

COURSE:
MULTIMODALITY IN LITERARY TEXT

Representing Action: Transitivity and Verb Processes

Lecture 8

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Learning Objectives

1. Introduction to representing action through transitivity
2. Six processes of transitivity model:
Material, Behavioral, Mental, Verbal, Relational, Existential
3. Case of representing people

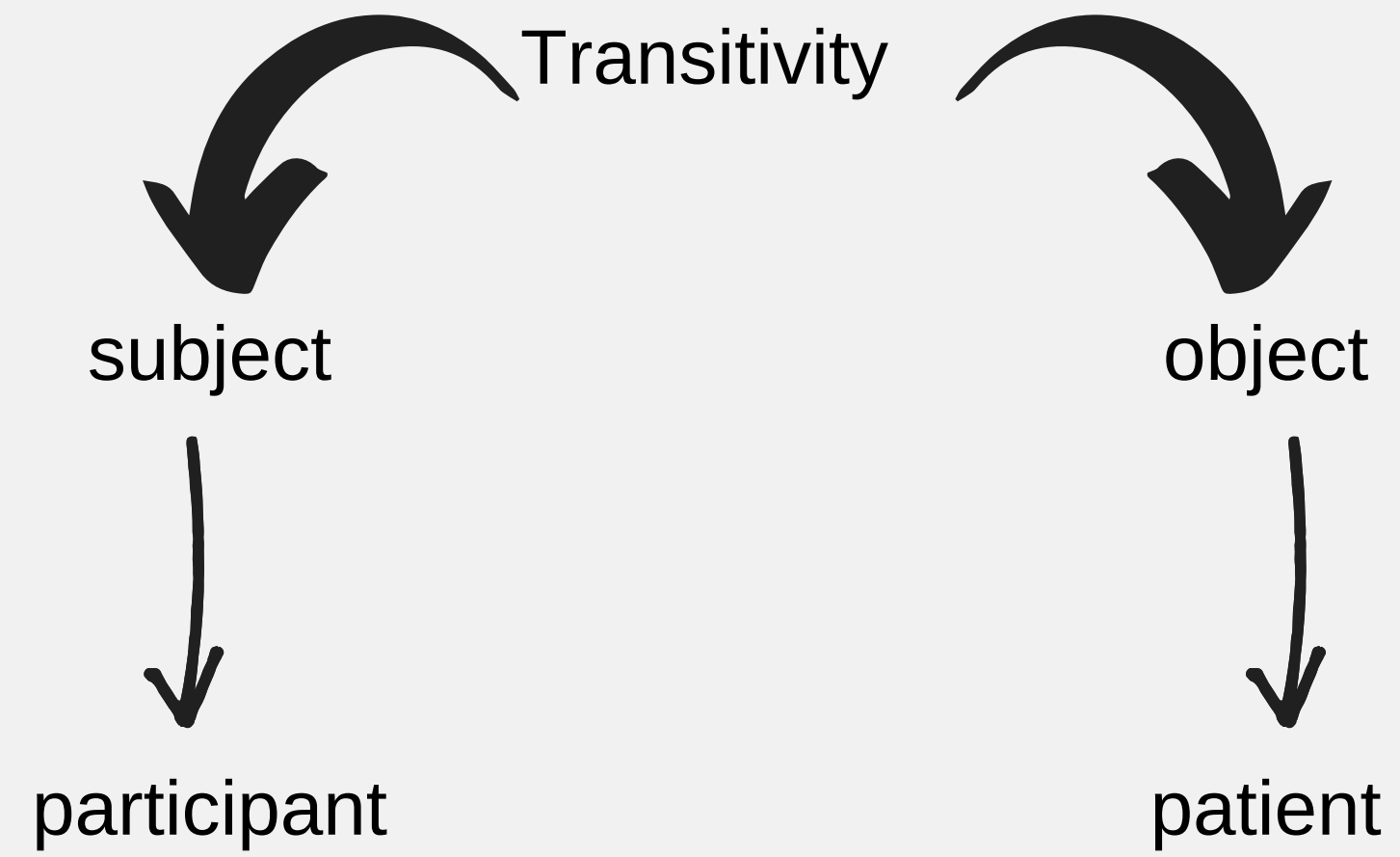




Introduction to representing action through transitivity

Transitivity representation is how people are represented as doing something or doing nothing. Transitivity is a study about the depiction of people as doing what to whom in what way.

Machin and Mayr, 2012



Halliday in her book Introduction to Functional Grammar (2004) emphasizes that the actor or participant can choose which the language grammar to use according to the social circumstances. This is where the transitivity plays a significant role in making meaning of the language.

Then, the **transitivity analysis** is a powerful basis to see both:
what is included in the text and excluded from the text.



“Police killed a demonstrator”

“A demonstrator killed by police”

“A demonstrator killed”

The change from active to passive conceals the actor or agent.



From active to passive

- a. She **was arrested**, of course, for stealing.
- b. People whose application to remain in Britain **had been turned down**.
- c. Presumably the £200 million a year cost that **was estimated**.
- d. Whose applications **have been rejected** time and again.
- e. **The assistance given** to these people **must be provided** in kind.






active voice is often use to expose the minority group members, especially if they do bad things (van Dijk in Machin Mayr, 2012). Their role is not mitigated through passive voice, but strongly emphasized trough active voice.

“Muslims win a transfer out of too ‘white’ jail.”

“Terrorism convicts granted move from ‘white’ jail.”

→ Both sentences express negativity toward the actor or agent in an active sentence form. The agent in the first sentence is mentioned as ‘Muslim’ while in the second one mentioned as ‘terrorist.’ This agent is exposed as something negative because prisoners should not be given any privileges, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or any other identities attached to them.

Machin and Mayr (2012) also elaborated the **three main aspects of meaning** when studying the agency (who does what to whom) and action (what happens):

- 
1. **Participants:** can be individuals, objects, or ideas involved in the action.
 2. **Processes:** represented by verbs which describe the actions.
 3. **Circumstances:** can be in adverbs or prepositional phrases, that tells us where, when, and how the actions occur.

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**Six processes of transitivity
model**

Halliday (2004, 282) introduced six processes of transitivity model:

1. **Material:** things happen (actor, process, and the goal)
 2. **Behavioral:** actions or behavior process.
 3. **Mental:** thoughts and emotions (senser, process, and phenomenon)
 4. **Verbal:** speaking and communicating (the sayer, process, and receiver)
 5. **Relational:** connections between the carrier, process, and attribute or value.
 6. **Existential:** Existent process.
-

1

Material Processes

Material process elaborates a **process of doing** (Machin and Mayr, 2012). It involves actions, either concrete or abstract, that lead to a certain result. This process has two main participants which are **the actor and the goal**.

The New York Times

***2 Police Officers Killed in Connecticut
After a Suspicious 911 Call***

Figure 1 (Gold, M., et al., 2022)

Machin and Mayr (2012) added that material processes can also involve beneficiaries, such as when someone does something for someone else.

For example,

"The architects build the office building for a client,"

"office building" is the **goal** and "client" is the **beneficiary**.

Material processes can also be connected to something unaffected by the process, like

"I am working on a research grant,"

where "research grant" is linked to the **process** but is **not the main goal**.

2

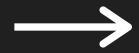
Mental Processes

Mental process is elaborated the process of sensing.

Machin and Mayr, 2012

It can be classified into three (Machin and Mayr, 2012):

1. **Cognition:** verbs use of thinking, knowing, and understanding.
2. **Affection:** verbs use of liking, disliking, and fearing.
3. **Perception:** verbs use of seeing, hearing and perceiving.



‘Women are often overthinking about their spouse cheating on them.’

“All parents are worried and never want their teenagers’ children to be part of free-sex and drugs cases.”

In some cases, mental process talks not only about action but also **reaction**. This is about how reactions are portrayed in discourses. In certain social contexts, reactions are more important than actions (Machin and Mayr, 2012).



Reactions can be found in the following expressions: “need”, “want”, “think”, “know”, “understand”, “respond”, “react”, etc.

3

Behavioral Processes

Behavioral process elaborates the physical and psychological aspects, such as: watching, tasting, staring, dreaming, breathing, coughing, smiling, and laughing.

Machin and Mayr, 2012

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Verbal Processes

Verbal processes are expressed through the verb 'to say' and the other same meaning verbs. A verbal process typically consists of three participants: sayer, receiver, and verbiage.

Machin and Mayr, 2012

The sayer is the person or thing speaking which can be human or human-like, or even an inanimate object/thing.

→ The person or thing that the verbal process is directed at is called a **receiver**.

Verbiage is a way to express these verbal processes in noun way or change the verb into noun.

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Relational Processes

Relational processes in language convey information about states of being or how things relate to each other. Relational processes help us present things as 'facts,' even if they could be seen as opinions.

Machin and Mayr, 2012

News | Israel-Palestine conflict

Ukrainians stand with Israel amid war with Hamas, despite grievances

Historic ties between Kyiv and Tel Aviv appear stronger than recent disagreements over weapons deliveries as Ukrainians express support for Israel.

Figure 2 (Mirovalev, M., (2023))

**The
Guardian**

Forensic marking to protect England's shipwreck sites from thieves

Historic England announces scheme to deter would-be criminals from treasures at shipwreck sites

Figure 3 (Brown, M., 2023)



Existential Processes

Existential processes represent that something exists or happens. These processes use common verbs such as: exist, arise, or occur, and have only one participant in a sentence. This participant, which is indicated by 'there is' or 'there are', indicates a nominalized action or certain phenomenon.

Machin and Mayr, 2012

“There is a fight between law enforcers and students.”

→ “the students were attacked by the law enforcers.”

“the students were attacked.”

“the students injured”

Multiple Diversions Occur at Manchester Airport Due to Damaged Runway

Figure 4 (Field, J., (2022), Aviation Sources News)

03

Adjuncts

The lexical choices or words to describe adjuncts, or additional details, have big effect on how people were seen as active participants in society. Adjuncts are simply lexical items or words that can be used to give more information about things as well as to modify them.

Machin and Mayr, 2012



“Routinely involved in assessing and recording the extent of perineal trauma ... and being responsible for initiating appropriate interventions and treatment.”

Machin and Mayr (2012)



“Midwives are expected to make assessments regarding management of perineal trauma that are vitally important to the long-term health of women. It is common practice and a generally accepted rule within many maternity units. Perineal repair is recognized as a role of the midwife.”

Machin and Mayr (2012)



Figure 5 (Mellya, M.F., (2023), Netflix)

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, we've highlighted the value of examining text to understand what participants are depicted as doing, both through language and visuals. This analysis helps us uncover the hidden messages within the text. We've introduced categories for breaking down actions, providing a more precise view of power dynamics, humanization, and other underlying issues tied to the text's ideology.

Furthermore, we've noted that there can be differences between how actions are represented linguistically and visually. For instance, a soldier might appear thoughtful and watchful in a visual representation, while the text describes them as behaving aggressively. In such cases, we can explore how these elements work together to convey specific discourses. One practical method for this analysis involves creating tables to compare the actions assigned to different participants.



Thank you



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Figure 1

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Figure 2

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Figure 3

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Figure 4

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Figure 5

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