First” including six chapters: Chapter 1(The Period), chapter 2(The Mail), Chapter 3(The Night Shadows), Chapter 4(The preparation), Chapter 5(The Wine-Shop) and Chapter 6 (The Shoemaker). The scope of the study will be narrowed down to a transitivity analysis according to the process types of the verbs and then the characters’ destiny and situation as well as the characteristics and themes in “A Tale of Two Cities” will be discussed. There are some examples of processes:

Table 1. Examples of each process type

<i>The last burst</i>	<i>carried</i>	<i>the mail</i>	<i>to the summit of the hill.</i>
Actor	Material	Goal	Circumstance
<i>I</i>	<i>don't like</i>		<i>Jerry's voice</i>
Senser	Mental		Phenomenon
<i>We</i>	<i>had</i>	<i>nothing before us</i>	
Carrier	Relational		Attributive
<i>It</i>	<i>was</i>	<i>the best of times</i>	
Token	Relational		Value
<i>I</i>	<i>have to kneel</i>	<i>to my honoured father</i>	
Behaver	Beharivoral		Range
<i>'Halloa!'</i>	<i>the guard</i>	<i>replied.</i>	
Verbiage	Sayer		Verbal
<i>There were</i>	<i>a king with a large jaw</i>		
Existential		Existent	

process ranks second with 24.31% and then the mental process type with 12.47%. The three other types are: verbal with 11.38%, behavioral 4.72% and the existential with 1.5%. The pie chart shows that “Book The First” opens the story with a lot of things and events and its descriptions (relational processes) occurring and happening (material processes) in the story in the background of two big cities London and Paris. The fact that the material and relational processes dominated the other process types means that the writer wants to provide an overall situation and background for the readers to imagine the themes of the whole story. The group of the verbal, mental and behavioral processes ranks low because there are less description in detail on characters’ situation and interaction. The existential processes play a role to provide some prominent things for readers to focus more, and it is an extra ‘ingredient’ in the story.

Table 2. The frequency of process types used in each chapter.

<i>Chapters</i>	Chpt. 1	Chpt. 2	Chpt. 3
Material	6.86%	12.33%	8.55%
Mental	0.73%	13.82%	9.45%
Relational	4.10%	11.19%	11.19%
Behavioral	1.92%	10.58%	3.85%
Verbal	3.19%	10.76%	6.37%
Existential	15.15%	12.12%	9.09%
	Chpt. 4	Chpt. 5	Chpt. 6
Material	23.06%	26.54%	22.66%
Mental	29.45%	17.45%	29.09%
Relational	30.41%	21.27%	21.83%
Behavioral	14.42%	22.12%	47.12%
Verbal	29.08%	20.32%	30.28%
Existential	18.18%	24.24%	21.21%

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. The themes and situation unveiled

The following figure sums up the distribution of process types (including 2205 processes) in the novel.

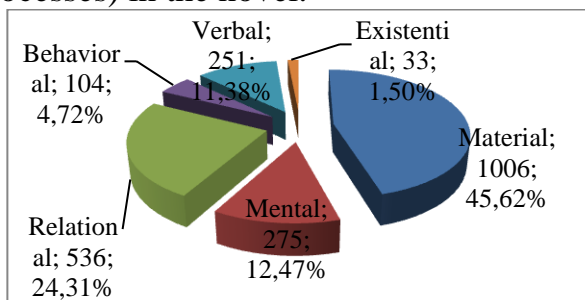


Figure 1. The distribution of process types in the novel.

As stated by the figure, the writer tends to use the material process type more than other process types (45.62%). The relational

The behavioral process type tends to increase because there are more interaction and scenes between characters in the story from chapter 1 to 6. The mental process type also increases, which means that the writer focuses more on the character feelings and emotions at the end of “Book The First”. There are more talks (verbal) and more focuses (existential) in chapter 6 than the

others because it is the “resurrection” which is the most emotional part in the first book.

4.2. *The characters’ destiny uncovered*

According to the percentages in the table 2, the themes and situation are clear to define and the characters’ destiny is uncovered. The following summaries are the detailed descriptions about each chapter:

Chapter 1 is about a brief introduction to both monarchies that make life for the common people terrible, where brutal capital punishment is used to discourage crime. People can be burned alive, cut off tongue, and made into guillotines ... This mainly uses material and relational processes to tell the readers about the chaos and injustice in both cities.

Chapter 2 provides more detail, and a specific situation appears. Charles uses two main characters in this chapter: the banker and his messenger. The mental processes appear more to talk about feelings of characters who suspected each other, and the verbal processes talk about the conversation between the banker and his messenger and the other character on the trip to the Paris. Chapter 3 - *The Night Shadows* continues with the insight feelings of two characters appeared in the chapter 2.

Chapter 4 – The preparation has more verbal and mental process because this tells the banker hesitated to tell (a conversation with) Lucy the news about her father’s news. It talks about her emotional feelings when she knew her father who had been in the prison for a long time was still alive. The material and relational processes still dominate this chapter because the banker tells a story about Lucy’s father with serial actions in his talk.

Chapter 5 uses more behavioral but less verbal and mental processes because it is about the scene of Paris, where people were starving, living in a poor condition.

With nearly the same total number of processes as the chapter 5, but chapter 6 has nearly twice the behavioral, verbal and

mental in comparison with the chapter 5. The reunion between Lucy and her father needs more emotions to describe (mental processes), more words to talk (verbal processes) and more actions to do to express the feelings of each character (behavioral processes). Lucy can represent for self-sacrifice because she dares to take care of her old father even she has never met before.

5. CONCLUSION

The linguistic structure has a close relationship with its meanings. Transitivity is an important semantic notion in the analysis of representation of reality. It allows us to analyze and represent the same events and situations in various ways.

Depending on the transitivity analysis, readers can unveil the metaphorical messages of “*A Tale of Two Cities*” in particular, and other English novels in general. Hopefully, English learners can apply SFG in other fields more, and realize its power as professor Hoang (2012, p.17) mentions in his book: “an indication about the reaching power of the systemic functional theory as developed by Halliday and other systemic linguists.”

6. REFERENCES

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