

Transitivity Processes in the 2021 Commencement Speech of DepEd Sec. Leonor M. Briones

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ABSTRACT

Grounded on Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar, this study explores the transitivity system in the 2021 Commencement Speech of DepEd Sec. Leonor Briones. It specifically aims to identify the transitivity processes and the dominant process found in the Commencement speech and to analyze the linguistic functions in this transitivity system. Employing an explanatory mixed-method design, the results shows that material, mental, relational, and existential processes are present in the Commencement Speech. Among the four identified transitivity process, the dominant is the material process (65%). Moreover, it is revealed that material processes evident in the Commencement Speech display the speaker's intention to state facts about achievements in the past and the present in response to the Covid-19 crisis that beset the Philippines, to inspire Filipino learners and teachers amidst the challenges of the pandemic, and to acknowledge the critical issue Filipino learners have been facing.

INTRODUCTION

Language, as human beings' medium of communication, exerts a transformative influence on the people in society. Such influence depends on the language choice of the interlocutor in a discourse especially when writing a commencement speech for a specific group of audience. The language we are exposed to can change how we perceive things. Teo (2000:9, as cited in Darani, 2014) claims that it "becomes a potentially powerful site for the dominance of mind." The language used in commencement speeches is structured in such a way as to make it possible to relate to others our experiences of the world - the inner world of his consciousness and outer world. Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics provide us with a framework that captures meanings embedded in the transitivity system of the corpus under investigation. The concept of transitivity is used to classify verbs and clauses based on their relationship to other structural elements. Texts that are considered finished products, such as graduation message, can be analyzed in terms of their value, such as their specific meaning. Transitivity is a major concept in the ideational function of language. Other functions include interpersonal and textual. Because the thesis is based on meaning and is an interpretation of language forms, the authors adopt a "functional" grammar" (Zhang, 2017). It is through the analysis of the distribution of the different processes which make up the ideational function that enables a researcher to draw themes and meanings from the texts which are essential in revealing the speaker's intentions. Furthermore, language, such as the vocabulary used in speaking, can be utilized to influence or form relationships. Speech is a power manifestation, according to Pradiptha, Purwati, and Hadiati (2020), which implies that when someone gives a speech, he or she has the ability to affect how other people think about a certain topic (p. 23). To put it another way, the speakers can persuade the audience that they share the same thoughts. As a result, they may gain sympathy.

Prior research has demonstrated that the way instructions are delivered has a major impact on people's behavior (Antonakis et al., 2014), and that precise word choices are frequently used to alter public opinion (Lischinsky, 2011). Commencement speeches during the Covid-19 pandemic have been one of the types of discourse that could influence the perceptions of people especially those in the education sector.

While transitivity has been mostly applied in literary works, news articles and political speeches, few studies have investigated commencement speeches and how this type of written discourse can be used as a medium to communicate power to persuade people especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. To the knowledge of the authors, there has not been any study which investigated the transitivity system of commencement speech, and which was written by the highest official in the Education in the Philippines. Moreover, the researchers have taken an interest in the study of this text for another reason- the text was written and published during the pandemic in 2021, when there had been calls to freeze the previous academic school year due to the high infection rates of Covid-19 in the country. This paper adopts transitivity theory of SFL to study the text of Leonor M. Briones and analyze some processes in it and then explains their functions of constructing theme. The results of this study enrich students' knowledge on discourse analysis and enhance their ability to decode meaning in spoken and written discourse. In doing so, this will enhance their comprehension and will be able to raise their level of language proficiency. It is hope that this study will serve a part of the pool of knowledge in linguistics studies for deeper understanding of written public speeches in relation to English language teaching, and as an avenue of direction for future research.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theory that guided the researchers for this study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which was developed by MAK. Halliday in the 1960s. In SFL, language is regarded as mainly functional. In SFL, the structure or form of speech is vital to serving the function. Therefore, without a function, the structure would be useless. As Fontaine (2013) puts it, "anyone who has tried to communicate with someone using unfamiliar language or a two-year-old will know that grammatically correct is almost irrelevant. "In most cases, function matters more than structure. However, one needs to understand how language is structured to generate and analyze its function effectively. In totality, structure and function are part of any discourse; however, in SFL, the function is given more importance as a point for analysis to determine the meaning being conveyed.

Halliday (in Fontaine, 2013) suggests that "a theory of linguistics must incorporate the functions of language in use." This is not similar to the traditionalists who see grammar as a unit separate from the meaning and context. The systemic functionalists recognize language as a social semiotic system. It is a system in which its purpose and form are always propelled by its context and the speaker's communication goals.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), SFL is a broad term that includes many types of analyses. The various types of analyses are the analyses of expression, which focus on phonetics and phonology. Next is the analysis of content that deals with lexicogrammar and semantics. And lastly, the analyses of context. Context is a primary concern since it significantly impacts the process of making meaning. Someone does not speak or write in mere sentences but in meaningful units of texts influenced by contexts. To analyze a text, one should start with its context and type (register and genre). This has something to do with the three contextual variables, namely: field (the topic being talked about), tenor (the relationship of participants), and mode (the channel of communication). These variables help explain how an individual's use of language depends on functions.

Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) emphasize a metafunction dimension to language. Metafunctions consist of ideological, interpersonal, and textual components. The first refers to the ability of a language to interpret human experience in categories (experiential) and develop more complex patterns (logical). This metafunction primarily discusses the use of transitive relations or transitivity. It contains three main elements: process, participant, circumstance, and the ideation function. The interpersonal meta-function includes the ability of language to negotiate social roles and attitudes. Any speech can be analyzed using so-called mood, modality, speech act, and interpersonal metaphor. Lastly, the text feature is the ability of language to create discourse with themes and prosody and the use of coherent devices at both the lexical and grammar level. The current research focused on language's ideational metafunction. As previously stated, the ideational metafunction is comprised by transitivity. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), the transitivity system can develop and propagate discourses and ideologies that are unknown to listeners. Halliday's (1994, cited in Balog, 2019) transitivity model was used, which was modified from Machin and Mayr (2012). Six processes make up the transitivity system: material, mental, behavioral, and social, existential, relational, and verbal. Table 1 summarizes these six steps.

Process	Description	Example
Material	Material processes are the “process of doing.” The two main participants of these processes are the actor and the goal. Actor is the doer of the action, whereas the goal is the receiver of the action. Sometimes, these processes do not have a goal like intransitive verbs.	Arrest, Demolish, Found, Attack, Demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They attack the kingdom. Arrive, Advance, Move. • She arrived ontime
Mental	Mental Process are known as the “Process of sensing.” They are composed of three classes: cognition, affection, and perception.	Understand, Like, See. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The president understands the situation.
Behavioral	Behavioral processes indicate “Psychological and Physical behavior.” Laugh, Smile, Look, Watch of material and mental processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taste, Dream, Breathe, Laugh, Smile, Look, Watch. She laughs loudly
Verbal	Verbal Processes are verbs that are synonymous to the verb “to say.” Verbal processes have three participants: Sayers (speaker), receiver (addresses), and verbiage (statement)	Explain, Claim, Mention, Announce, Proclaim <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He announced the result of the test.
Relational	Relational Processes are expressed by the verb “to be” and “to have”. They expressed “Possession, equivalence, and attributes”	Become, Mean, Define, Symbolize, Has, Have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It symbolize eace and unity
Existential	Existential processes normally use the verb “to be” and other synonymous word such as “exist, arise or occur”. They usually show the existence of some phenomena.	To be, Exist, Arise, Occur <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many trees

Note: Adapted from “Transitivity analysis of selected privilege speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago,” P.S. Balog, 2019, *Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 7, p. 50-51.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed explanatory sequential mixed method research. It emphasizes the quantitative phase first and after this comes the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2011, cited in Toyon, 2021). The second qualitative phase is frequently used to explain the results discovered during the quantitative phase. Essentially, this design provided answers to the current research questions. Specifically, the quantitative design was utilized by determining the types of transitivity processes present in the corpus and the dominant process among them. On the other hand, the qualitative design was carried out by interpreting the functions in the meaning found in the corpus' transitivity system.

Corpus

There was only one speech that was used as the corpus of this study. The speech was downloaded from the website of the Department of Education (<https://www.deped.gov.ph>) to ascertain it was a copy of the original text. Overall, there are seven (7) paragraphs in the written speech. This speech was selected as the corpus of this study because commencement speeches are means where distinguished individuals take the opportunity to inform the audience of their accomplishments, to provide encouragements, to suggest actions to take and values to cherish such as hope, cooperation, truth, bravery, obedience, and the like. The second reason for selecting this type of speech is that this text has never been studied in the Philippines. By limiting the corpus into this type of speech in the Education Sector and the speaker's age, new findings could contribute to what has been established and investigated in public speeches by renowned political figures especially in the Philippine government. Although there were commencement speeches delivered by DepEd Sec. Leonor M. Briones in the past school years, this commencement speech has been the most recent. To assess that this corpus was valid for investigation, it was approved by an expert in the field of Discourse Analysis, who is a college professor at Western Mindanao State University, Zamboanga City, Philippines.

Data analysis and procedures

The first step in the process of the data gathering and analysis is obtaining the text under investigation from the website of the Department of Education. The identification of transitivity representations was conducted using the classification in table 1 above as a guide. The data were gathered by gathering narrative text clauses from Leonor Briones' commencement speech. The clause expressions were then observed and grouped into process type categories. The data were examined based on Gay, Mills, and Airasian's theory (Gay et al., cited in Marhamah & Mukhaiya, 2019). 1) In this theory, the first step was data management. Here, the text was handled by the researcher and downloaded from DepEd Website for its accuracy. 2). After checking the data, the researcher read all of them from the text to gain a better understanding of them. The researcher attentively read and observed each clause, as well as the process kinds. 3). Description of the data was next. The clause was split,

categorized, and sorted by the researcher depending on the types of transitivity systems discovered. 4) Classification of data specifically clause expressions in the narrative text were examined, categorized, and recognized based on their characteristics. The data was analyzed by counting the number of times each process kind of clause expression appeared in the text. The frequency of each category was calculated and were entered onto data sheets, and the results of the data collection were entered into a table. These tables were created to make identifying process categories easier. The percentage of process categories that were represented was calculated by the following steps. The total or entire amount was calculated. The sum by the number to be expressed as a percent was divided. The smaller number was usually divided by the bigger number. Then multiplied the result by 100 (Helmenstine, 2020). 5) Interpretation of data followed. After all the types were identified and written down, they were used as the bases to make inferences, interpretation, and conclusion. The most common process types discovered were categorized as categories that would describe Leonor M. Briones' Commencement Speech in 2020. 6). Writing the Report; based on the research findings, the conclusions of this study were reported.

RESULTS

Transitivity processes and its distribution in the Commencement Speech

Table 2 Transitivity processes in the Commencement Speech of Sec. Leonor Briones

Transitivity Process	Frequency	Percent
Material	20	65%
Relational	6	19%
Mental	3	10%
Existential	2	6%
Total	31	100%

The corpus of the study, the Commencement Speech of Sec. Leonor Briones, is comprised of seven paragraphs. In total, it has ten (10) sentences. Table 2 presents the transitivity processes identified in the Commencement Speech of DepEd Sec. Leonor M. Briones, their frequency and corresponding percentage.

The table above shows the transitivity processes in the Commencement Speech of DepEd Sec. Leonor Briones for 2020-2021, written for the graduation ceremony of public schools in the Philippines. As shown in the table, there are four transitivity processes identified in the corpus after the analysis- material process, relational process, mental process and existential process.

The table also shows that the most dominant transitivity process is the material process which accounts for 65% or 20 out of the total 31 processes found in the corpus. Relational process comes second with a total of 6 verbs (19%). Mental and existential processes are identified in the corpus with 3 (10%) and 2 (6%) verbs, respectively. These findings support what Halliday argues about material process as the dominant process in transitivity system. He claims that a discourse normally covers all six process types, but the dominating

process is material process, which refers to human action that ensures the existence of beings Li and Tao (2018).

Linguistic Functions in the transitivity system of the Commencement Speech Material Processes

Material processes are just doing things; they are the most common of the six processes (Yu, 2020). In this study, the high frequency of material process demonstrates that DepEd Sec. Leonor M. Briones chooses action words to reveal its theme and functions. According to Liping (2014, cited in 2019), material processes are the most employed transitivity process in political speeches because they may express facts, arguments, and feelings objectively and logically. The high frequency and density of the material process state a fact about actions that were effectively performed to overcome challenges in the past, actions that are effectively performed in the present and actions that will play a crucial role in future in response to the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic. These time-tested actions are intentionally selected by Sec. Briones to encourage and inspire Filipino learners and teachers that this pandemic is not new a challenge to them as heroes in the past have experienced and overcome them and are overcoming in the present. Examples that are typical of this process appear below.

...our learners persevered and made valuable gains for their future...(past)
While this historic season gave unprecedented challenges...(past)
this new breed of Filipino nation-builders – one that has experienced unusual obstacles
(past)
....and like those today who continue to go great lengths to assiduously provide support
for our education... (present)
they stand firm in Jose Rizal's words, "Without education and liberty(present)
Our heroes in the history of our country have faced many challenges without hesitation
and fear. (past)

In addition, the language choice of DepEd Sec. Leonor M. Briones in her Commencement Speech was aimed at inspiring the readers especially the learners and teachers in the public schools amidst the pandemic. This function of the transitivity system of her Commencement Speech in 2020 is parallel with Queen Elizabeth II's speech on Covid-19 which was delivered to instill inspiration to the people and to turn their doubts and dissatisfaction into satisfaction (Yu, 2020). Sec. Briones shows how the use of material process to exert power to inspire people. Thwaite (1983 as cited in Darani, 2014b) posits that if one desires to impose power, it is more effective to do so in the realm of 'doing' rather than 'sensing, saying, or 'behaving,' because it is more difficult to influence how people think than it is to influence how they act using physical force. Moreover, the material process present in the speech highlights her acknowledgement of the critical issue the Filipino learners have been facing. Similarity is found in Kamala Harris' speech where the use of material

processes showcases her recognition of the critical issue Americans have been facing (Liani et al., 2021).

Relational Processes

Relational process is evident in this DepEd Sec. Briones' Commencement Speech as it links one entity or activity to other entities or activities (Liani et al., 2021). There are six (6) instances where relational process is shown, and these appear in clauses. It comes second in rank to material process in terms of the frequency of the four identified transitivity processes. In this study, most of these verbs are linking verbs such as am, will be, be, are and is, which reveals DepEd Sec. Briones' confidence and positivity on overcoming the pandemic placed on the learners.

*I am confident that this new breed of Filipino nation-builders...
...will be vital in moving the country for the years to come.
Without education and liberty ...which are the soil and the sun of man...
...no reform is possible...
Let this ceremony be a reminder...*

Mental Process

About 10% of mental process are found in DepEd Sec. Briones' Commencement Speech, which are utilized to manifest her enjoyment or pleasure in greeting for having been completed and graduated from their elementary and secondary education. It could be seen that the secretary is praising and at the same time approving the milestone of graduating from the program. On the other hand, the use of mental process is intended to emphasize appreciation and gratefulness to the parents of the learners, whose invaluable support paved way for the success of their children in schools. The clauses below utilize mental process:

*I would like to express my warmest greetings congratulations to the graduating
learners...
...we are greatly indebted to the dedication that you have given to your children
during this crisis.
I am honored...*

Existential Process

In terms of the existential process which accounts for about 6% among the four transitivity process types, Briones utilizes them to acknowledge the achievements of the learners who were about to graduate in the elementary level, junior high school, and senior high school in the Philippines in 2020. Aside from giving recognition, she also uses existential process to display her gratefulness and pride for being one of those who have taken a crucial role for everything that the graduating learners have accomplished. As shown in the examples below, it is also through the existential process that she recognizes the victory of the learners over the challenges posed by the pandemic by being able to surpass them since its entry in the country in 2020.

...to be part of the accomplishments and milestones of this year's graduating batch.

Despite being tested in an extraordinary time...

CONCLUSION

The major goal of this work is to investigate the transitivity system of the Commencement Speech of Leonor M. Briones. Specifically, we examined transitivity processes present in the speech, the dominant process and the functions of the constructing theme. We have shown that material, mental, relational, and existential processes were present in the Commencement Speech. Among the four identified transitivity process, the dominant is the material process. Moreover, it is revealed that material processes evident in the Commencement Speech display the speaker's intention to state facts about achievements in the past and the present in response to the Covid-19 crisis that beset the Philippines, to inspire Filipino learners and teachers amidst the challenges of the pandemic, and to acknowledge the critical issue the Filipino learners have been facing. This speech is a display of her power through the employment of high frequency of material process to influence the perception of the learners and teachers about facing the pandemic while continuously pursuing education at the most critical times. Relational process was used to reveal DepEd Sec. Brione's confidence and positivity on overcoming the pandemic placed on the learners, while mental process was being utilized to pleasure in greeting for having been completed and graduated from their elementary and secondary education. Lastly, the utilization of existential process was aimed at acknowledging the achievements of the learners amidst the pandemic and at emphasize appreciation and gratefulness to the parents of the learners. Future work might yield different frequency and themes using a different framework of data analysis. These findings, in general, strongly support Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics that claim its purpose and form are always propelled by its context and the speaker's communication goals.

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