

Transitivity Analysis of Faust's Speech from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar

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Abstract: Drew Gilpin Faust, who as the first female president of Harvard, her appointment and her thought of running a school exert a vital part for Harvard. Her speeches attracts people's attention as well as touch people's hearts so that this research is a transitivity analysis of her freshman convocation address to the class of 2021, in which her speech can reveal relationships between language and meaning, for researchers being conducive to better understand the meaning conveyed by her speeches. Guided by Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar, this paper is apt to explore how transitivity is realized in Faust's speech, as well as to reveal the deep meaning of her speech. Faust can better grasp transitivity in speech, so as to achieve her purpose and meaning of speech, that is, significance of education to enable to graduates to recognize when someone is talking rot.

Keywords: systemic functional grammar, transitivity, freshman convocation address, process

1. Introduction

Drew Faust is the 28th president of Harvard University and the first female president since Harvard was founded 371 years ago. Her appointment has symbolic significance to some extent, that is, it symbolizes that Harvard University will be more open and democratic. Since taking office, she has put forward the idea of running a research university with philosophical implication through speeches, reports, press conferences and so on.

At the opening ceremony of Harvard University freshmen in 2017, Drew Gilpin Faust repeatedly asked that "What should a university education be at such a moment and what should it mean? And what indeed is a university? How do we think about its responsibilities — our responsibilities — at such a challenging and unsettled time in our country and in the world?" which calls for deep thought at such a challenging and unsettled time.

The most influential is the systemic-functional linguistic school for contemporary linguistic theories, whose main figure is the British scholar M.A.K. Halliday. The six core ideas of systemic functional grammar are metafunctional, systematic, stratificational, functional, contextual, and covert rate which provides a powerful theoretical framework for discourse analysis. Because of its operability and application value, it has been widely used in the analysis of various discourses.

This paper attempts to make a transitivity analysis of freshman convocation address from the perspective of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, and to explore how Halliday's transitivity system achieves the purpose, effect and function of the speech in Faust's speech, in order to find out the characteristics of Faust's freshmen convocation address and reveal the deep meaning of her speech.

This study is of pedagogical significance as well. By analyzing Faust's speech, it is apt to arouse the awareness of the public the importance of education. Besides, this study is of innovation significance.

2. Systemic Functional Grammar and Transitivity

Systemic Functional Grammar is put forward by M. A. K. Halliday, which is a sociologically oriented functional linguistic approach that regards functions as being "built into language as the fundamental organizing principle of the linguistic system".^[1] The publication of *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* by M.A.K. Halliday in 1985 symbolizes that Systemic Functional Grammar has been relatively mature.

Halliday (1994) reckons that language is the product of social activities, and all cultures reflect metafunctions with some universal meanings in language, namely conceptual functions, interpersonal

functions and textual functions.

Interpersonal function, one of the three metafunctions language put forward by M. A. K. Halliday, refers to establish, maintain or establish interpersonal relationships, which is embodied that language can not only express the speaker's experience and inner activities, but also the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation and his judgment and evaluation of things, which are mainly realized by mood and modality^[2]. While textual functions, refers to relate language to the context in which its users live, which is embodied in the complete meaning that the speaker wants to express owing to a certain context^[3].

Ideational metafunction refers express the speaker's internal world and logical relationship between things, including experiential function and logical function^[4]. According to language usage, ideational function is divided into several semantic functions and their corresponding subsystems, including transitivity, voice and polarity. Transitivity, as a semantic system of ideational metafunction, categorize experience through grammar, as well as point out participant and circumstantic element related to various processes^[5].

Human experience can be divided into six different processes through transitivity(M. A. K. Halliday, 1994): (1) material process; (2) mental process; (3) relational process; (4) behavioral process; (5) verbal process; (6) existential process.

3. The analysis of transitivity in Faust's Freshman Convocation Address

Systemic functional grammar holds that various components in each clause has its own special significance so that this research classifies freshman convocation address according to principle of six processes in transitivity system as a unit of clauses, and analyzes the address. There are 192 clauses containing transitivity system in the whole discourse, and the frequency and proportion of each process in the speech are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The frequency and proportion of each process

Process	Frequency	Proportion
material process	101	52.60%
relational process	58	30.21%
mental process	20	10.42%
verbal process	9	4.69%
behavioral process	3	1.56%
existential process	1	0.52%

It is no doubt that Faust mainly adopted material process and relational process at the opening ceremony of Harvard University freshmen in 2017. There are 101 clauses of material process, occupying 52.60% in total, which is the most frequently used process among all processes. The second is relational process, which appears 58 times, accounting for 30.21%. While the other four processes appear less frequently, which are: mental process, verbal process, behavioral process and existential process from high to low. The presentation of this frequency is not random or accidental, but related to the purpose and effect of the speech, or the function of the speech.

Generally speaking, material process tends to describe everything that happens outside, which generally does not involve subjective factors such as personal emotions. Faust is willing to employ a large number of material process clauses to reflect objectivity and authenticity of her convocation address, improving credibility and persuasiveness. While relational process is chosen to reflect the relationship between things, so she chooses relational process clauses to describe her attitude and viewpoint as a speaker. And mental process clauses are inclined to express psychological activities such as feeling, reaction and cognition, in that she chooses mental process to express her true feelings as well as her best wishes and expectations for freshmen.

In a word, various process exert a vital part in President Faust's freshmen convocation address to achieve her purpose of speech, which reflects her hidden ideology. The following is a further analysis of Faust's real communicative purpose and possible implied ideology through specific process clauses.

3.1. Material Process

Material process is a process of doing. This process is generally represented by dynamic verbs,

aiming to describe external experience^[2].

Material process can objectively describe events. In Example (1), Drew Gilpin Faust chose the substantive verb "invited" to describe an exploration journey that Harvard, as a research university, can bring to students. In Example (2), she chose the verb "write", "did", "pursue" and "spend" to describe the objective facts that "you" as an actor referring in particular to freshmen, can roam in the vast world of classrooms, laboratories, libraries and museums to explore new knowledge in fields of science and engineering.

Example (1) And as you learn, you are invited to be part of this adventure of discovery — in and beyond classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and museums.

Example (2) You may eventually write a senior thesis —about 40 percent of last year's graduates did —a project in which you pursue an interest, a problem of your own independent research —or perhaps you will spend a summer as part of our undergraduate research village,...while you work closely with faculty in pursuit of new knowledge in fields of science and engineering, ...

Example (3) This requires all of us to work with courage and generosity and humility —to be willing to engage in the great debate...

Example (4) Which brings me to the second essential characteristic of universities is that I want to emphasize to you today.

In Example (3), Faust chose "requires", "work" and "engage" to describe her requirements for freshmen in the next four years of college. Beyond an endless exploration of knowledge provided by Harvard, freshmen are apt to have courage, generosity and humility. In addition, "brings" and "emphasis" in Example (4) describe the meaning of university not only in the above-mentioned parts, but also hints the importance of university education described below at the opening ceremony of Harvard University freshmen in 2017.

Faust is the first female president of Harvard since its founding, symbolizing that Harvard University will be more open and democratic^[6]. Faust puts forward her thinking of running a research university with philosophical implication through her speech. In this discourse, a lot of material processes tend to state objective facts, which enable to improve the credibility of Faust's speech, and then achieve her speech purpose of emphasizing the significance of education, so that freshmen entering Harvard in 2017 can convince her and respond to her calls to explore new fields.

3.2. Mental Process

Mental process is a process of sensing that expresses mental activities such as perception, reaction and cognition. Mental process generally have two participants. One is the subject of mental activities, that is, senser, and the other is the object, that is, the perceived phenomenon. Compared with material process, mental process describes inner experience.

Mental process tends to subjective expression, so that Faust express herself directly to the audience through mental processes. There are a total of 20 clauses indicating mental process at the opening ceremony of Harvard University freshmen in 2017, which are few in number but indispensable. In these 20 psychological processes, Among these 20 mental processes, Faust repeatedly uses sense verbs see and hear and cognition verbs know, think and believe.

Example (5) its elements of difference that render Harvard College the extraordinary experience that I know you will find it to be.

In Example (5), the verb "know" contains appreciation and implicit trust, which implies admiration for richness and diversity of university and expectations that freshmen will discover its significance and put it into practice during their four years in university. This statement not only enable to proficient in significance at college, but also calls on freshmen to implement their actions.

Example (6) In recent weeks we have heard threats of global nuclear war, we've seen frightening examples of extreme weather...

Example (7) How do we think about its responsibilities — our responsibilities — at such a challenging and unsettled time in our country and in the world?

Mental process "heard" and "seen" in Example (6) express a shudder at terrorism in Spain, Finland, Belgium, and Afghanistan, and chilling instances of hatred, racism, anti-Semitism, and violence in an

American college town, which aroused strong resonance among audiences. Especially at present, human beings are facing a special period of obscurity, so that anxiety is spreading. Harvard University freshmen in 2017, are called on to seriously think about significance of university to them and move forward. At the same time, the word "think" in Example (7) is more likely to cause freshmen to think about how to view the responsibility of university at such a challenging and unsettled time in the country and in the world, that is, the responsibility that needs to be shouldered. In addition, the expression "we" is more likely to guide freshmen empathize with it and increase the sense of intimacy.

Example (8) We believe that the pursuit of truth requires a continuing process of testing and reassessment, of argument, and challenge and debate.

We do it because we believe in the power of community as an essential educational force.

The mental process "believe" in Example (8) expresses Faust's approval of the pursuit of truth in that university is the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Besides, people believe in truth and pursue the power of truth unremittingly, and firmly believe that education and learning are driving force of human progress. This process becomes increasingly powerful in this situation, which indicates Faust's firm belief in truth and her desire for freshmen to education.

3.3. Relational Process

Relational process refers to a process of being that reflects what kind of relationship things are in, that can be divided into attributive and identification, which are inclined to achieve characterization and identification.

Relational process aims to establish the characteristics of relationship and is the most direct way to evaluate or judge. In this freshman convocation address, Faust makes extensive use of link verb "be", which expresses the relational process, and the substantive verbs "mean" and "need" to describe relationships between things.

Example (9) What should a university education be at such a moment and what should it mean?

Example (10) And what indeed is a university?

In Examples (9) and (10), relational processes are adopted in interrogative sentences, which causes freshmen to think deeply about what university education should be, what university education means and what indeed is a university. In this circumstance, only when freshmen think about it themselves can they understand real meaning and implied meaning of Faust's speech.

Example (11) This is why it is imperative that your class collectively represent the widest possible range of backgrounds.

Example (12) We have never needed the promise of this University more.

The relational process "be" in Example (11) expresses the reason why freshmen need to survive in the complex campus environment. Continuing the above, it implies that Faust requires them to distinguish right from wrong in university, which is the main significance of university education. Choosing the substantive verb "need" in Example (12) expresses Faust's hope that the talents of every member of this campus will be fully welcomed and brought into full play. Additionally, everyone are expected to make progress to enable Harvard a place of mutual respect as well as become the best of ourselves. Especially confronted with constant hatred and violence all over the country, she is eager for freshmen to unite in a different way so that they could become the model of Harvard.

3.4. Verbal Process

Verbal process is a process of speaking to exchange information, which participant is a sayer.

In this address, verbal processes account for only 4.69% of the whole discourse and occurs 9 times, mostly through "describe", "ask" and "talk" to do so.

Example (13), the late Jeremy Knowles, described what he saw as the most important goal of higher education: it was, he said, to ensure that graduates can recognize when "someone is talking rot."

Example (14) Talk a lot so others can learn from you.

In Example (13), the late Jeremy Knowles is the participant named sayer, who was a former dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in verbal processes "described" and "said", describing what he

believes is that the significantly important goal of higher education, is to enable graduates to distinguish right from wrong. Consequently, these clauses expressing verbal process point out theme of Faust's speech, which enhances her credibility and resonates with freshmen. Similarly, verbal process "talk" in imperative sentence in Example (14) expresses Faust's expectation for new students, so as to build Harvard into a model that is increasingly brilliant because of diversity rather than divided.

3.5. Behavioral Process

Behavioral process refers to a process of behaving, such as breathing, coughing, sighing, dreaming, crying and laughing, which indicates externalization process of internal experience. Behavioral process indicates the process of physiological and mental behavior. Generally, there is only one participant, that is behavior, and the actor is generally a person.

The behavioral process appears less frequently in this speech, second only to the existence process which appears once, and its occurrence frequency is three times, all of which are expressed by the substantive verb "listen".

Example (15) Listen even more so that you can learn from them.

Example (16) And listen generously to others so that they may take risks too.

"Listen" in Example (15) and Example (16) as well as "talk" in Example 14 have the same meaning expression in Faust's speech, which similarly expresses Faust's expectation for freshmen, expecting freshmen to put into action during their four years of university, so as to become better themselves.

3.6. Existential Process

Existential process is a process of existing indicating that something exists. In existential process, there must be an existent, which means the existence or occurrence of something. The typical sentence pattern of existential process is there be sentence pattern, and existential process is inclined to express by verbs "exist" and "happen".

Halliday pointed out that existential process is not common in discourse. The existential process only appears one times, accounting for 0.52% of the whole freshmen convocation address.

Example (17) We recognize there is always more to know, so we must be open to new ideas and new perspectives.

In this speech, Faust only employ a there be sentence pattern to express existential process, which responds to Faust's philosophical thought of running a research university, that is, there is no end to explore new knowledge in various fields, so freshmen must embrace new ideas and new perspectives, to the possibility -even the probability-of being wrong.

4. Conclusion

To summarize, it is no accident that material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process and existential process in this freshmen convocation address, which expresses Faust's ideology to a certain extent.

Faust, as the first female president since founding in Harvard, put forward explicit idea of running a research university with philosophical implication through speech, emphasizing the significance of university education, that is, education is to ensure that graduates can recognize when someone is talking rot^[7].

In this freshmen convocation address, a large number of material process clauses are expected to describe what will or should happen to freshmen in their four years of university, so as to improve Faust's credibility and persuasiveness, calling on freshmen to act aggressively. She chooses relational process clauses to reflect the relationship between university and freshmen, and expresses her high approval of university education. The mental process clauses are inclined to express Faust's warm welcome to her freshmen, her suggestions for their future development as well as her best wishes and expectations for freshmen future.

In addition, although the other three processes appear less frequently in speeches, these three greatly enrich speech process while serving the subject. In this speech, Faust not only states the facts,

but also expresses her views accurately, choosing different processes to enrich her speech and enhance the infectiousness of her utterance. Thus, Faust can better grasp transitivity in speech, so as to achieve her purpose and meaning of speech, and make freshmen accurately capture the deep meaning of her freshmen convocation address.

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