

Field: The TRANSITIVITY SYSTEM and Representing the World

THE TRANSITIVITY SYSTEM

The transitivity system is that system of grammar in and by which speakers/writers in English realize experiential meanings, in and by which they encode their experiences of the world around them. As you know, in the experiential function every clause in English can be seen to be made up of combinations of participants and circumstances revolving around the obligatory Process. But there are almost endless possibilities as to how we encode our experience(s) in this transitivity structure. Moreover, just what part of our experience goes into which constituent part of this structure is by no means fixed and will vary widely from speaker to speaker, situation to situation.

Transitivity, then, is the name for that part of the grammar in and by which speakers to realize ideational meanings in the clause; and speakers encode their experiential reality by their choice in wording, by their choice of Process type (the Process, as you know, is the core of the Transitivity system) and their choice of participant roles and circumstances. Thus, when we analyze the **clause as representation**, it is not enough to describe only the Process types, but we must also take note of the participant roles associated with the Process and the possible selection of circumstances.

We will now discuss the system of Transitivity in greater detail (definitions and many examples have been taken from M.A.K. Halliday 1994, Eggins 1994, and Gerot and Wignell 1994, ad Thompson 1996).

The external world experiences are made up of actions, events, things happening with people or things (participants) involved. Sometimes the participants do things to make things happen (they are Actors in this case) or the participants may just bear the brunt of the actions (They are Goals in this case), or they initiate an action which is taken by another participant (in this case they are Agents). There may be only one participant, as in the example "*I know*", or there may be a number of participants, as in the example "*I made her take a train*", which

consists of three participants (Agent, Actor, and Goal).

Material Processes

MATERIAL PROCESSES AND PARTICIPANTS

• Material Processes and Participants Actor and Goal

TASK 1: Which of the following examples would you consider material Processes? What participant roles do you identify? (Examples adapted from Eggins 1998)

1. Diana went to New York.
2. There were huge lines of people at the Red Cross center.
3. Diana donated blood.
4. Her blood was tested immediately.
5. Diana was one of thousands of donors.

• Tip

- ✓ One way to decide if a Process is a material one or not is to ask the question: What did X do?

MATERIAL PROCESSES AND CIRCUMSTANCES

The Process types tell us what kind of action is going on or if any 'action' is going on at all. Circumstances tell about the Extent, Location, Manner, Cause, Contingency, Accompaniment, Role, Matter, and Angle of the action going on. In other words, they answer the questions, 'how long', 'how far' (Extent), 'when' and 'where' (Location:Time/Space), 'how' or with 'what' or 'what like' (Manner), 'why' (Cause), 'under what conditions' (Contingency), 'with whom' (Accompaniment), 'what as' (Role), 'what about' (Matter), and 'says who' (Angle)

As you have already studied, degree, also by NGs.

Circumstances are realized by AGs. PPs and, to a lesser

Review of circumstances. Identify the type of circumstances in the following examples.

1. Police shoot 11 dead in Salisbury riot.
2. The USA, unlike Italy, is a federation of states.
3. Many people survived thanks to the courage of the faceless fire-fighters.
4. Morgana waited on line with Dave for hours.
5. She was travelling as a tourist.
6. Rooney scored a goal in both games.

6.2 Mental Processes

While material Processes construct what is happening or being done in the external world, mental Processes construct what take place in the inner world (for ex. *She cares*). Halliday calls mental Processes those which encode meanings of thinking or feeling. Examples: *to think, to hope, to like, to dislike*. You would do well to review the comparison of the grammar of material and mental Processes in the first year course-book *Functional Grammar: an introduction for the EFL student*, Freddi 2004. As with all Processes, the labels of the participants in a clause with mental Processes reflect the function these elements have in the mental Process: the participants are **Senser and Phenomenon (what is Sensed)**. As you know, the Senser has consciousness – in order to think, feel, and perceive. The second participant is the **Phenomenon**, what is perceived by the conscious Senser. With these clauses the question "Who did what" is no longer applicable. You ask different questions, questions not about actions, but about thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. "What did X think or feel?". While with material Processes one can say *He resigned*, with mental Processes utterances with only one participant, such as *He thought* or *I like*, make no sense. Mental Processes involve – at least potentially – two participants: a **human conscious** participant, the Senser (the active participant) and the second participant, **though not necessarily explicit**, the Phenomenon (the non-active participant). The Phenomenon **may be only potential or understood from the context**; it could also be a grammatical 'Fact'.

Recall too that mental Process verbs are divided into three classes: **cognitive** (thinking) and **affective** (liking) and **perceptive** (feeling).

Examples of mental Processes:

<i>I</i>	<i>hate</i>	<i>spinach</i>
Senser	mental: affective	Phenomenon
<i>Her question</i>	<i>baffles</i>	<i>me</i>
Phenomenon	Pr.: mental: cognitive	Senser
<i>They</i>	<i>heard</i>	<i>the sirens.</i>
Senser	— Pr.: mental: perceptive	Phenomenon