The investigation of mood and modality in the first letter of Nahj al-Balagheh based on the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's systemic functional grammar

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Abstract

Believing that some particular texts worth scientific studies, we put the first letter of Nahj al-Balagheh under investigation according to the concept of mood and modality in the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's systemic functional grammar. A brief literature of mood and modality is given first. Then, the theoretical framework of the study is set, and finally, the text of the letter is analysed and explained according to the theory. The result indicated that the theory is assignable to Arabic, the language of the letter, but mediation is needed. The mood structure is mostly leaning on the predicator as it pays an important role in showing tense, polarity and modality of the clause. Subject and modal adjuncts are also apparent in some clauses as mood elements. The text of the letter is composed mostly of positive statements so that a knowledgeable source, Imam Ali, gives information to a group of unaware deceived people about the controversial subject of the third Khalifeh's death. Some imperative clauses are also included to warn the people and to offer them the correct way.

Keywords: Mood, modality, interpersonal metafunction, systemic functional grammar.

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1. Introduction

Nahj al-Balagheh is widely known as the second most valued book after Quran among Islamic religious books. Sharif Razi gathered 242 lectures, 79 letters and 500 advices of Imam Ali in a book, and called it Nahj al-Balagheh, which means the way of eloquence. "This book is enriched by many scientific subjects, a lot of social behaviour conducts, and more definitely, many techniques of eloquent speech, Islamic governing rules, and so on" (Hajez, n.d.). As many Islamic scholars believe that this thaumaturgy knowledge, though not being the foreknowledge inspired by Allah, is offered to Imam Ali by the holy prophet Muhammad, (IbnAlhaitham, n.d.).

This book, being so lofty among other religious books, has always been under investigation, which resulted in many explanatory and interpretive works among Islamic authors. However, it seems that the book is not worldly studied, as it deserves. That is many scholars interested in religious topics may not be familiarised with Nahj al-Balagheh. Studies like this can pave the way for more works to be done on such precious religious books.

The bulk of foregoing works on Nahj al-Balagheh are subject- or content-oriented interpretations and explanations of the book. A different research approach by adopting a linguistic theory to investigate the text of Nahj al-Balagheh accordingly may unveil some aspects of the book, which have not yet been made apparent. This study is, thus, done based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG in short), a mostly meaning-based linguistic theory. More specifically, the mood and modality of the introductory letter of Nahj al-Balagheh is put under investigation based on their concept and development in the interpersonal metafunction of SFG presented by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and expanded by Thomson (2004). To do this, a brief literature of Mood and Modality is given first. Then, the theoretical framework of the study is set. The analysis of the first letter of Nahj al-Balagheh based on the presented theory and a short conclusion are the remaining parts of this article.

2. Review of the literature

In describing the interpersonal metafunction of each language, one can imagine the existence of a system for mood and modality (Sani Bozkurt, 2018). It is because when we express ourselves or share our experiences, we frequently use some utterances in which possibility, probability and obligation are clear. Lyons (1977, p. 848) defines Mood as a grammatical category in some (not all) languages. He believes that there are some inflectional particles as the formal markers of Mood in some languages. It is a lexico-syntactic category in association with tense and aspect.

Mood not only brings form and content in association but also shows the interconnectedness of content and function (Palmer, 2001, p. 93). Formation of the mood of an utterance depends on some elements on which the interpersonal interaction outbreaks; it has a mutual effect. Then, "there are some lexico-grammatical systems which we rely on to express our messages in such a way that our hearers have a good chance of understanding why we are saying something to them" (Thomson, 1996, p. 38). Halliday and Mattheiessen (2004, p. 72) assert that a clause is either in indicative or imperative mood and if indicative, it is either declarative or interrogative. The interrogative mood, in turn, is either a polar or a Wh- question.

Palmer (2001) points out that it is difficult to differentiate systems of mood and modality, as in some languages the general system of modality partakes some features of both. However, modality is a semantic domain, whereas mood, like other grammatical categories, can be a specific feature of a language or common features of languages (Bybee, Revers & William, 1994). Modality has traditionally been studied in association with mood, but today it is mostly focused on in terms of cognitive studies. It is defined as the grammaticalised view of the speaker (Bybee et al., 1994), mental realities on propositions, events, and their real condition (Mitchell & El-Hassan, 1994), commitments and beliefs of the speaker (Diab et al., 2009), uncertainty and imagination (Matsuyoshi et al., 2010), and so forth.

Palmer (1999, pp. 1–3), following Jespersen (1924), believes that modality is a semantico-grammatical feature. He discusses different ways of grammaticalisation in modality and clarifies the domain of its functions in relation to other grammatical categories of tense, aspect, gender and number. He knows modality as the state of proposition in an event, which is an inter-language category one can put under typological studies.

According to Halliday (1994), modality shows if the person expresses his judgment or makes a prediction. Here, modality refers to the interpersonal meaning between Yes and No, i.e., different levels of certainty exist between the two positive and negative poles. "Modality regards clause and other language units as the exchange in propositions and proposals, while proposition refers to the exchange of Information and proposal backs to the exchange of Goods and Services" (Halliday and Mattheiessen, 2004). Thomson (2004) proposes that modality refers to the validity of information on its probability scale or usuality scale; the scale in the former includes possible, probable and certain and the latter moves from sometimes, to often and finally to always.

After this short review on the literature of mood and modality, it should be mentioned that the majority of the studies conducted on mood and modality have been on the theoretical verge resulting in different classifications and categorisations and the text of Nahj al-Balagheh, though being under interpretation and explanation, has not been yet practically analysed leaning on the concept of Mood and Modality of SFG as far as the attempt of the researcher indicates.

3. Theoretical framework of the study

This study is theoretically based on a pattern of SFG presented by Halliday and Mattheiessen (2004) in which the clause is tackled as an Exchange and Mood and Modality are considered as the bases of the interpersonal meaning. In this view, language and other semiotic systems are as a network of interrelated selections (Halliday, xiv) and context is defined according to the variety of languages taking its use into account (Halliday and Hassan, 1976, p. 44). Here, the variables of language are field of discourse, tenor of discourse and mode of discourse. Determination of these variables is not random or intentional because each represents a kind of meaning (ibid: 50) and a metafunction as a result.

Halliday summarises the functions of language in three metafunctions of experiential, textual and interpersonal. Experiential (also called ideational) metafunction concerns our perception of the world, and the textual metafunction indicates the use of language in composing verbal or written texts. But the interpersonal metafunction, as the leaning point of this study, is that part of the language which protects, fixes and mediates our social relations. Here, meaning is a form of interaction through which the speaker associates an action to the hearer (Halliday, 1985, p. 53) a mutual relation. The exchange is either on information or goods and services. Therefore, the four basic language functions are as follows: giving information »statements«, demanding information »questions«, giving goods and services »offer« and demanding goods and services »command« (Halliday and Mattheiessen, 2004, p. 106).

To analyse a text on its interpersonal metafunction, Halliday divides each clause in two parts of Mood and Residue. Mood includes Finite, a part of verb group, and Subject, a noun group, as in the following examples:

The student	*has*	*finished*	*her homework.*
subject	finite	predicator	complement
Mood		**Residue**	

ليلا و نهارا	هولاء القوم	الى قتال	كم	دعوتـ	قد	نـى	انـ
laylanvaniha:ran	ha u la:?al quwm	elaqhital	kum	daGuwta	qad	ni:	in
day and night	those people	to fight	you	call	certain	I	sure
adjunct	*complement*	*adjunct*	*comp*	*predicator*	*moodprtl*	*subj*	*mood adj.*
Residue				**Mood**			
For sure I asked you to fight against those group of people all days and nights							

On the interactional perspective, the speaker introduces an element (subject) about which certain claims are posed. He shows the validity degree of the claims in Finite. Then, the claims are presented in the rest of the clause (Thomson, 2004, p. 54). The mood includes subject and finite in statements and polar questions. In Wh-questions, depending on the function of the Wh- element (subject, complement or adjunct), it may be part of the mood or residue:

a)

What	*can*	*make*	*it*	*Possible?*
subject	finite	predicator	complement	adjunct
Mood		**Residue**		

b)

What	*can*	*John*	*bring*	*to the class?*
complement	finite	subject	predicator	adjunct
Residue	**Mood**		**Residue**	

Exclamations are like wh- questions:

How	*simple*	*it*	*will*	*be!*
adjunct	adjunct	subject	finite	predicator
Residue		**Mood**		**Residue**

In polar questions, the speaker wants the listener to clarify the polarity of the clause, first. Because of some thematic reasons, the speaker begins the clause with Finite:

Will	*you*	*be*	*there*	*on time?*
Finite	subject	predicator	adjunct	adjunct
Mood		**Residue**		

There is no mood element in unmarked imperative clauses as there is no apparent subject, the addressee is the subject and any time reference is also redundant, i.e., it can only refer to an action not happened yet- future. Finite is used to show negation, though:

Don't	*go away.*
Finite	predicator
Mood	**Residue**

The subject appears in unmarked imperatives:

You,	*leave*	*the room*	*now.*
subject	predicator	adjunct	adjunct
Mood	**Residue**		

The concept of subject in SFG corresponds to its traditional definition, but here it, also, is an entity that the speaker wants to make responsible for the validity of the proposition being advanced in the clause (Thomson, 1996, p. 45). "Subject is not just a formal category but, like other grammatical functions, it is a semantic category in nature" (Halliday and Mattheiessen, 2004, p. 112).

The other element of mood is finite. In English, it is the first functional element of the verb group. Preceding the subject, it is easily definable in polar questions. As the name indicates, finite brings the proposition to reality, so that it becomes negotiable. This gets possible by the determination of its reference in time and place (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 115).

The contemplated functions for finite in this theory are showing tense, polarity and modality. The Finite element may be apparent, an auxiliary (e.g., does, did, are, have,...), or a modal auxiliary verb (e.g., will. may. must,...); the former mostly indicates tense and the latter shows modality. Finite is sometimes induced in the clause itself. For instance, past tense is implied from the verb «went» in the following clause: *They went out*. In Arabic, the language under investigation here, the lexical verb, referred to as predicator, puts upon such a capacity that it can play the major role in indicating the finite functions: showing tense, polarity and modality.

In terms of polarity, a clause is either positive or negative. This is mostly determined by the finite element, but some complements (like nothing) and some modal adjuncts (like hardly) can also show negative polarity. For example, the following clauses are in negative polarity:

1. He hardly helps his family.
2. He said nothing to me.

Modality in English is expressed either by modal auxiliaries, modal adjuncts or a combination of both. From the three types of circumstantial, conjunctive and modal adjunct, as presented in this theory, the last one can have an interpersonal role and be a part of mood. Modal adjunct is further classified in mood and comment adjuncts. Mood adjuncts may have concept of tense, (e.g., «already» in English and «da? eman:»دائما in Arabic), polarity (e.g., «yes» in English and «naGam:» نعم in Arabic) and modality (e.g., «maybe» in English and «ehyanan: » احيانا in Arabic). Comment adjuncts (like «unfortunately» in English and «su:elhaz: » سوء الحظ in Arabic) bring in a view about the message of the clause as a whole.

Tackling modality based on Halliday's SFG, Thomson (2004, pp. 60–65) highlights some related concepts like speaker's commitment, source of modality, modal responsibility, appraisal and interaction and negotiations among the participants. Speaker himself can be the source of the modality, or he can report the view indirectly by the words of the participants. In storytelling, for example, the characters of the story speak instead. Modal commitment indicates the degree of speaker's commitment to the validity of the message. For instance, in «I shall never be happy.», in comparison to «I may be quite wrong.», one can clearly feel a higher degree of commitment.

The speaker can accept the responsibility of the claim (by using the subject « I» together with modal auxiliaries), or hide himself by using modal adjuncts and transferring the responsibility to others and expressing the message so that it feels like a piece of reality. Appraisal (or evaluation) concerns the specification of the speaker's opinion about the subject, i.e., is it good or bad. Good and bad are the extremes of the continuum and there are other levels in between.

The last topic in this regard is the negotiation and the interaction between the participants. Looking beyond the clause and involving the text as a whole, it scrutinises the way the participants are involved in their interaction. The clause was already defined as an exchange, and then the projected role the speaker assigns to the participants looks important. In the following example from the war lecture (خطبه الجهاد) in Nahj al-Balagheh, Imam Ali clearly shows the way he calls his addressee, people of Koofa (كوفه):

يا	ا شباه الرجال	و	لارجال	و	حلوم الاطفال	و	عقول ربات الحجال
ya:	?ashba:h ?arrija:l	Va	la: rija:l	va	hulu:mul ?tfa:l	va	Guqu:luraba:tilhija:l
addressing prt	like/men	and	no/men	and	resistance/ infants	and	wisdom/brides/chamber
Hay, you look like men but are not men. You are as resistant as infants and as wise as the brides in chamber.							

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He names them false, low resistance and less wise people, which implies that the speaker – Imam Ali – is a knowledgeable information source.

3.1. Data analysis

The first letter of Nahj al-Balagheh is written by Imam Ali to the people of Ku:fa (کوفه) Ansari, 631: 90). This is the text of the letter:

سَمْعُهُ كَعِيانِهِ	يَكُونَ	حَتَّى	أَمْرِ عُثْمَانَ	عَنْ	كُمْ	أَخْبِرُ	نـي	إِنَّـ	فـ
samGahu: kaGiya:nuhu:	yaku:na/ 3rd sing	hatta:	?amriGuthma:n	Gan	kum	?axbur/1stsing	ni:	?in	fa
hearing like seeing	be	so that	Othman issue	from	you	announce	I	sure	then
I will inform you form Othman issue so informative that you feel you see when you hear.									

اِسْتِعْتَابَهُ	أَكْثَرُ	رَجُلاً مِنَ اَلْمُهَاجِرِينَ	ـكُنت	فَ	عَلَيْه	طَعَنُوا	اَلنَّاسَ	إِنَّ
?estiGatbah atisfaction	aktharu	rajolanminalmoha:jiri:n	kontu 1st sing be/ I	fa	Galayhi	taGanu:/ 3rdpl	?anna:s	?in
	more	a man fromemigrants		then	against him	blame	people	sure
The people blamed him but I, though an emigrant man, wanted more satisfaction for him.								

سَيْرهمافِيه اَلْوَجِيفُ	أَهْوَنُ	طَلْحَةَ وَ اَلْزَبَيْرُ	كَانَ	وَ	عِتَابَهُ	أَقَلَّ	وَ
sayrahoma: fi:hialvajif	?ahvanu	talhavazobayr	ka:na/3rdsing	va	Gita:bahu:	?aqallu	va
an I scolded him less but the simplest thing Talhah and Zobayr did was attacking him.							

غَضَبٍ	فَلْتَة	فيه	عَائِشَة	مِنْ	كَانَ	وَ	اَلْعَنِيفُ	حِدَائِهِمَا	أَرْفَقُ	وَ
GHaDhab	faltahu:	fi:hi	Ga:?isha	min	ka:na	va	alGani:f	Heda:?ihema	arfaqu	va
anger	hurry	in it	name	from	be	and	unfair	behaviour/their	kindly	and
and their[even] more kind behaviour was unfair.										

غَيْرَ مُسْتَكْرَهِينَ	اَلنَّاسُ	بِايَعَنِي	وَ	هُ	قَتَلُو	فَـ	قَوْمٌ	لَهُ	أُتِيحَ	فَـ
qayramus-takrahi:n	anna:s	ba:yaGni: /3rdpl	va	hu	qatalu: /3rdpl	fa	qawmun	lahu:	?uti:Ha /3rdsing	va
without reluctance	people	allegiance/ me	and	him	killed	then	group of people	to him	attack	and
Then a group of people attacked and killed him. And people came under my allegiance with no reluctance.										

د ارَ اَلْهِجْرَةِ	أَنَّ	اِعْلَمُوا	وَ	طَائِعِينَ مُخَيَّرِين	بَلْ	مُجَبِرِينَ	لَا	وَ
da:ralhi:jrah	inna	Glamu:/2ndpl	va	ta:?iGi:namuxayyari:n	bal	mojbari:n	la:	va
immigration place	sure	know/ you	and	willingly/freely	but	obligation	no	and
and they were not obliged but they did it willingly and freely. And you be aware that the immigration place(Medina)								

جَيْشَ اَلْمِرْجَلِ	جَاشَتْ	وَ	بِهَا	قَلَعُوا	وَ	بِأَهْلِهَا	قَلَعَتْ	قَدْ
jayshalmirjal	ja:shat	va	biha:	qalaGu:	va	biahliha:	qalaGat	qad
boiling pot	boil 3rdsing	and	from	deserted 3rdpl	and	to people/its	desert3rdsing	clearly
deserted its people and the people left there. It is like a boiling pot.								

جهَادَ عَدُوَّكُمْ	بَادِرُوا	و	إِلَى أَمِيرِكُمْ	أَسْرِعُوا	فَ	عَلَى اَلْقُطْبِ	اَلْفِئَتَة	قَامَتِ	وَ
jahadaGaduwwukum	**ba:daru:**	va	ila: ami:rukum	?asriGu: /2ⁿᵈpl	fa	Galalqutbi	**?alfitnah**	**qa:mat/ 3rdsing**	va
war to enemy	**forward**	and	lord/yours	**hurry**	then	maximum	**riot**	**aroused**	and

and intensive riot you move in hurry toward your lord and start fighting your enemy.

عَزَّ وَ جَل			اَللَّه	شَاءَ	إِنْ
Gazzavajalla			**alah**	**sha:?a**	in
darling and great/ the most			**Allah**	**will3ʳᵈ sing**	if

If The most darling and the greatest god wills.

Based on the theory, the clause is the unit of study. Mood and residue are first determined in each clause by highlighting the Mood elements in boldface fonts. In the first clause of the letter, Mood includes the mood adjunct » ?ina (اِنَّ) « , » i:(ي) « as the subject, and »axbir (اخبر) «as the predicator. The responsibility of the message of this introductory clause of the letter, which can be generalised to the whole text, directly goes to the speaker – Imam Ali. He, as the source of the message, is going to announce something about the issue of Othman's death. According to the mood adjunct, he is certain about the validity of the message to be told; so he asserts it in a positive present tense statement. His commitment to the validity of the message is more emphasised in the next clause. There, the subject is induced in the predicator»yaku:nu (يَكُون) « and together with the mood adjunct » ?ina(اِنَّ) «, and the adjunct »samGahu: kaGiya:nohu: (مْعُهُ كَعِيَانِهَِۛس) « the Mood is formed. This clause clearly shows the commitment of the speaker to the validity of the message as he claims one can feel watching the scene when I talk about.

The third clause uses the subject »alna:s(الناس)« and the finite is again induced in the predicator»taGanu:) (طعنوا) «. The people, taken as the subject, are responsible for blaming Othman. This clause is better understood when evaluated in contrast to its following clause in which the implied subject from the predicator»kunta (كنت), and then the responsibility holder, is the speaker. The Finite is taken from the mentioned predicator plus the two semantically opposing adjuncts of »akthara (اكثر) and aqala (اقل) «. The message of the preceding clause is a sarcastic behaviour for which the people are responsible, but in the following clause Imam Ali's claim is not only a less blaming behaviour to Othman but more to his satisfaction. These two semantically contrasting clauses are both statements with positive polarity. The tense is in the past and indicates some happenings before Othman's death.

In the next clause, the subject is »Tolaha and Zobayr« and the predicator»ka:na (كان)« plus the adjuncts »ahvana) « (اهون) (and »arfaqa (ارفق)) assume the presupposed functions of the Mood. The named persons are then responsible for attacking and misbehaving Othman. An evaluation of the messages, from the eyes of the speaker, in this clause and its preceding one can be understood when the two pairs of the opposing adjuncts are compared: akthara/aqala versus ahvana/arfaqa. Two positive past tense statements carry the message of misbehaviour to Othman.

The same theme of meaning continues in the three following clauses, but the subject is changed first to a new participant called »Ayesheh« and then to some other people taking the responsibility of the message of the clause. The functions of the finite are again induced in the predicators »uti:ha(اتيح) and qatalu «(قتلوا) i.e., they are positive past tense verbs presented in statements. The subject changes from quwm to alna:s(الناس), which is more semantically inclusive. In contrast to quwm as a limited group of people, almost all (alna:s) accepted the responsibility of going under the allegiance of Imam Ali. Three successive adjuncts appraising the message of the clause play an important role in pointing the mood structure of the clause:»Ghayramostakrahin/la: mujbiri:n/ta:?iGi:nmuxayari:n- غيرمستكرهين/لا

مخيرين	طائعين	(مجبرين/	which	means	that	the

allegiance was not odious, not obligatory, but optional and obedient.

Up to here, and in order to give information, the statement is the dominant structure. Some clauses are now used in imperative mood in order to offer or warn the addressed people. The predicator»?iGlamu:) « اعلموا (is a clause by itself, both the mood and the residue. It is a warning to the deceived people of Medina. In the following clause, some particles showing certainty (inna(اِنَّ) and qad(قد) plus the predicator qalaGat (قلعت) form the finite; the subject is da:ralhejrah (دارالهجره), which in fact refers to the city of Medina. Thus, it can be certainly understood that Medina has evacuated its dwellers. The next clause in which the predicator qalaGu: (قلعوا) is the only mood element from which the subject ahlaha: (اهلها) is implied asserts a mutual reaction between the city of Medina and its dwellers: the condition in Medina forced them to leave and they themselves accepted to go, ahlaha:, meaning the dwellers, as the subject carries the responsibility of this removal.

The two following clauses are directly related to the preceding clauses semantically. Here, the riot in the city which brought about its evacuation is set by focusing on the predicator ja:shat (جاشت) as the mood element in one clause and qa:mat (قامت) plus ?alfitnah (الفتنه) as the mood elements in the other clause. Medina is the subject induced in the predicator ja:shat meaning boiling. Then the condition in the city is severe like a boiling pot. It resulted in riot as the subject ?alfitnah indicates in the following clause.

The letter is summed up with two imperative clauses and an optative one. As it is the norm in imperative clauses, asra?u: (اسرعوا) and ba:diru: (بادروا) are the predicators, and the Mood elements. Imam Ali offers the people to hurry in uniting him and to fight against the people who deceived them. In both clauses, the responsibility is put on the addressee as the implied subject of the imperatives. Imam Ali calls him as ?ami:r(امیر) meaning The lord, while the above named people(Tolhah, Zobayr, and Ayesheh) as Gadu: (عدو). These are the projected roles assigned from the speaker which could, easily, be traced back in the text. The closing clause of the letter, as it is the norm, is an optative clause. This clause is significant as Allah is the subject and then responsible for the message. Sha:?a(شاء) as the predicator occurring in a conditional structure after in(اِنْ) represents a wish forwarded to Allah.

4. Conclusion

This study tackled mood and modality based on the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's SFG on the first letter of Nahj al-Balagheh. When analysing the text according to the specified concepts and definitions, it revealed that the presented theory set based on English by Halliday is also assignable to Arabic but mediation is sometimes needed to cover all the presupposed axioms in the theory. For example, although the predicator (verb) is mostly put out of the mood structure in English, it is mostly the prominent Mood element in Arabic. That is the predicator indicates the assigned functions of the Finite in this theory, and the subject, too, is implied from the predicator in many cases. Therefore, it is almost always a part of the mood structure.

The dominancy of the statements in this letter indicates the process of the exchange of information. It is clear from a speaker in a higher status, who calls himself the lord of the people and people go under his allegiance, to a lower status people who need to be guided. The speaker shows his guiding role by using some imperative statements in the letter.

Contrasting appraisal is clear at least in two parts of the letter: once his accommodating behaviour towards Othman verses the misbehaviour of Tolhah, Zobayr, Ayeshe and their followers. The other one is the limited group of people who attacked and killed Othman against a great number of people coming under Imam Ali's allegiance.

What stated here is just the interpretation of a letter from Nahj al-Balagheh based on a scientific linguistic theory. More researches are possible to be conducted on analysing religious texts based on various available scientific theories. This letter can, for instance, be put under investigation taking

other metafunctions of SFG as the base. However, any comment or criticism on this study is welcomed by the writer.

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