Original Research Article

A Study on *Easter, 1916* from the Perspective of the Ideational Function

Zhang Li[1], Yin Xue[2*]

[1]North China Electric Power University, No. 689 Huadian Road, Lianchi District, Baoding City, Hebei Province, China
[2]English Department, Foreign Language School, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China

*Corresponding author: Yin Xue

English Department, Foreign Language School, North China Electric Power University, Baoding, Hebei, China

Abstract

Easter, 1916 is a classic work of Irish poet Yeats, describing four leaders in Irish raising and expressing Yeats' complicated attitudes toward the rebellion. Being different from the traditional view of history, the study interprets the poem by analyzing its clauses from the perspective of functional grammar. It is concluded that a large amount of material process are used to represent the experiences of the characters, which realizes the narrative function of a poem. Relational process, the identifying one particularly, highlights the beliefs of revolutionaries and Yeats' suspicion of their sacrifice. But finally, the mental, verbal and behavioural processes rebuild his support for the uprising and the nationalism represented by it.

Keywords: *Easter, 1916*, Ideational function.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the national poet of Ireland, William Butler Yeats is prolific in poems concerning the Irish movement. In addition to his patriotism, traces of history are as well as demonstrated in his poems. For example, *Easter, 1916*, illustrates the people who are active and suffer in the rebellion for Irish independence, which marks the failure of Easter Rising in 1916. Therefore, due to its realistic element, the studies carried out on it are mainly related to the perspective of history and culture. "By means of the poetic language, Yeats expressed his profound reflection on the historic events of the time. In so doing, a dialogue has come into existence between literature and history" (Zhai, 101). Besides, many literary theories as well as have been applied in exploring Yeats' historical mind. As the interdisciplinary research on his poem emerges, "Yeats' study takes on a new direction of multi-discipline" (Zhou, 48). Therefore, the study with the combination of functional linguistics can provide a new point of view on Yeats' poem *Easter, 1916*.

According to Halliday, the Functional Grammar (FG) refers to natural grammar, indicating the sense that everything can be explained by language, which is realized by three functions, that is, ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Ideational function is generally achieved by clauses that enable human beings to build a picture of reality, to be more specific, the event around them and inside them. In other words, it greatly contributes to the interpretation of the written texts to figure out their underlying meanings.

Easter, 1916 contains Yeats' experience with revolutionaries and the rebellion, indicating his attitudes towards the movement. That is to say, the poem in nature achieves the purpose to represent the things that happens around the speaker as well as the emotion within his inner world. Therefore, it is feasible to interpret the poem from the perspective of ideational function. Moreover, the study focused on the poem *Easter, 1916* with the ideational function as its theoretical framework can expand the perspectives of Yeats' research.

II. METHOD

The object of the study is Yeats' poem *Easter, 1916*. To be more specific, it is the clauses in the poem for the fact that under the framework of functional system, they are the smallest units to analyze. Therefore, the study should separate the sentences and identify the clauses first. The next step comes to the grouping of process types, which is merely concentrated on recognition and labeling of the six process types in the clauses of the poem. The results are presented in table formats.

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In the research design, quantitative and qualitative analysis are both utilized. Due to the limited length of the poem, the data is collected by manual sorting without the necessity of assistance from the software. Based on the results of data collection, further content analysis is conducted, which summarizes the features of the poem in transitivity system.

III. RESULTS

3.1 The Collection of the Clauses

Clause, generally refers to "a constituent with its subject and predicate, [which] is included in a larger sentence" (Hu, 81) in traditional grammar. However, according to systematic functional linguistics, the clause is further classified into two types, that is, major clause and minor clause. The two types of clauses vary from each other on the condition that whether a Predicator is included or not. Based on this classification, the data of clauses in Yeats' poem are indicated in the following Table 1:

Table 1: The data of the clauses in the poem

Major Clauses	62
Minor Clauses	7
Clauses in Total	69

From the above table, it can be noticed that the proportion of the two types of clauses are markedly different. To be more specific, accounting for about 90%, major clauses are the dominating types in the poem, while there are only 7 minor clauses that can be reached. Therefore, the major clause is the concentration of the study.

3.2 The Collection of the Process Types

The finding shows that only five process types are available in the poem. The respective data are presented in the chart 1:
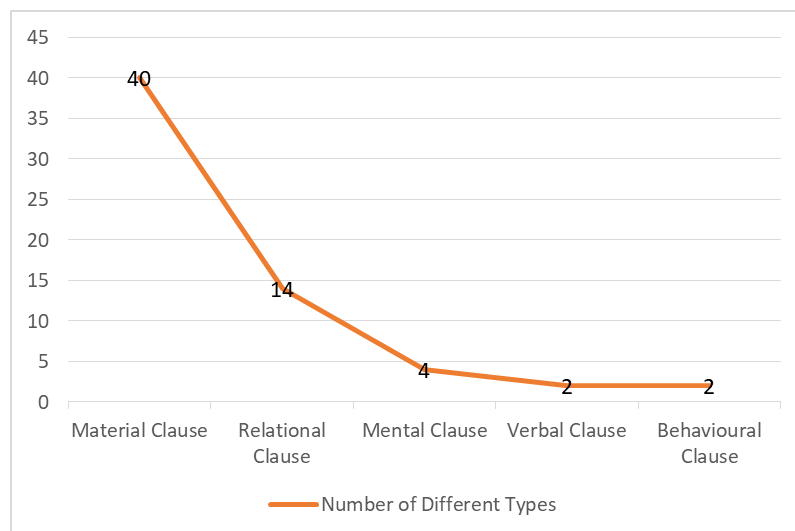

Chart 1: The data of the process types in the poem

According to the above chart, it can be drawn out that the material process counts for the largest proportion of the process types used in the poem. Only second to it, the relational process is numbered as 14 in the poem. The rest mental, verbal and behavioural processes also appear in it with a limited amount.

IV. DISCUSSION

Process is the central element of the transitivity system, and a detailed explanation on the mentioned five process types can be reached in the following part.

4.1 The Material Process

The material process, concentrates on the experiences that happen around people, in other words, reflects the event of "doing-&-happening", which accounts for 65% of the process types emerging in the poem. It is generally realized by the elements, such as participant, material process and goal. But the goal or the objects may be absent in the intransitive clauses.

In the poem *Easter, 1916*, the author employs a large amount of transitive clauses, for example:
Example 1:
This man had kept a school
And rode our wingèd horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.

In this example, the material process can be marked by the verb "kept", "rode", "coming" and "won". The element of "Actor" is realized by the noun phrase "this man", and "his helper and friend", and pronoun "he", and the Goal is achieved by the noun

"school", "horse", and "fame". They belong to one of the subtypes of material clauses known as transformative ones, "where a pre-existing Actor or Goal is constructed as be transformed as the process unfolds" (Halliday, 2004:176). In doing so, the details of information are presented, which as well as achieve the function that "the use of material process is one of narrative text linguistics features" (Zein, 2018:150) that illustrates their experiences to readers. In addition, the unfolding of the process is expressed by the tense employed in the clauses. "The unmarked tense selection is the present-in-present (e.g. is doing)" (Halliday, 2004:176) rather than others. But with the tense marks "had kept", "was coming", and "have won" in the poem, Yeats intended to clarify the time order of the things happening by his logical consideration of grammar.

In doing so, Yeats presents two men's living experiences of school management, horse riding, achieving the purpose of introduction. In ordinary literary works, such a function is merely achieved by relational process, which is effective in presenting their features. But Yeats applies a cluster of verbs to describe the character and the things that happened around them. It not only indicates their characteristics, but also reinforces his memory for them that "that woman" refers to his childhood friend Constance Markievicz, school keeper to Padraic Pearse, "helper and friend" to Thomas MacDonagh, and "a drunken, vainglorious lout" to Yeats' rival in love John MacBride. Therefore, Yeats' sadness for their sacrifice is expressed that they all have been animate individuals before their active behavior in the campaign. Instead of static process of relational clause, material clause represents their action when they are alive, contributing to intensifying author's grief for their death. Such a function of emotional expression is also realized in the following example,

Example 2:
I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,

In this part, Yeats shows the living state of the Irish people, recalling the social condition before their rebellion. By material clauses, he vividly pictures Irish society that is "grey" and "meaningless". It demonstrates his unsatisfaction towards current Ireland that the colony of England serves as a fetter for their people, and his call for the independence of Ireland.

There are also plenty of intransitive clauses in the poem, for example:
Example 3:
The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range

From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

The intransitive material clauses are formed with the structures as Actor "horse" + happen "comes from", Actor "hens" + happen "call" and etc. By the description of the clauses, the personified images of animals are created, which distinguishes the text from ordinary language. In addition, by endowing the capability of movement for non-humans, an environment filled with uncertainty and transformation is formulated. "Tumbling cloud", "plashed horse" and "calling hens" are all reflecting the disorder of his nation under the rule of England, conveying Yeats' pursuit for Irish independence. However, there is one thing being consistent all the time, that is, the stone, the symbol for the beliefs of revolutionaries, which appears in the form of relational process.

4.2 The Relational Process
The clauses that indicate relational process are also the key to analyzing the features of Yeats' poem. Being different from the material process, "relational clauses serve to characterize and to identify". That is to say, the process consists of two participants to denote the relation between them. There are majorly two sub-types of relational process that are applied to realize the attributive or identifying purpose for the participants in it. Both these two types can be figured out in the poem, as follows:

Table 3: The Collection of the Two Types of Relation

Types of Relation	Number
Attributive	12
Identifying	2

According to Table 3, it can be summarized that Yeats tends to present the possessive relation rather than that of identity. It also responds to the above discussion that he chooses material process to replace the introduction of identifying. Taking two clauses from different types of relation as an example,

Example 3:
A terrible beauty is born.

Example 4:
The stone's in the midst of all.

In these two examples, what they share in common is the process mark "is". The attributive clause

in example 3 demonstrates the feature of the terrible beauty, which suggests his complicated emotion caused by the dream of independence and the scarifies of rebellious leaders. "Yeats would have been, initially at least, disappointed by the course of the uprising because of his hopes that a cultural revival, not insurrection and violence, would incubate his nationalist ideals" (Smith, 231). Such a contradiction is intensified in the identifying clause. It describes the state of the stone. Being distinguished from animated images presented by material process, his description of the stone is organized through a static relational process. The contrast between the unchanging determinism of nationalists with their changing life is thus formed. In Yeats' view, revolutionaries' persistent desires to launch a rebellion for Irish independence that they seem even to be enchanted. Although they embrace a huge sense of patriotism, such a stubborn insist turns them into soulless stone. "The heroes portrayed by the poem have been led by the sacrifices they have made to substitute an ugly confidence in their own simple faith for an intelligent comprehension of the complexity of real human experience" (March, 70). In this way, Yeats' attitude on the opposition to revolutionary violence unfolds.

4.3 The Other Processes

In addition to the material and relational process, the other types of process employed in the poem are mental, behavioural and verbal process, which are interrelated between each other. Mental process is used to portray the inner world of a person, or in other words, the things that happen within human beings. Behavioural process is located in the middle of material process and mental process, while verbal process is a mixture of relational and mental process. Therefore, all three processes are relevant to people's world of consciousness.

Example:
> Was it needless death after all?
> For England may keep faith
> For all that is done and said.
> We know their dream; enough
> To know they dreamed and are dead;

In this stanza, verbal and mental clauses can be available that are respectively realized by the marks "said", and "know". Because "there is always one participant who is human" (Halliday, 2004: 201) in such processes, it serves the function to express the speaker's mind. As the sequences of questions raised in the same stanza that "O when it may suffice", "Was it needless death after all" and "what if excess of love bewildered them till they died", Yeats doubts about the value of the rebellion with executed leaders. But in the mental clause "we know their dream; enough to know they dreamed", he appreciates their nationalism and

heroism again in Easter raising. "Yeats is still critical about these patriots; on the other hand he cannot ignore their death for their country" (Kıycı, 121). In other words, he disagrees with violent revolution, but also respects them for their courage to accomplish their mission even at the expense of their life.

V. CONCLUSION

Yeats is one of the greatest poets in the history of literature, and his works have been concentrated by various scholars. Taking his poem *Easter, 1916* as an example, the study attempts to interpret it from a distinctive perspective, that is, the ideational function. Finally, it concludes that diverse process types applied in Yeats' poems play different roles. Material clauses represent the experience of those leaders in the rebellion, indicating Yeats' grief to their scarifies. Relational process of identifying demonstrates his opposition for the violent campaigns, and mental and verbal ones are utilized to reclaim his nationalism. Therefore, Yeats' complicated attitudes towards the rebellion are expressed.

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