A transitivity analysis of Adichie's Zikora and Kafka's A report to an academy

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Abstract: The research recognises that prose fiction forms a significant source of data for stylistic investigations. The study aims to examine transitivity features in Chimamanda Adichie's 'Zikora' and ' A Report to an Academy' by Franz Kafka. The research recognises that the short stories have not attracted much linguistic research interest over the years. In doing so, it applies Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday as an analytical tool to explore 20 clauses with reference to system networks in general and the transitive system in particular. The study first identified the independent clauses in the text. Subsequently, it randomly chose 20 clauses for the analysis of transitivity patterns. The analysis pays attention to participants, process, and circumstances in the clauses. The research discovered that the material process is more frequent than other process types in Adichie's 'Zikora', with an equal number of material and mental processes in Kafka's A Report to an Academy. This choice helped the former in presenting actions of the characters rather than giving a mere narration about their mental preferences, while the latter created a balance between doing and mentalising.

Keywords: Clause, System networks, Systemic functional linguistics, Text, Transitivity

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1. Introduction

The study explores transitivity features in the short stories, *Zikora*, by the Nigerian-American writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *A Report to an Academy* by the German writer Franz Kafka. Areas of interest are *metafunctions* identified by the movers of the systemic functional theory of language, led by M.A.K. Halliday, and particularly transitivity patterns. These short stories, like their authors, represent two differing worlds but are unified by the fact that they belong to the same context of situation – the short story genre. Another unifier is that both texts were written and published during a global crisis. *A Report to an Academy* appeared during the First World War, while *Zikora* saw the light of day during the coronavirus pandemic. One thing that is central to the arguments of functional linguists is that all languages of the world have what they refer to as *metafunctions*. These *metafunctions* are represented in the *lexicogrammar* – Transitivity, Theme and Mood – which they call system networks, and the systems are found at the level of the clause (Aliyu, 2022). Transitivity configures reality. In other words, language users describe and relate their real-world experiences in the clause. Given that these two short stories are separated by time, it is assumed that the experiences shown in them will differ, hence the notion – style is time. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to unravel the system of transitivity in the structure of select clauses in the short stories and its contribution to the expression of meanings by the authors.

Most linguistic studies on literary texts focus on the novel and poetry genres. Additionally, stylistic studies on literature tend to restrict themselves to one text or multiple texts by one author. Like any other genre, the short story is a platform that writers exploit to represent and describe their real world experience. Therefore, it is important to explore this genre. Not only this, it is also important to compare two stories unified by a genre and separated by authors
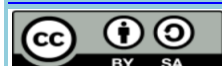
and themes. The aim of the study is to explore transitivity patterns in *Zikora* and *A Report to an Academy,* and it is guided by the following objectives:

i. to explore transitivity processes in the short stories
ii. to highlight how the different processes inform differences between the short stories.

1.1. The Author: Chimamanda Adichie

Born in Enugu in Nigeria in 1977, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie graduated from Eastern Connecticut State University, majoring in Communication and Political Science. She holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University and a Master of Arts degree in African History from Yale University. She wrote a number of novels and essays.

1.2. The Author: Franz Kafka

Franz Kafka is a German author. He enrolled at the Charles University of Prague, where he started reading Chemistry, but transferred to law after a fortnight. Kafka bagged the degree of Doctor of Law on 8th June, 1906 and did a mandatory year of free service as law clerk for the civil and criminal courts and subsequently in other places.his works cut across the novel genre, novella, short story, and letters.

1.3. The short story: *Zikora*

This short story, *Zikora*, the author's work of fiction, contains 35 pages. It was first published in 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis. It starts with Zikora, the central character, a Nigerian attorney who is 39 years old, now living in Washington DC, in the final sphases of labour in the hospital, and how she faces isolation, a pointer to the Covid crisis. It narrates how Zikora met Kwame, also an attorney, but of Ghanaian origin, at the launch of a book. The duo had dated happily until Zikora discovered that she was pregnant, at which point Kwame changed his disposition. From that development, Kwame refused to have anything with her, rejecting her calls and texts.

1.4. The short story: *A Report to an Academy*

A Report to an Academy is a fictional work by Franz Kafka written between March and April in the year 1917. The work of fiction assumes the sort of speech given by a former ape who has learnt to imitate human actions and speech, and who is reporting his life and experiences to an assembly of academics, the reason for the title, *A Report to an Academy*.

The narrator of the story is a human who was previously an ape; he has been promoted to a human being by applying science. Previously an ape in the African jungle, the narrator recounts how he was shot and caught by a hunter, who packed him onto a ship bound for Europe. He recollects the sudden disappearance of his liberty as he found himself confined to a cage on board the ship. He yearns to escape, but is aware that if he ends up in the sea, it is his fate, and he would drown.

2. Literature review

This section provides a review of the literature that is relevant to the theme of this research. The review is presented under two heads: conceptual review, empirical review, and theoretical framework.

2.1. Conceptual review

This sub-section reviews the keywords: clause and text. According to Collins (2004: viii) in Bankole (2015: 24), a clause is a group of words that contains a verb. Bankole observes that not every group of words containing a verb can be called a clause. He cited such sequences as *is coming* which is a nominal group in spite of the presence of the verb 'coming'.

Mathews (2007:58) defines a clause as any unit of syntax whose structure is considered a condensed form of a sentence. Therefore, in particular, it is one that contains a verb and the elements that accompany it. Downing and Locke (2006), in Bankole (2015: 24), are of the view that the first distinction to make in the rank of a clause is to differentiate between a finite clause and a non-finite clause. Finite clauses may be subordinate or independent, but all non-finite clauses are subordinate.

In Systemic Grammar, there are ways of classifying clauses into different groups. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) in Bankole (2015: 67) state that F and P belong to the same unit (verbal group), and the first element in the group is taken as the F while the other element(s) in the group is P, but the situation whereby F & P conflate the appropriate Do-verb is selected for tag question.

People produce a text when they speak. or write. Text, according to (Halliday & Hasan 1976) in (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 14), is any instance of language, in whatever form, that makes sense to someone who comprehends the language.

Systemic linguistics is focused on text linguistics (Halliday, 1985). The analysis of 'text' is very central in Halliday's SFL. The theory is aimed at providing a grammatical model for the analysis of text: a grammar that under which it possible to carry out meaningful investigations on text, spoken or written.

Text, according to Nesbitt (2004), cited in Isyaku (2014), is the system's potential in the actual situation of use. He maintains that the relationship between text and system from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics is seen as one of instantiation. Isyaku (2014: 17) goes on to assert that a particular kind of text is a particular instantiation of a linguistic system. Text is the representation of choice as demonstrated in the following diagram:

System   ←————————————→   Text

Instantiation

(Language as potential)   (Language as instance)
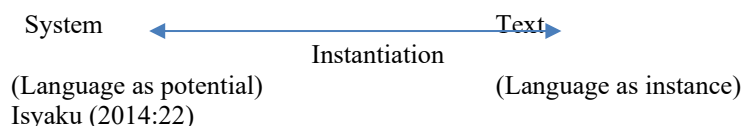
Isyaku (2014:22)

According to Halliday and Mathiessen (1997) in Isyaku (2014:14), the connection of the system to text, known as instantiation, is not simple. They maintain that it is problematic.

2.2. Empirical review

Abdulraheem (2016) carries out a linguistic stylistic study of poems by Tanure Ojaide. The study delved into poetry studies using Systemic Functional Linguistics. It concentrated on network systems – MOOD, THEME, and TRANSITIVITY. The researcher asked such questions as how lexical options in the poems help in achieving meaning and how the choice of words and expressions define Ojaide's style. He navigated the semantic relations such as synonymy and repetition, from the poems by Ojaide, such as *The Fate* and *Delta Blues*. The research effort focused on one author. That is to say that it could not have answered the question: Does style proclaim a man?

Isyaku (2014) examines patterns of transitivity in news media. He analyses the transitivity system in selected newspaper reports across subjects that are related to health, politics, education, sports, and science. He asks questions such as how the transitivity system accounts for language function in newspaper reporting from a Systemic linguistics point of view, and how newsmen package and present their experiences of life. Findings of the research reveal that mental, material, relational, and verbal processes are found in news reports. Isyaku's research is related to the present one because of its use of SFL as a theoretical framework. The aim of Isyaku's research was not to make any comparison.

Orakwue (2015) analyses Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study aimed at identifying some linguistic features that the author made use of to appreciate her cultural and historical realities behind the novels. The researcher used Systemic Functional Linguistics to accomplish this task. The study examined the author's use of nouns, processes, adverbs, and sentence types. It discovered more proper and common nouns, material processes, adverbs of manner, and not many simple sentences. The research also revealed that register variables hugely affected the writer's choices. The research is relevant to the present one for studying Adichie's texts and their employment of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It is different from this study in that it studied the novel genre and not the short story form.

Kwesi and Mensah (2022) carry out a study titled of foregrounding the Verbal Process in Adichie's Zikora from the standpoint of stylistics. The goal of the study was to use corpus methods to examine verbal process types under TRANSITIVITY in the short story. The research sought to answer two questions: how verbal processes deconstruct gender subjugation, and the high quantum of the verbal processes is associated with the attribution of qualities to other characters. The study discovered that the writer deconstructed the subjugation of women through dialogues and that the foregrounded verbal processes reflect the attribution of the processes. The study is related to the present one in three senses. First, it analysed one of the two short stories this study seeks to analyse. Second, it applied Systemic Functional Linguistics. Three, it analysed TRANSITIVITY, one of the network systems under this study. However, it is different from this study in that it was more of a corpus study.

2.3. Systemic functional linguistics and the notion of system networks

The theory of Systemic Functional Grammar focuses on language use – that is, the functions of language (Coffin, Donohue & North 2009) and Berry (1995). The theory has the greatest potential as a framework for understanding the nature of language and its use (Fawcett, 2010). In unearthing the functions of language at the level of a clause, functionalists suggest network systems – Transitivity, Mood and Theme (Ojo, 2006). Citing Eggins (20014), Mohammed (2012) says that the theory is based on the postulation that the function of language is to make meaning, and context affects this meaning.

Transitivity represents the ideational function of language, which is the system of representing the world. It helps in demonstrating the views of language users. A language analysis that places weight on form is not likely to reveal such details. In transitivity analysis, we segment a clause to contain three parts, namely: Participants, Process, and Circumstance. According to Halliday (1994), transitivity has 'participants', 'process', and 'environment', and the choice of these elements in the system of transitivity reflects the standpoint of the language user. According to Halliday (1994), a process consists potentially of three parts:

    (i)   the 'process';
    (ii)   'participants';
    (iii)   'circumstances relating to the process.

The first component, the process, is the reality, action, or event represented in the clause. Human enables its speakers to present a mental picture of reality (Halliday 1994) and (Eggins 20024). In the words of Halliday (ibid), reality consists of 'what is happening: of doing, happening, feeling or being. There are different processes: Material (the process of doing), Mental (the process of sensing), verbal (the process of saying), existential (the process of existing), relational – Attributive (the process of attributing), and others. Circumstances have to do with the kind of information given about the surrounding process on location, cause, time, manner, and many more. Participants are those who are involved in the event. Different tags are given to them depending on the process.

3. Research methodology

The study deploys the Systemic Functional approach as an analytical tool. The study has noted that the theory acknowledges three universal metafunctions which are present in the structure of the clause and that it is the lexicogrammar that brings these language functions to light. The research revolves around one of the three network systems that realise the metafunctions under the head of lexicogrammar. This system network is transitivity. The study makes use of the random sampling procedure to draw 20 clauses from the clauses that make up the short stories. It then dissects each of the clause to make clear which portion is Participants, which section is Process and which is Circumstance. The type of participant each clause has is tied up to what process type it embodies. These processes are labelled as Material, Mental, Behavioural, Existential, Verbal and Relational.

4. Findings and discussions

Each of the 20 clauses is analysed in a tabular form. Each analysis reveals the participant(s), process and circumstance, where it is present.

4.1. Transitivity Analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Zikora*

Clause 1: He said jokingly that I needed to vet his friends… (page 9)

Table 1: Analysis of Clause 1

He	Said	jokingly	that I needed to vet his friends
S AYER	Pro: Verbal	CIRCUMS	VERBIAGE (reported)

The table shows that He is the participant in the clause above. The constituent indicates the maker of the statement, which is the point of reference. 'Say' is the process, because it is about saying, it denotes a verbal process. 'Verbiage' shows the remarks made by the participant.

Clause 2: I remembered the night of Aunty Nwanneka's birthday party (page 27)

Table 2: Analysis of Clause 2

I	Remembered	the night of Aunty Nwanneka's birthday party
SENSER	Pro: Mental	PHENOMENON

The table shows that 'I' is the participant in this sequence. What the participant does is recall his experience, a mental process that deals with cognition.

Clause 3: I told Aunty Nwanneka I was hungry (page 7)

Table 3: Analysis of Clause 3

I	told	Aunty Nwanneka	that I was hungry
SAYER	Pro: Verbal	RECEIVER	VERBIAGE

The table 'I' is the element that fits the participant slot within the structure of this clause. The predicator 'told' expresses the verbal process. 'Aunty Nwanneka' received the information, while the remainder of the clause constitutes what is said by the participant.

Clause 4: Something is wrong (page 6)

Table 4: Analysis of Clause 4

Something	Is	wrong
CARRIER	Pro: Relational	ATTRIBUTE

The table shows that the nominal group 'something' is the participant in this relational clause. The finite element 'was' introduces the relational process while the adjectival group functions as an attribute of the nominal element.

Clause 5:   We left the hospital in the early morning (page 26)

Table 5: Analysis of Clause 5

We	left	the hospital	in the early morning
ACTOR	Pro: Material	GOAL	CIRCUMS

The table shows that the nominal group 'we' is the participant in this material process. The predicator 'left' introduces process. The second nominal group, 'the hospital', is the goal of the material process. 'In the early morning' is a circumstance of time.

Clause 6: She was crying (page 16)

Table 6: Analysis of Clause 6

She	Was crying
BEHAVER	Pro: Behavioural

The table shows that the nominal group 'she' is the participant. The predicator 'crying' introduces the behavioural process.

Clause 7: I knew him very well (page 13)

Table 7: Analysis of Clause 7

I	Knew	him	very well
SENSER	Pro: Mental	PHENOMENON	CIRCUMS

The table shows that the nominal element 'I' is the participant in this clause. The mental process is introduced by the predicator 'knew', a process of affection The second nominal property 'him' is the phenomenon, while 'very well' is a circumstance of manner.

Clause 8: She brought her toddler…(page 14)

Table 8: Analysis of Clause 8

She	Brought	Her toddler
ACTOR	Pro: Material	GOAL

The table shows that the nominal group that has 'she' as its head is the participant in this clause. The material clause is expressed by the predicator 'bought'. The second nominal element is the goal.

Clause 9: …there was his African American mother from Virginia

Table 9: Analysis of Clause 9

There	was	his African American mother	From Virginia
	Pro: Existential	EXISTENT	CIRCUMS

The table shows that the existential process is expressed through the predicator 'was'. 'His African American mother' is what exists while 'from Virginia' is a circumstance of location.

Clause 10: I had breastfed him in the hospital   (page 26)

Table 10: Analysis of Clause 10

I	had breastfed	him	in the hospital
ACTOR	Pro: Material	RECEIVER	CIRCUMS

The table shows that the nominal group 'they' is the first participant in this clause, which represents the actor. The verbal process is unveiled by the predicator 'breastfed'. 'Him' is a receiver. 'In the hospital' is a circumstance of place.

4.2. Transitivity Analysis of Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*

Clause 11: I saw these people going back and forth (page 3)

Table 11: Analysis of Clause 11

I	Saw	These people	going back and forth
SENSER	Pro: Mental	PHENOMENON	CIRCUMS

The table shows that the nominal element 'I' is the first participant, Senser. The mental element of perceiving reality is expressed by the predicator 'saw'. 'These people' is the phenomenon sense. The remainder of the clause forms a circumstance of manner.

Clause 12: There was admittedly a crack running between them (page 2)

Table 12: Analysis of Clause 12

There	Was	admittedly	a crack running between them
	Pro: Existential		EXISTENT

The table shows that the existential process is expressed by 'was' (a verbal group in the clause). 'A crack running between them' is what exists in reality.

Clause 13: There is a wonderful German idiom… (page 5)

Table 13: Analysis of Clause 13

There	Is	a wonderful German idiom
	Pro: Existential	EXISTENT

The table shows that the existential process is expressed by 'is' (a verbal group in the clause). 'A wonderful German idiom' is what exists in reality.

Clause 14: The whole thing was too low for me to stand up in (page 2)

Table 14: Analysis of Clause 14

The whole thing	Was	Too low fo me to stand up in
CARRIER	Pro: Relational	ATTRIBUTE

The table shows that the nominal group 'the whole' is the participant in the clause above. The verbal group 'was' expresses the relational process. The remainder is the attribute of the participant.

Clause 15: The zoo is nothing but a different barred cage (page 57)

Table 15: Analysis of Clause 15

The zoo	is	nothing but a different barred cage
CARRIER	Pro: Relational	ATTRIBUTE

The table shows that the nominal group 'the zoo' is the participant. The verbal group 'is' introduces the relational process. The remainder of the clause is an attribute of the participant.

Clause 16: As I say, I was not calculating

Table 16: Analysis of Clause 16

As	I	say	I was not calculating
	SAYER	Pro: Verbal	VERBIAGE

The table shows that the nominal group 'I' is the participant in this process. The predicator 'say' stands for the verbal process. 'I was not calculating' is what the participant said.

Clause 17: I had understood (page 4)

Table 17: Analysis of Clause 17

I	had understood
SENSER	Pro: Mental

The table shows that 'I' is the participant that did the sensing. The mental process has been introduced in this clause by the predicator 'understood'.

Clause 18: He didn't understand me (page 4)

Table 18: Analysis of Clause 18

He	didn't understand	me
SENSER	Pro: Mental	PHEOMENON

The nominal group 'he' is the first participant in this clause. The predicator 'understand' introduces the mental process of sensing. The second participant's 'me' is affected by the sensing of the first participant.

Clause 19: My manager is sitting in the anteroom (page 5)

Table 19: Analysis of Clause 19

My manager	is sitting	in the anteroom
ACTOR	Pro: Material	CIRCUMS

'My manager' is the first participant in the close above process. The predicator 'sitting' is the material process. The prepositional phrase 'in the afternoon' is a circumstance of time.

Clause 20: I followed his movements down to his throat (page 4)

Table 20: Analysis of Clause 20

I	followed	his movements	down to his throats
ACTOR	Pro: Material	TARGET	CIRCUMS

The nominal group 'I' is the participant. The verbal group that succeeds it expresses the material process. The prepositional phrase that follows represents a circumstance of extent.

4.3. Summary of findings

From the 20 clauses analysed, it was found that the material process (of happening or doing) is more frequent in *Zikora*. It accounts for 30% of the process types. This has an effect in the literary story. The story is told from the third-person point of view. The writer presents the events in the short story in a way that she is able to gives the story life. She gives a picture of what her characters did rather than giving a non-stop rendition. This kind of style engages the audience, for readers would feel as though they are watching a show in a concert. This way of organising stories is more common in the drama sub-genre, for in dramas, stories are demonstrated, whereas they are narrated in prose-fiction. It follows that the style of Adichie in the short story is that of plays and a deviation from the manner of composing prose.

Next to it is the mental process, which accounts for 20% in the short story by Adichie. It is now an established fact that transitivity has to do with the representation of the world. Writers of fiction take advantage of the literary avenue to express the experience of the world under their belt to the reader. It is therefore not a wonder that in the expression of these experiences through characters, we see the world of the author.

The use of the verbal process to tell stories in the prose genre is the most usual thing. However, the verbal process is not the dominant process, accounting for only 20% of the process types. As raised elsewhere, this makes the style of the author somewhat different from the conventional style of prose-fiction.

Relational, behavioural, and existential processes are often less common processes in texts. Each of them accounts for 10% in *Zikora*.

Table 21: Summary of Findings in *Zikora*

S/N	Process	Frequency	Percentage
1	Material	3	30%
2	Mental	2	25%
3	Verbal	2	20%
4	Relational	1	10%
5	Behavioural	1	10%
6	Existential	1	10%
Total		10	100

Comparatively, in *A Report to an Academy by Franz Kafka*, material process and mental processes account for 30% each. This is rather fascinating as the author does not stop at actions of his character but ensures that he keeps pace with what is going on in their minds.

Next to them is the relational process, which represents 20%, unlike in *Zikora,* where it is 10%. This is to say that apart from telling a story, Kafka also describes characters and events to his readers.

Like in *Zikora*, the Existential process accounts for 10% in *A Report to an Academy,* while the behavioural process is absent. The findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 22: Summary of Findings in *A Report to an Academy*

S/N	Process	Frequency	Percentage
1	Material	3	30%
2	Mental	3	30%
3	Verbal	1	10%
4	Relational	2	20%
5	Behavioural	0	0%
6	Existential	1	10%
Total		10	100

5. Conclusion

The study has attempted to analyse *Zikora* by Adichie and *A Report to an Academy* by Kafka from the perspective of transitivity. In other words, the discussion was on the clause in its ideational function. The purpose was to find out which of the process types is more frequent in the text and how the more frequent process type, instead of others, helped in conveying the intended message. The material process shows events or happenings as they unfold, which gives the audience a sense of what is going. The research found that material processes occur more frequently than other process types in Chimamanda Adichie's *Zikora*, while material and mental processes are equally represented in Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*. Adichie's choice of language effectively emphasises the actions of her characters, engaging readers beyond simple narration. In contrast, Kafka achieves a balance between narration and action in his short story by both engaging his reading audience and presenting his story.

6. Funding

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