

## A Stylistic Analysis of “Maria” in “Clay”: The Character in James Joyce’s Short Story

Ali Sorayaie Azar<sup>1\*</sup> and Nasrin Samad Yazdchi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Department, Islamic Azad University- Maragheh Branch, Iran

---

### ABSTRACT

During recent years “Discourse Analysis” has been very popular in analyzing literary texts. One of the frameworks used in discourse analysis is the “Systemic Functional Grammar”, developed by Halliday. Transitivity is a model taken from this framework, which works on processes and participants to analyze a text. In this paper, transitivity model is used to analyze a short story, “Clay” by James Joyce, or to say more precisely to analyze the main character of the story “Maria”. According to the different processes, sentences related to the character, are collected and analyzed. The result of the analysis approves the words of the literary critics, that “Maria” is a symbol for Virgin Mary in her being well-natured.

**KEY WORDS:** Transitivity, Narrative, Stylistics, Systemic Functional Grammar.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In linguistics the purpose of close analysis is to identify and classify the elements of language being used. This close analysis has been a useful way to study literary texts. In literary studies the purpose is usually an adjunct to understanding, and interpretation; so an extremely detailed attention is paid to the text. One of the ways to search for the hidden meanings in literary texts is using the transitivity model.

Transitivity model in text analysis helps us with the identification of the ‘ideology’ used behind the text by the author. Linguistic choices in transitivity play a fundamental role in clarifying implicit and dominant ideologies; these ideologies are pictured by processes used in the clauses. It is with investigating these processes that one can go beyond the clause level and draw the ideology that the author has used in his/her text. In this study the aim is to see how these processes act in creating the characters in a narrative.

#### 1.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

##### 1.1.1 What is narrative?

Narrative is a story consisting of thoughts or experiences. It has its own standards and includes some stages. These stages of narratives have been distinguished by [1] who claimed that narrative stages are: 1. Abstract, 2. Orientation, 3. Complicating action, 4. Evaluation, 5. results and resolution 6. Coda [1]. And also according to [2], narrative is a creative artefact and it is not necessarily representation of the actual events.

##### 1.1.2 What is stylistics?

Stylistics is studying the variation that can be found in texts. “Linguistics is the academic discipline that studies language scientifically and stylistics as a part of this discipline studies certain aspects of language variation” [3]. It mentions that different forms can convey different messages and these messages can be understood by close analysis suggested by stylistics. According to [4], stylistics can look like either linguistics or literary criticism, depending upon where we are looking at it. According to [5], the word style refers to the way in which, language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose. [6] gives a different definition of stylistics that it is the “study of literary discourse that has a linguistic orientation.”

[7], in his “Descriptive Linguistics in Literary Studies”, mentions:

*“Linguistics is not and will never be the whole of literary analysis, and only the literary analyst—not the linguist—can determine the place of linguistics in literary studies. But if a text is to be described at all, then it should be described properly, by the theories and methods developed in linguistics, whose task is precisely to show how language works.”*

---

---

\*Corresponding Author: Ali Sorayaie Azar, English Department, Islamic Azad University- Maragheh Branch, Iran  
Email: asorayaie@yahoo.co.uk

By this definition we can easily get the point that stylistics has a packet of tools that has borrowed from Linguistics and uses these tools in investigating the texts especially literary texts. That's why during these recent years literary analysts have been fond of stylistics to interpret and criticize texts.

As mentioned above stylistics is not alone and takes some theories and models or frameworks from Linguistics. The best known model that recently has been popular and used by many analysts is Halliday's "Systemic Functional Grammar".

### 1.1.3 What is SFG?

Systemic Functional Grammar is a model developed by [7]. It mentions that language is a kind of system that functions like a network. The term functional conveys the contextual feature of this system. This model claims that this system of language provides us with a variety of model that we can use to convey our messages. According to [8], the use of the language is divided to three categories:

1. Ideational Function: to express our perceptions and experiences of the world.
2. Interpersonal Function: to participate in communicative acts
3. Textual Function: to use language to organize the text.

So with referring to these meta-functions, it can be said that language is used to represent the world, or better to say 'a means of representing "worlds", perceived or imagined'[7].

### 1.1.4 What is Transitivity?

Transitivity is a well-known model taken from systemic functional grammar. Its function is "representing 'processes' or 'experiences': actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations" [9]. It works through "processes and participants" mentioned in the text. It also "indicates the worldview, framed by the authorial ideology" [10]. Actually the transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types. These processes are: 1- Material process, 2- Mental Process, 3- Relational process, 4- Behavioural process, 5- Verbal process, 6- Existential process, 7- Meteorological Process. In the following section, they will be explained.

#### 1.1.4.1 Material Process

Material process is a process of "doing"; it expresses the notion that some entity "does" something. According to [8] it involves "doing words".

Example: I am writing a letter.

Here "write" is the process and "I" and "a letter" are participants. The former is called the "Actor" and the latter is the "goal" of the process.

#### 1.1.4.2 Mental Process

Mental process is a process of feeling, thinking and perceiving. According to [11] mental processes are 'internalized' processes, in contrast to the 'externalized' processes of doing.

Example: John loves Mary.

In this case John is called the "senser" and Mary is the "phenomenon".

#### 1.1.4.3 Relational Process

According to [12], Relational process is a process of being in the world of abstract relations.

**a. Attributive Process:** e.g.: She is hungry

She is "carrier" and hungry is "attribute".

**b. Identifying Process:** e.g.: His name is Jack

His name is "identified" and Jack is "identifier".

#### 1.1.4.4 Behavioral Process

Behavioral process is a process of physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring. They "represent outer manifestations of inner workings, the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological states"[13].

Example: The old lady is breathing smoothly now.

#### 1.1.4.5 Verbal Process

Verbal process is a process of saying. Just like saying and meaning, the verbal process expresses the relationship between "ideas constructed in human consciousness and the ideas enacted in the form of language"[13].

Example: John says that he loves Mary.

#### 1.1.4.6 Existential Process

Existential process is a process of existing.

Example: There are a few pictures on the wall.

#### 1.1.4.7 Meteorological Process

Meteorological process is a process about weather.

Example: It's raining.

### 1.2 Purpose of this research

In this research, James Joyce's short story "Clay" is going to be analyzed and the focus of analysis is one of the characters. The character of "Maria" that can be parallelized with the character of Virgin Mary is chosen to work on. In this study, it has been tried to refer her sympathetic nature to the linguistic choices that Joyce has picked in this story.

## 2. METHOD

To do the research a text had to be chosen, so we chose a literary text to work on, of course mostly because of the researchers' interest in literary texts. Normally a short story was chosen, named "Clay", a work by James Joyce. The reason we selected one of Joyce's works is James Joyce's conscious writing style; one can be sure that the way he writes and the words he chooses conveys a message behind. Clay is the story of a woman, an innocent tiny well-natured one. The character's name is "Maria". The literary critics parallelize her with the Virgin Mary. It has been tried to see whether this conclusion can be derived from discourse analysis of the story. To do the analysis a framework was needed, so we decided to analyze it with Halliday's framework, Systemic Functional Grammar. From this framework transitivity model was chosen. As mentioned in previous section, transitivity model includes different processes. And it was according to these processes that the text was analyzed. It is necessary to mention here that only the processes related to Maria are chosen. Then according to type of the process they were grouped and are shown in tables that will come in the next section. With this analysis we want to see whether the rules of the processes and participants convey the same thing as the one for literary criticism.

## 3. RESULTS

As mentioned before, one of James Joyce's short stories "clay" was chosen to work on (see Appendix). According to the Transitivity Model and the processes explained above the text was analyzed. Of course, it should be mentioned that only the lines that were related to "Maria" have been selected. Below different parts have been noted to match these lines from the story with their related processes. First part is devoted to the lines which show the material process.

### 3.1 Lines related to material process

Line 1: The matron had given her leave to go out (although it is not mentioned here, so the beneficiary is "Maria").

**Actor:** the matron---**Process:** had given---**Goal:** her leave to go out

**beneficiary:** Maria

Line 25: Joe had brought [the purse] to her

**Actor:** Joe---**Process:** had brought---**Goal:** the purse---**Beneficiary:** her

Line 36: the boys had got her the position

**Actor:** the boys---**Process:** had got---**Goal:** the position---**Beneficiary:** her

Line 110: an elderly gentleman made room for her

**Actor:** an elderly gentleman---**Process:** made---**Goal:** room---**Beneficiary:** her

In these three lines it can be noticed that "Maria" has the beneficiary role. Something has been done for her favor. It can be interpreted that people love Maria. And each time in story we can see that every time Maria is delightful for these favours. There are other sentences showing the material process as follows:

Line: Joe made her sit down.

**Actor:** Joe---**Process:** made---**Goal:** her---**Process2:** sit down

Line: Joe made Maria take a glass of wine.

**Actor:** Joe---**Process:** made---**Goal:** her---**Process2:** take---**Goal2:** a glass of wine

Considering these two lines we see that Maria is treated kindly by others. Such treatments are especially from Joe that makes Maria surprised in the story. We can still find lines that Maria is the actor:

**Table 1**

Actor	Process	Goal
Maria	Had cut	Them[barmbracks]
She	Took out	Her purse
She	Had nursed	Him
She	Took off	Her working skirt
She	Laid	Her new skirt
She	Changed	Her blouse
She	Bought	A dozen of mixed penny cakes
She	Moved	Her hand
She	Bent	Her tiny head

In these sentences (Table 1), although Maria is the actor, she doesn't have any effect on people or if she has it is a serving. With investigating carefully, we see that the goals of the processes are Maria's own things (her hand, her purse, her skirt). In two of the sentences the goals are barmbracks and cakes that actually Maria with these processes is serving people. The remained one is sentence that its goal is him and goes back to "Joe" that again it shows Maria's kindness and her serving. We had one more sentence that has a beneficiary in it and we can state that the actor is "Maria" (see Table2 ).

**Table2**

Actor	Process	Beneficiary	Goal
She	Gave	the visitors	one or two slips from her conservatory
Maria	Gave	to the eldest boy	the bag of cakes

Again we see Maria's kindness and her gentleness to the visitors and to Joe's son. Still we have some other materials processes remained that are as follows (Table 3):

**Table3**

Actor	Process
She	Went
She	Stood
She	Got out (2 times)
She	Had to sit
She	Came( 2 times)
She	Had to get up
She	Sang

In these sentences we have just one participant. There is no goal. They show that Maria doesn't have any effect on other things. We can still find some sentences that the actor is not Maria but her body, these kinds of statements show that Maria doesn't have any effect even on her own body. And her body is the only case that controls itself (Table 4).

**Table4**

Actor	Process	Goal
The tip of her nose	Met	The tip of her chin
Her minute body	Shook	Itself

### 3.2 Lines related to mental processes

In the story there are many mental processes that are directly related to Maria. In this section those parts will be analyzed to better understand the thinking process of the Maria (Table 5):

It can easily be noticed that the number of "mental processes" exceeds the one for material ones. It shows that Maria think about different things more than doing anything. Looking to processes mentioned above, we can see that mostly we have the item "thought". Moreover, the interesting thing to point is that the phenomenon she thinks is all good and kind thoughts.

In the processes, we cannot find the word hate or dislike but we can see items such as "like", "hope" and "looking forward to". They show the mental innocence of the character, Maria, to us. Throughout these sentences there is no bad feeling or a hatred toward anybody, and it shows the beautiful nature of Maria to us.

**Table5**

Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Circumstance
Maria	Looked forward to	Her evening out	
She	Hoped	That Joe wouldn't come in drunk	
She	Felt	Herself	In the way
She	Liked	It	
She	thought	That they were nice people	
She	Liked	Looking after them	
She	Knew	That Mooney meant well	
She	Thought	Of how she used to dress for Mass	
She	Looked		With quaint affection at the diminutive body
She	Found	It	A nice tidy little body
She	Arranged	All she was going to do	In her mind
She	Hoped	They would have a nice evening	
She	Thought	What else would she buy	
She	Decided	To buy some plum cakes	
Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Circumstance
Maria	Thought	He was a colonel-looking gentleman	
She	Reflected	How much more polite he was than the young men	
She	Thought	How easy it was to know a gentleman	
Maria	Thought	She would put in a good word for Alphy	
Maria	Had never seen	Joe	So nice

**3.3 Lines related to “Relational Process”**

Here we only have attributive processes. All the carriers except one of them go back to Maria. The first two attributes show the simple and maybe not very attractive appearance of her. On the contrary to her appearance she has a great soul inside that tiny body. It can easily be understood by the third sentence. Next sentence her childish nature of her liking her own rain cloak. And it again shows her innocent inner self. The last sentence is different from others in the way that its carrier is different but here “it” is a dummy pronoun and refers to Maria’s buying a big bag of cakes. And once more we see the good and well-made nature of Maria.

**Table6**

Carrier	Process	Attribute
Maria	Was	A very small person
She	Had	A long nose
Maria	Is	My proper mother
She	Was	Glad of her own rain cloak
She	Was	Sure [they would have good time]
Maria	Was	delighted
It	Was	Too good of her

**3.4 Lines related to “Verbal Process”**

If we look at the reported sentences said by Maria carefully, we can see that she is very careful about the way she speaks and try not to irritate people with her words; for example in sentence number 11 although she doesn't know why Joe is laughing, she agrees with him. And she uses “by mistake of course” when she asks the children if they have eaten the cakes. In the last sentences we can find her humble nature, when she says they don't have to worry about her and that she doesn't want anything. And whenever she is the receiver, we see that the speaking characters are nice to her, except that stylish woman; and that's why we get a negative effect about her character, and it is important in comparing her stylish manner with Maria's simple one.

**3.5 Behavioural process**

For behavioral process we had:

**Table7**

Behaver	Process
Maria	laughed

The process that we have here is “laugh”. Again we have another reason to refer to Maria as a kind woman.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Considering the result section we come to the same conclusion as the one for literary critics. With the processes mentioned we saw a character that doesn't have anything to with the outer world except worrying about it, helping, nursing and making happy. We saw that the thought existing in her mind are all an evidence for her good nature. It can be said that discourse analysis of the work proves the idea of the critics.

##### 4.1 Implication

This study is another evidence for the language teachers, especially teachers of literature to apply functional grammar in their classes. So they can both teach the students about language and literature. In this way students can be aware of the language and can use their gained knowledge in their writings too. Of course, it will also be useful for their reading comprehension, in the way that they will notice the differences between processes and the types of participants and of course the messages that those differences convey.

#### REFERENCES

1. Labov, W. and J. Waletzky (1967) “Narrative Analysis”.
2. Davies, A. (2005). *A Glossary of Applied Linguistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
3. Crystal, D. (1979). *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman.
4. Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. Longman.
5. Leech, Geoffrey and Mick Short (1981). *Style in Fiction*, London: Longman.
6. Widdowson, H.G.(1975). *Stylistics and the Teaching of literature*. London: Longman.
7. Halliday, M.A.K.(1964). *Descriptive Linguistics in Literary Studies*. London: Edward.
8. Bloor, Th. and M. Bloor. (1995). *The Functional Analysis of English: a Hallidayan Approach*. London: Arnold.
9. Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Second Edition. London: Edward London.
10. Fowler, R. (1986). *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Simpson, P. (1993). *Language, Ideology and Point of view*. London: Routledge.
12. Iwamoto, N.(1998). *Stylistic and Linguistic Analysis of a Literary Text: Using Systemic Functional Grammar*.
13. Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar (Second Edition)*. London: Edward Arnold.