

Analysis of “A Haunted House” By Virginia Woolf through the Lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a widely used approach for text analysis. It can also be used in teaching and translation studies. Recently, there has been a growing popularity of this approach in literary stylistics. “A Haunted House” by Virginia Woolf is a master piece which allows literary analysts to be entangled with whether it falls into the genre of love or supernatural. The paper aims to examine the theme selection and transitivity to discern how the genre being presented to the reader. The story has been analyzed at two levels. It explores its thematic structure and transitivity using qualitative method that is SFL and employs quantitative data analysis to present its findings. The paper examines 82 clauses and probes into the creation of supernatural genre. A careful analysis of data shows that material processes and unmarked themes with inanimate participants maintain the sense of supernatural whereas marked themes give prominence to time and place. The study paves a way to further endeavors to investigate the nature of text construction using SFL. It has some implications for translation studies and literary analysis.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics, Short story, Supernatural, Love, Genre Analysis*

Introduction

Virginia Woolf novels were widely discussed in literary domains because of their novelty as she tried new approaches which showed that she had a penchant for language. She suffered from a manic depression and eventually succumb to her illness. She committed a suicide. Her story “A Haunted House” seems to be amalgamation of supernatural and love genres ¹in narrative writing, consequently, scholars are often entangled with the debate that which genre this short stories caters to.

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a theory presented by Michael Halliday (1925). Halliday further categorizes language into three metafunctions: Interpersonal, Experiential, and Textual. These metafunctions shape communication dynamics, express experiences, and structure discourse. These metafunctions are compatible with Field, Tenor and Mode which are elements to determine the nature of any genre. All these three components shape a text and give it a specific shape. SFL is a powerful lens which probably can shed light onto the intricate process in the creation of the short story “A Haunted House” which is about a woman who informs the reader about the presence of a Ghostly Couple. In a Haunted House, Woolf showcases her artistry and amalgamate two genres in a way that they seem inseparable. What language elements are

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responsible for molding this master piece using the material of love and supernatural is the question that has intrigued the researcher.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the thematic structure presented in the story.
- To examine transitivity processes involved?
- To discern what elements shape love and supernatural genres

Research Questions

1. What thematic structures are involved and how they shape meanings?
2. What transitivity processes are at work and how they mold the depicted genres?

Literature Review

Halliday (1925) presented the SFL theory which lays its emphasis on multiple layers of meanings which can be drawn at the clausal level. He calls these layers Metafunctions. These metafunctions correspond to Tenor, Mode and Field which shape any genre.

Thompson (2014) elucidates that the interpersonal metafunction of language investigates its role in forging and sustaining relationships, managing behavior, disseminating information, and engaging in negotiation. Essentially, language serves as a tool for interaction, its structure tailored to achieve communicative objectives.

In dissecting the interpersonal functions assumed during communication, Thompson posits that Speech Functions or roles (e.g., issuing commands, making offers, posing questions, or asserting statements) are taken on by communicators in the exchange of texts, whether spoken or written. These Speech Functions are categorized under Mood, broadly classified into Imperative and Indicative. Imperative Mood manifests in commands, offers, questions, or statements, whereas Indicative Mood encompasses declarative and interrogative statements.

Apart from Mood, interpersonal metafunctions are also scrutinized in terms of Modality. Modality encompasses the expression of certainty or uncertainty, known as Modalization, and the imposition conveyed when requesting action or exchanging goods and services, referred to as Modulation.

Summarizing these perspectives, Thompson concludes that the Tenor/Interpersonal metafunction of language is discerned through the analysis of Mood Choices (Declarative, Imperative, or Interrogative), Speech Functions (statements, questions, commands, offers, demands), and modality choices (probability, obligation, inclination) in spoken or written texts. This analysis reveals how grammar is utilized to influence recipients' behavior and negotiate with them through information exchange.

Gledhill, 2013 delineates Tenor or Interpersonal Metafunction as the dynamics between the communicator and the audience, focusing on how this rapport is established through language. It scrutinizes how power dynamics are conveyed through linguistic choices that denote approval/disapproval, acceptance/rejection, certainty/uncertainty, and the like (Gledhill, 2013).

Another Metafunction is Field or Experiential Metafunction. Thompson (2014) explains that Experiential Metafunction pertains to how language represents the world, focusing on the substance of communication. At the clause level, it explores "who does what to whom," along with the "when," "where," "why," and "how" of texts. Field analysis delves into observing Processes, Participants, and Circumstances within text frames (Thompson, 2014), with Transitivity being the key grammatical system for analyzing experiential metafunctions.

Processes are realized through verbs and are fundamental elements upon which other constituents depend. They encompass Material Processes, Mental Processes, Relational Processes, Verbal Processes, Behavioral Processes, and Existential Processes.

Material Processes involve physical actions or events where key participants include the Actor (performing the action), the Goal (the action's target), and the Scope (the action's location). Halliday (2004) elucidates that material processes denote the act of doing, wherein an entity engages in an action, which may affect another.

Mental Processes encompass various types: perceptive processes (involving sight, hearing, or smell), emotive processes (expressing preferences or feelings), cognitive processes (involving thought, memory, or decision-making), and desiderative processes (expressing wants or wishes). These processes involve participants like the senser (agent of the mental process) and the phenomenon (target of the mental process).

No study has been carried out on "A Haunted House" using SFL which researchers think is the gap needs to be filled for two reasons. First of all because Woolf's novels have been targeted for their novelty as she had been experimenting in this genre which means there must be worth exploring elements which can be discovered with a powerful approach for text analysis like SFL. Secondly, the findings would add value to the pool of knowledge about approaches to creative writing specifically in short story writing.

Methodology

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a qualitative approach in which through close reading metafunctions are analyzed using the frame work presented by Halliday (1925-2004). Through close reading 82 Clauses were examined for discerning the presence and role of theme structure and transitivity in constructing this short story and its genres. After having conducted the qualitative analysis the findings were explained with quantitative data to gain better picture.

QUALITATIVE METHOD + Data Analysis + quantitative data to explain findings.

Qualitative data is quantified to explain the findings after identifying the thematic structure and transitivity processes. This was done based on the frequency of occurrence of each theme and process type.

Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out at the clause level. Eighty-two clauses were selected and examined for transitivity and theme structure. The Hallidayan model analyzed marked and unmarked themes and processes involved in the transitivity system. The qualitative analysis was rechecked by two experts in Systemic Functional Linguistics at the researcher's workplace to validate the data and findings. The qualitative data was quantified to explain the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Out of 82 selected clauses thirteen were observed to be marked themes starting with Adjunct: adverbial or prepositional. Adjuncts in these clauses have been positioned as a departing point which gives prominence to the aspect they carry. They carry two aspects: time and place. Van Dijk (2000) also states that the markedness is used by the writers to describe setting of place and time. This had been examined in the SFL analysis of Woolf's story 'A haunted House' in this study also. (See Table 1)

The prominence given to time establishes gesticulation and observation. A ghostly couple movies, talks, comments and the narrator observes their every movement giving the reader a sense of time passing swiftly as search is to be finished soon. For example, "whatever hour", "now again", "a moment later" all give the clauses a marked status pointing out that

time is important and they set the motion too. This data also show the narrator is a keen observer and readers are hooked by the sense of time passing, motion and pace. Besides marked clauses that indicate time, the story has some marked themes which highlight the importance of the place. For instance, clauses begin with prepositional phrases “here we left”, “from place to place”, “from the deepest well” show that place is crucial. Woolf gives distinction to time and place through marked themes which justify the couple’s aim to search the treasure. Moreover, marked themes with respect to time also provides Woolf the writer and the narrator a room to comment what she observes. The readers also feel observing things as a result of marked highlighting time and place in the story.

Table 1 Distribution of marked themes

Clauses	In Numbers	Percentage
Marked (Time)	8 clauses	10%
Marked (Place)	5 clauses	6%

Animate and inanimate unmarked themes

The thematic structure in the story is comprised of 84% unmarked and 16% marked theme. 51% of unmarked themes have inanimate topical themes and 33% possess animate topical themes which has some implications. This distribution of unmarked themes suggest that non-living elements is involved in most of processes, therefore, a spooky sense has been attempted to be present throughout the story. From the ideational lens “haunted house” is made by the block of unmarked inanimate themes. See Table 2

Table 2 Distribution of unmarked themes.

Clauses	Percentage
Unmarked (Topical animate)	33%
Unmarked (Topical inanimate)	51%

Transitivity

A Haunted House includes four processes material, mental, verbal and relational. Most of the clauses have material processes, some have relational and verbal whereas a few clauses hold mental processes. The distribution of each in percentage is as follows:

Table 3 Distribution of Transitivity

Material Processes	80%
Relational processes	8%
Verbal processes	8%
Mental processes	4%

The data show that most of the clauses involve material processes which related to do aspects happening (Transformative), and doing (Creative). These two aspects appear to be dominant. In the story actions are happening and participants are doing them. This engenders a sense of reality. To understand the dominant nature of material processes, further analysis was carried out which laid out the data:

Table 4 Transformative and Creative Processes

Material Process Transformation	Material Process Creative
Woke, went, look, find, rise, bubble, sound,	Read, draw, open, spread, find, seek, open

roar, splash, spill, bends, falls, cross, stoop,	
cross, come, darken, breath, fade, turn,	
reflect, slides, shields, burns, cease, sleep,	
spread, go, drives	

It can be learned from table 4 that transformative material processes dominant the text which depicts that events or things are happening creating a sense of spookiness. This is validated by investigated whether inanimate participants are involved in the transformative processes or more than animate participants.

When data in this regard was analyzed it was observed that transformative material processes are more associated with inanimate participants than animate. (See Table 5)

This suggests that these processes play vital rule to build a sense of haunted house. For example, "The wind roars", "The doors go", "the flame stoops" builds a sense of things happening automatically and weave mysterious setting.

Table 5 Distribution of Material Processes

Inanimate + Transformative processes	Animate + transformative processes
bubble, come, sound, roar, splash, spill, fade,	woke, went, come, darken, look, pause,
turn, reflect, slides, burns, shields, falls,	breath, sleep, cease, rise
bends, stoop, spread, go, drives, stop, cross	

The inanimate participants are not involved with creative processes whereas animate participants are engaged in some creative processes like look, find, seek, search. This may also suggest that love as a genre was depicted through animate material processes. For example, in the clauses where he, she, and they have been kept as unmarked themes the relation among the ghostly couple appears and reader learns about the bonding they have. Apart from inanimate topical unmarked themes, transformative material processes, the unmarked topical themes begin with "You" second person pronoun also seem to maintain supernatural genre.

To understand the system supernatural genre creation (See Fig 1)

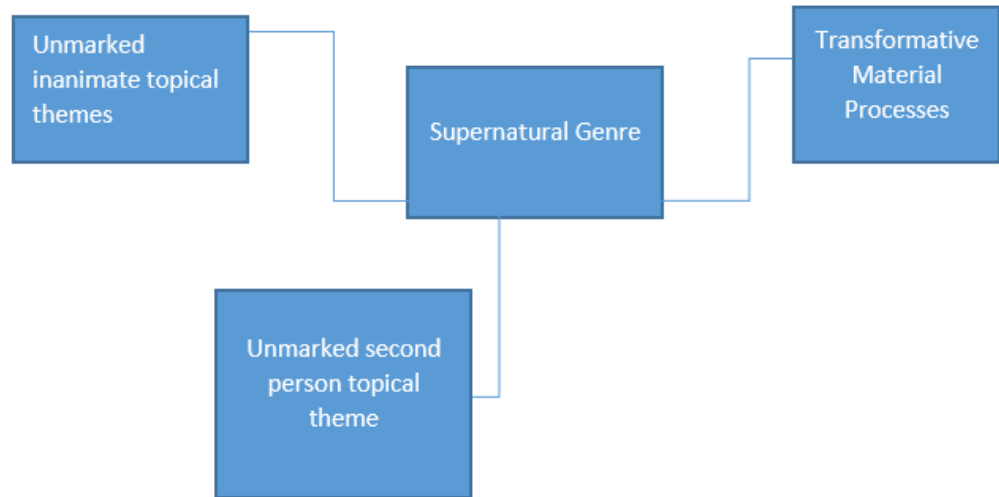


Fig 1 System of Supernatural Genre Creation

Conclusion

Woolf's writing style was considered to be experimental in old days and it is observed that in this story she developed supernatural sense by giving time and place prominence through marked themes, by constructing the text with large portion of unmarked topical themes that involved inanimate participants engaged in transformative material processes. This way she employed a peculiar style that has woven supernatural genre into a love story. SFL approach to analyze text is useful to understand the system which is at work to create a text as this study reveals how supernatural genre has been created and maintained. This approach can help translators and educationist to unfold intricate systems of any text which might improve their work.

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