

The Grammar of Trauma: A Transitivity-Based Stylistic Analysis of psychological states in Emma Donoghue room using M.A.K Halliday system

Asst. Lect. Murtadha Ali Hussein Al- Araji

Al-Qadisiyah University / College of Education

murtadha.hussein@qu.edu.iq

Date Received : 26/2/2026

Date of Acceptness : 29/3/2026

Abstract

Trauma is both a language and emotional experience. A fundamental problem with trauma theory and its literary representation is that words fall short to describe pain, fear, and damage that are felt inwardly. Using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by M. A. K. Halliday as a basis for transitivity style analysis, this paper examines the ways of describing pain in Emma Donoghue's Room. Focusing on selected passages narrated by Jack, the five-year-old protagonist, the analysis reveals the frequency and types of processes involved. The analysis, therefore, delves into the ways the novel represents psychological pain, physical experience, and the fractured thought process characteristic of trauma narratives. Material processes dominated in data, comprising 62%. This result clearly indicates how the traumatic world of Jack centers on the body and activities and also how physical habits, movements, and sensory contacts become substitutes for the direct expression of emotions. Mental processes, which comprised 22%, on their part, reveal more internal conflicts in Jack and also details the effects of being locked up, being scared, and the developmental disruption on his psyche. Relational, Verbal, and Behavioral processes occur less frequently. Transitivity analysis confirms that it is an effective approach through which trauma is mapped onto the language use. This may be considered an example of Donoghue's style, which reflects how traumatic experiences can be complex, impenetrable, and obscure and how they impinge on the body and mind.

Key words: Grammar, Trauma, transitivity, Stylistic, psychological states, Halliday system

نحو الصدمة: تحليل أسلوب نوحى للصدمة النفسية في رواية "غرفة" لإيما دونوهيو باستخدام نظام التعدي هاليداي

م.م. مرتضى علي حسين الأعرجي

جامعة القادسية/كلية التربية/قسم اللغة الانكليزية

murtadha.hussein@qu.edu.iq

تاريخ الاستلام : ٢٠٢٦/٢/٢٦

تاريخ قبول النشر : ٢٠٢٦/٣/٢٩

ملخص

الصدمة هي صدمة اللغة والعواطف. تكمن مشكلة أساسية في نظرية الصدمة وتمثيلها الأدبي في أن الكلمات لا تفي بالغرض لوصف الألم والخوف والضرر الذي يشعر به المرء داخليًا. باستخدام اللغويات الوظيفية النظامية (SFL) التي طورها هاليداي كأساس لتحليل أسلوب التعدي، تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في طرق وصف الألم في رواية "غرفة" لإيما دونوهيو. من خلال التركيز على مقاطع مختارة يرويها جاك، البطل ذوالخمس سنوات، لذلك، يتعمق التحليل في الطرق التي تمثل بها الرواية الألم النفسي، والتجربة الجسدية، وعملية التفكير المتصدعة التي تميز روايات الصدمة. سيطرت الأفعال المادية في نتائج البيانات، وشكلت ٦٢٪. تشير هذه النتيجة بوضوح إلى كيف يتركز عالم جاك الصادم على الجسد والأنشطة، وأيضًا كيف تصبح العادات الجسدية والحركات والاتصالات الحسية بدائل للتعبير المباشر عن المشاعر. أما الأفعال العقلية، التي شكلت ٢٢٪، فتكشف بدورها عن صراعات داخلية أكثر لدى جاك، وتفصل أيضًا آثار الحبس والخوف وتوقف النمو على نفسيته. نظرًا لأن أفعال العلاقة واللفظية والسلوكية نادرًا ما تحدث. يؤكد هذا النوع من التحليل على أنه نهج فعال يمكن من خلاله رسم الصدمة في استخدام اللغة. قد يعتبر هذا مثالاً على أسلوب دونوهيو، الذي يعكس كيف يمكن أن تكون التجارب الصادمة معقدة، وغير قابلة للاختراق، وغامضة، وكيف تؤثر على الجسد والعقل

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوح، الصدمة، الأسلوبية، التعدي، الحالة النفسية، نظام هاليداي.

1. Introduction

Trauma is a linguistic as well as an emotional experience. A basic problem of trauma theory and literary representation involves the incapability of words to mirror suffering, fear, and fragmentation. Trauma, in the words of Caruth (1996, p.3), is "the unclaimed experience," an incident that defies direct narrative because it surpasses conceptual and representational confines. According to Herman (1992, pp.175-176), traumatic memories are often recorded as "wordless emotions" versus cohesive narratives. Language is the point where memory, emotion, and identity fight to reinterpret meaning when trauma speaks.

Emma Donoghue's *Room* captures this linguistic and psychological paradox. The story of Jack, a five-year-old boy born in captivity, and his mother, who has spent years behind bars in a confined environment, is told in the book. The novel presents the story from Jack's limited perspective, transforms words into a representation of the psychological states that follow trauma: dread, anxiety, dissociation, and, ultimately, adaptability. Simple yet emotionally intense, the child's grammar captures the psychological effects of being in captivity while also reflecting his developmental stage. One such artistic portrayal of trauma is actually the child's linguistic abnormalities-an "emotional grammar" that speaks to the resistance and psychological dislocation of a traumatized soul.

While *Room* received considerable critical attention regarding its psychological and thematic dimensions, for example (Mullins 2016, p.42; O'Loughlin 2018, p.15; Barnett 2019, p.88) few studies have explored the contribution of language form to the representation of trauma. previous analyses of trauma tend to center around narrative structure, character psychology, or social context in which the trauma occurs, without detailed focus on the linguistic patterns through which traumatic experience is expressed. Stylistics, according to Simpson (2004, p.2) Jeffries & McIntyre (2010), acts as the bridge between language and literary meaning, explaining how grammatical choices create perception and feeling. M. A. K. Halliday's 1994 systemic functional linguistics forms an effective basis through which to investigate the relationship between language and human experience. His Transitivity System-which classifies sentences in terms of process types, including material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential-offers a useful tool to investigate the linguistic expression of experience and consciousness.

According to Halliday (1994, p.127), mental processes are the cognition, emotion, perception, and desire that form the basis of psychological states. Tendencies for introspection, terror, or detachment that reflect the mental life of traumatized characters can be determined by searching out repetition and context. In *Room*, the interaction between material and cognitive processes might suggest the increasing fogginess of the boundary between reality and what is taking place within Jack's mind. In that respect, the speech pattern is as much a response to trauma as it is an outcome of such traumatic experiences. It is a symptom of the mother's suppressed fear, the child's poor cognitive development, and their progress linguistically and mentally after finally being liberated from captivity.

This study uses M. A. K. Halliday's Transitivity System in Systemic Functional Linguistics for analyzing Emma Donoghue's *Room*. This gives a linguistic platform to test how sentence grammar represents fear, worry, attachment, confusion, and recovery. It does not define trauma based on any external psychological theory, but will examine how

Donoghue's verbal choice creates and conveys psychological meaning. Using Halliday's paradigm, the current study investigates how language structure portrays the inner life of Jack and Ma, whose perception is framed by the constraint of confinement and their progressive exposure to the outside world. The study aims at discovering how choices and the prevalence of process types, especially relational and mental clauses, indicate shifts in identity, emotion, and cognition.

The proposed approach relates linguistic form to psychological significance and thus furthers both stylistic and trauma studies. The grammar of the narrative is never neutral; it conditions, in subtle ways, the audience's view of the characters' mental life (Toolan, 2016:103). According to Eggins (2004, p.336) and Halliday & Matthiessen (2014, p.178), choices of transitivity indicate how the language represents social reality and human experience. This study investigates how lexis in the sentence structure is used by Donoghue's story to convey the dual nature of trauma: its necessity for articulation and its silence.

This paper illustrates, in addition, that in *Room* the linguistic rendition of trauma is more important than the material. The grammatical constructions that typify Jack's voice, the verbs of observation, emotion, and cognition come together to build a linguistic representation of trauma and recovery. *Room* invites readers to view trauma not simply as thematic concern, but also as a specifically linguistic event, in which the distinctions between syntax and psychology are not clearly defined. The study is primarily concerned with recognizing and categorizing different types of transitivity processes that exist in specific selections in the novel "Room". This includes the examination of how these process types play out their roles at the clause level for the purpose of meaning representation, specifically, experiential meaning. Another aspect involves investigating the prevalence and frequency of such process types to reveal patterns of meaning creation.

2. Literature Review

Cunanan (2011, pp.69-79) investigates how the use of certain language resources by a literary work reveals to the reader the worldview of the writer or character. It is intended that this be done in an accessible way for ESL teachers through drawing on SFG. In SOC writing, it seeks to raise awareness of converging linguistic patterns. Also, by adopting a different framework within the framework of a literature-based language program, the research illustrates a link between linguistics and literature. This will hopefully enable the students to appreciate how the language of a text contributes to the veracity of fiction. The study attempts to show how a reader can gain insight into the author's elusive and subjective mental style or identity through the careful consideration of the author's choice of words.

Isti'anah (2015, pp.63-78) demonstrates how transitivity analyses unveil the meaning and truth in both literary and nonliterary texts. Even though linguists commonly conduct transitivity analyses to discuss nonliterary materials, they can also be conducted on literary texts. Meaning and truth can be unraveled by critically examining texts so as not to mislead readers. Transitivity analyses are conducted when discussing texts of a literary nature to determine how certain subjects and characters are represented by authors of such texts. Transitivity studies are conducted for nonliterary texts to determine how language is used in influencing individuals and disseminating ideas for groups. Transitivity analyses can thus be used to determine objective readings of texts.

Sharma (2019, pp.6-9) demonstrates that stylistics are important to the interpretation and understanding of literature. In both poetry writing and teaching, stylistic language strategy is vital. Teachers and students have the opportunity to teach, write, and learn in an imaginative manner through the fields of stylistics and linguistics. The application of stylistic analysis to literature study and teaching is referred to as pedagogical stylistics. Students and people at large will benefit from a literary study and stylistic analysis one way or another since they will be close to other languages and improve their ability to communicate. Discuss stylistics, stylistic methods, and the relationship between language and literature in this essay.

Mohammed and Ismaeel (2023, pp.117-124) state that Two American poems dealing with the relation between linguistic structures and socially produced meaning are Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" (1883) and Robert Creeley's "America" (1968). They were known for celebrating the greatness and freedom of America, respectively. Using certain verbs, the study attempts to reveal the poets' intentions based on Halliday's transitivity emanating from Systemic Functional Linguistics. This study also closely looks at Halliday's transitivity covering processes such as material, mental, verbal, existential, relational, and behavioral in order to show its roles in the overall meanings of the two poems.

Yousif (2025, pp.131-145) examines two major prison autobiographies, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *A Sense of Freedom* by Jimmy Boyle, in order to discuss how language really shapes identity, power, agency, and resistance. The research investigates how the authors construct their experiences of incarceration through language. Therefore, the research ascertains how these authors analyse their prison experiences by investigating the six types of transitivity processes: Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential. Twelve closely selected passages from the two works were chosen in an attempt to highlight some recurring linguistic patterns and ideological themes. There are two distinct pictures of jail life in the search. In *A Sense of Freedom*, Boyle's existence was hinged on the institutionalized physical abuse and violence on the prison wall and his strong reliance on material processes, thereby portraying him as a passive kind of individual shaped by external factors. Again, Malcolm X's autobiography emphasizes strongly on mental and relational processes that reflects his intellectual enlightenment, self-discovery, and empowering personal journey. This study addresses the question of how transitivity figures choose to represent power and confrontation across these dimensions and provides us with revealing information about how language shapes our identities, institutions control us, and how we exercise our own agency in relation to incarceration.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Stylistics

Stylistics, sometimes referred to as 'literary linguistics', is the investigation and analysis of texts, with a focus on literary writings, but not exclusively. The roots of stylistics go back to classical poetics, especially rhetoric (Bruke, 2014, p.1). Modern stylistics welcomes corpus, critical, cognitive, educational, pragmatic, gender, multimodal, and, most recently, neuroscientific approaches, going far beyond what was done in the past under the rubrics of rhetoric, poetics, formalism, structuralism, and functionalism. To the outsider, this diversity may appear to be fragmenting the field. But that couldn't be further from the truth, since stylistics is, on many levels, a study of interdisciplinary. "Stylistics is a method of

textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language," (Simpson 2004: 2). Thus, stylistics continues to use the methodological genes that rhetoric, its ancestor, gave to it. Its strength lies in the fact that it can be applied to textual data, which is its principal use.

Bruke (2014, p.2) highlighted that A stylistician "can arguably be viewed as a kind of empirical or forensic discourse critic: a person who with his/her detailed knowledge of the workings of morphology, phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and various discourse and pragmatic models, goes in search of language-based evidence in order to support or indeed challenge the subjective interpretations and evaluations of various critics and cultural commentators".

3.2. Transitivity

Halliday (1967, p.199) defined transitivity as the "set of choices" related to cognitive content, the linguistic representation of extra linguistic reality, including feelings, thoughts, and perceptions as well as external world events. Mood is a reflection of how participants are organized in speech situations, providing possibilities for the role of the speaker: The speaker may be stating, questioning, or commanding; he may affirm, seeking confirmation, deny, or assume any one of a range of stances that are made available by possibilities of language interaction.

Halliday's SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p.20) focuses on semiotics, the code of language, and how utterances and texts specify all possible meanings. SFL studies the functional and situational organization of language in the social context (Halliday, 1994, p.21). Precisely, it explains how speakers construct utterances and texts to convey their intended meaning through "generalised metafunctions that relate language to the outside world, where interactants and their social roles matter." SFL maintains that language has three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual, which are mirrored by a vast system network of meaning potentials that include subdivisions of Transitivity, Thing, and Quality, each with its own set of semantic properties for utterance formation (Haratyan,2011, p.261).

Syntactic transitivity defines the number and kinds of central arguments that occur in the clause and are determined by the head of the predicate. The predicate is typically designated as a verb, but in some languages, an intransitive predicate designates a thing or pronoun. There are two kinds of provision structures: an intransitive clause S has an intransitive predicate and a single central argument in an intransitive subject function while the other provision type-the transitive proviso-has a transitive predicate and two central arguments in a transitive subject function An and a transitive question function. In some languages, another disagreement has rare, non-peripheral status (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p.45) .

In Halliday, transitivity is both a necessary and powerful semantic concept. It is a part of language's ideational capability, and hence a fundamental tool in the study of representation (Toe, 2000, pp.144-145). Exceptional social structures and features no doubt require a range of transitivity examples. In this regard, transitivity can be used to describe how speakers/essayists encode their psychological sense of the environment in language and express their experience with their broad surroundings. The theory that transitivity is measurable as proposed by Halliday will be used in analyzing the clausal structure of a

sentence, which is determined by the principal verb. According to this theory, there are three kinds of transitivity processes, namely material procedures, relational procedures, and mental procedures (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p. 171).

Material processes of transitivity are methods of undertaking action, which is often physical and tangible. Halliday designates them as activity circumstances, which indicate how anything or someone takes up an activity or factor and "does" something that might well be done to another substance. Two fundamental participants that often occur in material processes are the Actor (the one performing the method) and the Goal (the one or thing acted upon by the process). According to Tsunoda (1999, p. 391), relational procedures understand the links between two members. There are two types of Relational procedures: Identifying Relational, which fills the demand for characterization, Token and Value. In this way, the Value helps to define the personality of the Token. The third type of Relational process is the Attributive Relational, which is used to represent. The Carrier and Attribute are its members, and we can assert that "the x (acknowledged via Carrier) is an individual from the tasteful (acknowledged by Attribute)" (Ibid.).

Transitivity establishes the diverse sorts of procedures recognized in the language and the structures used to communicate them. In the transitivity framework, the performer and the objective are the focal member components and the interest is in whether or not the process is coordinated by the performer toward an objective. Transitivity structure may be summarized as operator + process + objective design representing the ability of language to make known the speaker's interaction with the outside world or his own inner world. Furthermore, these three segments are represented by decisions in the transitivity framework with its view of the universe of experience as a suitable arrangement of process components. Each technique provides its own model or diagram for translating a certain domain of knowing (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 121).

Transitivity is not only seen in trauma narratives as a category of grammatical analysis but also as a system that allows for the realization of experiential meanings in the clause. According to the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, transitivity systems represent the manner through which speakers construe events in the outer world and their internal experiences. The present study focuses on the analysis of different types of processes as realizations of experience in language, especially material, mental, and relational processes as action/interaction, cognition/perception, and identification/attribution respectively.

4.Method

4.1. Research Design

The mixed stylistic approach adopted for this study is underpinned by Systemic Functional Linguistics, more particularly, M.A.K. Halliday's Transitivity System within the ideational meta function. The linguistic choices of Emma Donoghue's *Room* are investigated to represent psychological states, emotional experiences, and trauma. This study adopts a stylistic analysis that connects lexico-grammatical patterns with psychological importance, based on the concepts of trauma story studies and cognitive stylistics.

4.2. Data Selection

The data consists of selected chapters from Room (2010) depicting the protagonist's horrific experiences and his emotional responses to those experiences, specifically passages including:

Constraints in *The Room*

Engaging with "Old Nick"

Periods of anxiety, fear, or disassociation

Escape and adaptation after escape

Purposeful sampling is used to extract clauses describing psychological or emotional states- more especially, clauses with mental-process or behavior-process indicators.

4.3. Analytical Procedures

The analysis adopted a systematic method of transitivity analysis based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, which comprises multiple stages. The first stage involves data segmentation whereby selected texts are divided into clauses, which form the basic unit of analysis. In this case, the second step involved identifying the type of processes in each clause using Halliday's taxonomy of process types, namely material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. Besides, circumstantial information concerning time, manner, and location was identified to improve meaning making. This was followed by a quantitative analysis of the frequency of occurrence of each process type to determine the underlying pattern.

5. Data analysis and Discussion

5.1. Data analysis

In this analysis, the linguistic coding of trauma in Room is investigated by making use of the theoretical framework established by Halliday called Transitivity. The analysis will take place in a way where every single piece of text will be analyzed with regard to both trauma theory and process types. Consequently, this interpretation will come immediately after the identification of the processes used.

Excerpt 1

"Today I'm five. I was four last night going to sleep in Wardrobe, but when I wake up in Bed in the dark I'm changed to five, abracadabra. Before that I was three, then two, then one, then zero. "Was I minus numbers?" "
(Donoghue,2010:8)

Transitivity Types

"I'm five," "I was four," "I was three...zero"

Process: Relational

Participants: Carrier: I, attributes: five, four, three, zero

"Before that I was three, then two, then one, then zero"

Process: Relational

Participants: Carrier: I, attributes: three, two, one, zero

"Was I minus numbers?"

Process: Relational in interrogative form

Participants: Carrier: I , attribute: the state being questioned.

Relational processes, clauses that convey states of being, identification, and classification, dominate the passage. Jack's constrained experiential world inside Room is reflected in these relational sentences, which build his sense of himself through static states rather than actions.

Excerpt 2

“I look down at Rug with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other. There’s the stain I spilled by mistake getting born. “You cutted the cord and I was free,” I tell Ma. “Then I turned into a boy.” (Donoghue,2010:10)

Transitivity Types

“I look down at Rug with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other”

Process: Material “look down”

Participants: Actor: I, Goal: Rug.

Manner and location: “with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other”

“There’s the stain I spilled by mistake getting born.”

Process: Existential (there’s)

Participants: Existent = the stain

Embedded clause: I spilled by mistake getting born – Material process (spilled) + Actor = I

Goal = stain.

“You cutted the cord and I was free,” I tell Ma.

Process: Material (cut) –

Participants: Actor = You, Goal = the cord

Since action and transition are the main themes here, observing, spilling, severing the cord, and changing into a boy, material processes predominate. Actions like "cut the cord" and "spilled by mistake getting born" demonstrate birth trauma and how Jack considers existence to be a series of physical, transformative experiences.

Excerpt 3

“When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I’m five I know everything” (Donoghue,2010:76)

Transitivity Types

“I was a little kid- I’m five”

Process: Relational, **Participants:** carrier- I, attribute: a little kid – five

“I thought like a little kid”

Process: Mental, **Participants:** senser: I, phenomenon: implicit thoughts, circumstance: like a little kid

“I know everything”

Process: Mental, **Participants:** senser: I, phenomenon: everything

Phrases such as "was a little kid" and "I'm five" illustrate how relational processes form the basis of identity construction. In contrast, as phrases "know everything" and "thought like a little kid" indicate, mental processes are crucial to psychical maturation. The relational identity theme and the mental self-awareness theme balance one another in the sentence structure. As such, this underscores Jack's relational self-definition and his mental notions of cognition, both significant factors of trauma and a restricted developmental environment.

Excerpt 4

“I've seen the world and I'm tired now” (Donoghue,2010:1930)

Transitivity Types

“I've seen the world”

Process: Material although the verb “see” is mental, **Participants:** Actor: I, Goal: the world
“I'm tired now”

Process: Relational, **Participants:** carrier: I, **Attribute:** tired now

The relational process dominates and brings out Jack's inner condition as it is articulated in the assertion, "I'm tired now." The relational clause provides the main emotional importance, while the material-perceptual clause, "I've seen the world," is used only for background information. The relational clause, which denotes a depletion of coping mechanisms typical in children experiencing sudden sensory freedom post-confinement, and the sudden switch from isolation to exposure elicit responses like shutdown, fatigue, and withdrawal, a common consequence or reaction to trauma. These three important ways that the sentence depicts trauma are through cognitive overload, since to "see the world" for a child is an overwhelming event; and emotional exhaustion.

Excerpt 5

“I think about Old Nick carrying me into the truck, I'm dizzy like I'm going to fall down” (Donoghue,2010:12)

Transitivity Types

“I think about Old Nick carrying me into the truck”

Process: Mental, **Participants:** sener: I , phenomenon: Old Nick carrying me into the truck
“I'm dizzy”

Process: Relational, **Participants:** carrier: I, **Attribute:**dizzy

“I'm going to fall down”

Process: Material , **Participants:** Actor: I

Jack's reflections on a horrific incident triggered the dominant cognitive process, which manifests through a number of effects. Trauma is an important factor as explained below:

1. Cognitive Intrusion, which refers to intrusive memories.
2. Embodied Trauma, wherein flashbacks take physical forms, for example, dizziness.
3. Fear of Loss of Control-as portrayed through statements that reveal physical instability triggered by memories of trauma.

Excerpt 6

“Scared is what you're feeling. Brave is what you're doing.”(Donoghue,2010:116)

Transitivity Types

“Scared is what you're feeling”

Process: Relational, **Participants:** carrier: what you are feeling, **Attribute:** scared
Mental process is also existed in the embedded clause “you are feeling”.

Participants: sener: you, **Phenomenal:** feeling

“Brave is what you're doing”

Process: Relational, **Participants:** carrier: you are doing, **Attribute:** brave

Material process is existed in the embedded clause “you are doing”, Participants: actor: you, Goal: Bravery

By distinguishing internal feelings from external actions, the analysis focuses on relationship processes that delineate states of feeling and behavior. Trauma often dissociates feeling from action. There may be fear without agency, yet bravery endures. The duality of experience underscores the importance of emotional identification even while acting, mirroring the process of trauma recovery.

Excerpt 7

“If I was made of cake,I'd eat myself before somebody else could.” (Donoghue,2010:39)

Transitivity Types

“If I was made of cake”

Process: Relational, Participants: carrier: I, Attribute: made of cake

Material process is indicated in the passive form “was made”

“I'd eat myself before somebody else could.”

Process: Material, Participants: actor: eat, Goal: myself, Circumstance: before somebody else could.

Being "made of cake," deals with how traumatized kids frequently use fanciful or magical metaphors to talk about their anxieties. Another example which essentially shows the defensive agency that is common in trauma survivors.

Excerpt 8

“It's called mind over matter. If we don't mind, it doesn't matter.” (Donoghue,2010:3)

Transitivity Types

“It's called mind over matter”

Process: Relational, Participants: carrier: It, Attribute: mind over matter

“If we don't mind, it doesn't matter”

Process: Mental, Participants: senser: we, Phenomenal: mind

“it doesn't matter”

Process: Relational, Participants: carrier: It, Attribute: doesn't matter

The quote is dominated by relational processes which focuses on defining, identifying, and attributing states. The modest kind of agency is evidenced by the embedded mental processes, which reveal internal cognitive control. The notion "mind over matter" best illustrates cognitive reframing, a mental coping strategy commonly employed in trauma to decrease stress. Through linguistically articulating control amidst overwhelming events, the phrase "it doesn't matter" illustrates how internal mental states relate to external events.

Excerpt 9

“I look back one more time. It's like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door.”(Donoghue,2010:321)

Transitivity Types

“I look back one more time”

Process: Behavioral , Process: look back, behavior: I, Circumstance: one more time.

“It's like a crater, a hole where something happened”

Process: Relational, Participants: carrier: It, Attribute: like a crater, a hole.

“Where something happened” is considered as material embedded clause.

Actor: something, Goal: happened, Circumstance: where

“Then we go out the door.”

Process: material, Actor: we, Goal: go out, Circumstance: the door

Looking back is a behavioral process that denotes attachment to trauma. Most expressions use vague actors, which is a common feature in trauma linguistics, as many victims rarely name what happened because of the complicated nature of their experiences. Expression "we go out the door" signifies transition; in other words, an escape, though it also communicates Jack's emotional disconnection and confusion.

Excerpt 10

“When Old Nick creaks Bed, I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it’s 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don’t know what would happen if I didn’t count, because I always do.” (Donoghue,2010:37)

Transitivity types

“When Old Nick creaks Bed”

Process: material, Actor: Old Nick, process: creaks, Goal: the bed

“I listen and count fives on my fingers”

Process: material, Actor: I, process: listen and Count, Goal: fives on my finger

“Tonight it’s 217 creaks”

Process: Relational, Carrier: It, Attribute:217 creaks

“I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops”

Process: Material, Participants, Actor: I (Jack), Old Nick, Goal: counting and stopping

“I don’t know what would happen if I didn’t count, because I always do.”

Process: Mental, Participants, Senser: I ,Phenomenon: don’t know what would happen

Major clauses in the text include physical activities such as Jack counting and listening and the bed creaking of Old Nick, which are examples of relational and mental processes that denote emotional and cognitive responses to traumatic experience. Jack's responses to Old Nick denote dependence on the abuser and the loss of agency that emanates from trauma. It is in this sense that trauma is quantified by Jack's utterance, “it's 217 creaks,” where the speaker attempts to measure or quantify that which cannot be controlled, a very common cognitive response to repeated trauma. What's more, Jack's articulation of mental uncertainty, "I don't know what would happen if I didn't count," signifies internalized fear and compulsion.

Transitivity Type	Total Count	Percentage
Material	31	62%
Mental	11	22%
Relational	5	10%

Verbal	2	4%
Behavioral	1	2%
Total	50	100%

Table (1) Transitivity Type

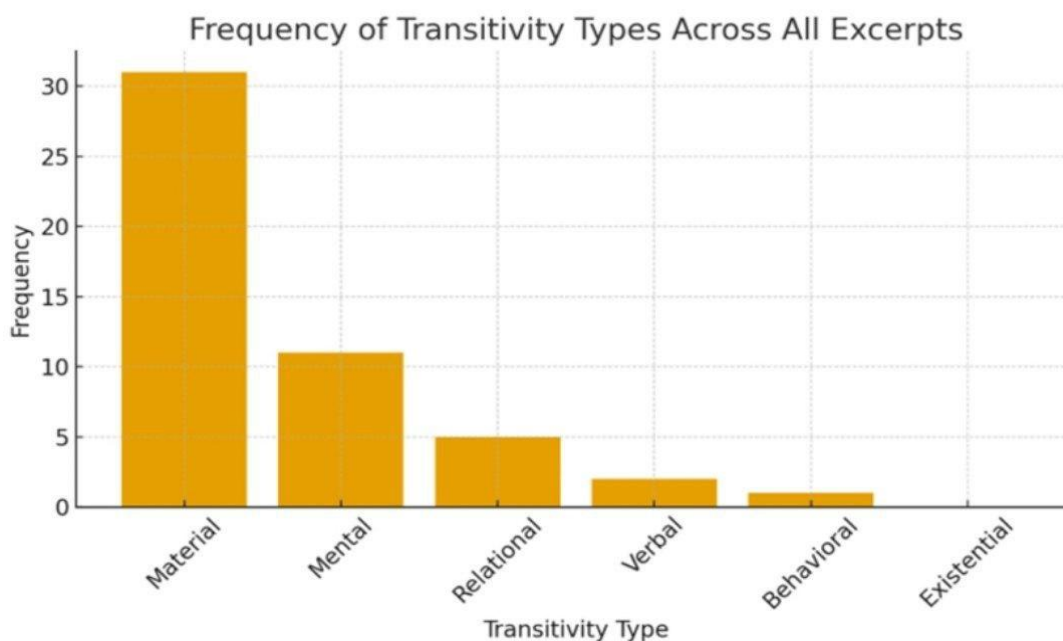


Figure (1) Transitivity Types

5.2. Discussion

The study of transitivity across the extracts revealed that material processes dominated at 62% of the total; mental processes accounted for 22% of the total, with relational, verbal, and behavioral processes accounting for just a few. This suggests that the narrative typically portrays traumatic experiences through things done and body sensations and sensory items involved, especially when the narrator is a child. The thought processes that Jack went through revealed his psychological battle. Ifechelobi and Akabuike (2021) and Hassan and Bilal (2024), in coming to the same conclusion that the material process type dominated their different investigations, shared the same idea. The finding is therefore in agreement with theirs. Tamara's own traumatic experiences come into the light through the use of material process and other forms of process by the author of the text.

The results presented above can be understood completely in the context of language where the patterns of transitivity are related to the linguistic expression of experience. Transitivity refers to the linguistic interpretation of external events and mental states in Systemic Functional Linguistics. The dominance of material processes is indicative of the fact that there is a preference for the expression of experiences in terms of actions and events. The presence of mental processes suggests that cognitive perception and emotions have been encoded into the sentence structures. The restricted use of relational and verbal processes is suggestive of the lack of preference for the expression of experience in terms of identity and

communication. The patterns of transitivity discovered from the data set relate to the concepts of trauma theory without treating it as an external theoretical construct.

Beyond the classification of process types, the results become more significant regarding an understanding of the linguistic construction of traumatic stories. In addition to being grounded in material processes, the emphasis of experiences on actions and events means that experience is not conceptualized through introspection or evaluation. From a transitivity point of view, the tendency will be to conceive of experiences materially, thus limiting the use of abstraction and emotions explicitly. This becomes particularly significant when considering the field of trauma narratives, whereby experiences are often difficult to organize in any coherent form. This is further supported by the reduced prevalence of relational and verbal activities, since the former tend to be associated with issues of identification and evaluation, whereas the latter is concerned with dialogue. These results reveal that trauma is not only shown on the conceptual level, but also through structural embedding through the choices made in terms of transitivity. The preference for the realization of material and cognitive processes represents an approach to the creation of meaning, which involves shaping experience through actions and perceptions, as opposed to a predetermined self-representation or narration.

6. Conclusion

This analysis of transitivity revealed that material processes dominated, followed by mental processes, with relational, verbal, and behavioral processes occurring far less frequently. This is not a coincidence; rather, it goes to support the kind of language used within the novel to represent trauma. Jack's limited physical world and the fact that his early trauma was an embodied one are both reflected in material processes, which stress acts, motions, and bodily sensations. His acts-running, hiding, counting, feeling, looking-become the points of articulation for storytelling trauma without naming it precisely. This agrees with theories that suggest trauma often expresses itself through habit, compulsion, and disconnected physical patterns rather than overt introspection.

Though less salient, mental processes are nevertheless present and equally crucial. These reveal Jack's attempts to cope with traumatic situations involving fear, confusion, attachment, and identity. They point to the psycholinguistics of trauma in highlighting how Jack contextualizes experiences that are beyond his cognitive level of understanding. In trauma and captivity narratives like *Tamara*; Transitivity Analysis of *Where the Crawdads Sing*, where the characters' lived experiences are narrated through doing and sensing rather than abstract thinking, these findings align with previous stylistic and trauma scholarship that outline similar tendencies.

Overall, the results support the usefulness of Halliday's transitivity theory in uncovering the language encoding of trauma. It is with regard to such aspects that trauma in *Room* is experienced through mental states and acted out by means of acts rather than merely being told. The effect is heightened by the limited vocabulary of the young narrator, which renders the story more reliant on bodily functions and sensory perceptions. This tallies with the emphasis on fragmented, embodied, nonlinear narrative that is advanced in trauma theory. The grammar of transitivity thus offers deep insight, ultimately, into how Donoghue exploits

the language choices of her child narrator in depicting imprisonment, dread, and psychological survival.

References

- Barnett, D. (2019). Captivity and the Child's Voice: Trauma and Survival in Emma Donoghue's *Room*. *Journal of Contemporary Literature*, 4(2), 112–128.
- Burke, M. (Ed.). (2014). *The Routledge handbook of stylistics* (Vol. 711). London: Routledge.
- Cunanan, B. T. (2011). Using transitivity as a framework in a stylistic analysis of Virginia Woolf's *Old Mrs. Grey*. *Asian EFL journal*, 54(4), 69-79.
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Donoghue, E. (2010). *Room*. London: Picador.
- Eggs, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. 2nd ed. London: Continuum.
- Halliday, M. A.K. (1967). Notes on transitivity and theme in English: Part 2. *Journal of linguistics*, 3(2), 199-244.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 2nd ed. London: Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.
- Hassan, U., & Bilal, R. (2024). Exploring post-traumatic transformation: Transitivity analysis of the novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(4), 3131–3140.
- Haratyan, F. (2011). Halliday's SFL and social meaning. In International Conference on Humanities, *Historical and Social Sciences* (pp. 260–264). IPEDR.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hodge, R., & Kress, G. (1993). *Language as ideology* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ifechelobi, J. N., & Akabuike, I. G. (2021). *Experiential meaning in Chimamanda Adichie's Purple Hibiscus: A linguistic analysis*. *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies*.
- Isti'anah, A. (2015). Transitivity Analyses in Literary and non-Literary Texts: for Truth and Meaning. *English Language Studies for Truth and Meaning*, 63-78.
- Jeffries, L., & McIntyre, D. (2010). *Stylistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mullins, M. (2016). "Language and Trauma in Emma Donoghue's *Room*." *Studies in the Novel*, 48(3), 312–330.
- O'Loughlin, K. (2018). *Narrating Trauma through the Child's Voice in Donoghue's Room*. *Contemporary Fiction Review*, 10(1), 45–60.
- Sharma, P. (2019). Stylistics Study in Literature and Language. *Academic Journal of Literature and Language Academic Journal of Literature and Language* ISSN UA, 1.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. London: Routledge.
- Toe, D. (2000). *Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide* (2nd ed.). Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.

Toolan, M. (2016). *Making Sense of Narrative Text: Situation, Repetition, and Picturing in the Reading of Short Stories*. London: Routledge.

Yousif, M. T. (2025). Transitivity in the Literature of Prisons: A Corpus Stylistic Study. *Journal of Language Studies Vol, 9(2 Part 2)*, 131-145.