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Power Relationships and Transitivity Choices in Graham Greene's *Dream of a Strange Land*

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Abstract

Stylistic analysis of a text uses many tools from linguistic research. Halliday's model of transitivity choices offers one such method of textual investigation. Transitivity choices construct the reality of the text world and its characters. Burton (1996) takes a feminist stance and traces power relationship in Plath's *The Bell Jar* where she establishes female character as a victim in power dynamics. This paper is an attempt to establish the pattern of power relationship in a male oriented domain in Greene's short story *Dream of a Strange Land*. The paper concludes that power relationships are not necessarily gender bound. They are found between humans as a part of their existence.

Keywords: Transitivity Choices, Graham Greene, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Power Relationship

Introduction

The stylistic analysis of a literary text involves a study of the linguistic elements that lend the text its literary quality. The features studied in the traditional stylistic analysis are syntactic, semantic, and lexical choices, foregrounding, morphology, phonology, and graphology. These features are analysed to strengthen both the linguistic and literary understanding of the texts. The point is made clear by Burton '...stylistic analysis is *not* just a question of discussing 'effects' in language and text, but a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of 'realities' as constructed through language (1996:230).

Halliday (1985) gave a new direction to textual analysis in his systemic functional linguistics (SFL) model. Halliday looks at reality in terms of processes; i.e. events happening: “Our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of ‘goings-on’ All these goings-on are sorted out in the grammar of the clause. . . . The grammatical system by which this is achieved is TRANSITIVITY” (Halliday, 1994:106). He goes on to elaborate: “The transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types” (p. 106). He identifies six different types of processes that build up our perception of reality. These include:

1. Material processes: of the external world
2. Mental processes: of the inner experience
3. Relational processes: of classification and identification
4. Behavioural processes: of consciousness and psychological states
5. Verbal processes: of linguistic enactment of symbolic relationships of saying and meaning
6. Existential process: of recognition of all kinds of phenomena, to exist or to happen (p.107)

In the composition of a text, deliberate and at times intuitive grammatical choices are made by the writers to construct text reality. Berry (1975) quoted in Burton elaborates on these choices as

In English grammar we make choices between different types of processes, between different types of participant, between different types of circumstance, between different roles for participants and circumstances, between different numbers of participants and circumstances, between different ways of combining processes, participants and circumstances. These choices are known collectively as the transitivity choices. (1996:227)

Deirdre Burton (1996:227) uses transitivity choices to find possible answers to the question, ‘who does what to whom?’ in her seminal paper *Through glass darkly: through dark glasses On stylistics and political commitment—via a study of a passage from Sylvia’s Plath’s The Bell Jar*. She establishes the social reality power-relationship in general, and of male dominance in relationship with female in particular, by examining transitivity choices.

Cunanan (2011) has stylistically analyzed Virginia Woolf’s *Old Mrs. Grey*. Azar & Yazdchi (2012) analyze the character of ‘Maria’ in James Joyce’s *Clay*; Thu Nguyen (2012) applies the transitivity model to Hoa Pham’s *Heroic Mother*. All

these researches find that the transitivity analysis allows a new perspective into the text and firmly establishes the realities of the textual and the narrative world.

This paper applies transitivity choices to analyze three short passages from Graham Greene's short story *Dream of a Strange Land*. The passages present the scene of the General's birthday party at the residence of the doctor, the Herr Professor. The doctor, a law-abiding man, refuses to treat a patient of leprosy in private as it is against law. However, the same doctor is forced by the army to hold the party at his place, also an act against law.

The purpose for selecting these passages is to analyze the relationship of power among men. Burton's paper (1996), written in a feminist perspective, suggests that women construct themselves as victims; though, it also states that a text written by a man would be open to a similar sympathetic discussion (1996:229) This paper examines transitivity choices to identify the pattern of power relationship and to find out if these help in understanding the realities of the characters in the selected passages in light of the Burton's statement.

The Text

The text is repeated below with sentences numbered and processes underlined.

(1) At one of the tables, on the right of the croupier, sat the old man whom he had seen pass in the Mercedes. (2) One hand was playing with his moustache, the other with a pile of tokens before him, counting and rearranging them while the ball span and jumped and span, and one foot beat in time to the tune from *The Merry Widow*. (3) A champagne cork from the bar shot diagonally up and struck the chandelier while the croupiers cried again, 'Faites vos jeux, messieurs,' and the stem of a glass went crack in somebody's fingers.

(4) Then the patient saw the Herr Professor standing with his back to the window at the other end of the great room, beyond the second chandelier, and they regarded each other, with the laughter and cries and glitter of light between them.

(5) The Herr Professor could not properly see the patient-only the outline of a face pressed to the exterior of the pane, but the patient could see the Herr Professor very clearly between the tables, in the light of the chandelier. (6) He could even see his expression, the lost look on his face like that of someone who has come to the wrong party. (7) The patient raised his hand, as though to indicate to the other that he was lost too, but of course the Herr Professor could not see the gesture in

the dark. (8) The patient realized quite clearly that, though they had once been well known to each other, it was quite impossible for them to meet, in this house to which they had both strayed by some strange accident. (9) There was no consulting-room here, no file on his case, no desk, no Prometheus, no doctor even to whom he could appeal. (10) ‘Faites vos jeux, messieurs,’ the croupiers cried, ‘faites vos jeux.’ (Greene, 1963: 91-92)

Analysis

On reading the passages, we get the impression that the Herr General seems to be in full charge of the situation. The Herr Professor is helpless as he is unable to control the happenings at his home; the patient is also in a state of helplessness for he cannot enter the house of the Herr Professor to meet him. A clause-wise analysis of the passages strengthens these impressions and gives us a better understanding of the characters’ realities. The analysis comprises of three steps suggested by Burton (1996):

- a) Isolate the processes *per se*, and find which participant (who or what) is ‘doing’ each process;
- b) Find what *sorts* of process they are, and which participant is engaged in which type of process;
- c) Find who or what is *affected* by each of these processes. (Burton, 1996:231)

Let us now analyse the text step by step.

Step 1: The processes *per se*

This step helps in identifying the actors and the processes associated with them:

Sentence #	Actor	Process
1a	old man (Herr General)	sat
1b	patient	had seen
2a	Herr General’s body part	was playing
2b	Herr General’s body part	counting and rearranging
2c	ball	span
2d	ball	jumped

2e	ball	span
2f	Herr General's body part	beat
3a	champagne cork	shot up
3b	champagne cork	struck
3c	croupiers	cried
3d	stem of glass	went crack
4a	patient	saw
4b	they (patient, doctor)	regarded
5a	Herr Professor (doctor)	could not...see
5b	patient's body part	pressed
5c	patient	could see
6a	patient	could . . . see
6b	someone (doctor)	has come
7a	patient	raised
7b	he (patient)	was
7c	Herr Professor (doctor)	could not see
8a	patient	realized
8b	they (patient, doctor)	had...strayed
9	patient	could appeal
10	croupiers	cried

The table above gives us a clear picture of the actors and their actions in the world described in the passages. The Herr General and his birthday party seem to dominate the scene (1a, 2a-3d, 10). The patient as actor comes next (1b, 4a, 4b, 5b-6a, 7a, 7b, 8a-9). The Herr Professor, i.e., the doctor has the minimum number of actions (4b, 5a, 6b, 7c, 8b). A simple counting of the actors and their actions is as follows:

Herr General (including body parts) as actor: 04

Objects in the birthday party as actors: 06

Patient (including body parts) as actor: 09

Herr Professor as actor: 03

Herr Professor and patient as joint actors: 02

Croupiers as actors: 02

Step 2: The *sorts* of process they are

After identifying which participant is doing each process, the next step is to determine what sorts of processes they are so that we may develop a better understanding of the characters' realities established by the text:

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- 1a old man (Herr General) sat = material-action-intention
 - 1b patient had seen= mental-internalized-perception
 - 2a Herr General's body part was playing= material-action-intention
 - 2b Herr General's body part counting and rearranging= material-action-intention
 - 2c ball span= material-action-intention
 - 2d ball jumped= material-action-intention
 - 2e ball span= material-action-intention
 - 2f Herr General's body part beat= material-action-intention
 - 3a champagne cork shot up= material-action-intention
 - 3b champagne cork struck= material-action-supervention
 - 3c croupiers cried= material-action-intention
 - 3d stem of glass went crack= material-action-supervention
 - 4a patient saw= mental-internalized-perception
 - 4b they (patient, doctor) regarded = mental-internalized-cognition
 - 5a Herr Professor (doctor) could not... see= mental-internalized-perception
 - 5b patient's body part pressed= material-action-supervention
 - 5c patient could see= mental-internalized-perception
 - 6a patient could... see= mental-internalized-perception
 - 6b someone (doctor) has come= material-action-intention

7a	patient raised= material-action-intention
7b	he (patient) was= relational
7c	Herr Professor (doctor) could not see= mental-internalized-perception
8a	patient realized= mental-internalized-cognition
8b	they (patient, doctor) had...strayed= material-action-intention
9	patient could appeal= material-action-intention
10	croupiers cried= material-action-intention

Out of the 26 clauses studied, 14 show the option of material-action-intention process; 06 show mental-internalized-perception process; 02 show mental-internalized-cognition process; 01 shows relational process; 03 show the option of material-action-supervention process. The power-relationships in these passages can better be understood if we relate these processes to the actors thereby determining their active or passive participation in the world around them. The Herr General affects the environment with material-action-intention process in 04 clauses. The ball affects the surroundings by material-action-intention process in 03 clauses. The croupiers, too, influence the party by material-action-intention process in 02 clauses. The champagne cork affects by material-action-intention process in 01 clause, while in another clause it affects by material-action-supervention process. The stem of glass influences the environment by material-action-supervention process in 01 clause. Thus we find the Herr General and the objects in the party commanding the situation with a majority of material-action-intention processes. The patient's presence is felt in 04 mental-internalized-perception process clauses; 02 material-action-intention clauses; 01 mental-internalized-cognition process clause; 01 material-action-supervention and 01 relational clause. The patient seems to have less control on the world around as he is involved mostly in mental-internalized processes. His influence is to be found in two material-action-intention clauses. The Herr Professor has the least power on the environment as he appears in two mental-internalized-perception clauses and in one material-action-intention clause. Both the patient and Herr Professor appear together in two clauses, mental-internalized-cognition and material-action-intention. The analysis in this part shows the Herr General to be the most powerful; the patient to be the least powerful; and the Herr Professor to be helpless in affecting the world.

Step 3: Who or what is *affected* by each of these processes

The analysis in this part establishes who or what is affected by each process:

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- 1a old man (Herr General) affects 0 by intention process
 - 1b patient affects 0 by perception process
 - 2a Herr General's body part affects his other body part by intention process
 - 2b Herr General's body part affects tokens by intention process
 - 2c ball affects the environment by intention process
 - 2d ball affects the environment by intention process
 - 2e ball affects the environment by intention process
 - 2f Herr General's body part affects the music by intention process
 - 3a champagne cork affects the environment by intention process
 - 3b champagne cork affects the chandelier by supervention process
 - 3c croupiers affect the environment by intention process
 - 3d stem of glass affects somebody by supervention process
 - 4a patient affects the Herr Professor by perception process
 - 4b they (patient, doctor) affect each other by cognition process
 - 5a Herr Professor (doctor) affects the patient by perception process
 - 5b patient's body part affects the pane by supervention process
 - 5c patient affects the Herr Professor by perception process
 - 6a patient affects the Herr Professor by perception process
 - 6b someone (doctor) affects the party by intention process (hypothetical)
 - 7a patient affects 0 by intention process
 - 7b he (patient) affects 0 by relational process
 - 7c Herr Professor (doctor) affects 0 by perception process
 - 8a patient affects 0 by cognition process
 - 8b they (patient, doctor) affect 0 by intention process
 - 9 patient affects 0 by intention process (hypothetical)
 - 10 croupiers affect the environment by intention process
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The analysis further strengthens the observations made earlier, i.e., the Herr General, the objects at the party and the croupiers affect the environment mostly by intention processes (1a,2a,2b,2c,2d,2e,2f,3a,3c,10) and, to a lesser degree, by supervention processes (3b,3d). It shows that they have the strongest effect on their environment. The patient affects none and Herr Professor by perception process (1b, 4a, 5c, 6a,); none by intention (7a, 9); the pane by supervention (5b); none by relational (7b) and cognition processes (8a). The analysis establishes him to have no power over the world depicted in the passages. The Herr Professor's influence is negligible as he affects the patient and none by perception process (5a, 7c) and affects the party by intention process in a hypothetical sense (6b). Both the patient and Herr Professor influence each other by cognition process (4b) and influence none by intention process (8b).

Conclusion

The transitivity choices in selected passages analysed in this paper construct the realities of Greene's characters in his story and strengthen our impression of their power-relationships. The difference is that Burton follows the feminist perspective in her analysis and tries to find out the reality of the female character in the text, while Graham Greene's passages present male characters and reveal their social reality. The study establishes the reality of power relationship among men-where they are powerful or powerless. The clause-wise analysis of the text brings the patterns of implicit power relationships. Herr Professor is powerful in relation to the patient and Herr General in relation to the Herr doctor. The analysis brings powerful Herr General to the fore, and establishes the Herr Professor and the patient as helpless. The analysis established the social fact that it is not only the women, who are victims in the world, it might as well be men. The difference remains of who is powerful over whom, men over women or men over men. The reality is of the control that one may have over others, physiologically, emotionally, politically, socially and religiously irrespective of the gender.

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