An elegant lady or a flower girl? A critical discourse analysis of pygmalion through a systemic functional perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the language of the main female character called Eliza in the play 'Pygmalion' by Bernard Shaw. This analysis is done by applying the transitivity system, which is part of English linguist Halliday's (1985; 1994) systemic-functional grammar. According to the transitivity system, verbs can be classified into six processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural and existential. The most important ones, which are analysed in the play Pygmalion for the analysis of power status, are the material, mental and relational processes. When considering the pattern of participant representation in a text from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, it is useful to have some general sense of the types of participants, which tend to be construed grammatically as powerful and of those which are construed as less powerful or even powerless. The investigation is based on the ideas suggested by Goatly (2000) who made the interesting suggestion that we may construct a hierarchy of participant power relations in a text based on their roles in different types of clauses and processes. The results show that Eliza's change of power status has an effect on her role as a participant in clauses and processes in the play that is in accordance with Goatly's (2000) theory about participants' power hierarchy in process types.

Keywords: CDA, systemic functional grammar, transitivity, power, participant role.

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1. Introduction

Pygmalion, one of the most famous plays written by Shaw (1916), tells a story of how a phonetics teacher – Professor Henry Higgins – teaches a poor Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle to speak and behave like a high-class lady. The fascinating aspect of reading literary works is that we get involved with the characters and imagine ourselves as a member of the plot, and get exposed to characters and writers' thoughts and actions. In the present study Eliza – the first female character in Pygmalion – is the only character who has changed in terms of power status. Her dialogues in the play are the chosen data for the present study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of changing Eliza's power status on her roles in material, mental and relational process types she uses in acts I and V using transitivity analysis framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

2. Summary of the play

The play Pygmalion tells a story of a poor flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, whose dialect is Cockney, and a phonetics teacher called Henry Higgins, who speaks English perfectly, that is a sign of his nobility. After overhearing a conversation between Higgins and his friend Colonel Pickering in the street, Eliza thinks that she will never succeed in her life because of her accent. She decides to go after Higgins and ask him to teach her the perfect way of speaking. He makes a bet with Pickering that in 6 months he would teach the poor girl how to speak 'correctly' and take her to an ambassador's ball and pretend that she is a duchess. Eliza learns lessons for 6 months, and acts and speaks perfectly at the ball. Afterwards, Higgins talks to Pickering about his winning the bet. Eliza overhears the conversation and feels terrible because she understands that Higgins gets all the credits for her good performance as a duchess and also realises that he does not care for her. She complains about his coldness and cruelty, runs away and decides to marry Freddy, a poor man, who is in love with her and promises to protect her. Higgins makes fun of her decision of marriage since her future husband is supposed to be a person who could not do anything for her. Higgins asks Eliza to go back to his house and to continue working there. Eliza becomes angry and upset with his cold behaviour. The last act ends without showing her decision. In the sequel of the play, Shaw informs the readers that Eliza marries Freddy, but continues working as a housekeeper at Higgins' house.

3. Review of literature

One of the main theories used for this study is CDA. Among the crucial presuppositions of CDA understanding is the nature of social power and dominance. CDA is defined by many experts in relation to power relations or dominance in the society. The famous critical discourse analysts, Fairclough (1993), defines that CDA aims to explore the relationships of causality and determination between a) Discursive practices, events and texts and b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes. He states that the investigation of the relationships is to understand how such practices, events and texts arise in the society. He adds that the aims should also explore how those are ideologically shaped. The version of CDA that is used in this study is the 'Lancaster School' version. This is the version that has been developed since the 1980s by Norman Fairclough and his colleagues at Lancaster University in England (Fairclough, 2001). Reflecting its origins in Critical Linguistics, this version is distinguished by its emphasis on textual analysis. In order to do such analysis, CDA has drawn on a variety of different linguistic theories but without doubt the one which has been widely used is Systemic Functional Linguistics sometimes also referred to as 'Hallidayan' linguistics after the leading proponent of this theory, Michael Halliday. As said before, the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of changing power status on participants' roles in material, mental and relational processes. To do so, first, we need to demonstrate Eliza's change of power in Pygmalion. This is done by Kuhi and Hassanimehr (2013). They used CDA to show that with the development of the plot the power relation between Higgins – Eliza's phonetics teacher – and Eliza is changed and this change is also demonstrated in discourse. From their analysis of the discoursal features in Pygmalion, the change of the

power-relation between Eliza and Higgins is clearly presented. Hence, the change is realised through discourse and it is reflected on power relation. Here we take a look at the path we want to go through in this study.

3.1. Critical discourse analysis and transitivity

Systemic-functional grammar (SFG) has been used by discourse analysts in the analysis of texts and their structures. SFG is called systemic because it is said that individuals have alternative options available to produce language in forms of utterances and texts and functional because of the variety of purposes language is used for (Halliday, 1994). As Eggins (1994) puts it, the function of language is to 'make meanings; that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged; and that the processes of using language is a semiotic process, a process of making meanings by choosing' (p. 2). Halliday presents that the context of a situation is arranged in three categories: Field, Tenor and Mode. By analysing these categories semantically, they can correspond to the ideational, interpersonal and textual components. Clauses represent meaning through these three functions together. The ideational function permits users of language to manifest their world experience through lexicogrammatical choices they make, which are part of the transitivity system (Halliday, 1994). The transitivity system, which is the lexicogrammatical realisation of the ideational function, is used to analyse the dialogues of the main female character – Eliza – in Pygmalion. The system allows an analysis of the meaning of clauses through the study of participant roles of Eliza in the processes she uses in the play. The transitivity concepts applied in this study are linked to CDA concepts, which offer a visualisation of power traces presented in the play. The main argument of the transitivity system is that the experiences we go through consist of 'goings-on' – happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming' (Halliday, 1994, p. 106), which are shared by people through clauses that constitute the language they use to communicate. According to the way people perceive the world (due to experiences they go through), they will present their ideas and meanings in particular ways, which in the transitivity system are called processes. According to the transitivity system, verbs can be classified into six processes: material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential. The most important ones, which are analysed in the excerpts taken from the play Pygmalion for the analysis in this study, are material, mental and relational processes. A process consists potentially of three components:

1. The process itself
2. Participants
3. Circumstances

These three components provide the frame of reference for interpreting our experience of what goes on. In the interpretation of what is going on, there is *doing, a doer and a location* where the doing takes place. This tripartite interpretation of process is what lies behind the grammatical distinction of word classes into verbs, nouns, etc. (Halliday, 1985, p. 102).

3.1.1. Material process
Halliday (2004, p. 179) states that material clauses are clauses of doing and happening, which construe a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy. The source of the energy is typically coming from the participant, which is named Actor. The Actor is the one that does the deed and brings about the change. In the material process, one participant functions as an actor, but in some processes, it also has a second participant, which we shall call a goal. For example, John cleaned the house. John (Actor) cleaned (Process) the house (Goal).

3.1.2. Mental process
Unlike material clauses that are concerned with our experience of the material world, mental clauses are concerned with our experience of the world of our own consciousness. They construe a quantum of change in the flow of events taking place in our own consciousness (Halliday, 2004, p. 197).

There are two participants in the mental process: sensor and phenomenon. The mental process can be named as a process of feeling, thinking and seeing.

For example, He noticed you. He (Sensor) noticed (Process) you (Phenomenon).

3.1.3. Relational process

Relational clauses serve to characterise and to identify. The English system operates with three main types of relations such as 'intensive', 'possessive' and 'circumstantial', and each of these comes in two distinct modes of being – 'attributive' and 'identifying' (Halliday, 2004). Table 1 shows the intersection between them.

Table 1. Intersection between intensive, possessive and circumstantial (Rasman, 2014, p. 27)

	(i) attributive 'a is an attribute of x'	(ii) identifying 'a is the identify of x'
(1) intensive 'x is a'	Sarah is wise	Sarah is the leader; the leader is Sarah
(2) possessive 'x has a'	Sarah is wise	the piano is peter's; Peter's is the piano
(3) circumstantial 'x is at a'	The fair is on a Tuesday	tomorrow is the 10th; the 10th is tomorrow

3.2. Analysis of participant power hierarchy in processes

Taking into account the pattern of participant representation in a text from the CDA perspective, it is useful to have some general sense of the types of participants, which are construed grammatically as powerful and of those as less powerful or even powerless. The critical ecolinguist Andrew Goatly has made the interesting suggestion that we may establish a hierarchy of participant power relations in a text based on their various roles in different types of processes. He employed such a hierarchy to analyse the depiction of nature and natural phenomena in BBC World Service radio news programmes (Goatly, 2002). In that study, he only considered Material process, but in an earlier presentation of his ideas (Goatly, 2000, p. 288) he suggests the following more encompassing hierarchy, listed in order of decreasing power:

1. Actor in Transitive Material process
2. Actor in Intransitive Material process
3. Sayer in Verbal process
4. Experience in Mental process
5. Experiencer in Mental process
6. Affected in Material process

According to this ordering, Actors are seen as having most dominant power, above all when they act on some other participant in a process. The power of Sayers lies in their ability to send messages and thus have an effect on the consciousness of other sentient participants. Experiences (or Phenomena) take power by virtue of being capable of impinging on the consciousness of other participants, albeit non-volitionally. Writers (Rahimi & Sahragrad, 2006) avoid certain words, for the purpose of soothing and propitiating or inculcating certain ideologies, and reinforcing particular feelings such as disgust, excitement, sympathy and respect. Experiencers (or Sensors) are relatively weak to respond to outside stimuli. Finally, Affecteds (or Goals) are construed as powerless since they get influenced by the action of Actors: in Goatly's phrase, an Affected is merely 'the victim of the power of Actors' (2000, p. 288). But in this version of Goatly's theory about participant power, transitivity processes such as verbal, behavioural and relational are not included. The relational process is the one that is necessary for data analysis in the present study. The improvised model of this hierarchy is presented by Jie (2007).

Table 2. Power hierarchy in process clauses and their participants in descending order (Jie, 2007, p. 92)

Participants and process	Explanations	Examples
Actor in transitive material process clause (ACT)	An active participant powerful enough to affect others	*Snow* blocked the road
Actor in intransitive material process clause (AC)	An active participant though not affecting others	*John* went into the room.
Sayer in verbal process clause (SAYER)	Message sender, having an effect on the consciousness of other sentient participants	Peter whistled
Token in possessive relational clause (TOKEN)	Owner, signifying property of the possessor	*I* have a car
Phenomenon in perceptual mental process clause (PN)	Capable of impinging on the consciousness of others but non-volitionally	I saw *the bird.*
Participant in intensive/circumstantial/existential relational process clause (either token or value) (RELATIONAL)	Neutral in terms of the relational process is the processes of being	*He is a teacher*
Prepositional complement (as part of noun phrase) (PC)	The syntactic-semantic categories that the node word belong in. They are	The chair in *the garden*
Circumstantial prepositional complement (CC)	considered the same in power hierarchy.	I Walked *on the road*
Premodifier in any process clause (PM)		different *government* officials
Sensor in mental process clause (SENSOR)	Sentient and responsive to outside stimuli.	*I* saw the bird.
Receiver in verbal process clause (RECEIVER)	Listener who receives the information of orders.	Peter told *Mary* the hurricane was coming
Value in possessive relational clause (VALUE)	Something that is said to be something else's	I have a *car*
Affected in material process clause (AF)	Most powerless because acted upon, the victim of the power of actors.	He passed *me* a knife

The power hierarchy in Table 2 is in descending order. Therefore, the most powerful participant role is dedicated to actor in the transitive material process (ACT) and the least powerful to affected in material process clause (AF). We use the same abbreviations in this table to present the data of the study.

4. Analysis of findings

The transitivity system of language has been frequently used recently to analyse the language of speakers and writers. It is used to study the structure of sentences, which is represented by verbs as processes, the nominal groups as participants involved in these processes, and adverbial and prepositional phrases as circumstances. It is part of the ideational function, which, according to Downing and Locke (1992), 'permits us to encode, both semantically and syntactically, our mental picture of the physical world and the worlds of our imagination' (1992, p. 110). The following analysis is based on the dialogues by the main female character in Pygmalion called Eliza Doolittle. Not all the dialogues are taken into account in this analysis but the ones that are located in acts I and V. To start with, here we present the table that shows the number and kinds of participant roles Eliza has in her dialogues in act I. The tables showing the number and percentage of participant roles are in the same descending order as Table 2 with the same abbreviations.

Table 3. The number and percentage of participant roles in act I

Participants and process	Occurrence	Percentage
ACT	8	24.24
AC	0	0
TOKEN	2	6.06
PN	1	3.03
RELATIONAL	3	9.09
PC	0	0
CC		
PM		
SENSOR	3	9.09
VALUE	0	0
AF	16	48.48
Total	33	100

As illustrated in Table 3, ACT and AF are the most used types of participant roles Eliza has in her own utterances. It is said that this hierarchy is in descending order. This table shows that in act I Eliza had 8 roles as ACT that equals 24.24% of all of material, mental and relational processes she had in act I and 16 roles as AF that equals 48.48%. Table 4 contains the number and percentage of participant roles Eliza has in her dialogues in act V.

Table 4. The number and percentage of participant roles in act V

Participants and process	Occurrence	Percentage
ACT	33	25.19
AC	18	13.74
TOKEN	17	12.97
PN	5	3.82
RELATIONAL	14	10.68
PC	3	2.29
CC		
PM		
SENSOR	27	20.61
VALUE	0	0
AF	14	10.68
Total	131	100

As obvious from Table 4, outstanding changes have occurred in the amount of participant roles in act V. In order to make these two tables comparable, we combine the two into one that is presented below.

Table 5. The percentage of participant roles in acts I and V

Participants and process	Percentage of participant roles in act I	Percentage of participant roles in act V
ACT	24.24	25.19
AC	0	13.74
TOKEN	6.06	12.97
PN	3.03	3.82
RELATIONAL	9.09	10.68
PC	0	2.29
CC		
PM		

SENSOR	9.09	20.61
VALUE	0	0
AF	48.48	10.68
Total	100	100

As presented in Table 5, the percentage of some participant roles has increased in act V. In order to grasp the power dimension of participant roles of Eliza in Pygmalion, we discuss material, mental and relational processes separately in this part.

4.1. Material process

Material processes are processes of doing-and-happening, which contain a change through some input of energy. The source of the energy comes from the participant named Actor (ACT). ACT is the one that does the action and causes a change. The other participants such as affected (AF) and beneficiary in the material process are not assigned much power but rather are acted upon by another participant. They are less powerful compared to actors in a transitive and intransitive material process. Hence, it can be inferred that actors in transitive and intransitive material processes are the most powerful participants compared to others. Based on the findings above, Eliza's role as an ACT in act I occupies 24.24% of all material, mental and relational processes she used in this act. As an AC she didn't have a part. These two roles are the most powerful roles in Goatly's participant power hierarchy. Considering the amount of ACT and AC Eliza is not allocated much power in material processes of act I. The highest amount in act I belongs to her role as AF (48.48%) in material processes that is the least powerful role. According to participant power hierarchy, she had less power in act I. This shows how Eliza is represented as a character who is less important and low in power at the beginning of the play. In contrast to the first act, in act V it's the other way round. The number and percentages of ACT, AC and AF roles change in the last act. ACT that was 24.24 in act I changes to 25.19 in act V that makes a little difference. But AC that was 0 in the first act and is one of the most powerful roles has changed to 13.74 in act V, and AF that was 48.48 has changed to 10.68, which show outstanding differences. An increase in ACT and AC's percentages is a sign of increasing power according to Goatly (2000) and it is the decrease in the percentage of AF, which is in the lowest step of Goatly's hierarchy and a sign of less power. A decrease in AF along with an increase of ACT and AC is an indication of power boost. Hence, Eliza is portrayed as a more powerful character in act V.

4.2. Mental process

The mental process is a process of cognition, perception and affection. Mental clauses are concerned with our experience of the world. They contain a change caused by a stream of events taking place in our consciousness. In the mental process, a phenomenon has a higher power compared to the sensor. It's because the phenomenon has the power to impinge on the consciousness of another participant. Sensors get influenced by an external stimulus that has no effect on another participant. Based on the findings above, Eliza plays the role of a PN in both acts I and V. In act I, her role as a PN is 3.03%. In act V, this amount increases to 3.82, which does not show much difference. Another participant in mental clauses is SENSOR who is the perceiver of the phenomenon. In act I, 9.09% belongs to Eliza's role as a SENSOR. The percentage of this role in act V is 20.61. Taking only mental processes into account, the findings of this study do not correspond to Goatly's (2000) theory of participant power. Taking a look at the percentages of Eliza's roles as PN and SENSOR, one can conclude that her power as a participant has decreased in act V comparing to act I. In the next sections, we will analyse the data from another point of view and will address all the participants in the process types together.

4.3. Relational processes

The relational process is the process of being, i.e., 'something is being said to 'be' something else' (Halliday, 1994, p. 119). In Halliday's SFG, the relational process is divided into three subcategories: the intensive, the circumstantial and the possessive, each of which comes in two distinct modes of being: attributive and identifying. In the table of participant power hierarchy (Table 2), TOKEN (possessor) in the possessive relational process stands higher compared to other participant roles of relational processes. In the first act, 6.06% belongs to Eliza's role as a TOKEN but increases to 12.97 in act V. As TOKEN is one of the powerful participant roles in the hierarchy, the increase of its percentage is a sign of Eliza's power growth. RELATIONAL is the other one in relational processes and stands lower compared to TOKEN. There are 9.09 of it in act I that changes to 10.68 in act V that is not a considerable increase. The other participant in relational clauses is VALUE that is not given any percentage in none of acts. Any increase in its percentage would be a sign of Eliza's power decrease. Then, we can conclude that relational processes in acts I and V also manifest Eliza's gaining power throughout the play.

4.4. Analysis of findings from another aspect

Here we embark on the analysis of the results of this study from another viewpoint to document correspondence of findings to Goatly's (2000) theory. In order to achieve this aim, we need to divide the results of Table 6 into two halves as follows.

Table 6. The most powerful and the least powerful participant roles in acts I and V

Participants and process	Percentage of participant roles in act I	Percentage of participant roles in act V
ACT	24.24	25.19
AC	0	13.74
TOKEN	6.06	12.97
PN	3.03	3.82
RELATIONAL	9.09	10.68
PC	0	2.29
CC		
PM		
SENSOR	9.09	20.61
VALUE	0	0
AF	48.48	10.68
Total	100	100

The upper part of the table that is highlighted contains all participant roles that are in a high position in terms of power. The lower half contains those roles that have a lower power position. In order to show that Eliza's power has increased through the play, we need to sum up the percentages of upper and lower positions in both acts (I and V). The calculated percentages are shown in Table 7:

Table 7. The sum of the most powerful and the least powerful participant roles in acts I and V

Participants roles	Percentage of participant roles in act I	Percentage of participant roles in act V
ACT	24.24	25.19
AC	0	13.74
TOKEN	6.06	12.97
PN	3.03	3.82
RELATIONAL	9.09	10.68
Sum	42.42	66.40
PC	0	2.29
CC		

PM		
SENSOR	9.09	20.61
VALUE	0	0
AF	48.48	10.68
Sum	57.57	33.58

This table shows that the percentage of participant roles, which are high in power – ACT, AC, TOKEN, PN, RELATIONAL – has increased through the play. It means that Eliza's power has increased in act V in comparison to act I. The lower part of the table, contrary to the upper part, shows a decrease in percentages. A low amount of powerless participant roles is also an indication of gaining power by Eliza Doolittle.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have used a tool for analysis of the text that is one aspect of the transitivity theory. We proposed a simple heuristic device – the participant power hierarchy by Goatly (2000) to measure the participant power. We found that it is a useful tool for textual analysis and applied it as a contribution to the investigation of ideology in a play titled Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw. The analysis of the transitivity system demonstrated the instances of the material, mental and relational processes and attempted to show how power is realised by the writer through transitivity and process types in the play. The findings show that the writer's language portrayed Eliza as a less powerful flower girl at the beginning of the play. Throughout the story, she changed to a lady and her language changed too. Comparing acts I and V by means of Goatly's (2000) theory of participant power hierarchy, the authors manifested some changes in Eliza's language that documents her power increase in the flow of the story and shows that change of power status results in the change of role as a participant in process types. This study aims to call people's attention to the power of language in portraying reality, and to invite individuals to a deeper understanding specifically in power relations in order to come to a social awareness.

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