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A Systemic-Functional Grammatical Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Short Story "The Mark on the Wall"

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the types of transitivity processes used in Virginia Woolf's short story "*The Mark on the Wall*". Transitivity is an essential tool in Halliday's systemic-functional grammar theory, which focuses on the grammatical structure of language and how language is used to convey the meaning. In SFG, language is divided into three metafunctions: Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. This study focuses on the ideational metafunction of language. The researcher selects transitivity as a representation of ideational metafunction. . This study employed the framework of transitivity proposed by Halliday. This study explains how transitivity helps Woolf express her ideologies, experiences, inner feelings, perspectives and attitudes toward the English society.

Keywords: Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG), Metafunctions, Ideational Metafunction, Transitivity and Process.

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تحليل نحوي وظيفي نظامي للقصة القصيرة "أثر علي الحائط" لفرجينيا وولف

مستخلص الدراسة

تناولت الدراسة نظرية هاليداي – التحليل النحوي الوظيفي- وقد ركزت الباحثة على أداة واحدة فقط من النظرية وهي (التعدية) وقامت باختيار نص أدبي من أجل تطبيق هذه الأداة واستنتاج ما حققته ومدى مساهمتها في تفسير وتوصيل المعنى المباشر وغير مباشر للغة. اختارت الباحثة قصة قصيرة للكاتبة فرجينيا وولف وهي (أثر علي الحائط). وهدفت الدراسة إلي معرفة ماهي نوعية الأفعال السائدة في هذه القصة القصيرة و كيف تم توصيل المعنى الذي تقصده الكاتبة الى القارئ من خلال استخدام التعدية. وأشارت الدراسة إلي هيمنة الأفعال العقلية في القصة القصيرة "أثر علي الحائط", حيث أن هذه الأفعال تعبر عن الشعور، كما أنها توصف الشعور الداخلي وتجعل المستمع يتجاوب مع المتحدث ويستنتج ما يدور بداخله من افكار ومشاعر هذا بالنسبة للنص المنطوق. واوصت الباحثة بتطبيق اداة التعدية علي نصوص ادبية أخرى كالنصوص السياسية او نصوص أدبية أخرى مثل الروايات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: النحو الوظيفي النظامي (SFG)، وظائف ما وراء الكلام

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الآداب - جامعة سوهاج

**A Systemic-Functional Grammatical Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Short Story "The
Mark on the Wall"**

I- Introduction

Language plays a very essential role in human life. It enables people to communicate and interact with each other. According to Catford (1965, p. 2), "language is a type of patterned human behavior, because human interact with each other by using languages in their social life". Bloor and Bloor (2004) state that "When people use language to make meanings, they do so in specific situations, and the form of the language that they use in discourse is influenced by the complex aspects of those situations" (p. 4). The study of human language is a very important matter. Language has systemic patterns with a specific set of rules called grammar. Grammar can be defined as the set of rules that governs how words are combined into sentences and how those sentences convey meaning. It helps us understand and interpret the meaning behind spoken and written communication. The type of grammar relevant to this study is functional grammar which examines how language is used to perform various functions in communication. It was propounded by Michael Halliday in 1960. In SFG, Halliday classifies language into three components of function named "metafunction," which are ideational, textual, and interpersonal (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p.29). In the ideational function, language relates to the speaker's experiences and has the function of comprehending the environment.

The researcher attempts to examine the significance of Halliday's Ideational metafunction of language in exploring human communication and interactions. Thus, the researcher employs transitivity model for this purpose. To achieve the researcher aims of this research, the researcher applies transitivity to literary text. This literary text is Virginia Woolf's short story namely, '*The Mark on the Wall*'.

I.1. Objectives of the study:

The researcher objectives of the study are:

- To investigate types of transitivity processes employed in Woolf's short story "*The Mark on the Wall*".
- To shed light how transitivity helps understand the author's main themes.
- To realize the role of the transitivity in analyzing the main character's actions, the different mental complexities and conflicts and attitudes.
- To show the most prominent transitivity processes in the short story.

I.2 Questions of the Study:

The following questions are posed by the researcher to be tentatively answered by the study:

- What are the most prominent transitivity processes employed in Woolf's short stories "*The Mark on the Wall*"?
- How do transitivity helps understand the author's main themes?
- What is the role played by transitivity in analyzing the main character's actions, the different mental complexities, inner conflicts and attitudes?

I.3. Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is an English novelist, essayist and feminist who is regarded as one of the most significant modernist literary writers of the twentieth century. She rejected past Victorian conventions and ideas. She created her own style of writing expression. She is known for the "stream of consciousness technique" through which she attempted to lay bare the inner conflicts and complex psychological side of her characters. Stream of consciousness can be defined as a literary device which describes a continuous flow of thoughts, feelings, emotions, images and memories in the character's minds (Baldic, 2001, p. 212). Some of her famous works include "*Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, A Room of one's own and A Hunted House collection*".

- Woolf's Short Story "The Mark on the Wall"

The Mark on the Wall is one of Woolf's most famous short stories, and one of her works in which she used "the stream of consciousness technique". It is a thought-provoking short story that explores the power of our imagination. Woolf takes us on a journey through the main character's thoughts, memories, and musings. This story is about a female character who remembers the event when she saw a mark on her room's wall. She decided to escape from reality into a long stream of consciousness in which she can express her thoughts, emotions, desires and fears

I.4 Significance of the Study:

This study helps linguistic students develop their analytical skills, apply Halliday's framework of transitivity to other texts, and explore the interconnection between linguistics and literary studies. It provides other researchers with the references needed in this field. It also deepens readers' understanding of the way in which language shapes narratives and reflects social and cultural contexts.

I.5. Delimitations of the study:

The delimitation in this study is the potential confusion and ambiguity in classifying certain processes into specific categories within transitivity. Transitivity analysis involves categorizing different types of processes, such as material, mental, relational, and verbal processes, based on their linguistic features and characteristics. However, there may be instances this study where certain processes exhibit similarities or overlapping qualities that make their classification challenging. For example, some processes may exhibit characteristics of both material and mental processes, or relational and verbal processes. This can create a dilemma in determining the precise category to which these processes belong. The similarity between these processes may lead to confusion and difficulty in accurately categorizing them, which in turn can impact the reliability and validity of my transitivity analysis.

II. Review of the Literature

There are several important studies that employed Halliday's framework of transitivity to literary texts. One these important studies is Halliday's article (1971), in which Halliday uses his systemic-functional grammar model to analysis Golden's novel. This novel is William Golding's second novel, published in 1955. He finds that every section of the novel is written in a different style, with different grammatical patterns. In his analysis, his main focus is on the choice of verbs and transitivity patterns, including processes, participants and circumstances that occur in the clauses and sentences of a text. Halliday illustrates how these linguistic choices are used by Golding to indicate "cognitive limitation, a decreased sense of causation and an incomplete recognition" (1971, p. 81) of how human beings can control the world, as represented by ok, "the principal character, Lok, is hidden in a tree watching the tribe in their work, their ritual and their play, and the account of their doings is confined within the limits of Lok's understanding, requiring at times a considerable effort of "interpretation" (1971,p. 108).

To study transitivity in a literary work, one should cover many related issues; literature, language, culture, etc. (Abu-hassoub & Mazid, 2020). Again, Mahmoud have tackled that 'combining multiple modal information, the domain of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) contributes to the interaction of a number of elements and symbols in order to create an overall meaning communication, combining texts, images, music, and gestures.' (Mahmoud, 2023, 4). Therefore, this study discusses transitivity from more than one dimension. Likewise, the context of a language whether the linguistic or cultural, directs everything. (Abu-hassoub, 2022, 80). Context is considered too.

Kennedy (1982) uses the transitivity approach to analyze two different texts: an excerpt from Joseph Conrad's novel *'The Secret Agent'*, and James Joyce's short story *'Two Gallants'*. With regarded to Conrad's novel *'The Secret Agent'* Kennedy selects the crime scene of Mr. Barlock's

assassination and analyzes it by using the transitivity in his article. Kennedy illustrates how Conrad in this scene employs the language to give the reader the impression of detachment, the reader conceives that the murderer is someone who is acting without deliberate intent. To get that impression to the reader, Conrad makes the inanimate objects or body parts the actors in the material clauses instead of making Mrs. Verloc the actor. He says, "Her right hand skimmed slightly the end of the table" instead of Mrs. Verloc skimmed her right hand. He also says "...the carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound from the side of the dish", instead of Mrs. Verloc hides the carving knife. In "... with a clenched hand holding a carving knife. It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely", he makes Mrs. Verloc's hand is the actor of the process as if she cannot control it. In addition, Kennedy discovers that Conrad tends to use passive voice, like in "'Come here," he said in a peculiar tone, which might have been the tone of brutality, but was intimately known to Mrs Verloc, as the note of wooing", "The knife was already planted in his breast". Conrad is successful in using transitivity features to achieve his aim.

In the same article, Kennedy also analyzes Joyce's '*Two Gallants*'. Kennedy explains how transitivity patterns reflect the asymmetrical relationship between Lenehan and Corley- the former is construed as a passive observer, whereas the latter is portrayed as an active man of self-decision who "gets what he wants" (1982, pp.92-94). Kennedy demonstrates that two-thirds of the seventy-two verbs of action in clauses where Lenehan is the participant are intransitive, used without a goal. In contrast, there are transitive and intransitive verbs of action in clauses where Corley is the participant. In this article, Kennedy shows that Joyce brings the three functions of language together in the text to reveal the distinction between Corley's and Lenehan's personalities. The language in the story shows that Lenehan's position is subservient to Corley (1982, pp. 94-96).

Cunanan (2011) demonstrates how the use of certain language resources in a literary work can reveal the author's point of view to the reader. Based on Systemic Functional Grammar, Cunanan's study aims to make the transitivity framework more accessible to teachers

of English as a second language. Cunanan intends to help students understand how the language of text contributes to the authenticity of fiction and clarifies how the author's linguistic choices enable the reader to comprehend the author's complex technique in the text. (Cunanan, 2011, pp. 69-79). In this study, he depends on Halliday's framework of transitivity in analyzing Woolf's Old Mrs. Grey essay. This essay is about an illiterate, blind, old woman who suffers a lot. He applies transitivity analysis to illustrate the mind frame or world view of the persona in an essay written in the stream of consciousness technique. He finds out that Using transitivity as a framework helps to unlock and probe what flows directly through mind of the persona. Transitivity analysis enables readers to understand and feel Mrs. Grey's sufferings and pains.

III. Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Grammar Theory:

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a linguistic theory developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s. It focuses on the grammatical structure of language and how language is used to convey the meaning. In SFG, language is regarded as "a social semiotic" (Halliday, 1985, p. 53). This means that language is regarded as a system of signs that carries meaning.

Halliday's three Metafunctions:

The ideational metafunction deals with how the clause represents or expresses the content or meaning. It focuses on the way language represents and construes the world and how it communicates information. "There are two parts to this representation: experiential meanings encode the experiences and logical meanings show the relationships between them" (Butt et al, 2000.p.5).

The interpersonal metafunction deals with the social and interpersonal aspects of communication. It focuses on how language is used for interaction, to establish social relationships, and to perform social actions.

The textual metafunction deals with how language is organized and structured in a text or

discourse. It focuses on how language is used to create coherence and to connect ideas and information within a text.

Transitivity:

Transitivity is a component in the ideational metafunction. Halliday (1978) confirms that "transitivity is the key to understand the ideational meaning of texts"(p. 132). It describes how language represents different types of experiences in the world, such as actions, thoughts, feelings, states, and events. According to Simpson (1993), "transitivity refers generally to how meaning is represented in the clause" (p.88).). Bartlett (2014, p. 45) mentions that "transitivity is the technical term for the relationship between the roles different participants play within a process". Mazid (2014) argues that "As part of the ideational function in the Hallidayan paradigm, transitivity is a powerful semantic concept and an essential dimension of the analysis of representation" (p.96). The transitivity system consists of three main components: process, participant, and circumstance. Gerot and Wignell define those components as the following: "Processes are central to transitivity. Participants and circumstances are incumbent upon the doings, happenings, feelings, and beings" (1994, p.54). Transitivity is an important analytical tools in the ideational experiential metafunction of language, which concerns the grammar of the clause. It can be said that transitivity is the grammatical description of the content of the clause. Eggins (1994) states that transitivity analysis "refers to the semantic processes realized by the verb type in the clause; the participants expressed by noun phrases; and the circumstances expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrases" (p. 12). Halliday also suggests that "the transitivity systems are concerned with the type of process expressed in the clause, with the participants involved in this process (whether animate or inanimate), and with various attributes and circumstances of the process and the participants" (Halliday, 1966, p. 38).

Types of Transitivity Processes:

According to Halliday, transitivity is divided into six processes: material, mental,

relational, verbal, behavioural and existential.

The material processes focus on the actions or physical events that take place and involves a doer (also known as the actor) and a goal (also known as the goal or the affected). Fontaine (2013, p. 74) states that “the material process is a physical activity and an action's representation conducted by an entity”.

The mental processes focus on the internal cognitive activities and experiences of individuals. It involves the consciousness, thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and volition of a person.

Relational processes are processes of being or having. They express identities, attributes, or relationships between entities.

Verbal processes are processes of saying or communicating. They express verbal actions or reports of speech or thought. Thompson argues that “verbal processes are intermediate between mental and material processes: saying something is a physical action that reflects mental operations” (2014, p. 106).

Behavioral processes are processes of behaving or acting. They express observable human behaviors that are not clearly material or mental.

Existential processes are processes of existing or occurring. They express the existence or occurrence of something in the world.

IV. Methodology

The researcher used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze Woolf's short story and explore the processes of transitivity present in it. The qualitative analysis involved close reading and in-depth analysis of the short story to explore the patterns and meanings of transitivity. These qualitative findings were then supported by the quantitative method which helps measure the frequency of these processes of transitivity across the short story, count the occurrence of different process and types, and calculate their percentages in relation to the overall number of processes identified.

V. Analysis and Discussion

After analyzing the data, the researcher found that Woolf uses the six processes of transitivity in “The Mark on the Wall”. The prominent process is the mental process in "The Mark on The Wall". She also found that the total number of processes that appear in this story is 388.

Type of transitivity process	Frequency	Percentage
Material process	105	27.1%
Mental process	152	39.2%
Relational process	96	24.7%
Verbal process	13	3.4%
Behavioural process	13	3.4%
Existential process	9	2.3%

Figure1. A List of Frequencies of Types of Transitivity Processes in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

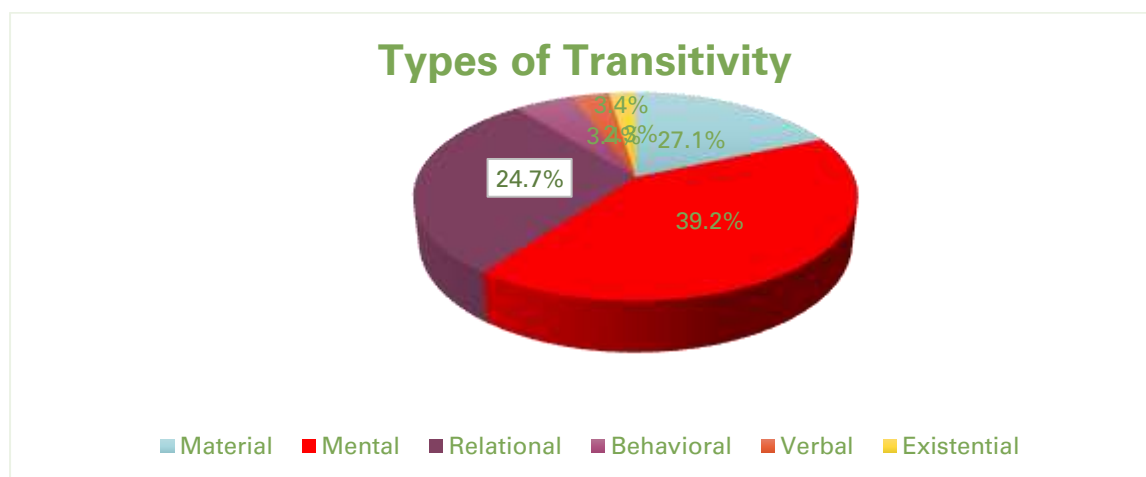


Figure 2. Transitivity Process Types in “*The Mark on the Wall*”

From the pie chart, it can be seen that the mental process accounts for about 39.2% of the total processes. The material process accounts for about 27.1%, the relational process accounts for about 24.7%, the behavioural process accounts for 3.4%, the verbal process accounts for about 3.4%, and the existential process accounts for about 2.3%. As a result, the researcher found that the mental process has the highest number, reaching 152 occurrences. The material process occupies the second position in the story, with 105 occurrences. The relational process comes in third with 96 occurrences. The behavioural and verbal processes

come in fourth position, each appearing about 13 times. The existential process takes the last position, being used 9 times.

-Mental Process in “The Mark on the Wall”:

The mental process is the most dominant process that appears in “The Mark on the Wall”. Woolf used the four subtypes of the mental process, such as seeing, thinking, wanting, loving, etc., in this short story. Woolf depends on her technique of writing “The stream of consciousness” through which she presents the inner complexes and conflicts in her main character. The mental process is the best process that expresses this technique. Through the mental process, Woolf could convey the main character’s feelings and thoughts, such as her fear of war and her desire to escape from the war and its events, the negative effect of civilization on nature, the gender inequality, and the peaceful thoughts in her imagination. The researcher presents some examples of the mental processes used in ‘The Mark on the Wall’ as follows.

I	think of	the fire
I	Remember	that I was smoking a cigarette when I saw the mark on the wall for the first time
They	Wanted	to leave this house
They	Dislike	to hear their praises
One	Could imagine	a very pleasant world
Senser	Mental Process	Phenomenon

Figure 3. Examples of the Mental Processes Used in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

-Material Process in “The Mark on the Wall”:

In this short story, the material process occupies the second position of the total process in the clause with 27.06%, similar to 105 occurrences. The main character appears as an actor only in 12 material processes, which equals 11%. This achieves the writer's portrayal of her main character, who sits in her room and contemplates the mark. The use of material clauses by Woolf describes the state of people during the war. Woolf also employs material processes

to symbolize the influence of civilization on societies and the inequality between genders by portraying actions and events in the main character's mind.

We	had just finished	our tea	
I	was smoking	a cigarette	
as ants	Carry	a blade of straw	so feverishly
The cows	Swish	their tails	beneath them on hot afternoon
Actor	Material Process	Goal	Circumstance

Figure 4. Examples of the Material Processes Used in 'The Mark on the Wall'

-Relational Process in "The Mark on the Wall":

The third major process in "The Mark on the Wall" is the relational process. It comprises 24.7% of all the story's processes. Relational processes help to define, describe, identify, and symbolize entities, facts, or activities. In this short story, three different types of relational processes—intensive, possessive, and circumstantial—occur. It follows that the various processes employed by Woolf serve to characterize the nature, ownership, and location of various objects.

That mark on the wall	is not	a hole	
Carrier	Relational process: intensive	Attribute	
We	should have	a snail	on our wall
Carrier	Relational process: possessive	Attribute	Circumstance
It	may even be caused	by some round black substances, such as a small rose leaf.	
Identified	Relational process:	Identifier	

	circumstantial		
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Figure 5. Examples of the Relational Processes Used in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

-Behavioural Process in “*The Mark on the Wall*”:

Behavioural process is a psychological and physiological active process, and it is the line dividing the physical world from the mind. This means that various behaviors, like breathing, smiling, listening, coughing, waving, dreaming, etc., are signs of the awareness process. In ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’, the behavioural process presents 3.4%, as similar to 13 times of occurrence. These behavioural processes are used to indicate to character’s physiological and psychological actions.

I	Looked	at the dust on the mantelpiece
I	looked up	through the smoke of my cigarette
Someone	is standing	over me
Behaver	Behavioural process	Circumstance

Figure 6. Examples of the Behavioural Processes Used in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

-Verbal Process in “*The Mark on the Wall*”:

The verbal process is defined as the process of saying. The verbal process is carried out by the verb 'to speak', such as say, speak, announce, ask, report, etc. In this short story, the verbal processes present 3.4%. '*The Mark on the Wall*' does not demand a lot of verbal processes as the story does not involve many characters, it involves only two characters, one of them is a female character who enters a state of consciousness, and the second character appears at the end of the story to interrupt her train of thoughts.

The seed must have been sown in the reign of Charles the first	I	Said
“What flowers grew in the reign of Charles the first?”	I	Asked
“I am going out to buy a newspaper”	Someone	is saying
Target	Sayer	Verbal process

Figure 7. Examples of the Verbal Processes Used in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

-Existential Process in “*The Mark on the Wall*”:

The existential process indicates that something exists or is happening. It is usually indicated by the word “there”, which has no representational function, but indicates the existence. This process is rarely used in the short story, presenting only 2.3% of the total processes.

There	Was	a rule for everything	
There	Must be	some book	about it
There	Is	no harm	
	Existential process	Existent	Circumstance

Figure8. Examples of the Existential Processes Used in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’

Transitivity is an important analytical tool that enable readers to figure out the writer’s main themes. The analysis of transitivity in ‘*The Mark on the Wall*’ plays an essential role in revealing the way the female character encodes her experience of the world, including her inner world of consciousness, and Woolf’s purposes in this short story.

VI. Conclusion

Transitivity is very powerful tool in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar Theory. In this study, the researcher preferred to select a short story written by Virginia Woolf, as Woolf was one of the influential writers, and her writings have always attracted the interest of many readers and writers due to her innovative language and unique style, she was very famous for her stream of consciousness technique, and almost all of her works are written in this form with the aim of presenting the inner consciousness of the human psyche. In *'The Mark on the Wall'*, there are six processes of transitivity found. The material process represents 27.1%, the mental process represents 39.17%, the relational process represents 24.7%, the behavioural process represents 3.4%, the verbal process represents 3.4%, and the existential process represents 2.3%. From these proportions, it is obvious that the most dominant process is the mental process, which represents 39.17%. This means that Woolf was very successful in choosing a process that expresses her themes and techniques in this short story.

The use of the mental process contributes to communication between readers and characters and to manipulating the distance between them. It is the process that enables the reader to be in touch with the character and to share the same thoughts and sensations. The mental processes are employed to express Woolf's Stream of Consciousness technique, which is the most influential technique that characterizes this short story. This technique reflects the inner side of the human experience. This story is about a female character who remembers the event when she saw a mark on her room's wall. She decided to escape from reality into a long stream of consciousness in which she can express her thoughts, emotions, desires, fears, and so on. Although the material process occupies the second position in the total number of processes, with 27.1% as similar to 115 times of occurrence, the main character appears as an actor only in 12 clauses, which equals 11%. This means that the character does a few activities in the domestic and physical domain, and most of the events and actions happen in her reverie.

The relational process holds the third position among the total number of processes, representing 24.7% or occurring 96 times. Woolf employed this process to enable her to consider entities in relation to the mark, using these entities to symbolize war and its events, the effect of civilization on nature, and the gender inequality. The behavioural process and verbal process occupy the fourth and last positions, respectively. Although the verbal process is important in dialogues of novels and short stories, it appears only in 13 clauses. This is an expected result as the narrator is a first-person narrative voice, and there are only two characters in the story, with the second character appearing only at the end.

The application of Halliday's transitivity analysis to Virginia Woolf's short story '*The Mark on the Wall*' has provided valuable insights into the textual patterns and discourse construction within the narrative. Through this analysis, we have identified the dominant types of processes employed by Woolf in her storytelling, including material, mental, relational, and verbal processes. The findings reveal that Woolf's deliberate choice and distribution of these processes contribute to the overall meaning and interpretation of the story. The prevalence of mental processes reflects the introspective and reflective nature of the narrator's internal musings.

By employing transitivity analysis, we have gained a deeper understanding of how Woolf crafts her narrative, showcasing her unique style and artistic choices. Additionally, the analysis has shed light on the themes of subjectivity, consciousness, and the complex relationship between the self and the external world that are central to Woolf's writing. This study expands our understanding of Virginia Woolf's narrative style and the ways in which she employs transitivity to convey meaning and evoke emotions in '*The Mark on the Wall*'. It underscores the significance of linguistic analysis in literary studies and the valuable insights that can be gained by examining the syntactic choices made by authors. By delving into the subtle nuances of language and narrative structure, we can unravel the complexities and richness of literary texts, thus enriching our appreciation of literature as a whole.

Suggestions for Further Research:

It is suggested that other researchers apply transitivity to analyze other texts, such as political texts or other literary texts like novels and plays. They also can apply transitivity to other author's works. It also is suggested that they can focus on other tools such as modality and cohesion.

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