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Transitivity Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Story "A Temporary Matter"

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Abstract

Systemic functional linguistics is well known and the most popular used approach in the discipline of linguistics to analyze the nature and function of the language. The present study uses the tool of transitivity analysis to analyze Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "A Temporary Matter" by examining different process types in the story. The study investigates and explains how two major characters are portrayed and represented through the language used in Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter". The research tries to explore why a particular type of process is used by the writer and how these linguistic choices in transitivity play an important role in the characterization of both the major character, Shobha and Shukumar in the story. The study aims to find the influence of Jhumpa Lahiri's being a diasporic woman writer on the choice of selection of process type in the characterization of the character of Shobha and Shukumar in the story.

Keywords: Transitivity Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistic, Jhumpa Lahiri, Short Story.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike animals, humans are gifted with the unique gift of language. Language as an integral part of human life enables humans to express and communicate. But the language is not just a medium which humans use to express and communicate "rather it is a social practice a way of doing things" (Kroger Wood 4), "a material form of ideology" (Fairclough 73), "a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (Halliday 15).

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theory of linguistics that claims:

Language or any other semiotic system, can be seen as a system of choices. Language users choose from a network of options in order to create a text, whether that text is written or spoken. What is then conveyed, the meaning of the text is dependent upon the choices made by the speaker from the options within the language system or in some cases, from what is not chosen (Teo 24).

Halliday(1994) believes that language expresses three main kinds of meanings simultaneously: "ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings". Language and its ideational meaning represent patterns of experience of the world and it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. This reflective experiential aspect of meaning is called transitivity (85). Transitivity is an analytical tool that foregrounds agency and makes silent "who does what to whom" (Teo 25). Halliday(1994) also proposes that "the aim of Systemic Functional Grammar has been to construct a grammar for the purpose of text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written, in modern English" (41).

The present study intends to use the tool of transitivity analysis to investigate the characterization of Shobha and Shukumar by examining different process types in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story "A Temporary Matter". The research will primarily focus on the analysis of the process type for the exploration of ideational meaning in the story and how it helps us to understand the characterization of the two characters in the story.

THEORY OF TRANSITIVITY

Traditionally transitivity used to be considered as a way of distinguishing between the verb based on whether they take an object or not. In traditional grammar, whether the verb takes an object or not is used to make the verb transitive and intransitive. But Halliday uses the concept of transitivity in a much broader sense. It is Halliday who

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first stated that transitivity should be regarded as a property of clauses rather than verbs. In his book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985), Halliday describes transitivity as follows:

A fundamental property of language is that it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of “goings-on”: of doing, happening, feeling, being. These goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of language and expressed through the grammar of the clause. This is the system of Transitivity. Transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognized in the language and the structures by which they are expressed” (101).

As transitivity is concerned with the representation of the mental picture that a writer has of the world, it involves “the transmission of ideas and therefore belongs to the ideational function”(Halliday101). There are three elements of transitivity: participants, process, and circumstances. Grammatically in general, the process is expressed by a verbal group, grammatically, in general, the process is expressed by verbal group, a participant by nominal group and circumstances are by the adverbial group. According to Halliday (1973), Transitivity is “the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his [sic] experience of the processes of the external world, and of the internal world of his [sic] own consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances” (134).

Further, Halliday (1994) adds transitivity system “is a set of grammatical systems which construes the world of experience into a manageable set of Process Types”(106). Under the concept of Transitivity, he classifies 5 major types of process: Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioural and Verbal. Transitivity is mostly analyzed for process type. The process is the most important and central aspect of transitivity. These processes are named and classified on the basis of what function they perform. Halliday defines “material process” as “processes of doing” (110). The example of which can be verbs like kick, run, paint, burn. Further, He defines “mental process” as “process of sensing”(117). Examples of these verbs are like see, feel, know, like. “Relational Processes” are defined as “processes of being”(119). Verbs like be, have, become falls under this category. Further, he classifies “behavioural processes are the process of (typically human) physiological and psychological

behaviour, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring.” (139). At last, comes the “verbal process” which is defined as the “process of saying”(140). Verbs like say told fall under this category.

SUMMARY OF JHUMPA LAHIRI’S “A TEMPORARY MATTER”

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the most important contemporary women diasporic Indian writers. She is well known for her collection of short stories and her novels which is the reason for her success. “A temporary matter” is one of the well-known stories of Jhumpa’s Lahiri which is published in her first story collection “Interpreter of maladies”. The story deals with topics such as detachment, grief, and lost love. The content is about a married couple called Shobha and Shukumar whose relationship has undergone a drastic change after the miscarriage of their child. The story starts with the informing notice that the electricity will be cut for one hour daily for 5 days in the locality of the house. From the very beginning through their small conversation the tension between the couple gets reflected. As the story moves on, the reader gets to know that Shobha and Shukumar have lost their child and that this loss has changed their life drastically. They start consciously ignoring each other. Shobha becomes a work alcoholic while Shukumar turns utterly passive. A communication gap comes in between their relationship. The sudden blackout of electricity forces them to come out of the shell. The one hour in which electricity was cut was a time in which they start interacting and for a while, they are together. On the suggestion of Shobha, they started playing a game in which they have to tell reveal one’s such a secret which the other person won’t know. In the darkness of the room, they open up with the dark secret of their person. In the end, the games which they started with general revelation finally lead to the biggest revelation of their life. Shobha reveals her decision that she wants to move on in their relationship as she has decided to shift to another flat. This revelation of Shobha hurts Shukumar. In response, he also reveals a fact that he never wanted to tell as he knew that this is something that Shobha always wanted to keep secret. But he revealed it by stating that he has held their child before they buried it. Their child was a boy. They had a boy child. And the story ends with the description that they both cried together for the things now they knew.

OBJECTIVE

To use the tool of transitivity analysis to

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investigate the characterization of Shobha and Shukumar by examining different process types in Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “A Temporary Matter” to explore the characters of Shobha and Shukumar by particularly highlighting the ratio of differences in the choice of the process which is made separately by Shobha and Shukumar in their separate clauses

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of that, the study collects the data from Jhumpa Lahiri’s short story “A Temporary Matter” for applying the tool of transitivity. This story comprises 423 sentences. For the analysis, the study divides the sentences into different clauses. Above all this research finds approximately 634 clauses, out of which 100 clauses are selected which contains 50 clauses are of Shobha and 50 of Shukumar respectively. Through the representation of the analysis of selected 100 clauses an attempt has been made to explore the transitivity patterns, particularly highlighting the ratio of the difference in the choice of the

Shobha

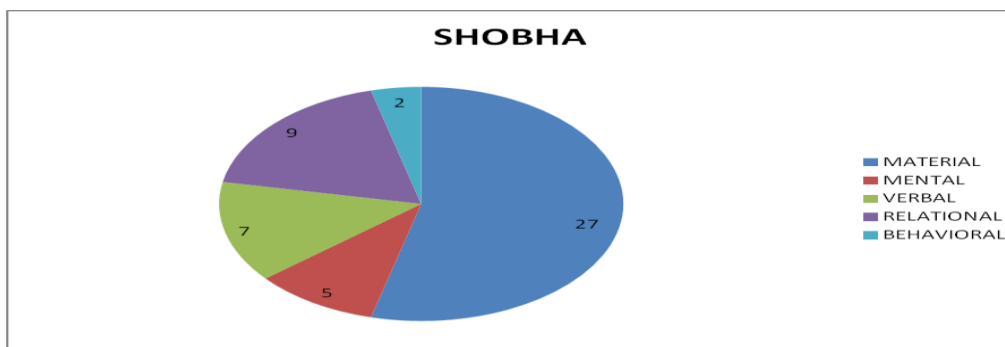
process which is made separately by Shobha and Shukumar in their separate clauses. The basis of the criteria for selection is partially random and partially on the basis of convenience. The important point is to highlight only finite verbs are examined in the selected clauses of Shobha and Shukumar.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As mentioned above in the methodology, the research has randomly selected fifty-fifty clauses of each Shobha and Shukumar. In the analysis of transitivity the research has on the one hand side found out that 27 out of Shobha’s 50 clauses are material, 9 are relational, 7 are verbal, 5 are mental and 2 are behavioural process type. And on the other hand side, it was found out that 23 clauses out of Shukumar’s 50 clauses are material, 19 are mental, 5 are relational, 2 are verbal and 1 is behavioural. The table below summarizes the result of the Transitivity Analysis:

The process type in Shobha’s selected 50 clauses are:

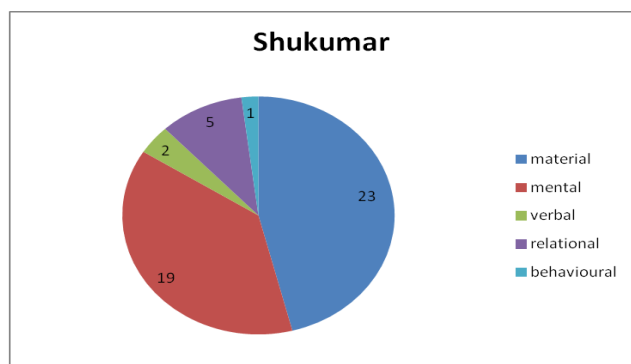
Process type	Number of clauses	Percentage of clause (%)
Material (Mt)	27	54
Mental (Mn)	5	10
Relational (R)	9	18
Verbal (V)	7	14
Behavioural (Bh)	2	4
Total	50	100



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Shukumar

Process type	Number of clause	Percentage of clause (%)
Material (Mt)	23	48
Mental (Mn)	19	36
Relational (R)	5	10
Verbal (V)	2	4
Behavioural (Bh)	1	2
Total	50	100

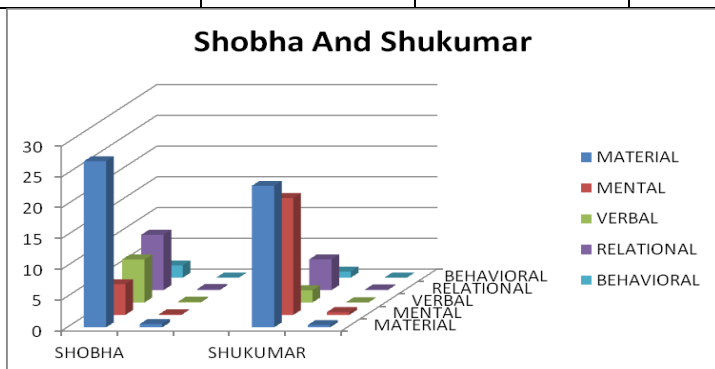


The comparison between the ratio of process type between Shobha and Shukumar:

Process type	Number of clauses	Percentages of clauses (%)	Process type	Number of clauses	Percentages of clauses (%)

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Material	27	54	Material	23	46
Mental	5	10	Mental	19	38
Relational	9	18	Relational	5	10
Verbal	7	14	Verbal	2	4
Behavioural	2	4	Behavioural	1	2
Total	50	100	Total	50	100



This finding reveals interesting aspects about both the characters in the story. The first thing that material process type is maximum and behavioural process type is minimum in both the cases which give the story the same foregrounding of analysis as both the character has same maximum and minimum process type which makes them stand on the same pedestal of analysis. . But if you compare the process type of both characters you will see Shobha has a higher percentage of material process in comparison with Shukumar. The material verb is best used to show power relations (Thwaite 1983; qtd in Poynton 64). With the attribution of the maximum material verb to Shobha and the maximum mental verb to Shukumar, the writer has intended to reverse the gender role. As generally women are considered more emotional in comparison with

men. On the one hand side, the maximum use of mental verbs in Shukumar's narrative shows that Shukumar is an emotional, sensitive, poor chap in the relation who still remembers the past time and is affected by the emptiness and estrangement the most. But on the other hand, she left the aporia for the other readers who want to interpret it differently. As the story is narrated from Shukumar's point of view the narration of the maximum material verb process of Shobha can show the limitation of Shukumar's vision that his male gaze can only see her action. He cannot see beyond the action. That is the reason why Shobha has fewer mental verbs and maximum material verb processes in the story. If the story had been narrated from Shobha's point of view then the scene and conclusion would have differed. For the fulfilment of the space in the

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Shobha narrative, the research finds more verbal and behavioural processes- As Jhumpa Lahiri has told the narrative from Shukumar's perspective but she has allowed access to Shobha's mind through her verbal process. So again and again through the verbal process, her inner thoughts, concerns, anxiety find an outlet.

The behavioural process is considered the blend of mental and material process types. The concentration of this blend more in Shobha also suggests to the reader that a more perfect blend of mental and material is found in Shobha. When Shukumar sees (Mn) Shobha look (Bh) in the story. This point can also be seen as a sign of the difference in the level of maturity in both the characters. Further, the relational verb process is meant to characterize and identify. This point reveals one more interesting aspect. On the one hand side, it shows the narration of the story from Shukumar's viewpoint but on the other hand side, the relational verb process is more about Shobha. It signifies the fact that the story gives more details of Shobha which you can see in her characterization. So the vacuum of her psychological insight which was missed in the mental verb process is again supported by the relational verb process.

CONCLUSION

So, the study concludes that one of the most emotional stories of Jhumpa Lahiri is actually a piece of high calculation and matriculation. The study finds that Jhumpa Lahiri who is an Indian Diasporic writer, settled in the United States, her culture and her upbringing in the USA and her postmodern age affect her choice of process type in transitivity analysis. In the characterization of both characters of the story "A Temporary Matter," she chose the option of process type on the basis of her social and cultural influences. Being brought up in American culture where everybody is running in haste; her character has been attributed with the highest material verb. In American culture, gender stands on equal pedestrian they share the equal in the pestering but traditional Indian scene is different so out of the influence of the both she has turned and twisted the gender role in a unique way where she has allowed both types of interpretations, on the one hand, she represents Shobha as more active, strong, practical where Shukumar appear emotional, sensitive and fragile. On the other hand, her lack of emotional attribution can always be limited to the limited traditional vision of male perception. So the analysis of the story with the framework of

transitivity is helpful in better understanding both the character and author's point of view. The research recommends that further research can also be done by analyzing other stories of Jhumpa Lahiri with the same transitivity framework.

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