Research Article

From Functionalism to Language Development: A Comparison of FCE and Summit Books

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper aimed to analyze *FCE* and *Summit* books which are among popular English language teaching textbooks. In particular, this study was an attempt toward the objective analysis of reading passages by finding the differences and similarities of the books in terms of their processes.

Methodology: To conduct the study, a corpus of 1964 clauses from reading passages of the two books named Ready for First Certificate of English *FCE* and *Summit* was formed, classified, and coded. The corpus was then analyzed based on Halliday and Mattheisen' (2004) transitivity system.

Results: The findings of the study revealed that there were significant differences between *Summit* and *FCE* books in terms of relational, existential, and verbal processes.

Conclusion: The findings of this study suggest that analyzing the schemas of the texts not only reveals the mindsets of their authors, but also can be an objective method for better understanding of a text The results were also discussed from an educational perspective, and suggestions were made for future research.

1. Introduction

The saliency of textbooks in English language teaching (ELT henceforth) classes cannot be ignored due to their importance in providing language input and practices for language learners (Richards, 2001). Textbooks are, in fact, the means of consistency in the language learning process which can give learners a sense of cohesion and belonging to a system (Toms, 2004) by guiding them and balancing the contents to be learned. The content of a textbook not only does transfer knowledge and information, but also develop certain attitudes in the mind of the learners. Coursebooks will directly or indirectly communicate sets of cultural values (Mclean, 2011). This is called a 'hidden curriculum' (Cunningsworth, 1995; Holly, 1990). Many educationalists claim that the hidden curriculum is more effective than the official curriculum. As mentioned, foreign language teaching textbooks are implicit means through which no cultural transmission occurs and it is not sheer development of foreign language pedagogy (Li, 2016). Since the underlying system is not explicitly stated, it requires us to look at course books in detail to understand the unstated values. Consequently, evaluating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks in any educational program can be of utmost importance.

Texts and reading passages are the integral components of textbooks which mirror how a writer comprehends and sees the world. In fact, authors of texts make a special choice of grammar and vocabulary with regard to those who are supposed to read their texts. Therefore, these are the writer's choices which create the meaning of the text (Teo, 2000). In this regard, systemic functional linguistics is a theory of linguistics that claims language, or any other semiotic system, can be seen as a system of choices. This theory focuses mainly on the principle that "…behaviors, beliefs and values within a particular cultural and social environment influence and shape both the overall language system…and language "instances," the way people use language in everyday interaction (Coffin, 2001, p. 95).

Functionalist movements began in Europe and flourished in the work of Halliday (1985) when he introduced systemic functional grammar (SFG). *Systemic* in this sense, considers language as "a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (Halliday, 1985); *functional* refers to Halliday's view that language is as it is because of what it has evolved to do. Functionalists hold to the belief that the very first role of language is to transfer meaning, and the speakers of a language produce spoken/written texts as an instrument. Halliday (1971) asserted that SFG could be really beneficial in text analysis

since it is meaning-based. In fact, SFG deals with language as a system of meaning which focuses mainly on the system rather than structure.

The system of a language is represented in the form of text (Thompson, 2004). Since texts are instances of the systemic choices being made, we can work backward from the text to discover the meaning, choices which have been made by writers, and what function they might serve. In addition, we can discover here what meaning choices have been made over other possible choices (Iddings & Oliveria, 2011). Halliday takes a very strong stand on functional theory in claiming that everything in the grammar can be explained in terms of use/function and supports the claim that a functional grammar is essentially a *natural grammar* in the sense that everything in it can be explained, ultimately, by reference to how language is used (Halliday, 1985).

According to this theory not only the emergence of grammar, but also the specific forms that grammars are closely related to the functions that language aims at serving (Halliday, 1985).
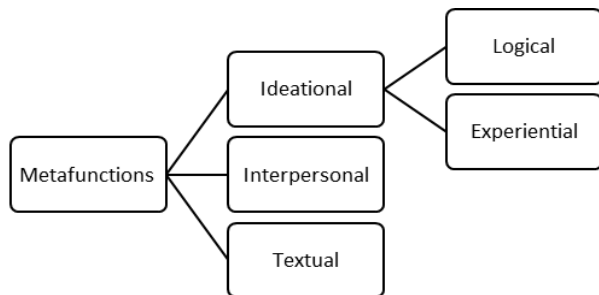

Figure 1.
Halliday's (1985) Metafunctions

In systemic functional grammar, clause as an initial unit of analysis carries three different meanings which are interrelated. In other words, these meanings provide a "theory of human experience, and certain of the resources of the lexicogrammar of every language" which are manifested in a specific function (Halliday, 1985, p. 29). Many discourse analysts have used the functional theory by looking at these three different levels of meaning called metafunctions. Metafunctions are further divided into three major categories, including ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Ideational metafunction embraces the meaning that "language is used to organize, understand and express our perceptions of the world and of our own consciousness" (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p. 11). It determines the ways in which the clause represents the experiences an author/speaker expresses. Lexico-grammatically speaking, "we are concerned here with the participants, typically expressed in nouns and nominal groups, who do some kinds of processes, typically expressed in verbs and verbal groups, under certain circumstances, typically expressed in prepositional and adverbial phrases" (Iddings & Oliveria, 2011, p. 27). Interpersonal metafunction considers interactive and personal aspects of language; in fact, it determines how a clause is represented as an exchange between speakers/writers and listeners/readers; it also

maintains relations with them, to affect their behavior, to express their viewpoint on things in the world, and to provoke or make change others (Thompson, 2004). Finally, the bridge between these two metafunctions is called textual metafunction, which is the main concern of this study. In using language, individuals organize their messages in ways that show how suitable they are in accordance with other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing. This metafunction plays the role of sequencing discourse, organizing the discursive flow, and creating cohesion and continuity in the text. It is, in fact, the manifestation of the world within discourse.

The researchers' focus is on transitivity when analyzing what the speaker/writer wants to say. The term transitivity would probably be familiar as a way of distinguishing between verbs according to whether they have an object or not; however, in SFG it is used in a broader sense. The grammatical system through which experiences are explained is called transitivity (Halliday, 1967). The transitivity system is composed of a manageable set of process types which form experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Each process type provides its own model or schema for construing a particular domain of experience. It should not be ignored that processes are one of the major components of transitivity systems. The other two components in this semantic system are participants and circumstances associated with the process. Processes, as the main concern of this study, are classified into two axes of major and minor processes in which minor processes are the link between major processes. The processes in the transitivity system are

1. Material: the process of doing and happening, which involves physical actions; some verbs in this category include *go, catch, occur, burn, paint, melt, unfold, and extend.* "The *doer* of this type of action is called the Actor: any material process has an Actor, even though the Actor may not be mentioned in the clause. Material devices can be divided into those which represent the action as involving only the Actor and those which also affect or are 'being done to' another participant. This second participant is called the Goal, since the action is, in a sense, directed at this participant" (Thompson, 2004, p. 90).

2. Mental: the process of thinking which involves perception, reaction, and cognition. There are clear differences between something that goes on in the external world and something that goes on in the internal world of the mind (p. 92); some verbs refer to these mental processes, including *think*, *know*, *feel*, *smell*, *hear*, *see*, *want*, *like*, *hate*, *please*, *disgust*, *admire*, *enjoy*, *fear*, *and frighten.*

3. Relational: the process of being and having; identifying and characterizing; verbs in this category include *seem*, *become*, *appear, have, own, possess, and so on.* Two different types of relational process has been indicated: the first type is called an attributive relational process; and the two participants are the Carrier and the Attribute. The second type is called an identifying relational process. "The function of this process is to identify one entity in terms of another" (Thompson, 2004, p. 96).

4. Behavioral: the process of behaving; it is the link between material and mental. "One of the main reasons for setting up this category is that they allow us to distinguish between purely mental processes and the outward physical signs of those processes" (p.103); some verbs in this category include *breath, dream, smile, laugh, cry, and cough.*

5. Verbal: the process of saying; as saying something is a physical action that reflects mental operations, it is the link between relational and mental; some verbs in this category include say*, quote, urge, report, and explain.*

6. Existential: the process of existing; there is only one participant in such clauses: the Existent, but it has no experiential meaning: its function is to avoid the need for, or the possibility of, a second participant in the clause and normally the subject is 'there'. It is the link between material and relational; verbs in this category include *to be* and *exist.*

Not only linguistic choices, but also comprehension of texts involves rapid integration of various types of semantic and syntactic knowledge (Altmann et al., 1992; Blom & Baayen, 2013; Ferretti et al., 2001; Tanenhaus et al., 1995). Among various syntactic entities, verbs are considered the most important ones, and their absence can lead to grammatical disorders (Druks, 2002). It is the semantic aspect of the verb which provides prompt access to the generalized situation structure (which could be called a schema) that relates to the situations/events to which it alludes (Ferretti et al., 2001). Fadanelli (2022) investigates the SFG manifestation in receipt genres and its effect on TEFL teaching. Xiang (2022) seek the representation of SFG in Biden's political speech. Iddings (2007) considers different functional processes in English humanities and biochemistry writing and sets out different teaching methods for the courses. Olson (2005) analyses President's speech according to the SFG. Egiins (2004) explores the social semiotic approach to the language most closely associated with SFG. Wang (2007) gives an account of SFG in their works and provides evidence to support the claim that it is the act of meaning which reacts to the world in the speaker/writer's mind. Verbs are, therefore, morphologically complex (in marking tense and agreement); hence, learning a language is, to a very large degree learning how to operate the verbal forms of that language.

This study is thus motivated to compare the two main ELT books, namely *Ready for First Certificate of English* (*FCE*) and *Summit*, which are popular among language learners and language institutes of Iran, to check whether they differ in the application of verbs. The ultimate goal of the ongoing research was then to find a plausible answer to the question of what kind of world is depicted in these books to learners through the utilization of different verbs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Material

This study entails the reading passages of the two books named *FCE* and *Summit*. The first criterion in selecting these two books to be compared was their similar level of difficulty, asserted by their writers to be high-intermediate to advanced for adults. Secondly, these books are being published internationally by leading publishers, including Pearson Longman and Macmillan. The final criterion was that the passages were longer than books in the lower levels and thus provided a better chance for the word choice of the writers. In fact, the total number of 30 reading passages (from the *FCE* and *Summit* books) formed the current corpus.

2.2. Procedure

The reading passages were broken into clauses, later, each clause was classified based on Hallidays and Matthiessen' (2004) transitivity system, and they were again coded. What challenged the researchers was the fact that some verbs, including to be, belong to both relational and existential processes. Therefore, after codifying and classifying the clauses, two specialists were used to attest to the soundness of the model application. Moreover, to increase the reliability of the results, clauses were double-checked after about one month from the first analysis.

2.3. Data analysis

After the classification, the frequency of each category was calculated based on the number of words. The results were analyzed by running the Chi-square test (SPSS version 22) in order to see if there are significant differences between *FEC* and *Summit* reading passages with regard to transitivity system processes.

3. Results and discussion

This study dealt with the possibility of any significant difference between the *Summit* and *FCE* books with respect to their transitivity system processes.

As is seen in Table 1, there was a significant difference among the transitivity processes used in the *FCE* book (χ^2 = 9.747, p < .05). Material and relational processes (N = 516 and 236, respectively) were employed more than expected (N = 176.3) in this book. Moreover, the findings revealed that while *FCE* book concentrated significantly on material and relational, other processes like mental, existential, verbal, and behavioral processes were utilized less (N = 150, 71, 58, 27, respectively). Behavioral was the least used process in this book.

The results of Table 2 revealed that there was a significant difference among the processes applied in the *Summit* book (χ^2 = 9.967, p < .05). In this book, the writer benefited significantly from the presence of material (observed N= 451) and relational (observed N = 208) processes more than expected (N = 122). The notable point is that the least frequent transitivity process in *Summit* book is related to the existential process.

Comparing these two groups suggests that the writers of both *FCE* and *Summit* books rely heavily on material and relational processes, which are among those major processes. On the other hand, minor processes, including behavioral, existential, and verbal, are those which receive less attention.

Table 1.
Chi-square Test for FCE Book

Processes	Observed N	Expected N	df	X²	Sig.
Material	516	176.3	5	9.747	0.000
Mental	150	176.3	5		
Relational	236	176.3	5		
Behavioral	27	176.3	5		
Verbal	58	176.3	5		
Existential	71	176.3	5		
Total	1058				

Table 2.
Chi-square Test for Summit Book

Processes	Observed N	Expected N	df	X²	Sig.
Material	451	134.3	5	9.967	0.000
Mental	130	134.3	5		
Relational	138	134.3	5		
Behavioral	28	134.3	5		
Verbal	42	134.3	5		
Existential	18	134.3	5		
Total	807				

Table 3.
Distribution of Chi-square Test of Transitivity Processes in FCE and Summit Books

Transitivity processes	FCE		Summit		Sig.	χ²
	Observed N	Expected N	Observed N	Expected N		
Material	516	483.5	451	483.5	0.187	1.738
Mental	150	140	130	140	0.232	1.429
Relational	236	186.5	138	186.5	0.000	26.276
Behavioral	27	27.5	28	27.5	0.893	0.018
Verbal	58	56.5	42	56.5	0.006	7.442
Existential	71	38	18	38	0.000	21.053
Total	1058		807			

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of transitivity processes chi-square test in both *FCE* and *Summit* books.

As shown in Table 3, there were non-significant differences among the three processes of material, mental and behavioral (p > .05). However, the utilization of relational (χ^2 = 26.276, p < .05), verbal (χ^2 = 7.442, p < .05) and existential (χ^2 = 21.023, p < .05) processes were significantly different. As the table illustrates, the relational process occurred more in the *FCE* book (observed N = 236) than expected (expected N = 186.5), but this was a similar situation for verbal and existential processes. This means that the verbal process (observed N = 58) and existential process (observed N = 71) are employed more in the *FCE* book than expected.

Overall, Figure 2 shows the differences regarding transitivity processes in *FCE* and *Summit* books.
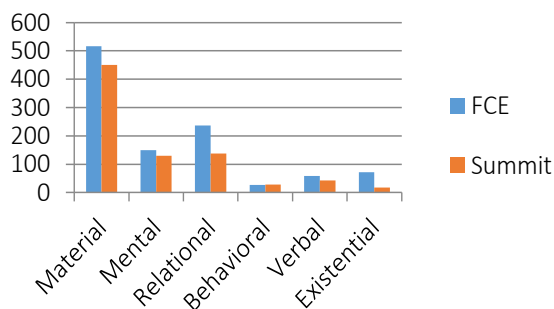

Figure 2.
Transitivity Processes in FCE and Summit Books

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the differences between *FCE* and *Summit* books with respect to Halliday and Mattheissen's (2004) transitivity system. Considering this, it cannot be ignored that language is a manifestation of its speakers' thought patterns, and in Austin's (1976) words, language encompasses all acts and functions its speakers do. Therefore, delving into the language people use can pave the way for a better understanding of their thought patterns and mindset. What counts in this regard is the process of word choice, and the meaning words carry. Accordingly, it can be seen both *FCE* and *Summit* books weigh down with material verbs, which signals the fact that the writers of these two books followed a realistic approach and tried to present the English language as tangible as possible for their readers, as Bloor and Bloor (2004) mentioned material processes are action-oriented. Regarding the major processes, there is a significant difference between the two books in utilizing the relational process. Bloor and Bloor (2004, p. 120) claimed that "The semantics of relational processes is very complicated, and different sets of participant functions can be associated with different, more delicate categories of relational process." It can be thus concluded that Morris, the writer of the *FCE* book, involves her readers in a more complicated process of understanding which is quite acceptable at advanced level.

Taking minor processes into account, significant differences can be seen in the utilization of verbal and existential processes which have traces of relational processes in themselves. Verbal processes are on the borderline of mental and relational processes, and existential processes, on the other hand, are on the borderline of relational and material processes. In this situation, it is not surprising that the *FCE* book differs significantly from a Summit book in terms of its relational processes; this book also favors the utilization of verbal processes and existential processes more than Summit books. In other words, the *FCE* book learners are involved in a more complex and abstract mental aspect of language learning in comparison with *Summit* book.

The findings of this study suggest that analyzing the schemas of the texts not only reveals the mindsets of their authors, but also can be an objective method for better understanding of a text, as it was suggested in the previous studies of Khodadady and Khosravani (2014) and Khodadady and Lagzian (2013). According to Khodadady (2017), the elements of texts are best captured by the words whose employment in isolation and in combination with each other creates the texts.

It can also be witnessed that looking at a text or more specifically, a language book through the lens of transitivity processes can reveal the flow of events learners are supposed to follow and decode in that language. In addition, such analysis can provide a deeper insight not only for material development, but also for those teachers and instructors who are teaching the books to language learners. Teachers should be aware of the underlying meaning they are transferring to the learners when they are teaching such texbooks.

Declarations

Competing interests

Not applicable.

Author's contribution

Tayyebeh Goodarzi performed the study and wrote the manuscript for publication in JCLR.

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