Systemic Functional Linguistics in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"

Ass. Lec. Eaman Ghazi Atia

eamanghazi22@gmail.com
University of Diyala/ Al Muqdad College of Education

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates Halliday's systemic functional theory which has been adopted to analyze the dramatic monologue of Browning's 'My Last Duchess'. This theory has been conducted to explain Browning's manner and covers a hidden guilt inside the poem's symbol structure of clearly used words and integrated narrative. Browning organizes his functional linguistic tools to emphasize the prominence of specific verbalizations that encompass interior meanings.

The focus of this study will be on the ideational function of language since it is a comprehensive function and could be applied on short discourse.

The data has analyzed according to the SFL theory which approved that it is applicable to any literary text. The study has concluded that verbal and behavioral processes are the most dominant in the poem, and this is natural since the poem is written by the technique of dramatic monologue.

Key words: SFL, Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess", Ideational Metafunction.

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اللغويات الوظيفية النظامية في قصدية روبرت براوننج "دوقتي الأخيرة"

م.م. ايمان غازي عطية

جامعة ديالى/ كلية التربية المقداد

الملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في النظرية الوظيفية النظامية لهاليدي والتي تم اعتمادها لتحليل المونولوج الدرامي لقصيدة روبرت براوننج "دوقتي الأخيرة". استخدمت هذه النظرية لشرح أسلوب براوننج

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وتغطية الذنب الخفي داخل البنية الرمزية للقصيدة من الكلمات المستخدمة بوضوح والسرد المتكامل. ينظم براوننج ادواته اللفظية الوظيفية ليؤكد على أهمية الالفاظ والافعال المحددة التي تشمل المعاني الداخلية.

سيكون التركيز في هذه الدراسة على الوظيفة الفكرية للغة باعتبارها وظيفة شاملة ويمكن تطبيقها على النص القصير. وقد تم تحليل البيانات وفقا لنظرية SFL التي اقرت إمكانية تطبيقها على أي نص ادبي. وقد توصلت الدراسة الى ان العمليات اللفظية والسلوكية هي الأكثر تواجدا في الدراسة وهذا امر طبيعي لون القصيدة كتبت بأسلوب المناجاة الدرامية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظامية الوظيفية النظامية، روبرت براوننج، "دوقتي الأخيرة", الوظيفة الفكرية.

1- Introduction

The divide among academic and practical linguistics is well- known and it, like other differences, has its merits. Truly speaking, most of the study of linguistics devotes itself to the creation of language ideas.

To exchange ideas and speech, people use language (written or spoken) as a tool to fulfil their communication. According to Halliday (1978: 14) language is the best means of communication. He points out that language has meanings rather than just a group of words or sentences. Any language is constructed though meaning and this meaning is perceived through its system. As a result, the interaction between grammar and text has led to what is called the theory of systemic functional linguistics (henceforth SFL). Abdlameer (2021: 24).

SFL deals with the association between language and its functions in social contexts. Halliday points out that SFL sees texts as "socially created components of information". When an individual read, write or create a text, he uses three types of culturally determined meaning to make decisions. The first is defined as FIELD; the subject matter, what is the communication purpose to talk or speak about. The next is TENOR. Phrases in which we select to represent ourselves as gentle, nervous etc. The third function is MODE. The language options which

render the content sound business like, written like etc. Darong (2022: 573).

2- Systemic Functional Linguistics and Literature

SFL sees any literary text as a rich method to be analyzed. A literary text is considered as an integrated unit that can not be separable from its social context. SFL explores how any literary language works by using linguistic patterns. As a result, Halliday explores three kinds of functional meaning thar are served to construe literature: Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual meaning which constitute what is named Metafunctions. Pasaribu et al (2020: 81).

Metafunctions are associated with the three features of genre. FIELD correlates with ideational meaning. TENOR is closely related to interpersonal meaning. MODE is oriented towards textual meaning. In this respect. SFL adapts to literary texts as a highly abstract meaning which can be analyzed linguistically. Alyousef and Alyahya (2018: 93).

2-1 Ideational Function

It refers to the "content function of language". It deals with what texts are about, i.e. the experience of the speaker of the real world. Via the ideational function, the individual's experience can be encoded as a member of the culture. Rashid and Jameel (2017: 3) adds that it is "concerned with the relationship between the external world and the internal world of our experience of the world". It is subdivided into six processes: Mental- Material- Relational- Behavioral- Verbal and Existential.

2-2 Interpersonal Function

This function explores the relationship among the characters in a given context. It states how the user of a language intrudes himself into the "context of situation". Eggins (2004:210). Moreover. Halliday explains that "both speaker and listener are expressing their own

attitudes and judgements and looking for to influence the attitude and behavior of others". (1978: 112).

2-3 Textual Function

It refers to how a given information is set in coherent texts. It deals with the creation of a text. Metekohy (2021: 42) clarifies that "it is a resource for presenting interpersonal and ideational meanings as information that can be shared by speaker and listener into text unfolding in context". It focuses on the THEME and RHEME of the clause. Theme is "the point of departure" and rheme is "the reminder of the message".

It is necessary to mention that the researcher will confine herself only of the verbalization in the ideational function.

3- The processes of the Ideational Function

3-1 Mental Process

It is the process of "saying". It reflects the world of consciousness. It enables the users of language to express thoughts and opinions. It is more like related to psychological matters. It can be distinguished by verbs like (hate- admire- see- want smell- realize- feel). In this process, we are not going to ask about actions but we deal with mental reactions. This means that the sayer most be a conscious human being who feels or sees. Bloor and Bloor (2004:118-120).

3-2 Material Process

It is the process of "doing". It expresses actions that are concrete or tangible. "they express the notion that some entity does something or undertake some actions- which may be done to some other entity". This process indicates events that take place in the outside world of human being. It involves lexical verbs like (offer- buy- give- send- bring-take). Ahangari and Alaei (2016:206).

3-3 Relational Process

It Is the process of being in a specific sense of establishing a relationship between two entities. It is the process of "being" or "having". It is realized by the verb **be** or copular verbs as (seem- appear- own- have). It is divided into two types: identifying process, i.e. expresses the identical features of two entities. Attributive process, i.e. clarifies that an entity has some quality attributed to it. (Ibid:206).

3-4 Verbal Process

It is the process of "saying". Process clauses are very important in discourse. "They contribute to the creation of narrative by making it possible to set up passages". Verbal processes "show activities related to information". Saragih (2010: 8). The dominant verb is Say, with other verbs like: ask- show- deny- tell- report- claim).

3-5 Behavioral process

The process of "behaving". They involve physiological actions like "breathe and cough". This type of process has no clearly vivid characteristics of its own. "They are partly like the material and partly like the mental". Moreover. "Behaviorals thus express the form of doing that does not usually extend to another participant". Bloor and Bloor (2004:129).

3-6 Existential process

It is the process that something exists or happens. Its usual form is (there+ to be). "Existential processes usually employ the verb **be** or verbs like (exist- arise- occur). In addition, existential process is "a clause that presents an entity as existing without meaning anything additional about it". Eggins (2004:214).

4- "My Last Duchess" and Browning's Style

"My Last Duchess" is a theoretical monologue by Rober Browning. The poem consists of 28 rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter. The story of the poem is about an Italian Duke who was accused of murdering his wife. The Duke tells the story of last Duchess to the

count's emissary. He pulled aside a curtain to show the envoy a portrait of his previous Duchess painted by Fra Pandolf.

"My Last Duchess" demonstrates the poet's remarkable proficiency in employing language and literary devices. Browning's manner shows the implied guilt concealed inside the poetry's symbol structure of clearly stated words. He organizes his artistic materials to emphasize the significance of a few essential sentences that capture the core idea. Beaty and Matchett (1965:85-90).

Similarly, when examining Browning's vocabulary, Abjadian adds "Browning was very independent. Browning's syntax is his own. His words are usually punctuated by extended brackets. Here, the author avoids essays and the use of relative pronouns and those relishes piling alliteration on his poem". (2008: 339).

5- Data Analysis and Findings

Browning has used almost 76 verbs in his poem. These verbs are subdivided into six types according to the six processes of the ideational function of the language. As stated in the table below:

Types of processes	Percentage %
Relational Meaning	18.4
Mental Meaning	14.4
Verbal Meaning	24
Behavioral Meaning	22.3
Material Meaning	17.1
Existential Meaning	4
Total	100

Types of processes and their percentages

5-1 Verbal process

Browning has used 18 verbs in his poem, with a percentage of 24% which is marked as the highest among other verbs.

This use is considered natural since the poem is a dramatic monologue which needs actions by the only speaker. Browing uses verbs such as (call– say– ask– thanked– meet– repeat–chanced) to shed a light on the style and character of the duke. His conversation with the guest suggests his superiority and power.

- I **call**– That piece a wonder, now; ………..   2–3
- they would **ask** me,………………….   11
- We'll **meet**– The company below……………..   47–48
-

Such verbs explain that the duke has always the turn to speak and must not be interrupted and the listener is silent and impressive.

5-2 Behavioral Process

Among 76 verbs, Browning's use of behavioral verbs is about 17 verbs. In a percentage of 22.3%. Almost all behavioral verbs are manipulated to reflect the behaving matters of the duchess from the view point of the duke. Verbs like (smile– stoop– cause– let– came) are mentioned in the poem as:

- And **cause** enough…………………   20
- Who'd **stoop** to blame………………   34
- Oh sir, she **smiled**……………………   43

These verbs explain the duchess attitude of being so friendly and gives smiles to everyone without respecting her husband.

5-3 Relational Process

Out of 76 verbs, Browning's use of relational verbs in "My Last Duchess" is only 14. Its percentage is about 18,4%. Relational verbs are used to express the relationship between the participants, especially the duke and his murdered wife. Verbs like:

- She   **had**/   A   heart–   how   shall   I
say?……………………………………21–22
- She **ranked**/ My gift of a nine– hundred– years old……………. 32

- I **gave** commands; then all smiles stooped.………………………45

By the use of relational verbs, Browning depicts the duke's power and the duchess emotional perception.

5-4 Material process

Browning has used 13 material verbs in a percentage of 17.1%. such verbs are used to link between action verbs and the material world. Words like (painted- pictured- went- passed) explains the duke's position in expressing his power and his selfish insight towards physical aspects.

- That's my last Duchess **painted** on the wall…………………1
- Her looks **went** everywhere………………………………… 24
- Let/ Herself be **lessoned** so………………………………40

The relationship between the duke and the duchess is best expressed as the relationship of the follower and the followed.

5-5 Mental Process

These verbs show meanings that are related to understanding and sensory capabilities. Browning has used 76 verbs in his poem. Mental verbs constitute 11 verbs in a percentage of 14.4%. This means that the speaker 'the duke' tries to reflect his internal state to the listener. In lines like:

- Must never **hope** to reproduce the faint…………… 18
- She **liked** wate'er/ She looked on……………………. 23
- Or that in you **disgusts** me; …………………………….38

And many other mental verbs as (know- blame- miss). All these verbs explore the duke's jealousy and possessiveness. Moreover, his desire to control can clearly be noticed in narrating the events that lead to the death of his ex-wife. His pleasure lies in his control over others. The use of mental verbs vividly reflects the psychological status in the duke's mind that marked a complicated mix of control and arrogance.

5-6 Existential Process

The lowest type number of processes used in the poem are existential verbs. These verbs reflect that something exists or happens. It occurs in the poem three times with a percentage of 4%.

- **Puts** by the curtain…………………….9-10
- 't **was** all one…………………………25
- **Set** her wits……………………………40-41

The existential use of the verbs is to establish and reinforce the exist themes of jealousy and control of the duke upon his dead wife.
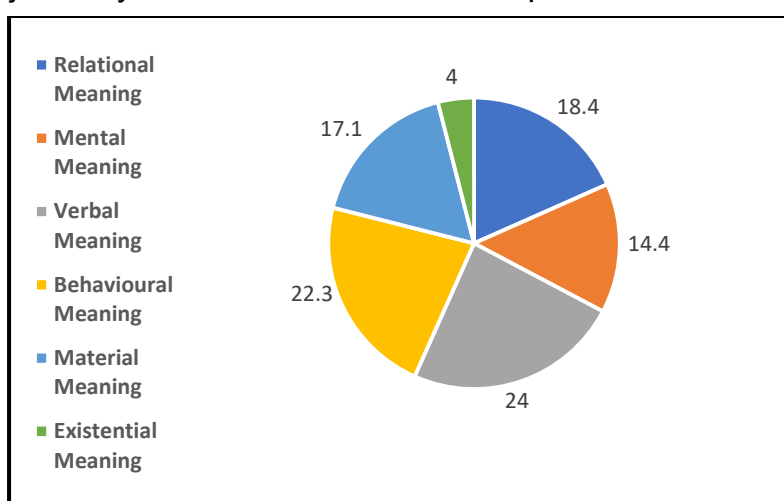
A diagram shows the processes of the ideational meaning and their percentages.

6- Conclusion

Browning's application of the SFL enables him to effectively express intricate concepts with the voice of just one individual. He uses the linguistic tools of the SFL to reveal the inner conflict of the duke. Browning's use of the ideational function enables him to control the type of verbs he has employed to reflect the material, behavioral or other actions of the participants.

According to the data analyzed, the use of the ideational Metafunctions in "My Last Duchess' is to reinforce the images of control and jealousy of the duke and the passive characters of the dead duchess and the passenger.

The use of the verbal process reflects the situation that Browning tries to 'take advantages of other's opinions to set the real scene of the events'. That is why its percentage is the higher among other processes.

Behavioral and relational processes are used respectively to show the behavior of the duchess that led to her death and the relationship between the characters and how the duke has broken up his relationship with his wife by ending her life.

Mental process shows the psychological state of the duke since he is the only speaker in the poem. This process reflects his power and control.

Material process in the poem deals with the events that occur in the outside world. It states the duke's 'physical actions'. Existential process occurs weakly in the poem.

This study conducts that the SFL is applicable to all types of discourse and can be studied from all authors' point of view.

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