

# The Study on Transitivity Pattern of Political Debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump

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## ABSTRACT

This paper has analyzed transitivity pattern of the final debate of the presidency in the United States of America. This research was based on the idea of Fairclough in 2002 that language is not only socially constitutive but also socially shaped. The significance of this analysis was that it helped to expand the Halliday (1994) functional system of language and discourse. Documentation method was used to collect a large corpora of data based on the notion of transitivity. A descriptive research in order to answer the research main questions; (a) which transitivity pattern is more frequent based on the Halliday functional model in our corpus? (b) How were the interactive effects of transitivity understood in the expanded model of Halliday? The results showed that the order of frequency of was sequenced in this way; material, relational and mental, verbal, behavioral and existential. And it was understood that with some minimal modifications, interactive effects of transitivity can be embedded in the Halliday' functional model.

**Key words:** Language, Discourse, Transitivity, Ideology, Functional Model

## INTRODUCTION

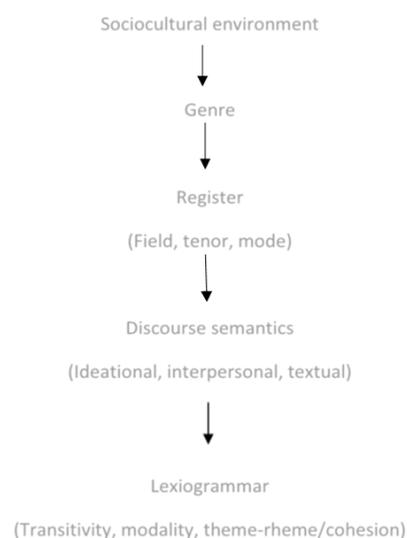
On the importance of language and language analysis, it is believed that "Language encode ours experience and thereby plays a crucial role in our involvement with other people, animal life in general, and inanimate matter" (Bloor and Bloor, 1995:107). In other words, Language is the most common form of social behavior and we depend on language in our public and private interaction, determining our relationships with other individuals and the social institutions we inhabit. It is also a material form of ideology, and to be infested by ideology (Fairclough, 2002). Fairclough (2002) believes that language to be a material form of ideology, and to be infested by ideology. Fowler (1986) makes the link between discourse and ideology even clearer when he defines discourse as socially and institutionally originating ideology, encoded in language. Also Gumperz (1971) discusses linguistic forms can be grouped into styles, or registers. And Simpson (1993) believes that that discourse is a way to mould and manifest ideologies, where "ideology" is defined as the everyday taken for granted collective set of assumptions and value systems that social groups share. It can be understood that language plays a crucial role in human's life as species that need to interact and communicate their ideas. So investigating this language as a means of communication needs a model that helps us understand how our life is influenced by our language and how our language influence our lives.

Functional linguistics claims that their model can do this. According to Inchaurrealde (2005), One of the basic assumption of functional linguistics is that language is a symbolic system with a certain purpose or purposes, mainly communication, although there are other possibilities too, such as the use of language as an instrument of thought.

Halliday's (1994) model of discourse analysis, based on what he terms systemic functional grammar, is geared to the study of language as communication, seeing meaning in the writer's linguistic choices and systematically relating these choices to a wider sociocultural framework. In his (1994) model, there is a strong interrelation between the surface-level realizations of the linguistic functions and the sociocultural framework. This can be seen in the following figure;

The arrows in the figure indicate the direction of influence. Thus, the genre (the conventional text type that is associated with a specific communicative function, for example a business letter) is conditioned by the sociocultural environment and itself determines other elements in the systemic framework. The first of these is register, which comprises three variable elements:

1. Field: what is being written about, e.g. a delivery;



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2. Tenor: who is communicating and to whom, e.g. a sales representative to a customer;
3. Mode: the form of communication, e.g. written.

Each of the variables of register is associated with a strand of meaning. These strands, which together form the discourse semantics of a text, are the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The metafunctions are constructed or realized by the lexicogrammar that is the choices of wording and syntactic structure (Eggs 1994).

In Halliday's (1994) terms, transitivity is a part of the ideational function of the clause. The ideational function represents processes or experiences: actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations. There are three components of what Halliday (1994) calls a "transitivity process", namely:

1. The process itself; what kind of event or state is being described
2. Participants in the process; the entities involved in the process, e.g. actor, Sayer, sensor, goal
3. Circumstances associated with the process- specifying when, how, where and why of the Clauses represent events and processes of various kinds, and transitivity aims to make clear how the action is performed, by whom and on what.

Transitivity is an essential tool in the analysis of representation. Different social structures and values require different patterns of transitivity. Halliday (1994) identifies six process categories in his system of transitivity which are summarized in the table 1.

The significance of analyzing the data propositions in terms of Participant, Process and Goal types puts focus on the doers, the actions done and the recipients of the action; in other words, who is doing what to whom?

In this study, researchers used a functional model to illustrate what features and properties are encoded in the political discourse between two United States candidates of presidency and how a functional model can be helpful in understanding these kinds of texts. Or to be more specific, researchers tried to answer the following questions;

1. Which transitivity pattern is more frequent based on the Halliday (1994) functional model in our corpus?
2. How were the interactive effects of transitivity understood in the expanded model of Halliday (1994)?

**Table 1. Process types, their meaning and key participants, (Halliday, 1994, p.143).**

Process type	Category meaning	Participants
Material: Action, Event	Doing, Happening-e.g. kick, run, paint, repair, send, burn,	Actor, Goal
Behavioral	Behaving	Behaver
Mental: Perception, Affection, Cognition	Sensing, Seeing , Feeling Thinking -e.g. see, hear, know	Sensor, Phenomenon
Verbal	Saying-e.g. say, tell, warn, argue, ask	Sayer, Target
Relational: Attribution , Identification	Being, Attributing, Identifying-e.g. be, have, become	Carrier, Attribute, Identified, Identifier, Token, Value
Existential	Existing	Existence

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. According to Arikunto (1993), descriptive research only describes a phenomenon without many hypotheses. The study described the phenomena found in the English text of a Political debate between two American candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, through describing accurately the types of transitivity involved in understudied text. This kind of research was adopted to get more in-depth feedback about something the researcher already knows, and to gain information about something the researcher does not know (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

### Data collection

The data used for the research were taken from what Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump sparred on the debate stage for the final time on Oct. 19 in Las Vegas, the Washington Post. Documentation method was used to collect this corpus. According to Chappelle (1998), the unit analysis of systemic functional linguistic is the text because the functional meaning potential of language is realized in unit no smaller than text. Similarly, Halliday (2004, p.33) says that text is the form of data used for linguistic analysis and all of the description of grammar is based on text. Referring to the statements, the data of the research which was the English texts of the final debate were in the form of text. The English texts were broken down into clauses because the compositional hierarchy of English in grammar usually starts from a clause (Halliday, 2004, p.20). There were 2063 clauses taken from the English text to be analyzed.

### Data analysis

After the data were collected, researchers attempted to do a descriptive analysis of data through totaling the frequency of the each category of the processes, the quantity of them were then converted to percentage score to make the explanation and evaluation of the claimed relationship among the transitivity, and functional categories of the Halliday's expanded model (such as style, genre, and other categories) much easier task.

## RESULTS

Halliday (1994) used the term process to refer to an activity that the arguments do. He proposed three main process types that are Material process (process of doing and happening), mental process (process of sensing,) and Relational process (process of being and having). There are another processes which are located at each boundary, Behavioral process, Verbal process and Existential process. These processes were studied as follows;

### The Frequency and percentage of Transitivity Process

Relatively high rates of data were achieved based on the analyzed corpora which are shown in the following tables (Tables 2-4). As it is illustrated in the table 2 the most transitive process is material process and the least transitive one is existential process. Also each interlocutor's cooperation in developing this discourse was studied and following results (Table 3) were drawn from it. Again, the scores show the distribution of transitivity descending order is as follows; material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential. The same hierarchy is established here which emphasis the material structure to be the dominant one.

**Table 2. Frequency and percentage of the transitivity used by both interlocutors.**

Process						Total amount
Material	Mental	Verbal	Behavioral	Relational	Existential	
851	377	209	60	542	24	2063
41.25%	18.27%	10.13%	2.91%	26.28%	1.16%	100%

**Table 3. Hillary Clinton frequency and percentage of transitivity usage.**

Material	Mental	Verbal	Behavioral	Relational	Existential	Total process
392	189	105	32	251	21	990
39.6%	19.1%	10.6%	3.23%	25.35%	2.12%	100%

**Table 4. Donald Trump frequency and percentage of transitivity usage.**

Material	Mental	Verbal	Behavioral	Relational	Existential	Total process
459	188	104	28	291	3	1073
42.78%	17.52%	9.69%	2.61%	27.12%	0.28%	100%

### Interactive effects of transitivity on the perception of other functional categories

To show the effects of transitivity on other elements of the expanded Halliday's model in order to prove that Halliday's model should be bilateral and the arrows should be two-sided and also to substantiate Fairclough (2002) claim that texts are formed by the context and social behavior and also they form the context and social behavior, researchers analyzed the behavioral process which was approximately used with the same frequency and score by both interlocutors. Researcher as oppose to Halliday's model and in accordance with the suggested expanded model starts with transitivity and takes an ascending approach. In this case after the transitivity which was analyzed beforehand, the next category will be ideational meaning which is realized by grammatical choices.

### Interactive effects of transitivity and Ideational meaning

From the frequency of the transitivity processes, it can be understood that Material processes which indicate what is going on outside oneself is emphasized more than other processes, so it can be claimed most of their speech was about their environment, or in other words who doing what to whom or to what, when, where, and how. Relational process is the process of being. In relational clauses there are two parts to the "being": something is being said to "be" something else. From the frequency of this process, it can be found that some values were attributed to different phenomena by these interlocutors about the "beings" of the mentioned phenomena, or in other words who, or what was/is/will be how.

Also mental processes enabled language users to express opinion, thoughts and tastes that help to identify their definitions of reality. Verbal processes involve a communication between a Sayer and an Addressee, where some message, the Verbiage, is communicated. Based on the frequency of this process, it can be found that different messages and verbiage were emphasized by the language users. By Behavioral Processes, language users indicate the physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, dreaming, snoring, smiling, hiccupping, looking, watching, listening, and pondering. Existential processes are processes of existence. These represent that something exists or happens. By existential process, language users indicated an entity existing without predicating anything additional about it.

In the following tables 5 and 6 the frequency and percentage of the participants involved in forming the ideational meaning in the clauses with behavioral process were indicated. It can be concluded that ideational meaning with behavioral transitivity is realized mostly through explicit behavior and explicit range.

**Table 5. The frequency and percentage of realized ideational meaning with and without "behavior".**

Type/token ratio of implicit behavior	Type/token ratio of explicit behavior	Implicit behavior	Explicit behavior	Total
20	80	12	48	60

**Table 6. The Frequency and percentage of realized ideational meaning with and without "range".**

Type/token ratio of implicit range	Type/token ratio of explicit range	Implicit behavior	Explicit behavior	Total
41.67	58.33	25	35	60

**Interactive effects of transitivity and style**

"Style" as defined by the researchers as 'rhetorical strategy used by an individual' were studied only by mentioning the style of language users in forming the clauses with behavioral processes, such as explicit mentioning of behavior and range or in other terms the clause participants, due to its approximately same degree and frequency of usage by the both language users (Tables 7 and 8). As the tables 9 and 10 show, it can be inferred that we can have an understanding of Trump's style based on the participant involved in forming the clauses. Clinton's style can be interpreted from the degree of the involvements of the participants are different from the Trump's style.

**Table 7. Trump's style in the clauses with behavioral transitivity in terms of behavior.**

Type/token ratio of implicit behavior	Type/token ratio of explicit behavior	Implicit behavior	Explicit behavior	Total
21.43	78.57	6	22	28

**Table 8. Trump's style in the clauses with behavioral transitivity in terms of range.**

Type/token ratio of implicit range	Type/token ratio of explicit range	Implicit	Explicit	Total
39.29	60.71	11	17	28

**Table 9. Clinton's style in the clauses with behavioral transitivity in terms of behavior.**

Type/token ratio of implicit behavior	Type/token ratio of explicit behavior	Implicit	Explicit	Total
18.75	81.25	6	26	32

**Table 10. Clinton's style in the clauses with behavioral transitivity in term of range.**

Type/token ratio of implicit range	Type/token ratio of explicit range	Implicit	Explicit	Total
43.75	56.25	14	18	32

**Interactive effects of transitivity and Register**

'Register', "a certain set of contextual parameters coming together, in a given context of situation"(Halliday, 1994). Register as Halliday (1994) said comprises three features; field, tenor, and mode. Based on the previous categories such as transitivity, ideational functional meaning, and the style of the language users following interpretation can be inferred about the register;

Field: two candidates that are talking to the audience about their stance as a candidate of presidency.

Tenor: through the ideational analysis and based on the fact that we know that formal style in English is the one with subject, it can be inferred that , for example as the statistics shows about the behavior, so the tenor is formal.

And, Mode: spoken to be heard.

**Interactive effects of transitivity and Genre;**

Genre defined by the researcher as 'rhetorical strategy used by a community with a specific communicative purpose', in which this genre is consist of 'register', 'a certain set of contextual parameters coming together, in a given context of situation'. All these terms establish an interactive process with their upper and under categories in Halliday functional model, which in here just their interactive effects produced by their lower categories were studied to



researchers were able to substantiate Fairclough's claim and provide what was lacking by the Halliday (1994) functional model and to merge this important issue of discourse as being both constitutive and constituted to Halliday's model.

Researchers also concluded that as Fowler (1986) had claimed "Transitivity patterns can reveal the certain worldview framed by the authorial ideology in a literary text", and as Gumperz (1971) discusses linguistic forms can be grouped into styles, or registers. In other words, it was understood that through the transitivity, which has the lowest hierarchical rank in this mode, analysts can reach information in an ascending order to the discourse level. And in addition to that, it was elaborated that Halliday's model of discourse and language should be bilateral and the arrows should be two-sided.

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