

**Investigation of the Transitivity System Operating under the
Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) Model to Reveal the
Differential Impact of the Prophecies in
William Shakespeare's *Macbeth***

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Abstract

The paper aims to study the Transitivity System under the Systematic Functional Grammar of CDA operating in the selected discursive sections of the tragic play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays occupy the peak among the plays ever written in the history of English Language and Literature. The style, tone, and way of constructing the discourse reveal Shakespeare's mastery and command over the language. The representation of the Elizabethan era in his writings through the brilliant characters in his plays exhibit the capacity of the man to go deep into human psyche. He leaves much for the audience for their imaginative exploration and thereby enhances the curiosity about the fate of the play. Critics argue that Shakespeare is 'alive for our time, and not restricted to his own'. The use of the Transitivity system under Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) tool of CDA will enable to bring out a theory of language in use in the discourse based on motivation, purpose and choice. The characters in the play are diverse and unique in their psychological motives. This is reflected in their dialogues with the choice of language in varying situations and circumstances. The analysis of the transitivity system occurring in the discourse through the dialogues of the major characters of the play will enable to bring out an insight into the ideational and interpersonal functions. This paper focuses on the prophecies of the three witches which appear in the first act of the play and the differential influence of the same on the minds and expressions of Macbeth and Banquo.

Keywords: *Transitivity, participants' role, Systematic Functional Grammar, Macbeth, discourse, corpus.*

I. Introduction: The Major Objective

The study is undertaken to explore the transitivity system operating in the selected corpus, decipher the psychological interpretation of the prophecies of the witches by the three chief characters and thereby examine the power relations. These objectives will be met by the identification and classification of the verbs into the transitivity process types and also by a comparative study of participants' role in the discourse with the aid of Michael Halliday's transitivity framework model.

II. Macbeth: A Brief Outline of the Play

This famous play by William Shakespeare revolves around the themes of ambition, power, deceit and murder. The chief protagonist of the play Macbeth is foretold by the three witches as he returns from the battle about his rise to the power of king in immediate future. While prophesying the same, the witches also envisaged that the following generation of kings will descend from Banquo, Macbeth's friend and fellow army man. Instigated, impelled and constantly exhorted by his wife, Macbeth killed King Duncan acting against his nature of being '*full o' the milk of human-kindness*' to rise to the 'great' power. He further sent mercenaries to kill Banquo and his sons and set clear the position of power for him and his lineage. Soon after, Macbeth visited the witches yet again to know more about what the future beholds. The witches assured that Macbeth can never be eliminated until the forest of Birnam moves towards his stronghold at Dunsinane and until he meets an enemy "not born of woman." Although impossible to believe, the witches' words came to be true in an unexpected turn of events as Malcolm's army moved towards Dunsinane carrying branches in front of them which seemed to be moving woods. At the final stage of the battle, Macbeth further came to know that Macduff was born out of the caesarian section of his mother. He fought back to defy the words of the witches but ultimately failed and ultimately lost his life at the hands of Macduff.

III. Working of the System of Transitivity

The system of transitivity helps in better understanding of any clause in a discourse. This is because the interpretation of the underlying transitivity processes in the clauses lead to a better semantic understanding of the ideational functioning of the language in use in the discourse. Expression of content and communication of required information are the chief features of ideational function of language. It emphasises on the clear and effective transmission of information for effortless and fast comprehension.

The transitivity process consists of three components. The components include (a) *Participants* (b) the *Process* and (c) the *circumstances* related with the process.

These transitivity process types can be further subdivided into six processes working in the clauses. The processes include:

- a) Material Process
- b) Mental Process
- c) Relational Process
- d) Behavioral Process
- e) Verbal Process
- f) Existential Process

a) Material Process

The processes of 'doing' something are expressed through Material Processes in the clauses. Material Process involves an 'ACTOR' or 'AGENT' i.e. the 'DOER' and may also involve a 'GOAL' or 'PATIENT' i.e., the 'DONE TO'. For example,

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ACTOR	PROCESS: MATERIAL	GOAL	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>The public</i>	<i>plundered</i>	<i>the bank</i>	<i>as the revolts turned violent.</i>
Subject	Finite/Predicator	Complement	Adjunct

b) Mental Process

The Mental Processes in the clauses demonstrate the concepts of affection, perception and cognition which cannot be investigated or replaced by *do*. Unlike the material process, the participants involved in the mental process include the SENSER and the PHENOMENON. The SENSER is the being who feels, thinks and sees, whereas, the PHENOMENON is what is felt, thought and seen. Therefore, the principal sub types of the Mental Process are:

- a) Perception: seeing, hearing, listening, etc.
- b) Affection: Hurting, worrying, liking, etc.
- c) Cognition: Believing, puzzling, understanding, knowing, etc.

Examples from the subtypes of above mental processes are:

SENSER	PROCESS: PERCEPTION	PHENOMENON	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>We</i>	<i>heard</i>	<i>the sound</i>	<i>of the falling blocks from the terrace.</i>
Subject	Finite/Predicator	Complement	Adjunct

PHENOMENON	PROCESS: AFFECTION	SENSER	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>The loud sound</i>	<i>hurts</i>	<i>my ears.</i>	-
Subject	Finite/Predicator	Complement	Adjunct

SENSER	PROCESS: COGNITION	PHENOMENON	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>I</i>	<i>understand</i>	<i>your problem.</i>	-

Subject	Finite/Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
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c) Relational Process

Relational Processes express the process of being, the presence of something. The various types of these processes are expressed by different ways of being, namely,

1. Intensive 'x is a' (relationship of sameness between two entities)
2. Circumstantial 'x is at a' (reference of location, time, manner)
3. Possessive 'x has a' (indication of ownership)

Each of the above can be further subcategorized into:

1. Attributive ('a is an attribute of x'): The participants present are CARRIER and ATTRIBUTE.
2. Identifying ('a is the identity of x'): The participants present are IDENTIFIED and IDENTIFIER.

The mental processes can be demonstrated through some examples:

TYPES	MODE	
	ATTRIBUTIVE	IDENTIFYING
INTENSIVE	<i>The view is breathtaking.</i>	<i>Mr. Ghosh is the librarian. The librarian is Mr. Ghosh.</i>
CIRCUMSTANTIAL	<i>The cultural program is scheduled on Friday.</i>	<i>The day after tomorrow is Friday. Friday is day after tomorrow.</i>
POSSESSIVE	<i>Mr. Ghosh has two jets.</i>	<i>The two jets are Mr. Ghosh's. Mr. Ghosh owns the two jets.</i>

Further instances of the modes with specification of the participants and processes are as follows:

1. **Attributive Clauses and the**
2. **Specification of the elements.**

ATTRIBUTIONS	CARRIER	PROCESS	ATTRIBUTE
Intensive	<i>The view</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>breathtaking.</i>
Circumstantial	<i>The cultural program</i>	<i>is scheduled</i>	<i>on Friday.</i>

Possessive	<i>Mr. Ghosh</i>	<i>has</i>	<i>two jets.</i>
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3. Identifying Clauses and the Specification of the Elements

ATTRIBUTIONS	IDENTIFIED	PROCESS	IDENTIFIER
Intensive	<i>The librarian</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Mr. Ghosh.</i>
Circumstantial	<i>The day after tomorrow</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Friday.</i>
Possessive	<i>The two jets</i>	<i>Are</i>	<i>Mr. Ghosh's.</i>

A unique feature of the identifying clauses in the relational processes of transitivity is that the participants, namely, the Identified and the Identifier can interchange their positions without any effect in the semantic interpretation of the clause. Example in relation to the above cited identifying clauses are as follows:

ATTRIBUTIONS	IDENTIFIER	PROCESS	IDENTIFIED
Intensive	<i>Mr. Ghosh</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>the librarian.</i>
Circumstantial	<i>Friday</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>day after tomorrow.</i>
Possessive	<i>Mr. Ghosh</i>	<i>owns</i>	<i>two jets.</i>

d) Behavioural Process

The verbs in the clauses exhibiting behavioral processes are mainly intransitive, thereby bearing only one participant, referred to as BEHAVER. However, there might also be a second participant in rare cases wherein it is regarded as BEHAVIOUR. The verbs denote both the material and mental aspects which are inseparable from the verbal structure. Therefore, it can be concluded that the behavioral processes have elements of psychological and progressive characteristics which answers the question-what did the Behavior do?

Example may be,

BEHAVER	PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL	(BEHAVIOUR)
<i>The winning team</i>	<i>jumped</i>	<i>(with joy.)</i>

e) Verbal Process

This process refers to the act of utterance or saying. The utterance includes all kinds of symbolic exchange of meaning. The verbal processes essentially involve a SAYER and a RECEIVER/ TARGET as its participants. For example,

SAYER	PROCESS: VERBAL	RECEIVER/ TARGET	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>The employees</i>	<i>shouted</i>	<i>at the Manager</i>	<i>protesting against poor working conditions.</i>
Subject	Finite/Predicator	Complement	Adjunct

f) Existential Process

The existence or happening of something is represented through the existential process in a clause. These clauses make use of the verb *be* and other verbs expressing existence like arise, exist, hang etc.

	PROCESS: EXISTENTIAL	EXISTENT: ENTITY	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>There</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>a book</i>	<i>on the table.</i>

	PROCESS: EXISTENTIAL	EXISTENT: ENTITY	CIRCUMSTANCE
<i>Life</i>	<i>exists</i>	<i>in other planets.</i>	-

IV. Corpus Selection

The corpus for the study includes careful selection of utterances of prominent characters in the play. The speeches of these characters are the consequences of the prophecies of the three witches who have a direct or indirect impact on their behaviour.

Corpus:

1. ACT 1, SCENE 1

- (a) Banquo: '*...The instruments of darkness tell us truths; Win us with honest trifles, to betray'sin deepest consequence.-*' (123-125).

(b) Macbeth: ‘Two truths are **told**, As happy prologues to the swelling act of the imperial theme....’ (126-130)

2. ACT 1, SCENE 5

a) Lady Macbeth: (reading Macbeth’s letter to her): “They **met** me in the day of success, and I have **learned** by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I **burned** in desire to **question** them further, they **made** themselves air, into which they **vanished**. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it came missives from the king, who all-**hailed** me ‘Thane of Cawdor,’ by which title, before, these weird sisters **saluted** me, and **referred** me to the coming on of time with ‘Hail, king that shalt be!’ This have I **thought** good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou might’st not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness **is promised** thee. **Lay** it to thy heart, and farewell.”

3. ACT 2, SCENE 1

(a) Banquo: ‘All’s well. I **dream’d** last night of the three weird sisters; To you they have **show’d** some truth.’ (19-21)

(b) Macbeth: ‘**Think** not of them;.....’ (22)

4. ACT 3, SCENE 1

(a) Macbeth: “... **Hechid** the sisters/When first they **put** the name of king upon me/And **bade** them speak to him. / Then, prophet like,/They **hailed** him father to a line of kings./Upon my head they **placed** a fruitless crown/And **put** a barren scepter in my grip,/Thence to be **wrenched** with an unlineal hand,/No son of mine **succeeding**. If ‘t be so,/For Banquo’s issue have I **filed** my mind;/For them the gracious Duncan have I **murdered**;/**Putrancors** in the vessel of my peace/Only for them; and mine eternal jewel/**Given** to the common enemy of man,/To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!....’ (58-72)

V. Distribution of the Systems of Transitivity in the Speeches

SL. NO	PROCESSES UNDER TRANSITIVITY SYSTEM	CHARACTERS	
		MACBETH	BANQUO
1	MATERIAL	Put, place, fill, murder, give, make, vanish, lay	Show
2	MENTAL	Think, learn, think, burn	Dream

3	VERBAL	Tell, bade, Refer, to deliver, promise, To question, hail	Tell
4	RELATIONAL	-	
5	EXISTENTIAL	-	-
6	BEHAVIORAL	Chid, Hail, wrench, murder, Salute, meet	Win, to betray

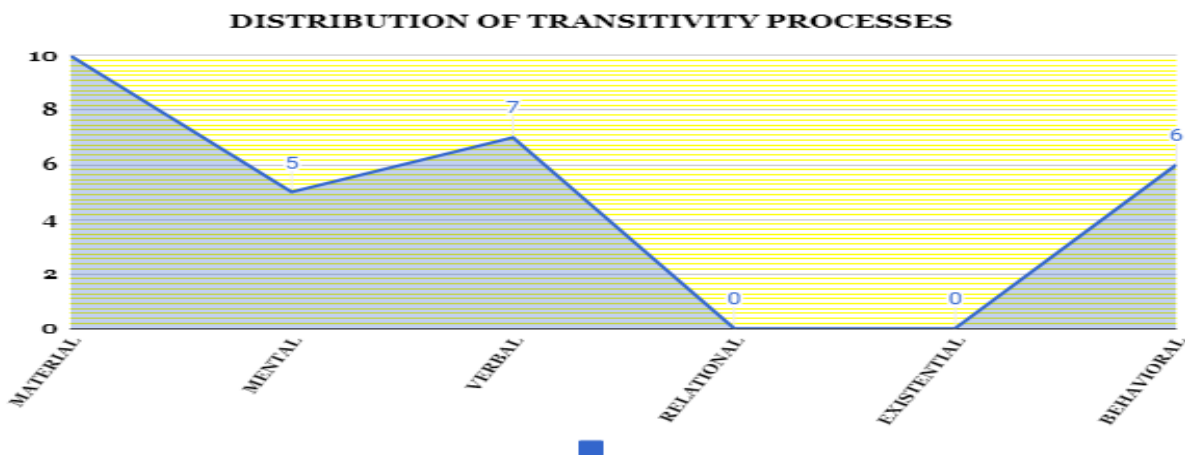
VI. Taggings of Participants' Role and Process Types in the Selected Speeches

1. *The instruments of darkness* [SAYER] tell [PROCESS:VERBAL] us [RECEIVER] truths [CIRCUMSTANCE].
2. *(The instruments of darkness)*[BEHAVER] Win[PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL] us with honest trifles [BEHAVIOUR], to betray's[PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL] in deepest consequence [BEHAVIOUR].
3. *Two truths are told* [PROCESS:VERBAL] (by the witches) [SAYER].
4. *They* [BEHAVER]met [PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL] me in the day of success [BEHAVIOUR].
5. *I* [SENER]have learned [MENTAL PROCESS:COGNITION]by the perfectest report [PHENOMENON].
6. *I*[SENER]burned [MENTAL PROCESS:AFFECTION] in desire to question them further [PHENOMENON].
7. *They* [ACTOR] made [PROCESS: MATERIAL] themselves [GOAL] air [CIRCUMSTANCE].
8. *They* [ACTOR] vanished [PROCESS: MATERIAL] (into air).
9. *Who all* [SAYER]-hailed [PROCESS:VERBAL] me [RECEIVER]'Thane of Cawdor.
10. *these weird sisters* [BEHAVER] saluted [PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL]me.
11. *(The weird sister)* [SAYER]referred [PROCESS:VERBAL] me [RECEIVER] to the coming on of time with 'Hail, king that shalt be!'
12. *I* [SENER] thought [MENTAL PROCESS:COGNITION] good to deliver thee [PHENOMENON].
13. *Greatness* [CIRCUMSTANCE] is promised [PROCESS:VERBAL]thee [RECEIVER].
14. *Lay it* [PROCESS: MATERIAL] to thy heart [GOAL].
15. *I* [SENER]dream'd[MENTAL PROCESS:COGNITION] last night of the three weird sisters [PHENOMENON].
16. *They* [ACTOR]have show'd[PROCESS: MATERIAL]some truth [CIRCUMSTANCE].
17. *I* [SENER] think [MENTAL PROCESS:COGNITION] not of them.
18. *He*[BEHAVER]chid[PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL] the sisters.
19. *They* [ACTOR]put [PROCESS: MATERIAL]the name of king [GOAL] upon me.

20. (*Macbeth/I*)[SAYER] bade [PROCESS:VERBAL]them [RECEIVER] speak to him.
21. They [SAYER] hailed [PROCESS:VERBAL]him [RECEIVER]father to a line of kings [CIRCUMSTANCE].
22. They [ACTOR] placed [PROCESS: MATERIAL]a fruitless crown[GOAL].
23. They [ACTOR] put [PROCESS: MATERIAL] a barren scepter [GOAL] in my grip.
24. Thence to be wrenched [PROCESS: BEHAVIOURAL] with an unlineal hand [BEHAVIOUR].
25. I [ACTOR]filed [PROCESS: MATERIAL]my mind[GOAL].
26. For them the gracious Duncan[GOAL] have I [ACTOR] murdered [PROCESS: MATERIAL].
27. (*The witches*) [ACTOR]Put [PROCESS: MATERIAL] rancors[GOAL] in the vessel of my peace [CIRCUMSTANCE].
28. (*I* [ACTOR] have) Given[PROCESS: MATERIAL] to the common enemy of man[GOAL].

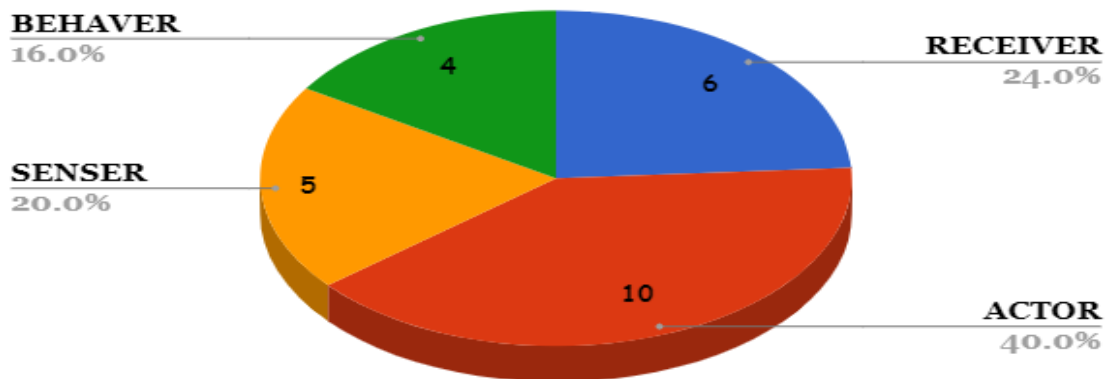
VII. Results and Findings

1. Distribution of transitivity process types in the selected corpus:



2. Role of participants in the selected corpus: a numerical distribution

DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS' ROLE



It can be observed that although the corpus selected for the study are utterances made by two important characters of the play: Macbeth and Banquo, 7 out of 10 times the role of ACTORS in their speeches are not played by themselves but by the three witches. This shows the severity of the impact of the prophecies of the witches in their minds, particularly Macbeth. Macbeth through the MATERIAL PROCESSES of transitivity talks about their supernatural activities and how they have disturbed his peace of mind by foretelling about the crown of kingship that awaits him. Banquo, on the other hand spoke to Macbeth by referring that the witches have ‘shown’ truth with their prophecies. In the remaining 3 contexts, Macbeth talks about how he had filled his mind with the thoughts of the imperial aim post prophecies of the witches.

The role of the RECEIVERS is generally assigned to the common man in general and to Macbeth and Banquo at times while referring to how the witches foresay about mankind and them. In all these contexts, the roles of the SAYERS are played by the witches with the aid of VERBAL PROCESSES of transitivity. On the other hand, Macbeth and Banquo are the chief participants to carry out the role of the SENSER whose utterances are influenced by the prophecies of the witches, thereby exhibiting the MENTAL PROCESSES of transitivity with respect to cognition and affection.

Finally, the participant role of BEHAVER are also majorly played by the witches in 3 utterances where the range of BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES of transitivity varies from meeting and hailing Macbeth as the future king to Banquo talking about how they speak truth about trifle incidents and later betraying in serious events.

The results clearly bring out the fact that the even though the utterances were made by characters like Macbeth and Banquo, the role of the active participants were majorly taken up by the three witches across various role identities. The power relations deciphered from the study show the powerful impact of the prophecies of the witches in the mind of Macbeth inspite of being

in such a position of high social power. The temptation to rise fostered by the constant persuasion by Lady Macbeth forced Macbeth to take the path of crime and deceit under the influence of supernatural creatures who have no societal existence.

VIII. Conclusion

Transitivity, thus, is the paramount concept in the representation of reality through spoken discourse. The process of transitivity exhibits the psychological complexities, power relations and inter-character relational positions which help the readers understand the discourse at a deeper level. This paper unravels such intricacies working in the selected discourse of utterances to comprehend how the prophecies of the three witches have controlled the minds of Macbeth and Banquo since the foretelling about their future.

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