

A Transitivity Analysis of PM Trudeau's Year-End Interview in Establishing the Government's Credibility

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Abstract: *The analysis of a language can illustrate how language reflects ideology, beliefs, and thoughts and a transitivity analysis of discourse can reveal the implications behind. In this article, the writer tries to make a transitivity analysis of PM Trudeau's year-end interview with CTV News, in which van Dijk's ideological square is also applied to discover not only the mental character, but social and psychological characters in Trudeau government's ideologies, especially on health and economy. Therefore, through the proper using of language, public dissatisfaction to the government can be alleviated, a positive public image of the government is set up, and the credibility of government has been established.*

Keywords: *Transitivity analysis; Government Credibility; Ideological square*

1. Introduction

Language has an indispensable role in the construction of social objects and social relations. (Chen, 2018). There are different ways to examine the language in its social and cultural contexts and to reveal the hidden meanings both in written and spoken language. The analysis of a language can illustrate how language reflects ideology, beliefs, and thoughts. A political speech can reflect the ideology of the authority and change the opinions of the audiences. (Chen, 2018). Thus, the choice of certain words in speaking has great importance since they can not only reflect the speaker's ideology, but even change, and manipulate people's ideas. Different frameworks can be utilized to analyze a language, the systematic functional linguistics (SFL) by Halliday is the one chosen in this paper.

According to Halliday (1994), language has a number of abstract and more general functions, that is, language meta-functions, including ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Among them, the ideational function is used to represent the real world (including the external world and the internal world). This means that 'it is intimately concerned with the processes involved, whether they be actions, events or states, the entities involved in these processes, and if mentioned the circumstances within which they take place' (Banks, 2002). It consists of experiential function and logical function. The former construals and constructs various experiences in the real world, and the latter reflects the logical semantic relationship between the above language units. From the perspective of experiential function, human beings mainly use language to describe human life. Therefore, the experiential semantic representation of language users can reflect their views on nature and human relations. The experiential function is mainly realized by the transitivity system of the clause and voice. Halliday (1994) pointed out that there are two kinds of semantic modes in the physical system of a clause: transitive mode and ergative mode, and they complement each other. The transitive model reflects human construal of different event types, distinguishes six different process types. A transitivity analysis of discourse can reveal the implications behind [1-3].

2. Methodology

In this article, the writer tries to make a transitivity analysis of PM Trudeau's year-end interview with CTV News. The whole scripts of PM Trudeau's response in the interview consist of 61 sentences, with a total of 1640 words, making each sentence with about 27 words. Since clauses are the main focus of transitivity, it will be inevitable for us to classify those sentences into clauses.

Sentences can be analyzed in different spectrum, thus they can be segmented into clauses in

different ways. Briton (2000) holds that a sentence consists of at least one clause, a main clause while a complex sentence also contains one or more dependent clauses, which are usually embedded to the main clause. According to Hallidayan linguists, clauses can be classified into six classes in terms of types of process, being respectively material clause, mental process, relational process, verbal process, existential process, and behavioral process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In Hallidayan grammar, 'a clause is any stretch of language centered around a verbal group. (Thompson, 2014) Thus, the verbal group will define a clause to be either finite or non-finite.

Here, the researcher first applies the above-mentioned framework to divide the 61 sentences into 268 clauses, 73 of which are independent clauses, and the rest are dependent, as shown in appendix 1.

Though the discourse selected is an interview which is mainly spoken, usually characterized with short and simple sentences, its political genre and the background of an year-end interview during COVID-19 pandemic make it formal, thus most sentences are complex sentences with several embedded clauses[4-6].

3. Results and Discussion

Transitivity is a prominent way of representation of ideational function through which people's ideas, beliefs, and ideologies can be reflected. In transitivity, three components are usually laid out to be analyzed, including participants, process, and circumstances.

Participants are assigned different names in different processes, and circumstances vary as well along with the changes of processes. The Process, participants and circumstance of each clause are shown in appendix 2.

In material process, which mainly involves a 'doing' process, the participants are called 'actor', being the 'doer', and 'goal', being the participant 'being done to'. (Thompson, 2014) An example to illustrate this is table 1, in which the actor 'we' serves as the 'doer' of the action 'made', while the goal 'commitment' serves as the participant 'being done to'.

Table 1: An illustration of material process

3a	We	made	a commitment	by Canadians
	actor	material	goal	circumstance

In mental process, which mainly refers to 'the mental processes of thinking, imagining, liking, wanting, seeing, etc', the respective participants are sensor and phenomenon. People may believe that sensor conflates with subject, while phenomenon conflates with complement, but this is not always true. In 'the news excited us', the subject 'the news' is 'phenomenon'.

Relational processes focus on the relationship between two concepts, in which the respective participants are 'carrier' and 'attribute' in attribute process, and 'identifier' and 'identified' in identifying process.

Verbal processes involve the action of saying, so participants making the action in this process are sayers, while the others can be receivers, targets or verbiages.

Existential processes denote the existence of an entity, in which a subject 'there' is typically found. Since 'there' has no experiential meaning, it only serves as the subject, not the participants. The participants in this process are called existent. One thing that needs to point out is that existential processes can also be realized in other ways, for example by utilizing 'exist'.

Behavioral processes refer to the physical actions of psychological processes as shown in table 2. It differentiate from mental processes in that behavioral processes are realization of mental processes. To realize the mental process of 'seeing', which is mental, behavioral processes like 'watching', 'looking', etc are utilized. Here, behavior serves as the participant, different from the actor, which is always human [7-11].

Table 2: An illustration of behavioral process

Behavioral process	He	looked	carefully
	behavior	Behavioral	circumstance

The transitivity analysis cannot be conducted without taking the background of the interview into consideration. The a year-end interview was made in a time of COVID-19 epidemic to reflect on a year like no other. The prime minister not only discussed his COVID-19 regrets, but defended his deficit

spending approach as well. The prime minister and his government's political ideologies and beliefs can be traced in the chosen words of the interview.

Like other terms, ideology is hard to define. According to van Dijk (1998), 'Ideologies are the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members.' He concluded that 'As systems of ideas of social groups and movements ideologies not only make sense in order to understand the world (from the point of view of the group), but also as a basis for the social practices of group members.' Ideologies mainly deal with six categories of issues. They include membership criteria, typical activities, overall aims, norms and values, position and resources. Each categories can be reflected through languages in diverse way. His theory of ideological square provides a possible way to the analysis of this interview. For van Dijk (1998), this method used to analyze most ideological discourses consists four aspects:

- Emphasize positive things about US;
- Emphasize negative things about THEM;
- De-emphasize positive things about US;
- De-emphasize negative things about THEM.

The combination of transitivity and the ideological square will not only discover the mental character, but social and psychological characters in Trudeau government's ideologies, especially on health and economy.

3.1 Process analysis

To analyze the transitivity of each clause in the interview, the writer makes a table about the occurrence frequency and percentage of different types of processes, as in table 3. In the total of 268 clauses, material processes take up almost half of the clauses, being 49.6 percent. In relational processes, the numbers of attribute clauses and identifying clauses are 70 and 2, being respectively 26.1 percent and 0.8 percent. Clauses ranking the third are mental processes with 44 clauses and a percentage of 16.4. The two following processes include existential processes of 12 clauses and verbal processes of 7 clauses. As a minor process, behavioral processes don't appear in the interview.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of occurrences of different types of processes

	Frequency of occurrences	Percentage
Material process	133	49.6
Relational process (attribute)	70	26.1
Mental process	44	16.4
Existential process	12	4.5
Verbal process	7	2.6
Relational process (identifying)	2	0.8
Behavioral process	0	0
Total	268	100

First of all, like in many other discourses, the 133 material processes hold the most prominent position in the interview, which is a significant sign that the Trudeau government wants to show to the public. Through this way, they want to show, in face of the present difficult situation, what the government have done and want to do, and also the government is keeping taking actions instead of staying idle. According to van Dijk (1998), typical activities is an important category in ideology. The typical verb groups chosen in the material process include 'do', 'give', 'fight', and so on, which show that the resources the PM wants to share with the public are the government's determination to fight against the present pandemic and the belief of winning the battle. By doing this, the public's doubt of the government's capability in dealing with public health problems, the economy and the deficit can be dispelled in some way. The material processes here also serve as a persuasion to persuade the public have faith for the government, which is a prominent factor in political discourse. Persuasion shows that participants are trying to influence the decisional outcome of deliberation by attempting to persuade the other participants of the reasonableness of the practical judgment they support (Fairclough, 2012). Clauses 7h and 7i contain subtle persuasion for people's faith [12-14].

(7d.) we've still got a tough winter

(7e.) to go through,

(7f.) but the end is in sight

(7g.) and we just have to hold on

(7h.) and we'll get through it.

(7i.) is a huge thing. Actor material actor material goal

In the above clauses, PM Trudeau persuaded the public to hold on and believe the government, and convinced them that we will get through the tough time, with the public and government staying together.

The second most applied process in the interview is relational process. Most of relational processes in the interview are attribute processes, which show the attribute of participants. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) concluded that three main types of relation – 'intensive', 'possessive' and 'circumstantial' are involved in the English system and each one falls into either the mode of being 'attributive' or the mode of being 'identifying'. Thus relational processes reflect the relationship between the carrier and the attribute or the identifier and the identified. Here clause 25a. shows attribute process, while clause 18a. illustrates identifying process.

(25a.) Doing PPE quicker would have been good.

(25b.) but we actually took that learning Carrier relational a ttribute from

(25c.) not having been as quick...

(18a.) But at the same time, we were one of the leading founding members of the COVAXS Facility. identified relational identifier

In 25a. the attribute 'good' is used to describe the carrier which is an action of doing. And in clause 18a, 'one of the leading founding members' identifies the identity of the identified 'we', thus it is reversible, and when the positions of the identifier and the identified are switched around, it still makes sense. In explaining 'doing', PM Trudeau used 'good', and in identifying the identity of WE, PM Trudeau applied 'leading'. Both entities are entitled with commendatory attributes, which show PM Trudeau's strong confidence in their policies of health and economy, and send a positive signal to the public about the government.

Mental processes follow relational processes as the third most frequent one. A mental clause reflects the inner mental activities, which involves the senser, being always animate, and the phenomenon, not necessarily being confined to one particular category of semantics or grammar; that's to say, the phenomenon can be a thing, a fact, or even a clause. Van Dijk (1998) pointed out that overall aims to show what people want and why people do certain things and values to show what is good or bad the group are two main categories in ideology. Mental processes provide suitable ways to expressing cognitions, perceptions, and feelings. Take the following clauses as an example:

(2h.) We knew

(2i.) That some vaccines would be faster Sensor mental

(14a.) We know that things go quicker, things go slower, challenges come. Sensor mental

(32a.) What

(32b.) We can ensure is nothing any private company does is going to Sensor mental

Interfere in any way with the full rollout of free vaccines to all Canadians

In the mental process, it can be seen that by using 'know', PM Trudeau tried to empathize with the listeners or audiences and convince them to accept the government's policy of vaccination. In clause 32b., 'ensure' is applied to assure the public that their interests are not allowed to be harmed, which makes the government's policy of vaccination easier to receive people's acceptance.

Existential processes and verbal processes only appear respectively 12 times and 7 times, mainly because the former is used to present the existence of problems and the later is more of a statement than a persuasion, neither of which serves well enough to promote the speaker's ideologies, thus they are not frequently utilized in the interview.

3.2 Participant analysis

The function of participants is usually neglected in process analysis. But in this interview, participants as subjects significantly reflect Trudeau and his government's the political dispositions on health and economy. Thus, in the following part, the writer particularly makes a table of the Frequency and percentage of occurrences of top 10 participants as subjects in the 268 clauses. Two things we need to clarify are that in some cases, the omission of some participants may happen, and we only list the top ten participants as subjects with a total of 154 participants. As participants are not necessarily required in some cases, there is an omission of 42 participants as subjects. And as we discussed above, 'there' doesn't serve as a participant in the existential clauses, as it has no experiential meaning, so they are not counted as subjects. They are also 45 miscellaneous participants serving as subjects.

Table 4: Frequency and percentage of occurrences of top 10 participants as subjects in the 268 clauses

Nominal groups as participants	frequency	percentage
We	69	25.4
That	18	6.7
It	16	5.9
I	14	5.2
People	9	3.4
You	7	2.6
Canadians	6	2.2
Who	5	1.8
They	5	1.8
What	4	1.5
Total	155	57.5

Table 4 shows that the most frequent participant used as subjects is 'we', referring to the Trudeau government, which consists a quarter of subjects in the 268 clauses. The frequently used participants as subjects in the top ten include that, it, I, people, you, Canadians, who, they, and what. One question remains here is that whether 'it' may be classified as participants, so do 'who' and 'what'. But that's not the main issue we need to make further exploration, as what we mainly deal with in the following part are WE and THEY.

According to van Dijk (1998), WE shows a strong orientation of ingroup polarization in ideology, while THEY serves as one of outgroup polarization. The first category in his ideology theory is membership criteria, which means who the participants belongs to. WE were used as the subject 69 times in the interview, and it shows that despite the doubt from the public, Trudeau government calls on the common Canadians to join 'US'. The considerable uses of WE can also be commonly traced in many political discourses. In contrast, when THEY was utilized in the interview, it might used to either emphasize the negative things about THEM, or de-emphasize the positive things about THEM. The following analysis of clause 10a. and clause 10d. will illustrate this:

(10a.) They're going to face challenges

(10b.) around distributing vaccines (10c.) that Actor material goal Everyone is facing

(10d.) but we do a very, very good job. Actor material goal

When using actor THEY, the goal is emphasized as something difficult or even negative, like CHALLENGES, while for the actor WE, the goal in the process becomes JOB with commendatory attribute GOOD. It strengthens OUR ideology and neglect or even degrade THEIR ideology, thus subtly guiding the public to accept OUR ideology. This is a typical phenomena in political discourse, as one important aspect of ideology is to persuade or manipulate. The positions and relationship of US and THEM can also be reflected.

Terms like these can also be analyzed in discourse. When we construct the scripts into two mini-corpus, one about health and the other about economy, then use 'we' and 'they' as search terms

and apply the word-processing software AntConc, the findings shown in appendix 3 verify the ideological square van Dijk proposed.

In the result of the top ten most frequently-used words, WE are used 69 times ranking as the third, following 'the' with 82 times and 'to' with 74 times, both of which seem not as powerful as WE in the representation of ideology.

We set the mode to highlight the right three words of 'we', and to highlight the left one and the right two words of 'they'. We found in the 69 times occurrence of 'we', the following three words are either commendatory or assuring.

- 4|| we are better on vaccines than just about
- 9|| we can come roaring back as quickly as possible
- 10|| we can ensure is nothing any private company does
- 16|| we do a very, very good job
- 22|| we had such a solid plan on vaccines
- 26|| we have more vaccines than necessary
- 38|| we made a commitment to do right by Canadians
- 39|| we managed it well in terms of people coming
- 50|| we're properly sharing best practices
- 52|| we're still in a better economic position

In the above 10 sentences, the underlined words in the following part of 'we' include 'better', 'well', 'commitment', 'more', 'solid', 'good', 'more', 'commitment', 'well', 'properly', and 'better'. The choices of these terms help to build faith for the government in the audience, and set a positive image of the government. In this way, the aspect of emphasizing positive things about US in the ideological square is well illustrated. While in some other sentences, de-emphasizing negative things about US is illustrated as well.

- 1|| we actually have less to rebuild
- 15|| we didn't see a lot of spread
- 49|| we are not going to tell provinces how they
- 57|| we shouldn't have moved as fast on people

Terms like 'less', 'didn't', 'not going to', and 'shouldn't' are selected here to show the de-emphasis of negative things about US.

As shown in the below five sentences, while in the 5 times occurrence of 'they', two are preceded by 'but', one is followed by 'have to', one 'actually', and one 'challenges'. These words also serve to emphasize the negative things about THEY.

- 1) but they're an island in the South Pacific a long way
- 2) But they matter even more in the middle and at the
- 3) how they have to do it, it's their jurisdiction.
- 4) system. They're going to face challenges around
- 5) what they're actually able to do.

In the high frequency list, the occurrences of vaccines, people, Canadians, and pandemic are 16, 15, 13, and 9. From these frequently-selected terms, the government's concern for Canadians and the confidence to get the pandemic under control can be revealed, which in turn, exposes the government spares no effort to set a positive image in the public.

3.3 Circumstance

Circumstances mainly focus on reflecting the background function, which are typically realized by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases: they are circumstantial adjuncts in interpersonal terms.

(Thompson,2014) In this paper, the writer didn't make specific classifications of circumstances not because they are not important or sometimes optional in reflecting ideologies, but mostly because of the limits of time and length of the writing.

4. Conclusion

Through a transitivity analysis from functional grammar and van Dijk's ideological square, the writer segmented the interview into 268 clauses, listed the participants, processes and circumstances in each clause. The writer first analyzed the frequency of occurrence of different processes and participants. Then with the help of AntConc, he verified the ideological square reflected in the interview. The writer draw a conclusion that in the interview, PM Trudeau tried to emphasize what the government had done and achieved to stop the COVID-19 pandemic from further spread and given the public the confidence of getting it under control, thus to show the strong belief that economy would rebound in the near future. In this way, public dissatisfaction to the government can be alleviated, a positive public image of the government is set up, and the credibility of government has been established.

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