



## The Realization of Transitivity Systems in Undergraduate Learners' Argumentative Essay Texts

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### Article Info

Article History:  
 Received 09 March  
 2019  
 Accepted 29 July  
 2019  
 Published 23  
 December 2019

Keywords:  
 Transitivity systems,  
 process types,  
 participants,  
 circumstances,  
 argumentative essays

### Abstract

Transitivity systems define as a system to explore how language concerns in the overall grammatical resources for construing going on. The ability to realize transitivity systems in argumentative essays is important because by realizing these systems, the writer can explore language in process of doing, sensing, saying activities happened in the real world. Therefore, this study aims to explore the realization of transitivity systems in students' argumentative essay texts. There are five argumentative essays written by students who have a good quality in writing skill. The findings show that the writers have already realized six process types corresponding with participants and circumstances. By realizing all process types in essay, the readers can experience different world so that they will know the writers' experience in using language to mark experiential meaning in essays. In this case, the writers mostly asked readers to experience with process of doing by material process. Thus, the writers moved the readers' attention by showing the experience of stating relation of the participants. The relation was showed in a configuration of being in attributing and identifying the participants. Therefore, the occurrence of other processes as well as participants and circumstances makes the argumentative essay text more alive.

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p-ISSN 2087-0108

e-ISSN 2502-4566

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, since high order thinking skills applied in educational context, critical thinking becomes a crucial one to be discussed. It has been considered as the essential skill in the area of language education. In the context of education, the teachers or lecturers should be able to stimulate students to critically thinking towards the happening issue or problem. They also should be able to engage critical thinking in students' mind which can be realized in written form, such as writing an essay, because it represents writers' opinion, knowledge and also indicates how deep the writers master language skills.

With regard to the context of English language education especially at collage level, undergraduate students should be given an adequate practice such as writing an essay to sharp their writing skill. It is very useful for them to actively participate even compete with others in international level to rise up the quality of human resources. As Alwasilah (2001) argued that teachers are given responsibility to assist their students to acquire critical thinking skills while learning English.

Regarding with developing critical thinking in higher education, it has correlation with the concept of writing argumentative essay. Basically, it can significantly be seen in the way the writers conceptualize their thinking including the arguments, opinions, and evidences in written text. Thereby, by fostering students to write argumentative essay, it means that teachers unconsciously help students to develop critical thinking skills as well as language competence. Their language competence also will simultaneously develop because they are trained to use even apply it to conceptualize and synthesize their opinion or arguments to build a critical text.

Furthermore, along with the concept of critical thinking which is in line with writing argumentative essay, in fact, it proves that it is not easy to develop learners' critical thinking (Alwasilah, 2001). The fact shows that in

academic writing, unfortunately, there are many problems appear when learners try to write argumentative texts. In contrast, based on preliminary research, when students are asked to write an essay, the fact shows that students have not been able to compose their idea associated with their background knowledge. Thereby, the main point is because they feel a little bit difficult to conceptualize the issue which is being discussed so that it affects to the quality of their argumentative texts (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010). Therefore, consequently, students should gain corresponding critical thinking skills which cover all elements to make a good composition of argumentative text.

In this case, to know whether or not the texts written by students has a good composition, nowadays, there is an approach namely Systemic Functional Linguistic specifically transitivity systems proposed by Halliday (2004). In line with the theory of transitivity systems, Thompson (1996) argued that a good text should consist of the realization of all systems of transitivity. Thereby, it should consist of material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural, and existential process along with participants and circumstances. Dealing with that, when learners write a text, it means that automatically they construct meaning through lexical grammar choices. Those are defined as transitivity system as the experiential meaning construction (Eggins, 2004, p.206). As Halliday (1994, p.106) asserts that transitivity is a system to do with the content that is expressed in language that is in all being, sensing, doing activities that happen in the spoken or written language. Thus, it is not a way of distinguishing between verbs according to whether they have an object or not, but then it refers to a system for describing the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its object (Thompson, 1996, p.78). Hence, it is important to apply one of language meta-function in analysing texts, namely experiential meaning (transitivity systems) to

know the writers' experience in developing their idea.

Dealing with the importance of analysing transitivity systems, especially in academic writing, transitivity systems have some benefits to increase the writing ability. One of the most one is we could know the realization of every systems flows in a text which enacts experiential meaning when the writers write a text. In this study, argumentative essay is chosen because it construes writers' critical thinking towards an issue. This kind of essays also will show the way the writers convincing the reader through their conceptualization of their critical thinking towards the issue. Hence, through analysing transitivity systems in argumentative essay, it is quite interesting because it construes human experience in using language. Thus, the researcher will know the writers' experience in conceptualizing their critical thinking using transitivity choices that can affect to the quality of texts.

Studies on exploring ideational meaning have been conducted (see e.g. Emilia et al, 2017; Larinkoski, 2014; Guiyu, 2015; Octaviani & Jauhara, 2014; Hemas, 2016; Alnes, 2009). Their study concerned on analyzing gender in EFL classroom, particularly in Indonesian context. In this case, they almost have the same studies which investigating gender identities within EFL students' academic essays. But then, Emilia differs from others. She investigates gender in EFL classroom materials, i.e. English textbook. Meanwhile, another finding found by (Larinkoski, 2014; Guiyu, 2015; Octaviani & Jauhara, 2014; Hemas, 2016; Alnes, 2009) showed that males are usually used material process in their writing. Therefore, females are mostly representing process of being rather than doing. From those previous studies above, a study conducted by Emilia (2017) is more effective. It is because she also analyzed as well as evaluated the quality of English textbook so that it gave a good feedback for teachers.

Departing from the explanation above, this study is primarily intended to capture realization of those six systems in argumentative essays written by undergraduate learners. It deals with how transitivity systems enact experiential meaning in argumentative essay texts which represent a meaning about reality (Sutopo, 2011). In every systems (process types), there are also the realization of participants of every process types as well as circumstances as a supporting systems to mark experiential meaning in the texts. Therefore, semantic grammatical choices which are on the other words called by transitivity systems have an important role to see the writers' experience in using language especially in persuading readers using their critical thinking elements in argumentative essay. Moreover, analysing transitivity systems in argumentative text using SFL can be useful to enable teacher to read representations in text critically (Threadgold, 1994, cited in Emilia, 2010).

## **METHOD**

This study is a kind of qualitative study. It functions to figure out the realization of transitivity systems in learners' argumentative essay. This study is a kind of discourse analysis. It is because this study deals with the ways in which language is used in text and contexts (Eggins and Slade, 1997). There is investigating students' argumentative essay text using functional grammar as the approach of discourse analysis.

The data of study are undergraduate learners' argumentative essay texts which have a good quality of writing. In this case, the researcher takes those essays from EFL Learners who are following the writing compulsory subject in the sixth semester. Thus, purposive sampling is used by the researcher to select five argumentative essays. As Arikunto (2006, p.139) stated that purposive sampling is the process of selecting sample by taking the subject that is not on the level or area, but it is taken based on the

specific purpose. It usually involves selecting a representative sample by the expert judgment.

After the data gathered, the researcher conducts several steps. Firstly, the researcher reads all argumentative essay texts then selects five best texts written by students who get the higher score. Secondly, the researcher breaks down the argumentative essays into clauses. The third is analyzing and identifying transitivity systems using table of instrument to put those clauses. There is a theory proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) to determine the transitivity systems realized in students' text. The fifth is calculating the occurrence of every process types along with its participants and circumstances in argumentative essays. The sixth is interpreting the findings to draw the realization of transitivity systems in argumentative essays. Then the last, the researcher tries to present the result of the findings descriptively.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Material Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners' Argumentative Essays

The following description is about the findings of material process of transitivity realized in learners' argumentative essay texts. In this case, learners' argumentative essays are presented by five texts. All of argumentative essay texts are analyzed using Transitivity Systems proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). From the analysis, it was found that material process in every text took the dominant one. The findings showed that there were 291 material processes realized in five texts. Thus, it also followed by participants namely actor, goal, range, and beneficiary. Therefore, the findings of circumstances also were found in texts. The texts presented all kinds of circumstances namely, circumstance of extent, location, manner, matter, accompaniment, role, angle, cause and contingency. However, circumstance of location took the dominant one. It indicated that the writers often used adverbial group of location or time in

delivering information of their argument or opinion to the reader.

In this case, the writer often used material process to argue her opinion. Material process was used to build the aspects of field in the text specifically to make argumentative essay more alive. It was because the writer construed the happening issue through her opinion in the essay. Furthermore, the realization of participants found in the text was dominated by actor and goal. Thus, beneficiary and range also had found in the text. The following representative findings below showed the realization of material process in argumentative essay.

**Table 1.** The Example of Material Process

In recent year,	the technology	has been expanding	exponentially.
Circ:extent	Goal	Pr:Material	Circ:Manner

Realized in the Text

In the opening essay, material process was realized. It was realized in reporting issue of technology in recent year. *Has been expanding* was indicated as the type closest to action which had described something happened in a real situation. Thus, the participant involved in this process was goal. It was because *the technology* was affected by the process of material. Therefore, it was clearly supported by circumstance of manner which described the situation at that time. Moreover, circumstance of extent also provided further experiential information about when the technology has been expanding so that this opening clause in the opening essay had been successfully realizing the process of material.

### Mental Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners' Argumentative Essays

Dealing with the findings of mental process realized in five texts, the result showed that the writer often used mental process to argue her opinion. Departing from the

findings, it showed that the writer used some kinds of mental process. She used process of cognition, feeling and wanting, and perceiving. Thus, the principle of mental process was senser followed by mental process and phenomenon. The following representative findings below will clearly show the way mental process realized in student's essay.

**Table 2.** The Example of Mental Process Realized in the Text

That	mobile devices	can help	Them
	Actor	Pr:Mat	Goal
Who	want to learn	language such as English.	
Senser	Pr:Mental	Phenomenon	

The representative finding above showed the way mental process realized by the writer. In this case, before realizing mental process, the writer firstly realized material process followed by mental process. In the second clause, the writer had already followed the regulation of mental process. Firstly, the word “*who*” was referred to the word “them” which was the reference of the word “some people”. It indicated as the “senser” which was realized by human. Thus, “want to learn” was indicated as mental process which was realized in a process of affection specifically wanting and followed by process of cognition. Hence, there were directly two mental processes realized in second clause. Therefore, the rest of words belonged to phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon was realized by nominal group summing up what was wanted and what was thought. Hence, this clause was successfully realizing mental process by construing process of wanting and thinking.

**Verbal Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners’ Argumentative Essays**

The following description represents the findings of analyzing the realization of verbal process in argumentative essays written by

undergraduate students. There were five essays which represented verbal clause. The findings showed that the writers mostly realized verbal process to argue their opinion towards the current issue being discussed. The following representative findings below will clearly show the way verbal process realized by the writer.

**Table 3.** The Example of Verbal Process Realized in the First Text

The	Argued		
opponent			
Sayer	Pr:Verbal		
That	mobile devices	are not designed	for educational purpose.
	Goal	Pr:Mat	Beneficiary

In this case, the representative finding above was indicated as verbal clause. It was proven that the writer used the word “argued” which was indicated as modes of saying specifically process of arguing. The word “argued” was indicated as intransitive verb which did not need an object. Thereby, the participant involved in this clause was only sayer. There was no verbiage or receiver at all as the participants of verbal process. However, even there were only sayer and process; this clause had already followed the principle of verbal process. Thus, it was enough to realize even mark experiential meaning in the clause.

**Relational Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners’ Argumentative Essays**

This part deals with the findings of relational process found in students’ argumentative essay texts. Five texts were involved in investigating the relational process. There were two types of relational processes that were relational attributive and identifying. Thus, those were also divided again into three parts, namely attributive of intensive, circumstantial, and possessive. Therefore, there was identifying of intensive, circumstantial and possessive. Based on the findings, relational process took the second domination after material process. It showed

that there were 116 of relational attributive intensive, 25 attributive possessive and 14 identifying intensive. The following representative findings will clearly show the way relational process realized in all five texts.

**Table 4.** The Example of Relational Process Realized in the Text

Almost all have their own mobile people device, especially smartphone.
Carrier Pr:Rel: Attribute Attr

The clause above was the example of relational clause realized by the writer. The realization of relational process in this clause was realized for arguing the writer’s opinion about smartphone. The example of representative clause above was indicated as process of attributive possessive. It can be seen from the word “have” which was indicated as possessive verb. Thus, the carrier was “almost all people” which was followed by attribute after process. Thereby, this clause had already followed the principle of relational process. The implication is the writer seems want the readers are aware of the importance of smartphone for people. Hence the writer assumed that everyone had a smartphone.

**Behavioral Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners’ Argumentative Essays**

Among the other processes, behavioral process was the limited one. Principally, this process was closets to the mental and verbal process. The following representative findings below will clearly show the way behavioral process realized in representative clause.

**Table 5.** The Example of behavioral Process Realized in the Text

There in my whe talk about fore opinion, n we MALL
Circ:An Beha Pr:Beha Circ:M gle ver vioral atter
I Think
Beha Pr:Beha ver vioral

Here, the representative findings above showed that the experiential meaning realized in the clause. In this case, the writer realized three systems of process types, namely behavioral process as well as participants and circumstances. Generally, the writer realized behavioral process when she wanted to argue her opinion. Principally, the writer also had followed the principle of behavioral process namely, behavior and process of behavioral. In this clause, the writer firstly realized circumstance. In this case, “in my opinion” was indicated as the circumstance of angle. Thus, the writer used personal pronoun “we” as behavior and followed by the verb “talk” as behavioral process. Therefore, not only in the first clause, the writer also realized it in the second clause. It proved that the word “I” was indicated as behavior and the verb “think” was indicated as behavioral process. Hence, the result indicated that the writer used process behaving specifically physiologically and psychologically.

**Existential Process Realized in Undergraduate Learners’ Argumentative Essays**

This part deals with representing the findings of existential process found in five argumentative essays written by undergraduate students. The following representative findings below will clearly show the way existential process realized in every texts.

**Table 6.** The Example of Existential Process Realized in the Text

The re	is	only	regard to the technical matters of the use of mobile devices to learn English
Pr:Existent		Existent	Circ:Accompaniment

The finding above comes from the first argumentative essay text which is written by undergraduate students. In this case, there were 4 existential clauses found by the researcher. One of the examples was presented above in the table. It was clearly showed that the writer implemented the existential process to push the contradiction corresponding with the technical matters of the use of mobile devices to learn English. Hence, the implication is the writer wants to stress the existence of something important to be discussed.

**Circumstances Realized in Undergraduate Learners’ Essays as Supporting Systems of Transitivity**

According to Droga and Humphrey (2003, p.43) the circumstances in a clause are typically expressed by adverbials which consist of two types namely adverbs and adverbial phrases. Thus, Halliday (1994a) identifies nine types of circumstances, namely circumstance of extent, location, manner, cause, contingency, accompaniment, role, matter and angel. Those circumstances based on the findings are realized in five argumentative essays.

Departing from the findings of circumstances realized in argumentative essay texts, the writers had successfully realized nine types of circumstances to support the existence of process types as the main system of transitivity. The occurrence of circumstances very gave a contribution to realize every process types realized in the clause. The

realization of circumstances in argumentative essay was very useful to achieve experiential meaning in the texts. It proved that the use of circumstance of place corresponding with location and time contributed to assign where and when the current issue had happened. This findings were almost the same as Oktoma (2017) who revealed the circumstance realized in narrative text. In this case, he found that circumstance of place seemed like the iconic one in narrative. It surely contributed to make the story more alive. As Derewianka (2012) stated that in addition, the circumstances also provide further experiential information about the story or plot will be carried out.

Turning to another role of circumstances, circumstance of manner also was found in argumentative essay. It took the second domination after circumstance of place. This circumstance was often realized in essays to give experiential meaning about means, quality and comparison. It used in essays to compare one point of view or opinion to another. Moreover, it also used to state how the current issue had flowed and developed. Thereby, this circumstance very gave a contribution to sharp the existence of process types realized in every clause in order to achieve experiential meaning in argumentative essay text.

Moreover, the occurrence of other circumstances, namely matter, cause, contingency, extent, role, angel, and accompaniment, made argumentative essay more completely achieve experiential meaning. It worked out based on its function which had different goal to give some contributions towards the occurrence of process types along with participants realized in the clause. As Derewianka (2011) argued that types of circumstances helped to set up what’s going on in the texts. Below was the example of findings of how circumstances realized in essays.

**Table 7.** The example of the Occurrence of Circumstance of Extent and Manner

In recent year,	the technology	has been expanding	exponentially.
Ci	G	Pr	Circ:
rc:extent	oal	:Mat	Manner

In the opening essay, the occurrence of circumstance of extent and manner was realized by the writer. Those circumstances had realized in material clause. Firstly, the circumstance of extent in the example clause above functioned to mark experiential meaning in state the duration. This circumstance gave a contribution to material clause to make readers what was going on at that time. Therefore, the circumstance of manner functioned to make readers achieve experiential meaning in terms of how far, how deep, or how feel the process occurred. In the other words, this circumstance of manner in that clause referred to a quality. Thereby, by applying circumstance of extent and manner in the example above gave a big contribution to mark experiential meaning in the clause.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Additionally, based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the configuration to encode the experiential meaning in the world of actions, relation, participants and circumstances had already gave the content to the students' argumentative essay written by undergraduate students. In this case, to achieve experiential meaning in argumentative essay, firstly, the writers asked readers to experience with process of doing by material process. Thus, the writers moved the readers' attention by showing the experience of stating relation of the participants. In this case, the relation was showed in a configuration of being in attributing and identifying the participants. Therefore, the occurrence of other processes made the argumentative essay text more alive.

By realizing all six process types in argumentative essay made the readers experience the different world so that they will know the writers' experience in using language to mark experiential meaning in argumentative texts.

Additionally, some circumstances also were realized in five argumentative essays. In this case, the writers realized all kinds of circumstances which were namely extent, location, accompaniment, role, manner, matter, angle, contingency and cause. Based on the previous findings and discussions section, circumstance of place took the highest percentages in the essays. It meant that the writers often used adverb of place or time to support the existence of each process in the essays. However, the occurrence of another circumstance also was useful to achieve experiential meaning in the essays.

Based on the results of this present study, there are several suggestions that are regarded essential. Firstly, by observing the result of this present study, the lecturers or teachers are suggested to teach academic writing using the concept of transitivity systems. It will be useful for students to know every realization of transitivity systems in every clause. Secondly, the students are suggested to study how transitivity systems realized in every clause representation in order to know the essential of word choices which are regarded essential in construing experiential meaning. Therefore, since this study concerns on realizing transitivity systems in argumentative essay, this study still has weaknesses because it only concerns on experiential meaning. Thereby, the future researchers are also suggested to conduct studies in three metafunctions namely textual meaning, interpersonal meaning and experiential meaning either in written or spoken language. It is very useful to see the comparison among metafunction so that the future researchers later can see different focus of meanings which can correlate one another.



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