

# PROCESS TYPES OF TRANSITIVITY SYSTEM IN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS' NARRATIVE TEXTS

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## Abstract

The present study is aimed at discovering the process types of transitivity system in English department students' narrative texts and its pedagogical implementation in teaching writing. Qualitative content analysis was utilized as the design of the research and the instrument used was writing sheet. The data were taken from clauses in narrative texts written by 24 students of English education study program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara. The data were analyzed by using transitivity in systemic functional grammar theory proposed by Halliday. The findings show that there are 801 clauses in the data and the six types of process were also discovered. The dominant process type found was material process totalling to 427 occurrences (53.3%) followed successively by the occurrences of mental (139 or 17.3%), relational (124 or 15.4%), verbal (58 or 7.2%), behavioral (24 or 3.6%), and existential process (24 or 3%). The pedagogical implementation is that the lecturer has to apply adequate technique and approach, and give some students more practice since they missed to present dialogue to represent verbal process in their narrative text.

**Keywords:** process; transitivity system; narrative text; systemic functional; teaching Writing

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## Introduction

Writing as one of productive skill is required to be mastered by students since it is stated in teaching English syllabus in varsity level (Harmer, 2004) [1]. This skill is taught in order to make students able to communicate well in the written form. There are some kinds of texts or genres that students should be capable of writing those such as recount, descriptive, procedure, argumentative, discussion, spoof, and narrative. Those texts are different each other due to its uniqueness as well as its function.

The uniqueness of narrative text can be investigated through its certain characteristics viz. lexicogrammatical features, schematic structure and communicative purposes. The schematic structure of narrative text comprises orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda parts (Anderson and Anderson, 2004) [2]. This has communicative purpose to amuse readers (Gerot and Wignell, 1994) [3].

Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) provides a study about the connection between language and its functions realized in spoken and written forms (Ben Cheikh, 2017) [4]. This theory was pioneered by M.A.K Halliday which the object of analysis is emphasized on the clause analysis rather than sentence analysis (Hanafiah, Yusuf, and Aswani, 2018) [5]. This clearly makes sense since a clause is a composite entity. This theory also explains that language also has three kinds of meaning called as metafunctions. Those are ideational (experiential and ideational), interpersonal, and textual function which works simultaneously (Yusuf, 2016) [6]. To sum up, SFL can be used to explain language and its function in social settings.

Martin and White (2005) [7] assert that ideational function, comprising of experiential and logical function, is focused on construing experience: what's going on, including who's doing what to whom, where, when, why and how and the logical relation of one going-on to another. Experiential function is realized through system of grammar called as transitivity system covering the use of process to explain the content of the clause, participants involved, and circumstances. Additionally, Halliday (1985) [8] elucidates that

transitivity describes the different types of processes recognized in the language and the structures by which they are expressed.

**Table 1. The elements of transitivity system**

He	was	a beautiful peacock	with his new family
carrier	<b>process:</b>	Attribute	circumstance
	<b>relational</b>		

The ability to produce a well-written narrative text is a compulsory for university students. The importance of narrative analysis is pointed by Martin and Rose (2007) [9] clarifying that stories are central in all cultures, in some form in almost every imaginable situation and stage of life. The failure to write this text has an impact on the accomplishment of their writing course so that they are not able to pass the course and have to take the remedy next semester. If students can master and write a narrative texts based on its language features and schematic structure, a good product of narrative text can be presented. The example provided in advance was taken from the data illustrating that there is a relational process in the clause. Relational processes are processes of being, whose central meaning is something is (attribute, identity) (Sinar, 2007) [10]. When a comparison of texts is made based on SFL, the difference can be observed among the patterns of choices used in the texts according to the context (Thompson, 2014) [11]. The use of relational process in the clause in table 1 represents that the writer attempts to attributing something or identifying something. In addition, the elements of transitivity system also include participants, and circumstantial elements. Since the use of material process is one of narrative text linguistics features, it is urgent to discuss the use of process in students' narrative texts.

Some previous studies conducted dealing with genre analysis by using SFL. Arancón (2013) [12] provides an attempt to presents the findings of the SFL-based genre analysis of a corpus of UNED students' essays. This study explains that a genre-based approach within SFL is able to assist to highlight the difficulties in writing for those learning Business English as an L2. The findings of this study are underpinned by Tshotso (2014) [13] claiming that SFL is applicable to evaluate students' writing. Another research was conducted by Rashid (2016) [14] exploring process of construction of Hiroko's central character in Kamila Shamsie's famous novel "Burnt Shadows". It reveals layers and layers of meanings and literary significances that one may not grasp otherwise it needs to be explored. The previous studies are contrastive from this research such as in the objects of analysis, the theories used, and the genres.

Therefore, this study is aimed at discovering the process types of transitivity system in English department students' narrative texts and its pedagogical implementation in teaching writing. The findings of this research are expected to be beneficial as a reference for lecturers in teaching writing, and students to improve the quality of their narrative text product. For further researcher, it is hoped that the findings can be used as a useful resource to develop their research and the comparison of their research findings.

## Literature Review

### *Systemic functional linguistics (SFL)*

Systemic functional linguistics is beneficial to make the analysis and the interpretation of language itself. It regards language as social semiotics by expressing meaning in context (Liu, 2014) [15] which means how language is employed by people to each other to accomplish daily social life (Eggsins, 2004) [16]. Another expert also argues that it also provides a study the interrelationship between language, text and the contexts (Lirola, 2012) [17]. Then, Saragih (2016) [18] also adds that the selection of language structure of text is done by the function or purpose set by its speakers. In short, SFL deals with meaning and grammar. Meaning is structured at three different levels simultaneously called as metafunctions consisting of ideational, interpersonal, and textual function.

### *Experiential function*

Lock (1996) [19] states that experiential function deals with how we talk about actions, happenings, feelings, beliefs, situations, states, and so on, the people and things involved in them, and the relevant circumstances of time, place, manner, and so on. This is also stated as clause as representation and it is realized in transitivity system.

### *Process types in transitivity system*

Transitivity system (henceforth TS) is a system which expresses both our external experiences of the world and the internal ones at the level of clause (Halliday, 1994) [20]. TS covers the use of processes, participants, and circumstantial elements in a clause. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) [21] points that process is typically realized by verbal group, construed into a manageable set of process types, and each

process type constitutes a distinct model or schema for construing a particular domain of experience as a figure of a particular kind as the followings.

*Material process.* Material clauses are clauses of doing-&-happening. Material process construes a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy. Material process obligatory have a doing (process) and a doer (participant).

**Table 2.** The example of material process in a clause

The crocodile	<b>couldn't stay</b>	any longer	in the lake
Actor	<b>Material process</b>		

*Mental process.* Mental process is a process of sensing: describing a quantum of change in the flow of events taking place in our own consciousness. The participant who senses, feels, thinks, wants or perceives is called as *Senser* and it is always human. Otherwise, something which is felt, thought, wanted, or perceived is addressed as *phenomenon*.

**Table 3.**The example of mental process in a clause

Honestly,	Adelia	only	<b>loves</b>	king Adam's wealth
	Senser		<b>Mental process</b>	Phenomenon

*Relational process.* The English system operates with three main types of relation: intensive, possessive, and circumstantial; and each of these comes in two distinct modes of being 'attributive' and 'identifying'. The category of relational process covers many different ways in which being can be expressed in English clauses.

**Table 4.** Basic categories of relational clause

	<b>Attributive 'a is an attribute of x'</b>	<b>Identifying 'a is the identity of x'</b>
<b>Intensive 'x is a'</b>	Aha is wise	Aha is the smartest here
<b>Possessive 'x has a'</b>	Vira has a doll	The doll is Vira's
<b>Circumstantial 'x is at a'</b>	The party is on Sunday	Tomorrow is the 16 <sup>th</sup>

*Behavioral process.* This process describes (typically human) physiological and psychological behavior. The boundaries of behavioral processes are indeterminate. They are partly like the material, and partly like the mental. They are the least distinct of the types of process because of unclear definition of their character.

**Table 5.**The example of behavioral process in a clause

He	<b>cried</b>
Behaver	<b>Behavioral process</b>

*Verbal process.* This is the process of saying which contributes to the creation of narrative by making it possible to set up dialogic passages and it covers any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning. The verbal process includes not only Sayer but Receiver (the one to whom the process is aimed), Verbiage (content of what is said or name of the saying), and Target (the thing that is targeted by the process) as well as three further participant functions in addition to Sayer: (i) Receiver, (ii) Verbiage, and (iii) Target.

**Table 6.**The example of verbal process in a clause

The king	<b>scolded</b>	the prince	Rudely
Sayer	<b>Verbal process</b>	Receiver	

*Existential process.* This process illustrates that something exists or happens. Typically, this process has the verb 'BE'; in this respect also they resemble 'relational clauses'. The entity or event that is being said to exist is mentioned as *Existent*.

**Table 7.**The example of existential process

One day at the farm	There	<b>was</b>	a hen	with her 7 eggs
		<b>Existential Pro</b>	Existent	

### *Genres*

Writing is the way to convey the ideas, messages, and thought in written form involving complicated process. Halliday & Hassan (1976) [22] points out that a text is regarded as a semantic unit of meaning which has clauses that are contextual properties that hang together. Fairclough (2003) [23] elaborates the definition of genre as the specific discursive aspect of ways of acting and interaction in social events course. Specifically, Pardiyo (2007) [24] further argues that genre is considered as text type which has a function as frame of reference so that one text can be written effectively and precisely. There are some kinds of genre taught in writing course in varsity level namely narrative, recount, procedure, descriptive, argumentative, discussion, spoof, anecdote, news items, and so on.

### *Narrative text*

Systemic Functional Linguistics analysis helps how the narrative is structured and the language is used to express certain meanings (Iddings and De Oliveira, 2011) [25]. Anderson and Anderson as cited in Agusta (2015) [26] explain that narrative text is a piece of text which tells a story and in doing so entertains and informs the reader or listener. The schematic structures of narrative text are orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda (Derewianka, 2004) [27]. Joyce & Feez (2000) [28] also hold that narratives have some linguistic features as listed below:

- Specific often individual participants with defined identities. Major participants are human, or sometimes animal with human characteristic.
- Mainly use action verb (material processes), that describe what happens.
- Normally use past tense
- Dialogue often includes and uses a number of saying verb (verbal process) such as said, asked, and replied. The tense may change to the present or future in the dialogue. Sometimes these saying verbs also indicate how something is said.
- Descriptive language is use to enhance and develop the story by creating image in the reader's mind.
- Can be written in the first person (I, we) or third person (he, she, they).

## **Method**

Qualitative content analysis was utilized as the research design. The research was conducted at English education study program of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia. The number of participants involved as sample was 24 second-year students. The reason of the selection is they have acquired the materials about narrative text and the method used in teaching writing is genre-based approach. The source of the data was collected from narrative text which the length of the text is 250-400 words. The main instrument used was the writing sheet.

The content analysis carried out data collection and data analysis procedure which concerns the more conventional processes of identification and representation of patterns that are significant to the results of the analysis. The data were analyzed by using some steps proposed by Ezzy (2002) [29] and Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) [30] as the followings:

- Recognizing the segments of the texts
- Identifying and separating the sentences into clauses
- Identifying, labelling, and grouping the types of process
- Data condensation
- Displaying data
- Inference making

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Results*

The findings show that there are 801 clauses in the data and the six types of process were also discovered. The dominant process type found in students' narrative texts was material process totalling to 427 occurrences (53.3%) followed successively by the occurrences of mental (139 or 17.3%), relational (124 or 15.4%), verbal (58 or 7.2%), behavioral (24 or 3.6%), and existential process (24 or 3%). The description of thematic occurrences and its distribution is presented in the following table.

**Table 8. The process types used percentage in English students' narrative text**

No	Process type	Occurrence	Percentage
1	Material	427	53.3%
2	Mental	139	17.3%
3	Relational	124	15.4%
4	Verbal	58	7.2%
5	Behavioral	29	3.6%
6	Existential	24	3%
Total		801	100%

The example of the material process as the dominant process type is illustrated as the following:

**Table 9. Text 1 clause 20**

The farmers	<b>planted</b>	Them	carefully
Actor	<b>Material process</b>	Goal	circumstance

In the clause presented in advance, the writer used material process which is in the traditional verb is considered as action verb. The participants involved are actor and goal. This process also occurs in every single text.

#### Discussion

Process is one of the elements of transitivity system. There are six types found in the data covering material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural, and existential process though the distribution of each process does not show equal frequency. The analysis reveals that material process is the dominant one and it is utilized in every single text. The frequency of material process is followed by mental and relational process. The use of mental process in the data is to express how the character senses, feels, thinks, wants or perceives something while relational process is also used to show something is (to identify or to give attribute to something). The finding is relevant that the use of dominant material process as one of the features of narrative text is used to explain what actually happens (Zein, Sinar, and Nurlela, 2017) [31]. Nurlela (2016) [32] in her research also supports the findings of this research. She discovered that material process is the dominant process used in narrative text found in book published by Erlangga publisher in 2010. The existence of other processes (mental, relational, verbal, and behavioural) are important in narrative texts since Agustien as cited in Arigusman (2018) [33] asserts that those five processes (material, mental, relational, verbal, and behavioural) are also part of narrative linguistic features. Arigusman's findings contradict to the findings of this study. He found that mental process is frequently used in narrative text. Another research conducted by Correa and Domínguez (2014) [34] has findings that material process is barely included in narrative text which also against the findings of this study. They claim that the readers of narrative text written by their student will have difficulty in comprehending what the participants did due to its lack of material process appearance. The inference can be understood that the use of dominant material process eases the readers to comprehend what is actually happening. They also found that the use of verbal process is barely used. In this case, the finding is relevant to this study that verbal process has only 58 occurrences. Verbal process is also important in order to signal the interaction between the characters. In complication part, it contains the conflict between the characters and it can be illustrated by using verbal process. It is very important to make a good complication since it is part of narrative schematic structure. The example of verbal process used in the data is presented in the following example:

The crocodile also *said* "I'm hungry and you are at my authority" (text 8, clause 34)

There are 8 students who do not present verbal process namely text 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 18, 19, and 20 in their narrative texts. It can be inferred that English education students of UMSU fail to present the interaction between the characters and their capability in writing this text is quite poor. The pedagogical implementation is the lecturer has to apply adequate technique and approach, and give some students more practice since some students missed to present dialogue to represent verbal process in their narrative text. Moreover, Emilia and Hamied (2015) [34], based on their research, claim that SFL genre pedagogy (SFL GP) can assist students to develop their writing ability in general. They provide recommendation to implement SFL GP in other contexts in Indonesia and other countries. This method can be considered by lecturers to apply in teaching narrative to improve students' narrative text quality.

## Conclusion and Suggestion

The conclusions are drawn that those six types of process appear in the data. The dominant process type found in students' narrative texts was material process totalling to 427 occurrences (53.3%) followed successively by the occurrences of mental (139 or 17.3%), relational (124 or 15.4%), verbal (58 or 7.2%), behavioral (24 or 3.6%), and existential process (24 or 3%). The pedagogical implementation is that the lecturer has to apply adequate technique and approach such as SFL GP, and provide additional material to strengthen students' understanding in writing this genre specifically the types of process in transitivity system since some students missed to present dialogue to represent verbal process in their narrative texts.

Then, the students are suggested to pay attention more on the use of process of transitivity system in narrative text since it is important and have an effect in their writing quality.

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