A Transitivity Analysis of Miranda in "Sexy": the Character in Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Story

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Abstract

Recently, discourse analysis is very popular in analyzing literary text. One of approaches to analyze texts is using transitivity in Systemic Functional Grammar developed by Halliday. Therefore, in this paper, transitivity is employed to analyze the character, Miranda, in Jhumpa Lahiri' short story. Because of the different processes, sentences or lines related to the character, Miranda, were collected and later were analyzed. The result shows that the mental process, the verbal process, the behavioral process, the material process, the relational process, and the existential process appear in the short story. It indicates that the writer wants to characterize deeply about the main character who took an important role in the story. Moreover, the mental process is dominant to appear in the story. By this frequent occurrence, we can see that the writer wants to convey the message that Miranda is a thinker who eventually realizes that having an affair is not fair to both the mistress and the wife.

Keywords: *short story, systemic functional grammar, transitivity approach*

Introduction

Interpreter of Maladies is a book collection of nine short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri published in 1990. Since Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian American who grew up in America and is influenced by both Indian and American culture, this collection mainly talks about the lives of Indian and Indian American who are caught in both Indian culture and American culture. It also centers on the characters and exposes how they feel and react. The nine short stories collected are "A Temporary Matter", "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", "Interpreter of Maladies", "A Real Durwan", "Sexy", "Mrs. Sen's", "This Blessed House", "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar", and "The Third and Final Continent".

"Sexy" is the most noticeable titles among those tales since it evokes people in a sense of appearance, beauty, and understanding how the object is called sexy. This short story shows the relationship between a white woman, Miranda, and a married Indian, Dev, who works in Boston. The mistress, Miranda living alone in an apartment, often feels lonely. She talks less. She is also described as sexy. However, sexiness itself is defined as loving someone you do not know by a child named Rohin.

Miranda gives an idea about the theme of this short story. It shows the relationship which ends in the feeling of guilt in loving other person's husband. This theme reveals how Miranda blinded by her relationship finally realizes that falling in love with a married man is wrong.

For those reasons, in order to provide a specific focus for the discussion, the character of Miranda in the short story entitled "Sexy"

by Jhumpa Lahiri is chosen as the source of the data. The book collection by Jhumpa Lahiri is chosen because her collection is an International Bestseller and the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Moreover, the character of Miranda is analyzed because in her book collection of nine short stories Lahiri emphasizes mainly in the emotional journeys of characters. Besides, Miranda herself is the main character who is mentioned repeatedly as "Miranda" instead of referring her with "she". This reflects the textual meta-function which shows how the writer, Lahiri, emphasizes the message to the readers or hearers.

In order to make the writer's interpretation of the text explicit especially about the character, Miranda, the transitivity approach in Systemic Functional Grammar is employed by investigating the processes in the transitivity model which appears in the text. Therefore, based on the background considerations, the aim of this study is to see how these processes are employed in creating the character reflected in the short story using transitivity approach of Systemic Functional Grammar.

SFG is employed because common short story cannot be separated from literary words whose wording has a close relationship with grammar. The functional grammar is to interpret the meaning of the text explicitly. It means grammar is used to analyze for finding sensible and useful things inside the text. It is emphasized by Halliday (1994, as cited in Eggins 2004: 2) and Halliday (1985) that

> *The aim has been to construct a grammar for the purpose of text analysis; one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any spoken, or written, in modern English...whatever the final purpose or direction of analysis, there has to be a grammar at the base….A text is a semantic unit, but not a grammatical one. But meanings are realized through wordings; and without a theory of wordings – that is, a grammar – there is no way of making explicit one's interpretation of the meaning of a text.*

As a result, after the analysis, the character of Miranda will be more understandable due to the transitivity approach and how the transitivity processes in creating the character of Miranda can be figured out. In addition, the transitivity analysis explains how finally Miranda realizes that having an affair was not fair at all to both his wife and his mistress, and decides to stop loving someone's husband. This study is also beneficial for the readers since it helps them critically understand the characters in the literary text.

This study focuses on Miranda as the character in the short story written by Jhumpa Lahiri. It uncovers Miranda as the character in the story by employing the transitivity process. In order to reach the research goals of this study, the transitivity processes analysis is employed.

The data were analyzed in top-down approach. First, the clauses related to the character Miranda were collected and analyzed based on their transitivity processes. Each process was analyzed to reveal the character.

The Occurrence of the Transitivity Processes

The processes related to Miranda are material process, mental process, verbal process, relational process, behavioural process, and existential process. These processes are used to reveal the character of Miranda. The frequency of occurrence of each process can be presented in the following table.

Table 1: The Transitivity Processes

No.	Processes	Occurrence	Percentage
1	Mental	51	50%
2	Verbal	15	14.71%
3	Behavioral	14	13.73%
4	Material	13	12.75%
5	Relational	8	7.84%
6	Existential	1	0.98%
Total		**102**	**100%**

The result shows that mostly the mental process appears in the short story. This indicates that the writer wants to emphasize

the character of Miranda as a woman who always consciously thinks and feels about something that makes her worried. Therefore, it is understood that in the end of the story Miranda finally has a guilty feeling of loving a married man. Moreover, the writer really wants to show the emotional journey of the character Miranda who becomes a mistress of an Indian man.

In order to reveal *Miranda* deeper, each process will be explained in detail in the following discussion.

The Mental Process

The mental process is the dominant process in this story and it is directly related to Miranda.

In this process *Miranda* can be analyzed as a thinker since her action is less than her cognition. She always has something to think in her mind. She always thinks, wonders, knows, and remembers about different things. It can be seen in the following sentences:

*(1) She **thought** he might be Spanish, or Labaese.*
*(2) She **wondered** if the actress and the Dixit girls were related.*
*(3) She **remembered** the fat part of it was green.*
*(4) Miranda **knew** how to wait.*

From the sentences, it can be seen that the process of thinking is very dominant in characterizing Miranda. She always has something in her mind. She thinks whether something is good or not. Besides, she is also a kind of person who is always curious about something. She wants to uncover what is bothering in her mind. Therefore, as in the mental processes cognition process frequently occurrs, the writer intends to tell that the character, Miranda, is a thinker, menaning that Miranda has a sharp cognition.

Moreover, the character of *Miranda* can be revealed more in these sentences. In this process, the perception process can be found. The verbs like *hear, see, watch, notice,* indicate that Miranda is a sensitive woman. She can be a good listener. She cares about anything around her. In addition, Miranda likes imagining something. From the following sentences, she mostly imagines or pictures her man, Dev. It is assumed that she is falling in love with the man who in this story he has a wife in India and she hopes something good for her relationship.

*(5) She **heard** him opening the door,..*
*(6) Miranda **pictured** the two of them at a restaurant..*
*(7) She **imagined** his kicking her….*
*(8) She **saw** women wearing skirts..*
*(9) Miranda **noticed** a man standing at one of the corners*
*(10) Miranda **watched** him sleep…*

Furthermore, Miranda is also described as a sensitive person. In this process, we barely find the verbs of *hate* or *dislike*, but we can see the verbs of affection such as *like*. Through this verb, it indicates that there is no bad feeling or hatred toward anybody. It denotes that Miranda is a positive person and it shows the beautiful nature of Miranda. We can find the verbs of hoping like *wish*, *believe*, and *hope*. By these verbs, Miranda is seen as someone who has positive thinking. She likes to wait for something good. It shows her optimism to be happy.

*(11) Miranda **wishes** she could draw a good likeness.*
*(12) She **liked** walking through the cramped…*

Therefore, as the mental process in this story is dominant, it can be concluded that *Miranda* is a thinker, positive person, caring person, and a sensitive person. It means the writer wants to show that *Miranda* has something to do mostly with her feeling or her mind.

The Verbal Process

In the verbal process, this short story mostly uses active voice in which the main character Miranda is frequently shown as the receiver. It indicates that Miranda is the one to whom the verbal process is directed. She always listens to someone who is speaking or telling something, especially when she has a conversation with Dev. It means that Miranda is powerless towards Dev who takes the

control of his mistress. We can say that Dev is dominant in the relationship with Miranda. It can be seen in the following sentences:

*(13) …he **told** her to stand at one end of the bridge.*
*(14) Dev **told** her stories about his childhood.*
*(15) …he **asked** her questions.*
*(16) He **told** her about how, at eighteen….*

Miranda's passivity in the conversation shows that the writer wants to tell that Miranda has a defensive character. She does not want to be blamed of what she has done with her lover Dev, the married man. That is why Miranda always keeps silent about her cousin's husband's getting affair. This is be clearly shown in the sentences:

*(17) Laxmi **told** Miranda her cousin's husband had fallen in love with another woman.*
*(18) Laxmi **told** Miranda that it wasn't the first time her cousin's husband had had an affair.*

The Behavioural Process

The processes which commonly occur are *nodded* and *stared*. The first common occurrence is *nodded*. It gives us another reason to refer that Miranda is not a talkative person. Instead of saying "yes" or something indicating that she agrees on something, she just nods her head to convey her message, answer, or agreement with something. The example of the sentences appearing in the short story are as follows:

*(19) Miranda **nodded**.*
*(20) She **nodded**.*

The second process in behavioral process is *stared*. It indicates the close relationship with mental processes since it mixes the material process and the mental process. As a result, it proves that Miranda is a thinker. She does the action of staring and what she stares at is the unimportant objects. It means that while she is staring, it is supposed that she thinks of something bothering her mind. Therefore, it adds the proof that *Miranda* is a thinker. Besides, it is seen that Miranda is always worried about something. She is even worried about having a call from her lover or not. The sentences can be seen in the following part.

*(21) Still she **stared** at some bottles, some short, other tall…*
*(22) She **stared** at her own phone…*

The Material Process

There are some lines in material process that are employed in reflecting the character, Miranda. The character most frequently-appearing in the material process is *Miranda*. Even though she is the actor in this process, she does not have any effect on other people around her. It seems that she is doing the activity for her own. If we take a look at the goal of this process, it reflects some particular places where she likes to go and most of the goals are inanimate objects. It can be seen in the following sentences.

*(23) Miranda **went** to Filene's Basement to buy herself things she thought a mistress should have.*
*(24) …she **walked** all the way to Central Square, to an Indian restaurant.*
*(25) Miranda **fastened** the chain in the door.*
*(26) … she **went** to the kitchen to pour herself more coffee.*

Moreover, it is noticed that Miranda has the beneficiary role. Something has been done for her. As mentioned in the verbal process, the use of the active voice is intended for those who have power. As a result, this material process strengthens the evidence that Dev has the power over Miranda. He takes the control of *Miranda* who has a beneficiary role and goal in this process. It is shown in these sentences:

*(27) …he **showed** her his favorite place in the city.*
*(28) …he **carried** her over to the bed.*
*(29) … (he) **entered** her without a word.*

The Relational Process

Mostly the relational process reflects the character of Miranda in both her appearance and personality. The appearance of Miranda shows her as a good looking woman. It is

employed in the attributive and identifying process. Apart from her appearance, her personality can also be seen in the attributive process. From the attributes which are assigned to the carrier, Miranda, hs a hesitant personality. She is afraid of something easily due to her own thought. From this, it is seen that the writer wants to show that *Miranda* has a bad experience with Indian when she was a child. It can be easily understood by these sentences.

(30) *She **had** silver eyes and skin as pale as paper…*
(31) *She **had** a narrow, egg-shaped head that rose to a prominent point.*
(32) *… she **had** been too frightened even to walk in the same side of the street as the Dixits' house*
(33) *…she **was** nervous to ask.*

The Existential Process

For existential process the data obtained is only one sentence. However, by this sentence, we can find the main cause in this story and the main cause which bothers Miranda's mind and influences Miranda towards her own decision of breaking up with her married-man lover. The main cause can be seen in the sentence (34) in which the word "sexy" that is said by her lover bothers her feeling as well as her thought and also affects her life. In short, the main cause that influences the character Miranda is the word "sexy" which is uttered by the man she falls in love with and is defined by Rohin, 7 years old, as "loving someone you do not know."

(34) *It **was** the first time a man had called her sexy*.

Conclusion

Considering the result section, we come to conclusion that the character of Miranda can be found out by employing the processes in transitivity approach. The character of Miranda can be seen in the material processes, the mental processes, the verbal processes, the relational processes, the behavior processes, as well as the existential processes. Those appear in the short story since the writer wants to focus on characterizing the main character Miranda. The dominant process appearing in this short story is the mental process. It indicates that the writer intends to emphasize how Miranda thinks, feels, and believes about her relationship with a married Indian man. Furthermore, the cognitive process occurs frequently which means that Miranda is a thinker. Moreover, from those processes, it can be found that Miranda could also be characterized as a defensive, passive, sensitive, kind, lonely woman. Therefore, it can be concluded that by using the processes employed in the story, the character Miranda can be mostly revealed as a thinker who always has something bothering her mind.

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