

Transitivity Analysis of « *The Crying lot of 49* » by Thomas Pynchon

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Abstract

Systemic Functional Grammar is a model developed by Michael Halliday in which language is seen from a functional perspective. Language is “a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning” (Halliday 1994, p. 15). Transitivity is an important notion of Systemic Functional Grammar which is widely used as a tool for Discourse Analysis. “Transitivity is a system of the clause, affecting not only the verb serving as Process but also participants and circumstances.” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 181)

This paper investigates the relationship between linguistic structures and meanings in a literary text. By applying Halliday’s transitivity framework, the paper attempts to reveal how the use of some linguistic cues can unveil the characteristics and techniques employed by Pynchon as a post-modernist writer. In particular, the paper focused on the analysis of the verbs according to the different process types in the experiential metafunction. The processes are material, mental processes, relational processes, verbal processes, behavioral processes, and existential processes. In addition, the paper seeks to uncover power relations by analyzing participants’ roles involved in each process.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Grammar, Transitivity, Process Types, Postmodernism, Crying Lot of 49.

1. Introduction

This study is carried out to explore first the transitivity choices in a literary text, and second to study power relations in this type of discourse. The first objective is achieved by classifying the verbs into six process types: material, mental, behavioural, relational, and existential. The second objective is realized by the study of participants' roles in a literary text. Thus, this study, located within the Systemic Functional approach developed by Michael Halliday, is interested in knowing how Pynchon projects his views of the post modernism area.

1.1 Objectives

According to Fulton (1999), to study style is to study meaning. Style is a mean to make meaning and literature is a mode of meaning. Through studying how language functions in a literary text, one can understand how a text means, what it does and why it is valued as it is, and how its language relates to the context in which it was written.

Hence, by employing Halliday's transitivity framework, this study tries to bring to light what motivated Pynchon to choose certain syntactic structures rather than others and to show the significance of this choice to a more complete understanding of the work.

2. The Crying of Lot 49

The Crying of Lot 49 is Thomas Pynchon's second novel published in 1966. This novel is classified as a postmodern novel. Pynchon was born in 1937. He published his first novel *V* in 1963 and he won the National Book Award by his long novel *Gravity's Rainbow*.

2.1. The novel presentation

Almost all works by Pynchon are complex. The plots are often difficult to follow and Pynchon's characters can be hard to relate to. Indeed, Pynchon has a tendency to fill his novels not with real characters but rather with characters that exist in the novel for a specific purpose.

2.2. The summary of the novel

Oedipa Maas, a young wife who lives in California. One day, she receives a letter telling her that her ex-boyfriend Pierce Inevary named her the executor of his estate. So, she travels to San Narcisco where she meets the layer, Metzger, assigned to help her and with whom she begins an affair. Oedipa quickly learns that Pierce's estate is very complex; she and Metzger have a difficult job ahead of them.

3. The methodology

This section describes the corpus of this paper as well as states the framework of analysis.

3.1. The corpus

The corpus of this study is composed of the first two paragraphs of the openings of the six chapters of the novel.

3.1.1. Instrument

This study relies on the UAM Corpus Tool version 3.8. The UAM CorpusTool aims at the annotation of text corpora. This software is retrieved for free and is available at <http://www.wagsoft.com/CorpusTool/>. It makes it possible for the user “to annotate a corpus of text files at a number of linguistic layers, which are defined by the user” (O’Donnell, 2008). These texts can be annotated at many levels: document level, semantic-pragmatic level and syntactic level (e.g., clauses, phrases, etc.).

3.2. The framework of analysis

This paper relies on Michael Halliday’s notion of transitivity which is a core basis in the theory of SFG¹. Through this theory, Halliday has developed a view of language as “a meaning-making system with an emphasis on choice.” (Neale, 2002:44). Halliday notes that transitivity belongs to the experiential metafunction and hence is “a resource for construing our experience in terms of configurations of a process, participants and circumstances.” (Martin et.al, 1997). In other words, by the transitivity system, Halliday introduced all “the features of the clause which contribute to the linguistic representation of the speaker’s experience.” (Halliday, 1969 cited in Neale, 2002: 49).

3.2.1 Systemic Functional Grammar

With the appearance of Functional Grammar, Halliday approaches language from a different perspective with a focus on functions rather than structures. For Halliday, “language is a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning”.

3.2.1.1 Metafunctions of language

In his functional theory, Halliday (2004) states that “experience and interpersonal relationships are transformed into meanings and the meaning is transformed into wording” (p. 25). Thus, according to Halliday (2004), the clause consists of three distinct yet interrelated metafunctions (the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual). Each metafunction is concerned with a meaning, and each meaning “forms part of a different functional configuration, making up a separate stand in the overall meaning of the clause (Halliday, 2004, p. 34). Halliday (2004) states that “the term metafunction was adopted to suggest that function was an integral component within the overall theory” (p. 31).

¹ SFG refers to Systemic Functional Grammar, a theory developed by Halliday over more than 50 years.

3.2.1.1.1 The textual metafunction (clause as Message)

This metafunction is concerned with clause as message and which deals with the organization of information within separate clauses and with the text as a whole. The part of the clause which carries out this line of meaning is known as thematic structures. Hence, the clause is divided into *Theme* and *Rheme*. As defined by Halliday (2004), the theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orient the clause within its context. The remainder of the message, the part in which the theme is developed, is called in Prague school terminology the Rheme (p. 64). The clause as message is thus organized into Theme+ Rheme.

3.2.1.1.2. The interpersonal metafunction (clause as Exchange)

This metafunction is concerned with clause as exchange and the relationship between speakers in a given discourse. When analyzing a clause in the interpersonal metafunction, the clause is composed of two main parts: the Mood and the Residue. The mood is also divided into two parts: the Subject which is a nominal group, and the Finite operator which is part of a verbal group. The residue consists of functional elements which are Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct.

3.2.1.1.3. The ideational metafunction (clause as Representation)

Through this function, “language provides a theory of human experience” (Halliday, 2004, p. 29). The ideational function allows language users to present their world experience through the lexico-grammatical choices they make, which are part of the transitivity system.

3.2.1.1.3.1. Transitivity

According to Halliday (1994, p. 106): “reality is made up of processes of going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming.” Transitivity focuses on each clause in the text, “asking who are the actors, who are the acted upon, and what processes are involved in that action”, (Matheson, 2005, p. 66)

The transitivity system proposed by Halliday is composed of three main types of processes: material, mental, and relational. There are also three minor types which are: behavioral, verbal, and existential processes.

According to Halliday (1994, p. 107), each situation type is made up of three components: “the process itself, participants in the process, and the circumstances associated with the process.” The process is realized by a verb and it is the central part of the situation. Participants are realized by a nominal group and circumstances are realized by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases.

➤ Process types

The presence and type of processes depend mainly on the participants involved, their number and type, as well as on the process itself. Halliday distinguishes six different types of processes.

➤ **The Material process**

This type of processes includes clauses of doing and happening. The two main participants associated with this process are: the Actor (the doer of the process) and the Goal (the entity affected by the process).

Example: the lion caught the tourist
Actor process: material Goal

➤ **The mental process**

Mental processes are grouped into four subtypes which are perception (see, hear, feel), cognition (know, understand, believe), affection (like, love), and desire (hope, want, wish).

Within this process, there is always a conscious participant known as the *sensor*: the one who perceives, knows, likes, etc. in addition to the sensor, there is another participant involved in the mental processes which is the *phenomenon* which is felt, perceived, known, thought, or wanted.

➤ **The relational process**

The process type occurs outside and inside human being. Relational processes are typically realized by the verb 'be' or some verbs of the same class (known as copular verbs); for examples, seem, become, appear, etc, or sometime by verbs such as have, own, possess. Halliday (1994:119) states that relational process is divided into two modes: identifying relational process and attributive relational process.

In the identifying mode, something has an identity assigned to it. It means that one entity is being used to identify another: 'X is identified by A', or 'A serves to define the identity of X' (Halliday, 1994: 122). The X-element is labeled as identified, which is to be identified, and the A element is labeled as identifier, which serves an identity. This mode is realized by the verbs: 'be' (is, am, are, was, were...), become, etc.

Attributive relational processes are the processes which assign a quality. 'A is an attribute of X'. In other words, in this mode an entity has some quality ascribed or attributed to it (Halliday, 1994:120). This type is realized by the verbs: sound, look, play, cost, have, get, seem, etc.

➤ **The behavioral process**

The behavioural process lies between the material and mental processes. It characterizes the outer expression of inner working and reflects physiological and psychological behaviours. This type of process usually has one participant who is typically a conscious one, called the Behavior.

➤ **The verbal process**

Between Mental and Relational processes are Verbal processes, which represent the act of saying. Usually three participants are involved in Verbal processes: the Sayer is responsible for verbal process; the Receiver is the person at whom the verbal process is directed; and the Verbiage is the nominalised statement of the verbal process.

➤ **The existential process**

Between Relational and Material processes are Existential processes which prove states of being, existing, and happening. Existential processes typically employ the verb *be* or its synonyms such as *exist*, *arise*, *occur*. The only participant in this process is Existent which follows the *there is /are* sequences.

The following table provides an example of each process type in the novel.

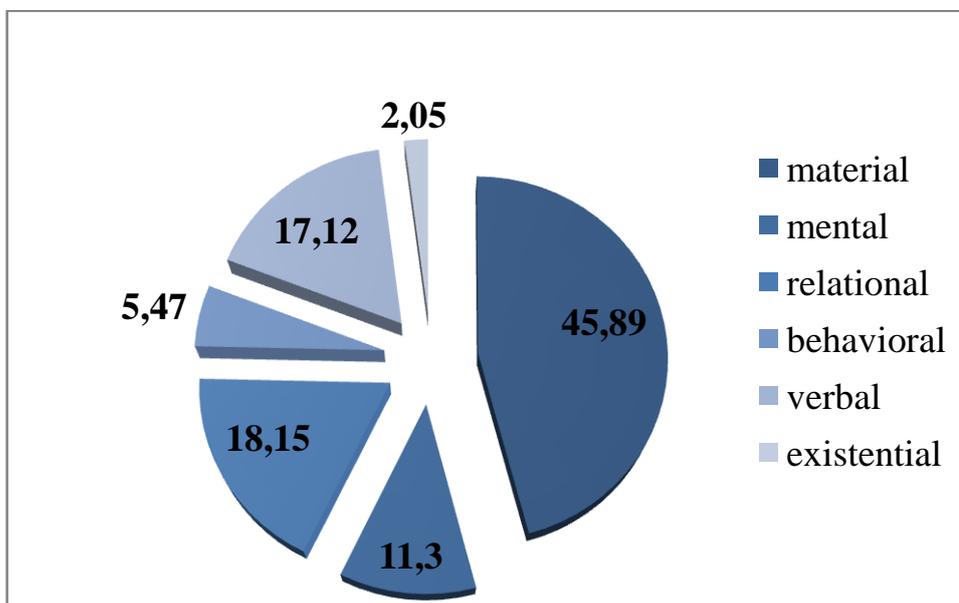
Table 1: examples of each process type from the novel

The process	example
material	The clerck took her. Actor material goal
mental	She thought of Muchoo. Senser mental phenomenon
Behavioral	She wondered Behavior behavioral
Relational attributive identifying	Muchoo was sad Carrier relational attribute It was less an identifiable city Token relational value
verbal	'I heard that,' Pierce said. Verbiage Sayer verbal
existential	There were no revelations Existential Existent

4. Results and findings

The following figure sums up the results related to the use of the six process types in the novel.

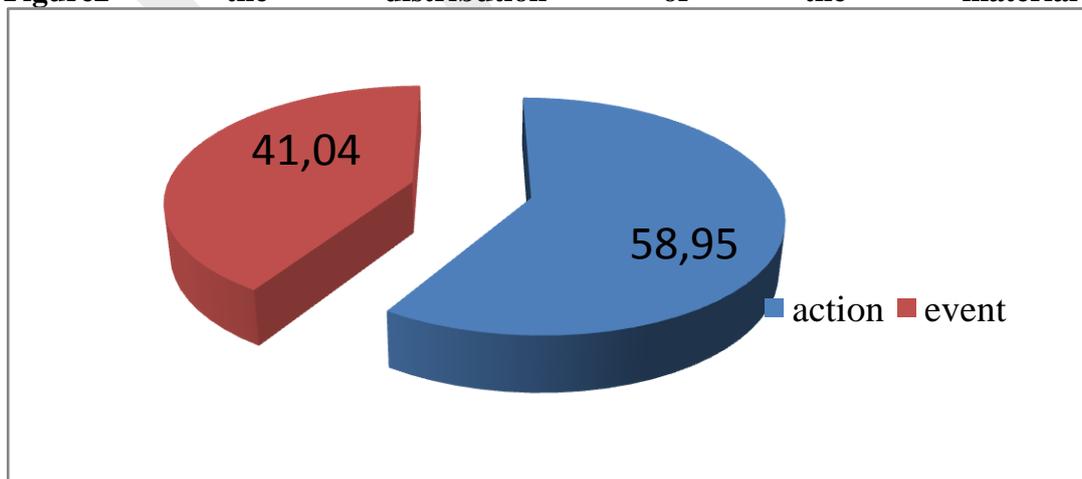
Figure1 the distribution of process types in the corp



As stated by this figure, the writer tends to use the material process type more than the other process types (45.89%). The relational process ranks second with 18.15% and then the verbal process type with 17.12%. The three other types are: mental with 11.3 %, behavioral 5.47% and the existential with 2.05%.

The material process is classified into action (58.95) and events (41.04) as shown by the following figure.

Figure2 the distribution of the material process



Concerning the participants' role, it is shown by the following table.

Table1. The participants' role

Actor (79)	Sense (52)	Behavior (16)	Say (50)	Carrier (23)	Token (30)
51	33	11	23	9	5

As it is stated by this table, the main character of the novel performs the main roles in each process type more than other characters. In fact, Oedipa Maas is the actor 51 times out of 79 processes. This can reveal the fact that she is acting but a detailed analysis shows that the verbs associated with the protagonist are intransitive verbs. Hence, Oedipa acts but does not affect others. While verbs associated with male characters are transitive verbs. Relating to the mental process, she is the senser 33 times out of 52 processes. Pynchon tries to concentrate on the psychological status of his protagonist and this may help readers to recognize and understand the character of Oedipa. This focus on the emotional state of Oedipa is meant to show her psychological disorder. From the first chapter, Oedipa thinks, knows, remember looking for a truth about the meaning of the Trystero System.

5. Conclusion

Transitivity is an important semantic concept in the analysis of representation of reality, in that transitivity enables us to analyze and represent the same event and situation in different ways. Relying on the transitivity analysis, the reader can uncover the thoughts of characters and sorting out 'who does what to whom' can help them understand the novel. The imbalance in agency between characters reflects the alination of the female character Oedipa and her detachment of the real world.

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