

Linguistic Structures and Their Reflection of Reality Conception in a Literary Text

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the language used by the main characters (Helena Popova and Grigori Smirnov) in the one- act play ‘THE BOOR’ written by Anton Chekhov through applying the theory of transitivity which is part of Halliday’s systemic functional grammar. The application of transitivity helps analyzing people’s perception of the world and its effect on the language they use and their choice of certain lexicogrammatical structures. Halliday states that ‘language enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them’ (1994:106).

The study focuses on the lexicogrammatical choices made by the two main characters mentioned above. The language used by them and their choice of certain linguistic structures arise the questions of whether they reflect the influence of their different motivations, the way they perceive the world, how they act, feel, and think as individuals or members of a community. Until readers understand how motivations affect the language used in a literary text, an important aspect of text comprehension will remain to a certain degree uneasy task.

The transitivity system states that the experiences people go through life consist of ‘goings-on’ – happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming’ (ibid). People express themselves in particular ways, which are called processes.

The present study will present the theory of transitivity showing its different processes, then utilizing this theory in the analysis of meaning of the one- act play mentioned above. The analysis will be limited to two processes, namely, the material and the mental ones as they clearly allow for the engagement of human participants in the process.

2. Summary of the play

The play begins at Popova’s house. She is still in deep mourning seven months after her husband’s death. She decided to stay alone at her house, refusing to meet or receive anybody. She said that she must remain forever faithful to her husband and to show him what true love and faithfulness mean.

Smirnov arrives and rudely insists on seeing her claiming that he has come on urgent business. Popova’s late husband owed him (1200) roubles and Smirnov demands the debt be paid at once because his creditors are after him. As she does not have the money at hand and

is not in the mood to deal with financial matters, she tells him that she will return the money the day after tomorrow. Smirnov refuses to leave the house until she repays the debt. They angrily vie with one another and engage in a series of arguments. Smirnov accuses women of dishonesty and being fickle whereas Popova makes the argument personal by insulting Smirnov calling him a ‘bear’ for his boorish manners. As the war of words escalates, Smirnov challenges the ‘grieving’ widow to a duel for insulting him and to show whether Popova, as a feminist, really wants equality. He was surprised by her proud acceptance of the challenge. He finds in her defiance an overwhelming attraction that he cannot fight. After instructing her on how to use a pistol, he realizes that he has begun to fall in love with this tough and spunky woman. Popova refuses to withdraw the challenge. This refusal increases Smirnov’s love for her, and he offers her his hand. The play ends as the proposal for a duel is stopped and a proposal of marriage is issued instead.

3. The transitivity theory

The transitivity theory or Halliday’s transitivity can be used as a useful linguistic means to reveal the linguistic features of literary works. Halliday states that transitivity is the lexicogrammatical realization of the ideational function of the clause. This function deals with what is called “transmission of ideas”; and it represents ‘processes’ or ‘experiences’: actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations” (1985:53). Halliday (1976:159) also states that the “processes” expressed through language represent our conception of the world or point of view. He notes:

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 the language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause... [T] he clause evolved simultaneously in another grammatical function expressing the reflective, experiential aspect of meaning. This...is the system of TRANSITIVITY. Transitivity specifies the different types of process that are recognized in the language, and the structures by which they are expressed (Halliday 1985:101).

According to Halliday, such a ‘process’ consists of three components:

- (1) The process itself, which is expressed by the verb phrase in a clause.
- (2) Participants in the process, which refer to the roles of entities that are directly involved in the process. They are expressed in nominal phrases.
- (3) Circumstances associated with the process, which are expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrase.

(Halliday, 1985: 101)

A transitivity analysis tries to investigate the principle “who or what does what to whom or what?” In other words, transitivity refers to the relationship between the action of

an ‘actor’ and its effect upon the ‘goal’. The transitivity theory as a model can help to provide a means to find out how certain linguistic structures of a text or discourse embody or encode certain ideological stances. As Fowler states:

Linguistic codes do not reflect reality neutrally; they interpret, organize, and classify the subjects of discourse. They embody theories of how the world is arranged: world-views or ideologies (1986:27)

Following Halliday’s tradition, the term transitivity is used here more as a semantic concept than simply as a syntactic description. Traditional grammar regards transitivity a syntactic description in the sense that whether a verb takes an object or not. Accordingly, it classifies a verb as being either a transitive or intransitive.

3.1 Types of processes

The transitivity system states that the verb in the clause can be classified into six processes: material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential. They represent processes of doing, being, sensing, saying, behaving, and existing, respectively.

3.1.1 Material processes

Material processes represent processes of doing which have two involved participants. The first is called the Actor (one who does something). The second is called the Goal (one to whom the process is directed at), and/or Beneficiary, that may be a Recipient (one that goods are given to) (Halliday, 1994:145). In addition to these two participants, there is another element called Circumstance, which tells information on the ‘when, where, how, and why’ of the process. Circumstance can be regarded as supplementary information. For example:

1. John kicked the ball.
Actor Process: material Goal

2. John hit the man very hard.
Actor Process: material Goal Circumstance: Manner

The order (Actor + Goal) can be reversed in a passive form, as in:

- (2) The man was hit by John.
Goal Process: material Actor

3.1.2 Relational processes

Relational processes are processes of being, ‘something is being said to ‘be’ something else (Halliday, 1994:119). In a relational process, a participant does not affect the other participant in a physical sense. Relational processes can be subdivided into two types: ‘intensive attributive processes and ‘intensive identifying processes.

3.1.2.1 Intensive attributive process

This type of process states that the participant involved is a Carrier of some quality attributed to it. The Carrier is always realized by a noun or a nominal phrase, and the Attribute by an adjective or a nominal phrase, for example:

1. He is strong.
Carrier Process: relational Attribute
2. He is a strong man.
Carrier Process: relational Attribute

3.1.2.2 Intensive identifying process

This subcategory of relational process is not concerned with “ascribing or classifying, but defining.” (Eggins, 1994: 258). The identifying process involves two participants: a Token, the entity which is defined, and a Value, the entity that defines the Token. It gives the Token “meaning, referent, function, status, or role” (Halliday, 1985: 115). The Token and the Value are expressed by nominal phrases, for example:

1. John is the president.
Token Process: relational Value
2. The president is John.
Value Process: relational Token

3.1.3 Mental processes

This type of processes represents the meanings of feelings reflected by verbs of liking, loving or hating. It also expresses thinking, knowing or noticing in addition to perceiving which can be represented by verbs such as hearing and tasting. Mental processes are “internalized” processes. They are different from “externalized” processes of doing and speaking (Simpson, 1993:91). There are two participants in the mental process. The first is called Senser (the conscious being who is involved in a mental process by feeling, thinking, or perceiving) and Phenomenon (that which is felt, thought, or perceived by the conscious Senser) (Halliday, 1994: 117).

According to Halliday (ibid: 118), verbs of mental processes can be subdivided into

three categories:

- 1) Cognition: those verbs of thinking, knowing, and understanding.
- 2) Affection: those verbs of liking, loving, fearing, and hating.
- 3) Perception: those verbs of seeing and hearing.

For example:

Cognition: I don't understand his theory.

The language of speakers and writers can be analyzed through using the transitivity system, which is part of the systemic functional grammar. This system studies the structure of sentences as represented by processes, participants involved in the process, and circumstances, in which they exist. Downing and Locke (1992: 110) state that the clause ‘permits us to encode, both semantically and syntactically, our mental picture of the physical world and the world of our imagination’.

The analysis of the present study is based on dialogues between the two main characters “Popova” and “Smirnov” in the one act play entitled “The Boor” written by Anton Chekhov. This analysis will be based on the main processes, namely, material and mental ones as used by these two characters.

4.1 Material processes used by Popova

The following is an analysis of the main material processes used by Popova. They can be identified as being moved by feelings of loyalty to love, forgiveness, and commitment to her dead husband. These processes are realized by verbs such as ‘leave’, ‘lies’, ‘buried’, ‘receive’, ‘disturb’, ‘enter’, ‘prove’, ‘find’, etc. The material processes used by Popova can be classified into three different categories:

Category (1): those verbs moved by feelings of loyalty as in the following examples:

- *Mrs. Popova: and I shall never **leave** it—why should I? My life is over. He lies in his grave, and I **buried** myself within these four walls. We are both dead.*
- *Mrs. Popova: You told him that since my husband’s death I **receive** no one?*
- *Luka: I said so, but he won’t listen; he says it is a pressing matter.*
- *Mrs. Popova: I **receive** no one!*
- *Mrs. Popova: what a bore people are! What can they want with me? Why do they **disturb** my peace? [She sighs.] Yes, it is clear I must **enter** a convent. Yes, a convent.*
- *Mrs. Popova: day after tomorrow you will **receive** the money.*
- *Mrs. Popova: sir, in my solitude I have become unaccustomed to the human voice and I cannot stand the sound of loud talking. I beg you, please to **cease disturbing** my rest.*
- *Mrs. Popova: I’m sorry I can’t **pay** you today.*
- *Mrs. Popova: [**gazing** at the photograph.] you shall see, Nikolai, how I can love and forgive! My love will die only with me—when my poor heart **stops** beating. [She smiles through her tears.] And aren’t you ashamed? I have been a good, true wife; I have **imprisoned** myself and I shall **remain** true until death, and you—you—you’re not ashamed of yourself, my dear monster! You **quarreled** with me, **left** me alone for weeks--.*

Category (2): those verbs moved by feelings of anger towards men as in the following examples:

- Mrs. Popova: *the man!* [She **laughs** sarcastically.] *The man true and faithful in love! Well, that is something new!* [Bitterly.] *How can you **make** such a statement? Men true and faithful! So long as we have gone thus far, I may as well say that of all the men I have known, my husband was the best; I loved him passionately with all my soul, as only a young, sensible woman may love; I **gave** him my youth, my happiness, my fortune, my life. I **worshipped** him like a heathen. And what happened? This best of men **betrayed** me in every possible way. After his death I **found** his desk filled with love-letters. While he was alive he **left** me alone for months—it is horrible even to think about it—he made love to other women in my very presence, he **wasted** my money and **made** fun of my feelings—and in spite of everything I trusted him and was true to him. And more than that: he is dead and I am still true to him. I have **buried** myself within these four walls and I shall **wear** this mourning to my grave.*
- Mrs. Popova: *I won't **give** you the money.*
- Mrs. Popova: [**striking** her fists and **stamping** her feet.] *you are vulgar! You're a boor! A monster.*
- Mrs. Popova: [**trying to cry** him down.] *boor, boor, boor!*
- Mrs. Popova: *you wish to **fight** a duel? Very well.*
- Mrs. Popova: *immediately. My husband had pistols. I'll **bring** them. [She **hurries** away, then **turns**.] Oh, what a pleasure it will be to **put** a bullet in your impudent head. The devil **take** you!*
- Mrs. Popova: *it isn't well to **shoot** inside, let's **go** into the garden.*
- Mrs. Popova: *you are afraid. Yes. A-h-h-h. No, no, my dear sir, no flinching! Please **follow** me. I won't **rest** until I've **made** a hole in that head I hate so much. Are you afraid?*
- Mrs. Popova: *go, or I'll **shoot**.*

Category (3): those verbs moved by feelings of hesitation and swinging as in the following examples:

- MRS. POPOV: **Wait** a minute!
- MRS. POPOV: *Nothing. You **may go**. But **wait** a moment. No, **go on, go on**. I hate you. Or--no; **don't go**. Oh, if you knew how angry I was, how angry! [She **throws** the revolver on to the chair.] My finger is swollen from this thing. [She angrily tears her handkerchief.] What are you standing there for? Get out!*
- MRS. POPOV: **Yes, go**. [Cries out.] *Why are you **going**? **Wait** no, **go!!** Oh, how angry I am! Don't come too near, don't come too near er come no nearer.*
- MRS. POPOV: **Go away!** *Take your hands off me! I hate you—you--this is--*

4.2 Material processes used by Smirnov

The following is an analysis of the main material processes used by Smirnov. These processes are realized by verbs such as 'work', 'pay', 'throw', 'stay', 'bring', 'come', 'leave', 'jilt', 'scrape', 'receive', 'bring', 'get', 'disturb', 'stop', 'jilt', 'fought', 'play'. They can be identified into two categories:

Category (1): those verbs moved by detachment from feelings and being very much concerned with financial affairs as being a merciless debt collector as in the following examples:

- *SMIRNOV: Your deceased husband, with whom I had the honor to be acquainted, left me two notes amounting to about twelve hundred roubles. Inasmuch as I have to pay the interest to-morrow on a loan from the Agrarian Bank, I should like to request, madam, that you pay me the money to-day.*
- *SMIRNOV: And I am in the mood to fly up the chimney with my feet in the air if I can't lay hands on that interest to-morrow. They'll seize my estate!*
- *SMIRNOV: Thank you. [He shrugs his shoulders.] And they expect me to stand for all that. The toll-gatherer just now met me in the road and asked why I was always worrying. Why, in Heaven's name, shouldn't I worry? I need money; I feel the knife at my throat. Yesterday morning I left my house in the early dawn and called on all my debtors. If even one of them had paid his debt! I worked the skin off my fingers! The devil knows in what sort of Jew-inn I slept; in a room with a barrel of brandy! And now at last I come here, seventy versts from home, hope for a little money, and all you give me is moods! Why shouldn't I worry?*
- *SMIRNOV: What can one say to that? Moods! Seven months since her husband died! Do I have to pay the interest or not? I repeat the question, have I to pay the interest or not? The husband is dead and all that; the manager is--the devil with him! Travelling somewhere. Now, tell me, what am I to do? Shall I run away from my creditors in a balloon? Or knock my head against a stone wall? If I call on Grusdev he chooses to be "not at home," Iroschevitch has simply hidden himself, I have quarreled with Kurzin and came near throwing him out of the window, Masutov is ill and this woman has moods! Not one of them will pay up! And all because I've spoiled them, because I'm an old whiner, dish-rag! I'm too tender-hearted with them. But wait! I allow nobody to play tricks with me, the devil with 'em all! I'll stay here and not budge until she pays! Brr!*
- *SMIRNOV: Pay me my money and I'll leave.*
- *SMIRNOV: Then I'll sit here until I get the money. [He sits down.] You will pay day after to-morrow? Excellent! Here I stay until day after to-morrow. [Jumps up.] I ask you, do I have to pay that interest to-morrow or not? Or do you think I'm joking?*

Category (2): those verbs move by feelings of challenging women as in the following

examples:

- SMIRNOV: *March! [LUKA goes out.] Ill and isn't receiving! All right, it isn't necessary. I won't **receive**, either!*

*I'll **sit** here and stay until you **bring** that money. If you're ill a week, I'll **sit** here a week. If you're ill a year, I'll **sit** here a year. As Heaven is my witness, I'll **get** the money. You don't **disturb** me with your mourning_or with your dimples. We know these dimples! [He calls out the window.] Simon, unharness! We aren't going to leave right away. I am going to **stay** here. Tell them in the stable to give the horses some oats. The left horse has twisted the bridle again. [Imitating him.] **Stop!** I'll show you how. **Stop!** [Leaves window.] It's awful. Unbearable heat, no money, didn't **sleep** last night and now_mourning—dresses with moods.*

- SMIRNOV: *[Imitating her.] Not at all funny_vulgar! I don't understand how to behave in the company of ladies. Madam, in the course of my life I have seen more women than you have sparrows. Three times have I **fought** duels for women, twelve I **jilted** and nine jilted me. There was a time when I **played** the fool, **used** honeyed language, **bowed** and **scraped**. I loved, suffered, sighed to the moon, melted in love's torments. I loved passionately, I loved to madness, loved in every key, **chattered** like a magpie on emancipation, **sacrificed** half my fortune in the tender passion, until now the devil knows I've had enough of it.*

- SMIRNOV: *[Laughing disrespectfully.] Mourning! What on earth do you **take** me for? As if I didn't know why you wore this black domino and why you **buried** yourself within these four walls. Such a secret! So romantic!*

*Some knight will **pass** the castle, **gaze** up at the windows, and think to himself: "Here **dwells** the mysterious Tamara who, for love of her husband, has **buried** herself within four walls." Oh, I understand the art!*

- SMIRNOV: *[Jumping up.] Whom do you think you are talking to? I'll **grind** you to powder.*
- SMIRNOV: *And you think that because you are a romantic creature you can **insult** me without being **punished**? I **challenge** you!*
- SMIRNOV: *I allow no one to insult me, and I **make** no exception because you are a woman, one of the "weaker sexes!"*
- SMIRNOV: *[Paying no attention.] A duel. That's equity, emancipation. That way the sexes are made equal. I'll **shoot** her down as a matter of principle. What can a person say to such a woman? [Imitating her.] "The devil **take** you. I'll **put** a bullet in your impudent head."*

4.3 Mental processes used by Popova

The mental processes used by Popova are realized by verbs such as 'love', 'think', 'hate', 'know', 'see', 'feel', 'care', and 'like'. These processes suggest that her interests are emotional. They can be divided into two categories:

Category (1): verbs reflecting feelings of hatred and disliking men as a result of her husband's cruelty and unfaithfulness. She identifies herself more like a Senser as in the following examples:

- MRS. POPOV: *[Resolutely.] Please don't speak of these things again. You **know** very well that since the death of Nikolai Michailovitch my life is absolutely nothing to me. You **think** I live, but it only seems so. Do you **understand**? Oh, that his departed soul may see how I **love** him! I **know**, it's no secret to you; he was often unjust to me, cruel, and he wasn't faithful, but I shall be faithful to the grave and prove to him how I can **love**.*
- MRS. POPOV: *[Gazing at the photograph.] You shall **see**, Nikolai, how I can **love** and **forgive**! My love will die only with me-- when my poor heart stops beating.*

- **MRS. POPOV:** *The man! [She laughs sarcastically.] The man true and faithful in love! Well, that is something new! [Bitterly.] How can you make such a statement? Men true and faithful! So long as we have gone thus far, I may as well say that of all the men I have **known**, my husband was the best; I **loved** him passionately with all my soul, as only a young, sensible woman may love; I gave him my youth, my happiness, my fortune, my life.*
- **MRS. POPOV:** *[With an angry laugh.] You **like** me! He dares to say he **likes** me! [She points to the door.] Go.*
- **MRS. POPOV:** *Leave! I **hate** you.*
- **MRS. POPOV:** *You are afraid. Yes. A-h-h-h. No, no, my dear sir, no flinching! Please follow me. I won't rest until I've made a hole in that head I **hate** so much. Are you afraid?*

The process 'care' shows that Popova wants to be treated kindly. She wants Smirnov

to be kinder to her and to take into consideration her sad life after her husband's death as in:

- **MRS. POPOV:** *I don't **care** to speak with impudent men. Leave! [Pause.] You aren't going?*

Category (2): verbs reflecting feelings of hesitation due to change in feelings of hatred

into feelings of love as in the following examples:

- **MRS. POPOV:** *Nothing. You may go. But--wait a moment. No, go on, go on. I **hate** you. Or--no; don't go. Oh, if you **knew** how angry I was, how angry! [She throws the revolver on to the chair.] My finger is swollen from this thing.*
- **MRS. POPOV:** *Go away! Take your hands off me! I **hate** you—you--this is—*

4.4 Mental processes used by Smirnov

The mental processes used by Smirnov are realized by verbs such as 'feel', 'worry', 'like', 'dislike', 'know', 'show', 'understand', 'think', 'see', and 'love'. This process demonstrates his detachment from emotion and attachment to financial affairs of life. They also express his hate and dislike of women, but later on he realizes that the hate may be

culminating into love as in the following examples:

- **SMIRNOV:** *The toll-gatherer just now met me in the road and asked why I was always worrying. Why, in Heaven's name, shouldn't I **worry**? I need money; I **feel** the knife at my throat.*
- **SMIRNOV:** *I did not come to see the manager; I came to see you. What the devil_pardon the language_do I **care** for your manager?*
- **SMIRNOV:** *Women's logic! That's why I never **liked** to talk to women, and why I **dislike** doing it now. I would rather sit on a powder barrel than talk with a woman.*
- **SMIRNOV:** *You don't disturb me with your mourning_or with your dimples. We **know** these dimples! [He calls out the window.] Simon, unharness! We aren't going to leave right away. I*

*am going to stay here. Tell them in the stable to give the horses some oats. The left horse has twisted the bridle again. [Imitating him.] Stop! I'll **show** you how.*

- **SMIRNOV:** *[Imitating her.] Not at all funny_vulgar! I don't **understand** how to behave in the company of ladies. Madam, in the course of my life I have **seen** more women than you have sparrows.*
- **SMIRNOV:** *Because—because—I--**like** you.*
- *Now, is it my fault that you owe me money? [Grasps the back of the chair, which breaks.] The devil know what breakable furniture you have! I **like** you! Do you **understand**? I--I'm almost in love!*
- **SMIRNOV:** *[Approaching her.] How angry I am with myself! Fall in love like a schoolboy, throw myself on my knees. I've got a chill! [Strongly.] I **love** you. This is fine all I needed was to fall in love.*

5. Conclusion

This study aims at shedding the light on the linguistic structures used by the two main characters in the one-act play “THE BOOR”. The study of transitivity realized through the analysis of the processes shows that the choice of certain linguistic structures reflects the fact

that these characters view the world in different ways.

The material processes used by Popova show that her actions are moved by feelings of loyalty to love and to her husband even though she states that true and faithful men in love do not exist. They are also moved by feelings of anger towards men and by feelings of hesitation and swinging as to whether allow herself to fall in love and get married again. The mental processes show that Popova identifies herself more like a SENSER expressing feelings of disliking and hate for men.

On the other hand, the material processes use by Smirnov show his detachment from emotion and attachment to financial aspects of life. The same thing is true with reference to the mental processes used by him. They express hate and dislike of women, but he realized finally that the hate may be culminating into love.

The language used by these two characters and their choice of certain linguistic structures answer the questions raised at the beginning of the present study. These linguistic structures reflect the influence of their different motivations, the way they perceive the world, and how they act, feel and think.

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