

The Analysis of the Soldier from Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspectives

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Abstract—The Soldier is a sonnet written in 1914 by Rupert Brook, a British war poet. The paper aims at analyzing the poem by applying M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a theoretical framework. The study mainly adopts a qualitative methodology to analyze the text by text linguistics. However, the quantitative methodology is also used to calculate the proportions of each metafunctional process in this poem. The main findings of this paper are:

1) Topic theme: the themes of the poem are I, dust, England, this heart, et., which show the soldier's love and gratefulness for England; 2) The focus of tense: The Soldier starts with a conditional clause and then uses present and past tense to create a context as if he was depicting a real external world instead of an imagination from the inner world. 3) Patterning and re-patterning: The patterning analysis shows the soldier in the poem emphasizes his motivation for sacrificing and spreading the precious things in England who had brought him up. The paper concludes that The Soldier shows a strong sense of patriotism, which might be an approval for the former literary studies of this poem from linguistic aspects.

Index Terms—Patterning and re-patterning, systemic functional linguistics, text linguistics, the soldier, transitivity, topical theme.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper utilizes M.A.K. Halliday's SFL as a theoretical framework to analyse literary work, concentrating on the topical theme, transitivity and grammatical patterning. The text selected is Rupert Brooke's most famous sonnet, The Soldier. Rupert Brooke was one of the British war poets during the First World War period. The poem was written in 1914, the beginning of the war, when the poet just settled off, but before long he died of illness without experiencing the real war. As patriotism and the idealized scene of war are vividly presented, this poem gained popularity and the enthusiasm of fighting for the motherland has once gone viral among the British people. By analyzing the aspects above, the paper tries to figure out its main idea and its characteristics as a war poem.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework harnessed in this paper is Halliday's SFL [1]. As its name indicates, SFL firstly views

language as a system and correlated with meaning. Depending on the context, language users can select from the language system to express their meaning potentials. For language is also utilized in social and cultural communication, SFL also emphasizes the functions of the language. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) [1], there are three main functions of language, which are named metafunctions -- Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual metafunctions.

People use language to represent their experiences from both the material and spiritual world, and the correlations among them [2]. This is the Ideational metafunction, which consists of two functions--experiential and logical. Interpersonal metafunction reveals the interpersonal relationships among human beings and the choices of turn-taking. Texture function focuses on how people form a text combined with a certain context to convey the information and their thoughts, consisting of four elements: theme, rheme, conjunctive and modal adjuncts.

According to Hu (2005) [3], a discourse starts with a theme. Following the theme there is a rheme that is the central content. One type of theme is multiple theme, which has three elements: textual, interpersonal and topical theme. Textual and interpersonal theme precedes the topical theme. The textual theme contains continuative (e.g. yes/no,) structural (e.g. and), and conjunctive (e.g. therefore.), which can enhance the coherence between the clauses. While interpersonal theme consists of modal (e.g. frankly speaking), finite in the yes-no question, and vocative. The topical theme is the experiential element and is indispensable in discourse that signals what the rheme will fit with [4].

Transitivity is one of the main sources to realize the experiential function. Being a semantic system, it allows people to choose from different types of processes to express their real-world experiences [3]. There are six types of processes: material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, and relational, which will be illustrated in the results and discussions sections. Apart from the process, participant and circumstance are also elements in experiential analysis, though not so focused as the process.

Patterning is also highly focused in the text and stylistics analysis. A text consists of sentences, and sentences consist of clauses. Patterning is the grammatical structure that takes up most of the clauses or sentences in the text. However, there are clauses or sentences whose structures are ungrammatical or 'deviating' the majority, so they are marked, which is called re-patterning [5]. This deviation or the unconventional use of normal language, needing more endeavour on the process of interpretation than the normal one, naturally demands more attention, which means it is highlighted.

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B. Previous Studies of the Text

Although the poem was composed in 1914, the existing literature concerning Brooke's *The Soldier* mainly focuses on the critics in literary aspects, without applying a linguistic theoretical framework to analyze it. Hence, this article will use Systemic Functional Grammar to analyze the poem based on literary studies.

According to previous studies, Harold (2003) [6] made a thematic analysis of *The Soldier* by combining a line-by-line interpretation and a comparison of theme and ideas with another text of Rupert Brooke written soon after the declaration of the war, *An Unusual Young Man*. He found that the poem expresses the soldier's strong determination of sacrifice due to his gratefulness to England by letting readers imagine. Although this study mostly agree with the main argument of Harold (2003)'s [6] analysis, this paper utilizes a new perspective to analyze this poem by SFL such as topical theme, and re-patterning. Additionally, the study holds that the image actually is the experience in the soldier's inner world, which is also a part of real-world [1]. Therefore, SFL can be used for analyzing the transitivity.

As a war poet, Rupert Brooke's works are compared with those of other war poets. Since Wilfred is also a distinctive war poet during World War I, Hühn (2016) [7] analyzed both his poem *Strange Meeting* and Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*. Although he found that these two poems share the same characteristic that they both imagine death during the war, the main ideas and themes in these poems are different, as the difference lies in whether the poet had real experience during the war. This finding is based on the historical facts of these two poets, but the texts themselves can also reflect the reason for the distinction of the context between these two poems. Hence, this research adds tense analysis to extend Hühn's research. By this study, the blank of analyzing *The Soldier* using SFL theories will be filled, and this method can be applied in other poem analysis in the future.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

While the study is mostly qualitative, the quantitative methodology will also be used when the data such as proportions and frequency are needed for the text analysis. For qualitative research, the sonnet, which contains fourteen lines will be divided into 23 clauses, and then a hypothesis will be stated based on the inclusive analysis of the poem.

From the beginning of the analysis, the hypothesis exploring the theme of the poem will be stated following the clause analysis, and then the focus will be moved to the analysis of topical theme, transitivity (process and tense) in sequence and patterning and re-patterning. During these analyses, qualitative methods can be seen in calculating the number of clauses that contain different types of processes, and the percentage concerning the frequency of using each type. Additionally, for the tense analysis, the article will also compare Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting* to help highlight the distinction of *The Soldier* from a linguistic angle, which will be presented in details in the findings and discussions section.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Clause Analysis

Robert Wilde's *The Soldier* is a sonnet. It contains two stanzas, with 8 lines in the first stanza and 6 in the second. According to the clause analysis, the poem can be divided into 3 sentences, in which each clause is included among several lines. Table I shows the analysis of the poem by dividing it into clauses. The first clause of the first sentence is abbreviated as <cl1a> whereas the others are abbreviated according to the order of their sentences and clauses.

TABLE I: CLAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE SOLDIER

Stanza	Line	Sentence	Clause	Poem
1	I	1	a	If I should die
			b	think only this of me
	II		c	That there's some corner of a foreign field
	III		d	That is for ever England.
		2	a	There shall be
	IV			In that rich earth a richer dust concealed:(explain)
	V		b	A dust whom England bore,
			c	shaped,
			d	made aware,
	VI		e	Gave, once, her flowers <2f>to love, her way <2g> to roam,
	VII		h	A body of England's,
				breathing English air,
	VIII		i	Washed by the rivers,
			j	blest by suns of home.
2	IX	3	a	And think,
			b	This heart,
			c	all evil shed away
	X		d	A pulse in the eternal mind,
			e	no less
	XI			Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
	XII		f	Her sights and sounds;
			g	dreams happy as her day;
	XIII		h	And laughter,
			i	learnt of friends;
			j	and gentleness,
	XIV		k	In hearts at peace,
			l	under an English heaven.

B. Hypothesis and Theme Analysis

1) Hypothesis

According to the background of the poem, the situation is settled in a pre-war period, when the speaker, an English soldier were to be sent to the battlefield. Therefore, its topic is war, with the patriotism and the idealization of the scene after death highlighted. It is expected that the soldier is extremely grateful for the nurture he has received from England due to the "blest" in line VIII. Hence, he loved his motherland

deeply and would devote himself to fighting for “her” even if he may die in the war outside England.

The poem can be divided into two sections based on the context:

- 1) In stanza 1, from <c 1a> to <c 2j> the poet guides readers to imagine if he dies in a foreign field and turns into English-originated soil. The soil was blest with the natural subjects such as flowers, rivers and sun of England, which imply that the soldier was concerned by his motherland and enjoyed its natural elements.
- 2) In stanza 2, from <c 2a> to <c 2b> the soldier leads readers to imagine another situation where after his death, his heart has been purified and spreads thoughts, dreams and precious memories in England to somewhere else around the world. (Stanza 2, <c 3a- c 3b>)

2) Topical Theme

Table II shows the topical theme. It can be seen that topical theme appears in clauses 1a, 1c, 2a, 2h, 3b, 3d and it keeps changing over the context.

TABLE II: TOPICAL THEME IN THE SOLDIER

Clause	Topical theme
1a	I
1c	there
2a	there
2h	England
3b	this heart
3d	A pulse

The changes of topical theme start with “I” (stanza1, <c 1a>), the soldier himself. It is because at the very beginning, the soldier states his situation-- he is still alive, which implies that people might imagine what would be like if he died. Then he sets a general sight of the imagination, thus the

topical theme shifts to “there” (stanza1, <c 1c> <c 2a>), which expresses the objective existence. In this way, the poet also changes readers’ attentions from a certain soldier to a member of England, which becomes a more general concept. Therefore, instead of simply writing down personal feelings of a specific self (i.e. <c 1a>), the poet stresses more on collectivism, which can be viewed as patriotism.

The following content is the scene where his motherland-England has played a crucial role in shaping him and giving him nourishment during his growth. In other words, these lines are related to what England has done for him, then “England” (stanza1, <c 2h>) becomes the topical theme. The combined “There” and “England” offers the background for the next section, in which the theme changed back to the dust -- the body of England’s.

In the second stanza, given that the basic information has been prepared in the former stanza, the poet expands the imagination scene focusing on the mental world of the dead soldier -- his heart becomes purified and eternal, giving back all the preciousness that England had offered (i.e. the thoughts, sights and sounds, dreams, and laughter’s, learnt of his friends and gentleness) to his heart. Hence, the topical theme firstly changes from “England” to “the heart”. The next theme of the sub-clauses does not continue using “the heart”. Instead, it changes to a nominalization of a typical activity of “the heart”, “a pulse”, which can be regarded as a metonymy. It aims to accentuate the action cultivated by his heart to return for his motherland’s nourishment.

C. Transitivity Analysis

1) Process

According to the transitivity analysis, there are four types of processes in the poem: material, mental, behavioural, existential and relational. Table III-VIII shows the different processes used in this poem and the percentage of them.

TABLE III: PROCESS AND PERCENTAGES OF EACH TYPE OF PROCESS

Process Type	Material	Mental	Behavioural	Existential	Relational	Total
Total number	8	4	3	2	1	18
Proportions	44.44%	22.22%	16.67%	11.11%	5.56%	100%

Among the four types, material process takes up most of the cases in this poem. Therefore, the other four kinds, mental (4), existential (3), behavioral (3) and relational (1) act as foregrounding. While material process can be seen in <c 2c> <c 2d> <c 2e> <c 2g> <c 2i> <c 2j> <c 3c> <c 3e> mental process can be seen in <c 1b> <c 2d> <c 2f> <c 3a> existential process in <c 1c> <c 1d> <c 2a> Table IV, V, VI, VII shows these processes in corresponding clauses, in which the italic types are the verb of the process.

TABLE IV: MENTAL PROCESS IN THE SOLDIER

Stanza	Sentence	Clause	Poem
I	1	b	<i>think</i> only this of me
	2	d	made <i>aware</i>
		f	her flowers to <i>love</i>
II	3	a	<i>think</i> ,

The mental process is related to activities in the mind. In these clauses, the mental process is realized by verbs such as “think”, “aware” and “love”. The word “think” used an

imperative clause to reflect that the soldier in the poem was intended to call on his readers to imagine scenes in the following lines. “Aware” and “love” are from the scenes of imagination in the first stanza, which share the same sensor “dust”, a symbol of the soldier, who at that moment would have died on the foreign battlefield.

TABLE V: EXISTENTIAL PROCESS IN THE SOLDIER

Stanza	Sentence	Clause	Poem
I		1c	That there’s some corner of a foreign field
		2a	There shall be
		2a	In that rich earth a richer dust concealed:

The existential process shows existence which is exemplified in the two clauses shown in the table above. In <c 1c> “there” indicates a circumstantial relation (Hu, 2005) [3], which states a situation—some corner of a foreign field. Similar to this, <c 2a> also uses “there” to a circumstantial relationship between “a dust” and the surroundings.

TABLE VI: BEHAVIORAL PROCESS IN THE SOLDIER

Stanza	Sentence	Clause	Poem
I	1	a	If I should <i>die</i>
	2	b	A dust whom England <i>bore</i> ,
	2	h	A body of England's,
	2	h	<i>breathing</i> English air,

The behavioral process is concerned with physical activities. In this poem, this process is realized as verbs “die”, “bore” and “breath,” which implies that the interrelationships between the soldier and England were extremely strong, similar to the relationship between mother and child.

TABLE VII: RELATIONAL PROCESS IN THE SOLDIER

Stanza	Sentence	Clause	Poem
I	2	d	That <i>is</i> for ever England.

The relational process reveals the relation between things, which can be distributed in attributive and identifying. There is only 1 clause in this poem that contains Existential process. In <c 2d> the poet used “that” to indicate a attributive relation.

The material process, which acts as the background of the poem, indicates the action done by the character(s) to other character(s). All of the material processes in this poem have two participants, Actor and Goal. Table VIII lists all the clauses that have material process and illustrates the participants of each clause in detail.

TABLE VIII: THE MATERIAL PROCESS CLAUSES AND THE PARTICIPANTS

Stanza	Sentence	Clause	Poem	Actor	Goal
1	2	c	<i>shaped</i> ,	England	dust
1	2	d	<i>made aware</i> ,	England	dust
1	2	e	<i>Gave</i> , once	England	dust
1	2	g	her ways to <i>roam</i> ,	dust	her ways
1	2	i	<i>Washed</i> by the rivers,	rivers	a body of England's
1	2	j	<i>blest</i> by suns of home.	sun	a body of England's
2	3	c	all evil <i>shed</i> away	this heart	all evil
2	3	e	<i>Gives</i> somewhere back the thoughts by England given;	a pulse	the thoughts

In stanza I, England appears the most frequently as an Actor in each sentence. Another two Actors, rivers and sun are elements of the nature of England can be observed in <c 1i> and <c 1j> then they can be regarded as the symbols of England. They show that England, or elements of it, having given the dust birth, nourished it and blest it. The “dust,” which stands for the soldier and regularly as the Goal, acts as the Actor in <c 2g> Hence, it is the foregrounding of Actor in this stanza. In terms of the Goal in these clauses in stanza I,

the Goal is mostly the symbol of the soldier, the dust or a body of England's. While in stanza II, the Actors shifts into “this heart” and a symbol of it, “a pulse.” Hence, these two clauses are about what the heart of the soldier did.

2) Tense analysis -- A comparison with Wilfred Owen's *strange meeting*

The soldier is often compared with other war poem composed during the World War I period, as it depicts an image of a soldier who is ready to fight against enemies in the war. However, another war poet, Wilfred Owen, had real experience in the war field, whose poem might focus more on the real belligerence scene. Owing to the differences of experience, the tenses in these two poems may differ in use. The study will compare the tense between this poem and Wilfred Owen's *Strange meeting*.

In *The Soldier*, the poet starts with a conditional clause “if I should die,” which intends to draw the readers' attention to the following situation, “some corner of a foreign field...” To add the information of how the dust was nourished by England, he used past tense to show the process of its growth. The second stanza is a present situation in the image scene, which is the reason why the poet uses the present tense. Though in *The Soldier*, rather than simply write down conditional clauses or subjunctives, which are commonly used for describing a situation that is not the reality, several verbs are using the past tense or present tense, which provides a more realistic situation for readers to get in instead of using conditional clauses for readers to image the “if” condition. In this way, the readers feel as if they are experiencing an existing occurrences, rather than listening to the soldier's narrations.

However, in *Strange Meeting*, the past tense is used more frequently than other tenses. The very beginning of the poem uses the past tense, settling for the readers a scene in the past, in which the scene that the soldier died and met a stranger happened. The few present tense is only seen in the conversation between the two characters and the conditional clauses.

Therefore, according to the analysis above, it can be concluded that the difference of the tense in these two poems lies in whether the experience was from the inner world in the poet's mind or the real external world--the battle field.

V. PATTERNING

In this poem, some lines reflect the patterning. According to the analysis, <c 2a>- <c 2d> <c 2h>- <c 2j> and <c 3e> shares the same patterning, the analysis of them illustrates as follows:

(1) <c 2a>- <c 2d>A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, **Noun+Attributive**

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,

(2) <c 2h>- <c 2j>A body of England's, breathing English air, **Noun+Possessive+ Complement**

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

(3) <c 3e>A pulse in the eternal mind, no less **Noun+Prepositional phrase+Predicate**

Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given

These groups, all starting with an article and continuing with a modifier (an attributive or possessive or a

prepositional phrase) or complements, are patterning of the poem. It is clear that the noun as a theme, differs from group to group: A dust, A body and a pulse, all refer to the soldier. The following constituents are adding more details to the noun. Group (1)s “a dust” is followed by an attributive which is a narration of England's nourishment to the dust. In Group (2), “a body” is modified by the possessive “of the England” to make clear where its origin was, and then a series of participles “breathing” “washed” and “blest” are used as adverbial, which can be regarded as complement that adds information to the subject. While in Group (3) a prepositional phrase and a predicate follow “a pulse”.

However, there are also two examples of re-patterning, playing a role of foregrounding. The analysis of them are as follows:

(4)<c 3a>-<c3c> And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

(5)<c 3h>-<c 3l> Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day; And laughter, learnt of friends, and gentleness, In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

It can be seen that both of the re-patterning cases occur in the second stanza. The (4), the first line of the second stanza, is a shift from material process to mental process in the last several clauses in the first stanza. (5) expresses his gratitude to England by listing all the wonderful things in England, such as “her sights and sounds”, “dreams”, “laughter”, etc.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper analyses Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*, using SFL as a theoretical framework and studying its topical theme, transitivity (including process and tense,) and patterning. In analyzing topical theme, the study finds that though the poem starting with the first person single “I”, the following content shows the interrelationship between England and the soldier, especially his inner world. For transitivity, only the verbal process is not included in the poem. Comparing the tense of *The Soldier* with that of Wilfred Owen's *Strange Meeting*, the paper discovers that *The Soldier*, using a conditional clause to settle a scene reflects Brooke's spiritual world and real experience of England's blessing rather than simply introduce his war experience. For the patterning and re-patterning, the gratefulness of the soldier for England from the very deep in his heart is highlighted. In conclusion, the poem shows his

idea that with England's blessing, the soldier profoundly loves her. Thus, he was ready to fight and die for her, even if he had not seen the real war. He was expecting it, which can be impressive for readers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author finished all the tasks, including conducting the research, choosing and analyzing the text and writing the paper, etc.

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