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RESEARCH PAPER

Ideational Metafunction in a Pakistani English Textbook: A Transitivity Study of the Punjab Textbook Board's Grade 9 Content

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the Punjab Textbook Board's Grade 9 English textbook employs transitivity structures to realize the experiential meanings, focusing on process types, participants, and circumstances within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study explores the ideational metafunction in textbook discourse. It examines how linguistic choices reflect ideological and pedagogical orientations. A mixed-methods approach analyzed 868 transitivity elements from the selected lessons. The material process was dominant(17.6%), followed by relational (7.6%) and mental (2.4%) processes. Participants (51.4%) and circumstances (19.1%) were frequent, with actor, goal, and carrier as key roles. The textbook prioritized factual description over introspective or interpersonal meanings. These results suggest the need for more balanced experiential representations in educational content and expose the underlying pedagogical and ideological orientations contained in the textbook.

Keywords:	Transitivity, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Ideational Metafunction, Grade 9 Textbook, UAM Corpus Tool

Introduction

In the context of education, language is more than a tool for communication; it plays a central role in shaping how learners understand their social and physical environment. Textbooks, as key instruments of instruction, significantly influence students' knowledge, beliefs, and social awareness (Muzaffar, 2016; Muzaffar, et. al. 2020). In Pakistan, English is a compulsory subject from an early level, and English textbooks serve not only to teach the language but also to convey cultural values, social roles, and ideologies. The Grade 9 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board is widely used in public schools, yet few studies have examined how it represents human experiences and social reality through language.

This study is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**,** a theory developed by Halliday (1985; 1994), which views language as a resource for making meaning. One of the key components of SFL is the ideational metafunction, which is concerned with how language represents experiences, events, and relationships in the world. Through transitivity analysis, this metafunction can be examined by identifying different process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, existential), their associated participants, and accompanying circumstances (e.g., time, place, manner). Analyzing these elements helps uncover the underlying meanings and ideologies

embedded in the textbook. There is little research on how grammatical choices in Pakistani school textbooks create experiential meanings, despite earlier studies examining ideology and representation in textbooks at a more discursive level. As a result, there is a gap in the functional linguistic analysis of the regional curriculum.

By using transitivity analysis on the Grade 9 English textbook, this study seeks to close that gap by exposing the linguistic encoding of human roles, experiences, and behaviors.

Despite the important role textbooks play in shaping learners' understanding, limited research in Pakistan has explored the linguistic structure of English textbooks using a functional approach. In particular, the Grade 9 English textbook has not been critically examined to determine how it represents actions, actors, and experiences. Without such analysis, the subtle ways in which language constructs worldviews and reinforces certain ideologies remain unnoticed. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the transitivity structures used in the textbook to understand how meaning is constructed.

Literature Review

Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Halliday (1985) established the concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in his influential work *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. According to Halliday (1994), SFL deals with language as a functional system that constructs meaning in social contexts. R Halliday (1994), building on Firth's ideas, developed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Later on, it was improved by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). SFL approaches language as a social semiotic system that represents meaning through three key metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

The ideational metafunction is the main focus of this study. It describes how language represents reality through the transitivity system, which includes processes (typically expressed by verbs), participants (those involved in the action), and circumstantial elements (such as when, where, and how something happens). It is this function that allows texts to express our experiences by capturing actions, thoughts, relations, and states of being. According to Matthiessen & Halliday (2009), the ideational metafunction provides the means to express both our experiences of the outside world and our inner thoughts. At the level of the clause, this is achieved through the transitivity system.

The Ideational Metafunction and Transitivity System

Within the ideational metafunction, the transitivity system consists of six major types of processes: material process (action/doing), mental process (sensing), behavioral process (behaving), Relational process (being), verbal process (saying), and existential process (existing). Each of these process types contains a particular kind of participants (e.g., Actor, goal, sensor) and circumstantial elements (e.g., time, place, manner) as well (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Each process type represents a different way of construing reality:

- **Material processes** describe actions and physical activities (e.g., run, walk, cut).

- **Mental processes** represent thoughts, feelings, cognition, and perceptions (e.g., know, think, feel).
- **Relational processes** express states of being, identity, or possession (e.g., be, have, seem, appear).
- **Verbal processes** involve acts of saying (e.g., tell, say, ask, order).
- **Behavioral processes** include actions we can see or experience as physical or mental (such as laughing, watching, smiling, or crying).
- **The existential processes** point out that something exists or happens (e.g., there is, there exists).

This way of classifying information gives us a clear way to examine how knowledge and experiences are formed in educational texts, even English textbooks.

Relevance of Transitivity Analysis in Textbooks

By using transitivity analysis, we can find out the hidden messages, teaching methods, and presentation styles in school textbooks. Seen from another angle, educational materials such as English textbooks also convey certain views on how society and the world work. Frequent use of specific processes may reflect an author's preferences for action-oriented, descriptive, or dialogic content (Eggins, 2004). Because of this, analyzing transitivity in educational linguistics is useful since it lets us see the hidden beliefs and methods found in school textbooks. Eggins (2004) claims that the language in a text usually carries deeper meanings that shape what students think about knowledge, their identity, and their role in society. As a result, analyzing the transitivity system in Pakistani secondary school textbooks can highlight patterns in how knowledge is presented, how learners become engaged, and what the main educational priorities are. Researchers can use the transitivity model to break down how meanings related to action, thoughts, being, and interactions appear in texts. This theory is used in educational linguistics to study how textbooks affect learners in terms of both ideas and teaching methods (Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2014).

The SFL transitivity model has been used extensively in research to examine textbook discourse, especially in Asian ELT contexts. These studies investigate the dominant process types and their alignment with genre expectations or educational objectives.

Dominance of Material and Relational Processes

Several studies indicate that material processes are by far the most frequent in textbooks, appearing mainly in both narrative and procedural texts. In Maya et al. (2020), analyzing the *Pathway to English Grade 9 textbook*, the most common process was material, which points to a predominant emphasis on physical activities. In their analysis of three chapters from the same textbook series, Nugraha, and Wihadi (2024) also noted a comparable dominance. Arifiani (2014) studied a Grade 9 textbook and determined that material processes made up 45.1% of the methods, followed by relational (26.9%) and mental (16.5%). These results point to a teaching strategy that prioritizes descriptive categorization and physical actions. Bondar et al. (2018) found, in their analysis of a vocational school textbook, that the main process used was material (48.6%), and relational and mental processes were used less often. Classifying and identifying things are done through relational processes. In her examination of the Grade 9 Indonesian textbook *When English Rings the Bell*, Salsabil (2014) discovered that the most frequent

process type was relational (41.22%). A similar study by Khalil et al. (2022) identified a strong use of relational processes in Grade 10 textbooks, showing that texts focus mainly on descriptive genres to help students grasp concepts.

Underrepresentation of Mental, Verbal, and Behavioral Processes

Some studies point out that textbooks do not include enough examples of mental and verbal skills that are needed for students to improve their reflection and communication with others. Nugraha and Wihadi (2024) note that meteorological and behavioral processes are almost absent, while Arifiani (2014) reports that behavioral (2.7%), verbal (7.7%), and existential (1.1%) processes appear the least frequently.

In their study of narrative texts, Mulyanti and Wati (2022), report no instances of behavioral processes, raising concerns about the limited portrayal of diverse human experiences. Similarly, Anggun (2016) also points out the lack of full genre realization in textbook texts, partly due to the limited variety of processes used.

Influence on Student Writing

Several studies extend the analysis to student-generated texts, showing that learners replicate the process-type distributions modeled in textbooks. Apendi and Mulyani (2020) find that in Grade 9 students' descriptive texts, material (41.6%) and relational (38.3%) processes dominate. Rohmat et al. (2018) observe a similar trend, with relational processes as the most common, indicating the influence of textbook input on student output.

Structural and Ideological Implications

Textbooks play a critical role in shaping how students perceive language and reality. Wengrum (2020) compares two Grade 9 textbooks and concludes that thematic structure and lexico-grammatical complexity significantly affect readability and accessibility. Hermawati et al. (2023), analyzing a Grade 7 Indonesian textbook, find the carrier participant and relational processes to be dominant, reinforcing the idea that some textbooks prioritize description and factual representation over action or reflection.

These findings suggest that ELT textbooks, particularly in state education systems, often privilege a factual, action-oriented representation of the world, potentially limiting learners' ability to engage with more abstract, emotional, or dialogic meanings. This has clear ideological implications—a textbook with an overemphasis on material and relational processes might construct a version of the world that is impersonal, objective, and externally oriented, at the expense of internal or interpersonal experience.

Despite abundant research in Southeast Asian and Indonesian contexts, there remains a gap in applying transitivity analysis to Pakistani textbooks. Given that English textbooks in Pakistan—especially those published by the Punjab Textbook Board—are centrally controlled and widely implemented, it is crucial to assess whether they represent a balanced range of experiential meanings. Therefore, this study tries to bridge that gap by examining the Grade 9 English textbook used in Punjabi public schools using Halliday's transitivity framework to evaluate the pedagogical or ideological positions that are implicitly conveyed as well as the linguistic construction of human experience.

Material and Methods

Research Design

Based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study used a primarily qualitative mixed-method design. The ideational metafunction—in particular, the transitivity system, which encapsulates the process by which language constructs experiential meanings—was the main focus of the study. Although qualitative interpretation of clause-level patterns was the main focus of the analysis, quantitative frequency analysis was also carried out to ascertain the distribution of various process types, participants, and circumstances.

Data Collection

Source of Data

The data for this study were collected from the Grade 9 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board. This textbook is extensively used in public-sector schools in Punjab, Pakistan. To cover a variety of topics, such as religion, national identity, history, entrepreneurship, moral values, and environmental awareness, passages were chosen from a variety of lessons. To ensure consistency in clause-based tagging, only prose texts were included; dialogues and poems were left out.

Sampling Technique and Sample

A purposive sampling technique was used to select representative lessons with narrative and expository styles, as these genres reflect the functional diversity of the textbook. Beyond representativeness, they were chosen for their distinct communicative purposes—narratives convey values and identity, while expository texts present factual and abstract knowledge, making them suitable for transitivity analysis within the SFL framework. The selected passages were saved as plain-text files and uploaded into the UAM Corpus Tool Version 3.3x for annotation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Once the chosen passages were imported into the UAM Corpus Tool, the following procedures were used to analyze the data in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions:

Manual Annotation

A custom transitivity annotation scheme was established based on Halliday's functional grammar. Each clause was manually tagged for its
- Process type (Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential processes)
- Participants (e.g., Actor, Goal, Carrier, Senser, Sayer, Token, etc.)
- Circumstances (e.g., Location, Manner, Cause, Extent, Accompaniment)

Tagging in UAM Corpus Tool:

After uploading all text files, the researcher manually tagged each clause-level unit using the transitivity scheme. Screenshots of the tagging hierarchy show the exact structure of participant, process, and circumstance types used in the analysis.

Quantitative Frequency Analysis

Following manual tagging, raw and relative frequencies for each category were determined using the UAM Corpus Tool's Statistics tab. The dominant transitivity patterns were visualized by converting these frequencies into percentages.

Interpretation of Patterns

After analyzing the tagged data, dominant experiential patterns were found, and tool screenshots were taken to show how the tool was used. In order to demonstrate how linguistic decisions create ideational meanings in the textbook, these examples were later covered in the Results and Discussion section.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the realization of the ideational metafunction in Grade 9 English textbook published by the Punjab Textbook Board, focusing on the transitivity system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 76). The study addressed four key questions regarding the types, frequencies, and functions of processes, participants, and circumstances used in the textbook discourse. All transitivity features were manually annotated clause by clause using the UAM Corpus Tool (a software for linguistic annotation), and their frequency and function were examined.

Overview of Transitivity Features

The study resulted in 868 transitivity features which made up 446 participants (51.4%), 256 processes (29.5%), and 166 circumstances (19.1%). The results show that Grade 9 content includes a lot of experiential meaning, especially by focusing on participant roles (see Table 1).

Table 1
Frequencies of Transitivity Elements in the Textbook

TRANSITIVITY-TYPE	N	%
- participant	446	51.4
- process	256	29.5
- circumstance	166	19.1
TOTAL:	**868**	**100.0%**

Note. Data was extracted using the UAM Corpus Tool based on the SFL transitivity framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Process Types: Dominance and Distribution

As shown in Table 1, the most prevalent of the 256 process clauses were Material processes (153 occurrences; 17.6%), followed by Relational processes (66; 7.6%) and Mental processes (21; 2.4%). The frequency of verbal, behavioral, and existential processes was significantly lower (see Table 2).

Table 2
Distribution of Process Types Across the Corpus

PROCESS-TYPE	N	%
- material-process	153	17.6
- mental-process	21	2.4
- Behavioral-process	5	0.6

- verbal-process	8	0.9
- relational-process	66	7.6
- existential-process	3	0.3
- agentless-passive-process	0	0.0
TOTAL:	**256**	**29.5%**

Note: Percentages are calculated as a proportion of all 868 transitivity elements

The results agree with findings from other studies (e.g., Maya et al., 2020; Arifiani, 2014; Bondar et al., 2018) that Material and Relational processes feature most in secondary English textbooks. The high occurrence of Material processes mirrors an emphasis on physical actions, historical events, and real-world practices (e.g., "He gave the Muslims a separate homeland", "Hazrat Asma tied the food").

See Figure 1 below for further examples of Material processes as tagged in the UAM Corpus Tool.
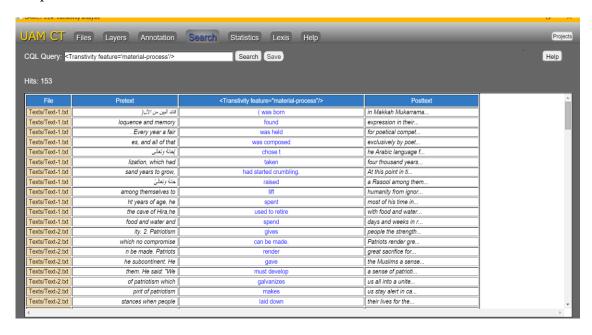

Figure 1: Material Processes in the Grade 9 English Textbook (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Extracted examples from the Grade 9 English textbook corpus analyzed via UAM Corpus Tool (based on Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Relational processes were the second most frequent type (66 occurrences, 7.6%). These processes encode states of being, identity, possession, and attribution.

Clauses such as "Patriotism is love", "The snow leopard is elusive", and "He was puzzled" exemplify attributive and identifying relational patterns. Figure 2 presents a range of such relational processes identified through the UAM Corpus Tool.

Figure 2 Examples of Relational Processes in the Corpus (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Representative relational clauses from the Grade 9 English textbook corpus tagged in the UAM Corpus Tool.

Mental processes appeared only 21 times (2.4%), indicating a limited representation of cognition, affection, and perception in the textbook. These processes were most frequently used in moral or ideological texts and often embedded in quotes, beliefs, or affective commentary. This aligns with studies by Anggun (2016) and Mulyanti & Wati (2022), who also reported low frequencies of such processes.

For instance, the clause "Its starry sky has excited the imagination of poets" illustrates a Mental process with the sky as the Phenomenon and the imagination of poets as the Senser (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Examples of Mental Processes in the Annotated Corpus (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Extracted from Grade 9 English textbook corpus using UAM Corpus Tool with SFL-based annotation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Behavioral processes appeared minimally in the corpus, with only 5 occurrences (0.6%). These processes reflect physiological or psychological behavior, often associated with sensing and action, but not directed toward another participant, like in material or mental processes.

Example clauses included: "He frowned", "Taseer looked intrigued", and "It blends perfectly with the surroundings"(see Figure 3).
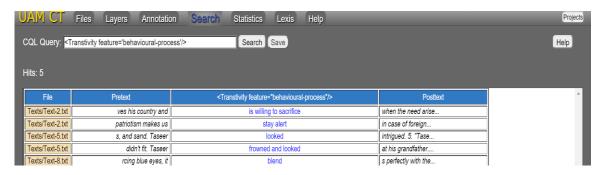

Figure 3 Examples of Behavioral Processes in the Corpus (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Behavioral clauses were identified from the textbook corpus using the UAM Corpus Tool based on Halliday's transitivity categorization.

Verbal processes were also limited, occurring only 8 times (0.9%). These processes reflect acts of saying, narrating, or reporting, and involve participants such as Sayer, Verbiage, and Receiver.

Examples included: "He said,", "His grandfather instructed,", "The narrator replied", and "Students hear about the topic"(see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Examples of Verbal Processes (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Representative verbal clauses extracted from the Grade 9 English textbook and tagged using the UAM Corpus Tool.

Existential processes were the least frequent, appearing only 3 times (0.3%). These clauses typically involve the verb "to be" and the presence of an Existent, often beginning with "there is/are".

Examples: "There are many instances", and "There was an empty glass jar"(see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Examples of Existential Processes (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Existential clause types are drawn from the annotated textbook corpus using the SFL transitivity model (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Participant Roles

A total of 446 participants were tagged. The most common participant roles were Goal-Material (133; 15.3%), Actor-Material (104; 12.0%), and Carrier-Relational (44; 5.1%), indicating a strong narrative-descriptive orientation (see Table 3).

Table 3
Distribution of Participant Roles in the Corpus

PARTICIPANT-TYPE	N	%
- goal-material	133	15.3
- range-material	9	1.0
- actor-material	104	12.0
- senser-mental	18	2.1
- phenomenon-mental	21	2.4
- behaver-Behavioral	4	0.5
- behaviour-Behavioral	3	0.3
- matter-Behavioral	0	0.0
- range-Behavioral	0	0.0
- target-Behavioral	0	0.0
- sayer-verbal	7	0.8
- listener-verbal	0	0.0
- verbalization-verbal	0	0.0
- carrier-attributive	44	5.1
- attribute-attributive	42	4.8
- token-identifier	18	2.1
- value-identified	19	2.2
- existent-existential	3	0.3
- recipient	9	1.0
- verbiage-verbal	8	0.9
- receiver-verbal	0	0.0

- possesser-relational	2	0.2
- possessed-relational	2	0.2
TOTAL:	**446**	**51.4%**

Note. Percentages here represent each role's share of all 868 transitivity elements, hence the column does not total 100%.

As in Salsabil (2014) and Hermawati et al. (2023), the prominence of carrier–attribute pairings reveals a preference for classificatory or descriptive content. The minimal presence of interpersonal roles (e.g., Sayer, Senser) highlights a monologic and externally focused worldview, possibly shaped by curriculum policy constraints.

Circumstantial Elements

Circumstances (n = 166) covered a wide range of types, with Location (Place and Time combined = 72; 8.3%) and Cause (Reason + Purpose = 34; 3.9%) being the most frequent. Manner and Extent also appeared but to a lesser degree (see Table 4).

Table 4
Distribution of Circumstantial Elements in the Corpus

CIRCUMSTANCE-TYPE	N	%
- extent	11	1.3
- manner	33	3.8
- cause	34	3.9
- contingency	9	1.0
- location	72	8.3
- accompaniment	7	0.8
TOTAL:	**166**	**19.1%**

Note. Percentages in this table are given as a proportion of all 868 transitivity features, and so the column will not sum to 100%.

These patterns mirror those found in narrative and informational genres, where time/place anchoring and goal-oriented clauses are common. The heavy reliance on purpose clauses suggests an instructional tone that supports moral or ideological messaging, e.g., "He was raised to lift humanity from ignorance."

See Figure 6 and Figure 8, below, for further examples of circumstance-type (cause) and circumstance-type (location) as tagged in the UAM Corpus Tool.

Figure 6 Examples of circumstance-type (location) (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Location-type circumstances were extracted from the Grade 9 textbook corpus using the UAM Corpus Tool and classified under SFL categories (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Figure 8 Examples of circumstance-type (Cause) (UAM Corpus Tool Output)

Note. Cause-related circumstantial clauses from the annotated corpus, tagged using the UAM Corpus Tool's custom annotation scheme based on Hallidayan principles.

Interpretation and Comparison with Literature

The results of this study were largely in line with prior research in the SFL tradition (e.g., Halliday, 1994; Maya et al., 2020; Nugraha & Wihadi, 2024). The dominance of material and relational processes, paired with the underrepresentation of mental and verbal processes, indicates a textbook model focused on concrete, external actions, and descriptive knowledge**.**

This distribution has ideological implications. As argued by Wengrum (2020)**,** a high frequency of material and relational processes in state-controlled textbooks can shape learners' worldviews as objective, impersonal, and factual**,** potentially limiting opportunities for personal expression, reflection, or dialogic engagement**.** This pattern was observed in the Grade 9 PTB textbook as well, suggesting a curriculum emphasis on factual narration and social norms over personal voice or emotional insight. In the Pakistani sociocultural context, where national identity, religious values, and moral instruction are emphasized in public education, such linguistic patterns are not coincidental but reflective of top-down curriculum control. State-approved textbooks often prioritize conformity, discipline, and collective identity over critical thinking or emotional self-expression, and this is linguistically reinforced through the predominance of material and relational processes.

By minimizing mental, verbal, and behavioral processes, the curriculum may implicitly discourage personal interpretation, dialogic reasoning, and affective engagement—core components of democratic and reflective learning.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how certain perspectives on experience, knowledge, and identity are encoded in textbook language choices, particularly transitivity patterns. The Grade 9 English textbook's emphasis on factual, external realities is reflected in its preponderance of material and relational processes, whereas its sparse use of mental, verbal, and behavioral processes suggests a limited engagement with inner thought, dialogue, and emotional nuance. These trends are not merely stylistic; they also represent more general ideological inclinations and curriculum priorities. Such linguistic framing, in the context of Pakistan's centralized educational system, leaves little opportunity for critical thinking or individual expression while reinforcing values like discipline, conformity, and national identity. It also shows how useful functional grammar is as a tool for evaluating instructional materials critically. By including texts that encourage reflection, empathy, and interaction—qualities crucial to democratic and holistic learning—policymakers and curriculum designers are urged to support more balanced representations of experience.

Implications for Future Research

This study has theoretical and pedagogical ramifications. Practically speaking, it means that committees that develop textbooks should take into account a wider range of lexical and experiential diversity, particularly the inclusion of texts that promote reflective and interpersonal engagement through mental, verbal, and behavioral processes.

Future research could compare the public and private sectors, broaden the corpus to include other grades or boards, or examine how students' writing reflects textbook patterns, as examined by Apendi & Mulyani (2020).

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