

## INTEGRATION OF THE TRANSIVITY MODEL TO PROBE GENDER ISSUES IN LITERARY TEXTS AND ITS IMPLICATION ON TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** The topicality of this paper lies in the effects of the linguistic utilization of literature that reflects social realities, mainly the crave of discerning complications on the relationship between men and women, inside a foreign language classroom. The aim of the present paper is to study the contribution of the Linguistic Analysis of literary works for unveiling the secrecy of gender dichotomy to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Hence, it is the aim of this paper to develop a working systemic-functional model through proposing Lexico-grammatical strategies for the ideational construal in meaning-making. It is based on the analysis of verbs (processes) used by male and female characters selected from some literary works, attached to different cultural backgrounds. This study postulates that analysis of language choice serves as a means to enable foreign language learners have an obvious reflection over gender-specific issues to enhance culture learning. Therefore, we recommend that the aforesaid framework can be utilized as a pedagogical tool in teaching EFL to improve the dynamics of socio-cultural practices taking place in classroom learning context.

**Keywords:** culture learning, gender, ideational meta-function, literature didactics, processes, TEFL

### 1. Introduction

In any EFL classroom, analysis of literary texts is found to be the most challenging problem that both teachers of literature and students face. In teaching English as a Foreign Language, analysis of literary texts is a process which combines a necessity to have a sophisticated literary knowledge including knowledge about the different literary genres and theories alongside a practical tool of analysis. Therefore, in this article, we introduce a linguistic-based literary analysis that EFL students can follow to decipher the way fictional characters are represented. Analysis is performed on two extracts taken from different literary works: George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Analysis is initiated by use of the transitivity model and ends up with reflections upon gender and cultural issues. The Transitivity Model, which is part of the Functional Grammar Approach to Discourse Analysis, opt to show how teachers can help their learners support their intuitions and enhance their skills of interpretation and reflection upon gender issues related to the foreign culture. This

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work is an interrelation among three main disciplines: Gender Studies, Literature didactics, and Discourse Analysis.

## **2. Ontologies of Gender: Gender as a Cultural Construct**

As it is apparent from the different views regarding Gender, essentialist and constructivist theories present opposing claims about how gender is conceptualized. According to essentialists, there are underlying biological claims which define the evolution of men and women over time. The natural compositions of the human nature including chromosomes, size of the brain, and hormonal activities are the basis of gender differences and behaviours (Wood, 2009). Though there were some attempts to interrelate studies in genetic research and brain research with social and cultural studies, they encountered little concerns in grinding gender inequalities and men's superiority over Women (Risman & Davis, 2012).

Social constructionism, in contrast, rests on the belief that reality is socially constructed and emphasizes language as an important means by which we interpret experience. Conceptualizing gender from a cultural perspective allows understandings about the way societies define masculinity and femininity. On the other side, it elucidates how individuals are acquainted with cultural values and construct identities according to the requirements of their culture. According to Hofstede (2011, p.12), Masculinity and Femininity as a complex dichotomy refers to "the distribution of values between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society, to which a range of solutions can be found." Julia T. Wood argues that "Cultural theories broaden our understandings by showing how social expectations and values about the sexes are systematically taught to individuals" (2009, p. 55).

## **3. Gender and Literature Didactics**

In fact, Gender Studies have found their way into most domains of academic research and teaching pedagogy. Although they haven't been widely addressed in foreign language teaching and learning, only a limited number of research deals with gender issues in the foreign language classroom since gender is seen as cultural construct which intersects with "race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis) ability, age, and social status in framing students' language learning experiences, trajectories, and outcomes" (Norton & Pavlenko 2004, p. 504 in Cornill & Volkman). These variables make gender a key topic within the educational theory, research and practice.

One of the main functions of literature is to invite insights into the lives of people and their sociocultural environments. In addition, learners are frequently faced with all kinds of gender representations in their daily life. They are often addicted to specific rules of gendered behavior and lifestyles. Integrating gender studies is supposed to be "an important point for constructive and critical engagement in the context of literary studies and within a wider concept of cultural learning." (Cornill, 2007, p. 186). The aim is to encourage involvement and critical detachment in literature learning.

Therefore, integrating gender studies in literature didactics is crucial for a set of reasons. First, gender is one of the main categories for social differentiation, and as such it has a major shaping influence on people's lives. Secondly, gender is a cultural system "with its own distinctive and regulatory regime" (Butler 2004, p. 40). In other words, understanding gender also requires specific concepts to gain insight into its systemic characteristics. Gender intermingles with other sociocultural categories (e.g. class, race, age, region) in various ways and, therefore, needs to be studied in its interrelationships with other categories.

## **4. The Evolution of Discourse Analysis**

reas of language study have evolved throughout the field of Linguistics and many other social sciences. Approaches to language study cover several core methods of text analysis as instances of actual language use. Though they slightly differ in strategies and principles, methods to text analysis lucidly provide more than one linguistic study for students, language and social researchers.

The Structuralists study language in terms of words and sentences uttered in a special speech community, and all its members share the same faculty. Accordingly, Ferdinand De Saussure (1966) sees language items as distinct signs presenting an idea or a 'meaning'. Simultaneously, Edward Sapir (1921, p. 15) perceives language elements as sequences of sounds. However, Brown & Yule (1983, p. 223) set forth that structural input is not always the source of comprehension. Widdowson (2007, p. 4) asserts that 'we identify a piece of language as a text as soon as we recognize that it has been produced for a communicative purpose.'

A much closer examination of Brown and Yule (1983, P. 1) assign two different functions to language: the transactional and the interactional. In the transactional function, people often use language to express feelings, moods, and attitudes. The interactional function tends to enable people to maintain social relationships. From this perspective, these communicative functions take the form of discourses that propose text production and comprehension (idem). Therefore, discourse as a process is undertaken in terms of the different functions that text structures present for writers and convey to readers.

Further approaches to text and discourse are presented by Halliday (1978). For Halliday (1978, cited in Brown & Yule, 1983), meaning is constructed at the 'interpersonal, ideational, and textual' level of the social context. The Interpersonal meaning shows what sort of social relationship is enacted between writers and readers, often described as 'tenor'. The Ideational meaning is more naturalized and objective. It provides descriptions to the type of a particular piece of information, including events, actions and participants, called 'field'. The Textual meaning is the mode through which texts are produced, whether spoken, written, or visual, i.e., a semiotic mode. Systemic Functional Linguistics, ergo, reveals how the linguistic level is related to the social context via the three meta-functions of language use.

#### *4.1. The Ideational Meaning and Transitivity*

Language in its ideational function concerns the transmission of ideas that represent our inner and outside experience of the world. The ideational meaning, which enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, consists of two components: the experiential meaning and the logical meaning. The former functions to represent experiences of participants and their actions in particular circumstances. The latter is the logical connection of such actions and events. The reflective experiential aspect of meaning is called Transitivity.

Transitivity is a grammatical system that deals with different types of processes which can be found in the language and its structures. It 'serves to encode how an action is performed, how the speaker or reader encode in language their mental representations of the world, and how they account for their experience of the world around them' (Wales. 1994). Halliday (1985) proclaims that transitivity is a semantic phenomenon revealed through processes, participants, and circumstances. For example, 'birds are flying in the sky' consists of "processes are flying, a participant birds and a circumstantial element in the sky" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 175). As shown in this sample, a participant is the doer of the action. The process is indicated by a verb. The circumstantial element determines the location where the doing takes place. Participants and the process are inherent elements in every experiential type of a clause, whereas circumstances are optional.

There are six types of processes: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential, summarized as follows:

- Material processes are processes of ‘doing’ which involves an Actor and often a Goal. The Actor means the one that does the deed, and the Goal implies directed act. Material processes are introduced by an action verb. Examples of action verbs are: walk, run, read, work, fight, drink, etc.
- Mental processes are processes of sensing which consist of two potential participants, Sensor and Phenomenon. Sensor is the conscious being that feels, thinks, or sees. The Phenomenon is what is sensed, felt, thought and seen. Therefore, Mental processes can be divided into three subtypes: perception (perceive, sense; see, notice, glimpse, hear, feel, taste, smell), affection (like, fancy, love, adore), and cognition (think, believe, suppose, expect, consider, know, understand).
- Relational processes are processes of being. There are three types of relational processes: intensive (x is a), circumstantial (x is at a), and possessive (x has a). Therefore, they can either describe a quality or represent a relationship between two entities.
- behavioral processes are of physiological and psychological behavior such as, breath, dream, smile, cry, cough, etc. which usually have one participant, the Behavior.
- Verbal processes are processes of saying which consist of three participants, the Sayer, the Receiver, and the Verbiage ‘content of the message’.
- Existential processes denote that something exists or happens. It is usually realized by ‘there’.

#### 4.2. *Transitivity in Literary Analysis*

Several studies have voiced concerns about the possibility to use the Transitivity model to analyze literary texts. “Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding’s *The Inheritors*” is a ground breaking example which tackles the patterns of Transitivity in analyzing participants, processes, and circumstances. This study illustrates how language is used to express worldviews that characters represent in the novel. Burton’s (1982) work on transitivity has motivated a range of feminist work which has tried to make use of linguistics in order to see the way that women are represented by writers. Burton conducts a transitivity analysis of a passage from Sylvia Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar* to show that the female protagonist characterized as a deficient and powerless character by the author.

The analysis of literary texts based on this model allows differences to appear between characters in the types of processes they accomplish. Participants, or rather characters, can be active agents generating change or only making sense of the world around them. Therefore, analysis will determine whether “a character is the passive ‘victim’ of circumstance, or is actively in control of the environment, making decisions and taking action” (Mills, 1995, p. 112).

Furthermore, in most texts of literature, Transitivity patterns can also be subject to social and cultural factors. Analysis possibly introduces different social structures and value systems in the different patterns of transitivity. Reflection upon gender roles that perpetuate gender stereotyping during analysis may give other insights upon cultural issues. So as to carry out the process of reflection and interpretation, some questions can be helpful:

1. Who are the characters playing in the text?
2. How does the language used by the characters differ?
3. How do these differences create gendered identities?
4. What cultural issues that these gender identities are displayed in the text?

## 5. Methodology

In this section, processes, participants, and circumstances are analyzed in an extract taken from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and an extract taken from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Both novels belong to two different literary movements. Characters in the selected passages are analyzed from a gender perspective following Halliday's Transitivity framework. So as to illustrate the characters' actions, representations and views, processes are written in bold type as a technique to make readers distinguish the types of processes used to represent characters. The sample analyses do not focus only on the dichotomy man vs. woman but also include the opposition of man vs. man. It applies the three steps developed by Burton (1982, p.202) which are (1) isolating the processes, and determining which participant (who or what) is doing each process; (2) determining what sorts of processes they are, and which participant is engaged in which type of process; and (3) verifying who or what is affected or seems to be affected by each of these processes. Transitivity basically presents how the world is perceived in three dimensions: the material world, the world of consciousness, and the world of relations. It categorizes potential number and the semantic roles assigned to the participants according to the nature of the processes.

### 5.2.1. Transitivity analysis of a selected passage from the Novel *Middlemarch*

#### *Dorothea vs. Casaubon*

*"Dorothea **felt** a little more uneasy than usual. In the beginning of dinner, the party being small and the room still, these notes from the mass of a magistrate's mind fell too noticeably. She **wondered** how a man like Mr. Casaubon would **support** such triviality. His manners, she **thought**, were very dignified... 'I **am reading** the Agricultural Chemistry," said this excellent baronet, 'because I **am going to take** one of the farms into my own hands,.'"* p.32

*"I **hope** you are thoroughly satisfied with our stay—I mean, with the result so far as your studies are concerned,' said Dorothea, trying to keep her mind fixed on what most affected her husband".* p. 357

*"Yes," said Mr. Casaubon, with that peculiar pitch of voice which makes the word half a negative. "**I have been led** farther than I had foreseen, and various subjects for annotation have presented themselves which, though I have no direct need of them, I could not preterm it."* p. 358

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*"Doubtless, my dear," said Mr. Casaubon, with a slight bow. "The notes I have here made will want sifting, and you can, if you please, extract them under my direction.' 'And all your notes," said Dorothea, whose heart had already burned within her on this subject, so that now she could not help speaking with her tongue. "All those rows of volumes—will you not now do what you used to speak of?—will you not make up your mind what part of them you will use, and begin to write the book which will make your vast I will write to your dictation, or I will copy and extract what you tell me knowledge useful to the world?: I can be of no other use."* Dorothea, in a most unaccountable, darkly feminine manner, ended with a slight sob and eyes full of tears (pp.358-359).

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*What I now wish you to understand is, that I accept no revision, still less dictation within that range of affairs which I have **deliberated** upon as distinctly and properly mine. It is not for you to interfere between me and Mr. Ladislaw, and still less to encourage communications from him to you which constitute a criticism on my procedure"* (pp. 666-667).

#### *Sample Analysis*

In order to unveil gender-related aspects, we focus on the processes used by the main characters in the novel. Throughout this short passage, we notice that both characters, Dorothea and Casaubon, use entirely different processes. The female character, Dorothea, frequently uses mental verbs as, felt, wondered, thought, wish, and believe. However, Casaubon's processes are mainly material such as, I am reading, I am going, and I went.

Dorothea's ardent desire to ask for a comfort state to her husband is seen through her frequent use of emotional verbs as, I hope. Even, her husband is always the Beneficiary of her actions, as no one else interests her but only him, though his insensitive language. In spite of using some material verbs, Dorothea's actions are directed to her husband. Meaning, the wife is very keen to help her husband at work, such as, *I will write to your dictation*, *I will copy and extract what you tell me*". Therefore, Dorothea's expected behaviour of crying, being frightened and disappointed is imposed from her husband's mysterious and negative use of power.

Casaubon, over again, in this sample passage mostly uses material processes identified in the clauses. Yet, the processes highlight his powerful position over the female character. The next point observed is that Casaubon processes, in one of these extracts, are virtually negative directed to his wife *'this is not the first occasion'*, *'I accept no revision'*, *'It is not for you to interfere'*. Such actions identify him as a strict and selfish man, followed with feelings of anger and negative attitudes. They also show his independent character as well his domination over the female, illustrated through his narrow image of Dorothea.

#### 5.2.2. Transitivity analysis of the selected passage from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

##### *Marlow vs. the Africans*

*Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair...The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die. They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now— nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of the eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. (Conrad, 2002, pp. 25-26).*

##### *Sample Analysis*

Participants in the first extract evolves around the Africans and the narrator Marlow. The most remarkable thing is that the group of Africans, as noticed in the subjects and objects of some sentences, are represented through their body parts "black bones, the fingers, the eyelids" and some other strange names "black shapes, the helpers, black shadows, moribund shapes". The narrator is characterized through the personal pronoun "I".

The processes which indicate the actions performed by the participants are distributed into material, relational, behavioral (or physiological), and mental. The material processes mostly consist of verbs in the passive voice past 'brought, lost, fed, sickened' that show a

serious moral indictment and a physical force imposed upon the Africans. Some of the relational processes identified by the auxiliary “to be” in the past simple as in, “they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly” are used to describe the Africans. The behavioral processes in “crouched, lay, sat, leaning, clinging, half coming out, half effaced, went off on all fours, were dying” resemble the passiveness and apathy of these people. In almost all of these, the Africans are denied speech since there is no verbal processes. This makes them being portrayed as phantoms deprived from any aspects of humanity including language. The mental processes are divided into perception ‘‘began to distinguish, saw, glancing’’, cognition as in ‘‘found’’, and “I stood horror-struck”. Such mental processes are ascribed to the narrator Marlow.

As regards to circumstances, they help to give thorough descriptions of the atmosphere in which the story is taking place. The circumstances found in the first extract, such as “within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair, in greenish gloom” show the extent to which the Africans live in harsh conditions under the mercy of the colonizer. As the passage is loaded with metaphors, the narrator also observes the Africans on the verge of dying “had withdrawn **to die**”.

### *5.3. Results: Reflections on Gender and Cultural Issues*

#### *Passage 1*

The passage is a good example of the Victorian patriarchal society. The construction of both characters Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon, in the first extract taken from the novel *Middlemarch* written by George Eliot is complex. This complexity often results in a kind of struggle and a stark contrast between the male and female dichotomy in the story.

Based on our analysis, we notice that their actions are totally different. Casaubon is passionate with a life of action in the public sphere. He exerts a kind of linguistic coercion upon his wife Dorothea “*It is not for you to interfere between me and Mr. Ladislaw, and still less to encourage communications from him to you which constitute a criticism on my procedure.*” He frequently exercises power through his knowledge and status. His actions, ergo, become particularly restrictive and suffocating for Dorothea who “*in a most unaccountable, darkly feminine manner, ended with a slight sob and eyes full of tears*”. Therefore, masculinity, in this passage, is defined by the construction of a relationship between power, knowledge, and status. Yet, Dorothea’s actions are mostly emotional. Dorothea, as a wife, is keen to be obedient and subservient to her husband though she earns disapproval rather than ardent appreciation from him. She attempts to become involved in her husband’s life work “*I will write to your dictation, or I will copy and extract what you tell me*”.

Therefore, these conflicting gender roles are the result of the oppressive expectations that the patriarchal society places on women. Marriage in such a society seems to be dominant and unsympathetic under the legacy of the husband. In brief, difference in language choice endorses gender inequalities. The character Casaubon is a symbol of male patriarchy and oppression whereas Dorothea represents a woman who struggles such discursive practices in society.

#### *Passage 2*

In the second extract, taken from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the characters are divided into the Africans and the narrator Marlow. The narrator’s use of parts of the body “the eyelids, the fingers, black bones” makes the Africans look as non-human who are

represented as nothing more than “black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees”. In this extract, the narrator stereotypes the Africans as savage and primitive.

Therefore, the passage identifies two different societies: The African and The European. Marlow’s attitude toward black Africans is complex. As we noticed during our former analysis, the narrator refers some aspects of human beings as feeling and thinking to himself rather than to the black people “*I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes*”. In fact, the narrator is only telling what he observes. He is horrified for their dead spirit “*they were dying slowly*”, “*brought from all the recesses of the coast*”, “*lost in uncongenial surroundings*”, struggling to maintain a semblance of self-control. His description of the natives is graphic and effective. Every depiction reflects the mental and the physical mal-treatments to which they were subjected by the more “enlightened” outsiders. The narrator’s image of the Africans who makes no attempt to minimize the harshness of the conditions reflects the ethnocentrism of the European society.

As it is noticed in the passage, the narrator does not identify the gender of the black people, but, instead, he describes them with strange names as “creatures and black shadows”. The absence of the gender identity of the Africans replicates the dominant ideology of the Europeans to suppress these dehumanized people destroying their culture and pertinence to a certain society.

## **6. Suggestions for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language**

Issues of gender awareness and cultural identity can be explored in the EFL classroom through interaction with literary works representing different gender views, stereotypes, representations and roles which differ from one culture to another. Furthermore, learners ought to be acquainted with the analytical tools appropriate for unveiling such gender-related issues. Such procedures connect Literature with EFL pedagogy courses where students are supposed “to post a series of anonymous gender narratives, one from a female and one from a male point of view” (Donnerstag, J., 2007: 236 In. Cornill, H. & Volkmann, L.)

The use of the Transitivity framework can make the task for teaching literature stimulating and thought-provoking. It can “reduce the burden on students and help them provide evidence for intuitions that the teacher has guided them to.” (McCrocklin, S. & Slater, T., 2017: 92). The framework is also vital in the analysis of characterization. Accordingly, Students can disclose power relations among characters exploring which characters are associated with doing, being, feeling, thinking, etc. They can further reflect upon clichés and prejudices of women and men characters. While performing text analysis, teachers guide students referring to a body of questions, proposed by Volkmann (2010: 175), so as to enhance reflection and interpretation skills:

- What types of roles do women and men have in a text?
- What values and power positions are attributed to men and women in the text?
- What are the attitudes towards women held by the male characters and vice versa?
- Is one gender given more prominence or dominance in a text?
- Are the text’s topics, imagery, style, etc. more “feminine” or more “masculine”? what assumptions do we base our gender ascriptions on?
- Does the text offer glimpses of a less oppressive society, a “gender utopia”?
- How are differences between male and female characters constructed?

While connecting learners with the enjoyment of literature, teachers can further develop students’ reading and writing skills throughout the different practical procedures of the Transitivity framework including analysis of participants, processes and circumstances. Exposing learners to gender-related issues using the Transitivity model, teachers offer



further incentives for open discussions. At this stage, a set of questions are suggested to be used for practical interpretations (Volkman, L., 2010: 169):

- What about the presentation of women?
- What about female authors?
- What about the feminine way of writing, reading and interpreting?
- What about the presentation of men?
- What about gender as a cultural construct?
  - What about the complex interrelationship between gender, race, ethnicity and class?

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, we introduced the possibility to use the Transitivity framework, which is part of the ideational meaning in Systemic Functional Grammar, to analyze literary texts so as to probe gender issues. The analyses are displayed on texts taken from two novels belonging to different literary periods. While the novel *Middlemarch* written by George Eliot belongs to the Victorian Literature, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* relates to Colonial Literature.

Analyzing patterns in transitivity choices makes more general statements about the way characters view their position in the world and their relationship to others. As well as signaling a move away from traditional concerns with the beauty of the language of literary texts to a concern with the ideology encoded therein, the study of literary texts from a gender perspective gives us flashbacks about how society and culture provide common-sense knowledge about men and women's representation and the roles they play in society.

Finally, we recommended that this method seems to be a working pedagogical tool for students which may increase students' interests, motivation and involvement in the learning process. As The Transitivity Analysis is initiated at the linguistic level, this may facilitate students' understanding of the language of the literary text. The teacher, hence, can provide useful strategies to guide students during the analysis process starting with characters, moving to processes, and, finally, circumstances. This pedagogical strategy can be fulfilled through tasks and guiding questions in order to simplify the operation. Thereafter, the teacher makes students reflect upon each individual use of language choice. Students, then, will be able to construct their interpretations upon gender differences, roles, bias, sexist language relating them to socio-cultural issues.

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