

IDEATIONAL FUNCTION IN THE SHORT STORY *FRIENDS* BY MICHIWICHI

Agneso Feronika Limbong¹, Diane Sarima Lestari Simbolon², Lendawati Manurung³, Sarah Nasrani Gea⁴, Rina Octavia Simarmata⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Universitas HKBP Nommensen, North Sumatera, Medan, Indonesia
agnesoferonikalimbong@student.uhn.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ideational metafunction within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with a specific focus on Michiwichi's short story *Friends*. This research aims to find out the types of processes that exist in the story. Four types of processes occur, namely material process, mental process, relational process, and verbal process. Language is examined not merely as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for constructing and representing experiential meaning. The analysis employs the transitivity system, which includes material, mental, relational, and verbal processes to explore how experiences are linguistically structured in the narrative. Adopting a descriptive qualitative approach, the research classifies each clause according to its transitivity elements (process, participant, and circumstance). The findings reveal that the text utilizes diverse process types to encode meaning, with material processes being the most prevalent, followed by mental and relational processes. These results demonstrate how linguistic features are deliberately employed to express the characters' emotions, motivations, and social dynamics. The study underscores the relevance of SFL in literary analysis and affirms that even brief fictional works can provide valuable insights for functional linguistic examination.

Keywords: Systemic Functional linguistics, Ideational, Process, Story

1. Introduction

Language serves a fundamental role in human existence, functioning not merely as an instrument of communication but also as a semiotic medium through which experiences, conceptual frameworks, and sociocultural realities are constructed and mediated. According to Halliday (1994) posits within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that language operates as a social semiotic system, implying a dynamic interplay wherein linguistic structures both influence and are influenced by their sociocultural context. This theoretical paradigm delineates three core metafunctions of language: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.

This study aims to identify the transitivity process types used in the short story 'Friends' by Michiwichi through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The main data source is the story text, analyzed qualitatively using the transitivity framework. Among these, the ideational metafunction is principally concerned with the linguistic representation of experiences and external phenomena. It is actualized through the transitivity system, which comprises processes (realized by verbs), participants (encoded as subjects and objects), and circumstantial elements (expressed through adverbials) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Collectively, these components facilitate the construction and articulation of both concrete and abstract experiences. According to (Coleman (2014) underscore the significance of ideational analysis in elucidating "how individuals systematically encode their perception of reality." While according to theory (Thompson, 2013) . Ideational meaning in a clause consists of experiential and logical meaning. The experiential meaning is that the sentence represents the content of experiences examined by transitivity structure, and the

logical meaning is the relationship between ideas and sentences in complex clauses (Hutabarat et al., 2020). The applicability of SFL spans multiple academic disciplines, including educational linguistics, discourse studies, and literary analysis. Schleppegrell (2004) highlights its efficacy in deconstructing pedagogical texts and enhancing students' ability to derive contextually embedded meanings. Similarly, O'Halloran (2007) illustrates the utility of SFL in literary criticism, particularly in examining how thematic elements, emotional characterization, and socio relational dynamics are linguistically realized.

Recent studies have expanded the application of ideational metafunction and transitivity analysis in various types of narrative texts. (Jelimun et al., 2020) language is regarded as a social semiotic system that reflects human experience through grammatical structures. One of the central aspects of this theory is the ideational metafunction, which is realized through the transitivity system. This system comprises six types of processes—material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential—each representing different kinds of experience. (Thapliyal et al., 2024) demonstrated that in children's storybooks, transitivity systems reflected moral values and psychological development of characters through diverse processes. (Agustina & Suarnajaya, 2021) discovered that Indonesian folklore narratives are rich with material and verbal processes, used to express physical actions and dialogues that build cultural themes. (Zein et al., 2019) emphasize that these processes reveal how writers construct meaning by assigning specific roles to participants and accompanying circumstances. In the educational context. (Mulyanti et al., 2022) demonstrate that transitivity analysis helps map the structure of narrative texts in accordance with students' cognitive development. Thus, the transitivity system in SFL provides a powerful tool for examining how experiential meaning is constructed within narrative texts. (Wijayanti and Fitria, 2025) further confirmed that digital narratives employ the SFL framework effectively to construct complex character interactions, emphasizing the growing relevance of SFL in digital and modern literary contexts.

Based on these observations, the author recognizes a gap in linguistic studies of digital literary texts. To address this gap, the author intends to conduct a linguistic analysis of Michiwichi's "Friends," a story that explores themes of friendship, social struggles, and identity. This story possesses a rich linguistic structure that holds potential for analysis through the transitivity system, a component of the ideational function. In addressing the research problem, the author plans to identify and classify the types of processes (such as material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential) used in the narrative and analyze how these processes depict the experiences and relationships among the characters. The primary objective of this research is to analyze the use of the ideational function, particularly the transitivity system, in Michiwichi's short story "Friends." This study aims to identify the types of processes present in the text, explore how these processes represent participants and circumstances within the story, and interpret how these linguistic features contribute to the construction of meaning and thematic development.

This research is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, as developed by Halliday (1994, 2004), with a focus on the ideational metafunction, which emphasizes how language represents experience. The transitivity system, central to the ideational function, involves the classification of process types, participants, and circumstances within an event. Previous studies, including those by (Putra et al., 2024), have demonstrated that transitivity analysis is effective in revealing how authors construct experiences in texts. However, the application of this theory to contemporary online literary works remains highly limited. Through this research, it is expected to reveal how the linguistic choices in the short story "Friends" are used to ideationally represent the experiences of its characters. The findings of this study are anticipated to contribute to a deeper understanding of meaning construction in narrative texts. Academically, this research will enrich linguistic and literary studies by demonstrating the practical application of SFL theory in the analysis of literary works. Practically, this study can serve as a reference for analyzing other digital literary texts that have emerged in the modern era.

Despite its extensive application, there exists a paucity of research examining the deployment of SFL—specifically the ideational metafunction—in short narratives disseminated through informal digital platforms, such as Michiwichi's *Friends*. Short stories present a compelling locus for such inquiry due to their synthesis of real-world themes and fictive constructs within a highly condensed narrative structure. The present study seeks to analyze the operationalization of the ideational metafunction in *Friends*, with a specific focus on identifying and categorizing the transitivity processes—material, mental, relational, and verbal—employed by the author to construct experiential meaning. By employing SFL's ideational framework, this research aims to elucidate the linguistic mechanisms underlying semantic construction in narrative discourse, thereby demonstrating the viability of functional linguistic analysis even in concise fictional works.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the ideational function is one of the three metafunctions introduced by M.A.K. Halliday. It reflects how language is used to represent our experiences of the world—both external actions and internal thoughts. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) state that this function is realized through the transitivity system, which classifies clauses based on six types of processes: (1) material, (2) mental, (3) relational, (4) verbal, (5) behavioral, and (6) existential. Each process type follows a specific clause structure and includes certain types of participants and optional circumstances.

Material process represent physical or tangible actions. They typically involve an *Actor* who performs the action, a *Goal* that is affected by the action, and optional *Circumstances* such as place or manner. The general clause formula is: Actor + Material Process + Goal + (Circumstance). For example, in "*She opened the door quickly*," "She" is the actor, "opened" is the process, "the door" is the goal, and "quickly" is the circumstance. Halliday (1994) describes material processes as processes of doing, which reflect the outer experiences of people or objects. Mental process express internal experiences, such as thinking, feeling, or perceiving. These clauses involve a *Sensor* (the experiencer), a *Mental Process* verb, and a *Phenomenon* (the content of thought or feeling), with optional circumstances. The structure is: Sensor + Mental Process + Phenomenon + (Circumstance). For instance, in "*He loves his dog deeply*," "He" is the sensor, "loves" is the mental process, "his dog" is the phenomenon, and "deeply" is a circumstance. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) highlight that mental processes deal with sensing the world internally.

Relational process express states of being, identification, or possession. They are divided into *attributive* and *identifying* types. The attributive structure is: Carrier + Relational Process + Attribute, as in "*The sky is blue*." The identifying structure is: Token + Relational Process + Value, such as "*Einstein is the father of relativity*." According to Halliday (1985), relational processes provide descriptive or defining relationships between participants. Verbal process refer to acts of saying or reporting. These clauses include a *Sayer* (the speaker), a *Verbal Process*, a *Verbiage* (the content spoken), and optionally a *Receiver*. The structure is: Sayer + Verbal Process + (Receiver) + Verbiage + (Circumstance). An example is: "*She said to him, I'm tired*." Here, "She" is the sayer, "said" is the verbal process, "to him" is the receiver, and "I'm tired" is the verbiage. Halliday (1985) suggests that verbal processes are symbolic exchanges that connect mental content with language. Behavioral process are semi-mental processes that reflect physiological or psychological behaviors such as smiling, coughing, or staring. The clause structure is: Behaver + Behavioral Process + (Circumstance). For example, in "*He coughed loudly*," "He" is the behavior, "coughed" is the process, and "loudly" is the circumstance. As Halliday (1994) explains, behavioral processes lie between material and mental processes, expressing actions that are not fully physical nor fully cognitive. Existential process indicate the existence or occurrence of something. These use the dummy subject "there," followed by an *Existential Process* and an *Existent*. The structure is: There + Existential Process + Existent + (Circumstance). An example is: "*There is a problem in the system*." "There" functions as a placeholder, "is" is the existential process, and "a problem" is the existent. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) explain that existential processes assert that something exists without further specification of action.

2. Method

Based on the results of the analysis of the *Friends* story, the research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. According Miles and Huberman (1994) descriptive qualitative research is used to understand the underlying reason, opinions, and motivational by providing insights into the problem. This approach was chosen because the study aims to describe in depth the linguistic elements in each sentence without using statistical data or hypothesis testing. The researcher first observed each sentence in the story script to identify the processes that occur in it. The analysis was carried out by carefully observing the elements in the clause structure, namely participants, process, goal, and circumstances. Each of these elements is analyzed to determine the function and role of each in building meaning in the discourse.

This study focuses on ideational analysis and the types of processes that occur in the short story of friends. The story consists of six paragraphs. Each sentence will be analyzed based on the predicate listed. After the text is analyzed, there are four processes in the text, namely material processes, mental process, relational process, and verbal process. Based on qualitative methods, researchers can analyze the number of processes that occur in the text. The primary data of this study is the text of the short story *Friends*, which consists of six paragraphs containing various clauses. Each clause in the story serves as the unit of analysis. The researcher collected the data through documentation technique by accessing the digital short story, reading it thoroughly, and identifying every clause manually. Each clause was extracted and noted for further analysis based on its process types.

The main instrument used in this study is a checklist table developed from Halliday's (1994) transitivity system, which includes six types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. This table was used to classify each clause in the text based on its process type, participants, and circumstances. The data were analyzed by following several systematic steps. First, the researcher identified all clauses in each sentence of the short story *Friends*. Then, each clause was classified according to the transitivity system of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). After classification, the researcher categorized the types of processes that appeared in the clauses, such as material, mental, relational, and verbal processes. The frequency and percentage of each process type were calculated to determine which type was most dominant in the text. Finally, the researcher interpreted the results by relating them to the SFL theory, and provided specific examples from the story to support the analysis. This procedure allowed for a thorough exploration of how experiential meaning is constructed through language in the narrative.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis, the material process is the most dominant type of process in Michiwichi's short story "Friends", accounting for 40% of the total clauses. This process type represents physical or tangible actions carried out by the characters, especially the protagonist, Bunny Rabbit. Examples of these actions include "running," "going," "asking for help," and "hiding." The frequent use of material processes indicates that the narrative heavily emphasizes real-world experiences and actions, particularly Bunny's efforts to escape danger and seek assistance. This helps create a dynamic storyline that is grounded in concrete events and sequences of physical activity. It can be seen on the following figure.

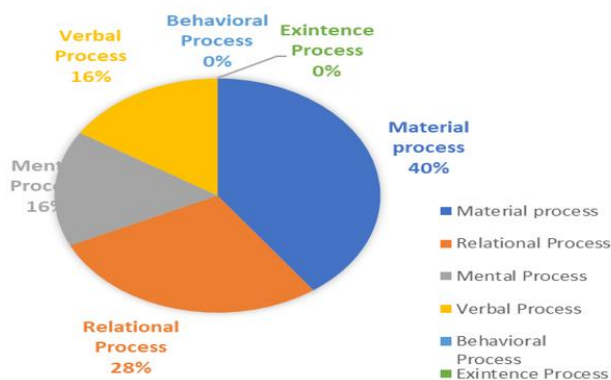


Figure 1. The Result

Although less dominant, the mental process also plays a crucial role in the narrative, appearing in 16% of the analyzed clauses. Mental processes refer to internal activities such as thinking, feeling, or perceiving. In the story, these are illustrated by Bunny Rabbit’s emotional responses, such as feeling sad or disappointed, as well as his cognitive decisions, such as deciding to ask for help and understanding that he must solve the problem on his own. These mental processes enrich the character’s psychological depth and allow readers to empathize with Bunny’s internal struggles and emotional journey throughout the story.

Relational processes appear in 28% of the clauses, making them the second most frequently occurring type. These processes express states of being, identity, or possession, and are often used to describe the conditions or attributes of characters. For example, Bunny Rabbit is described as “proud,” “scared,” and having “many friends,” while other characters describe themselves as “hungry,” “tired,” or “busy.” The use of relational processes supports the narrative by giving insight into each character’s current state or personality traits, which in turn influence their responses and decisions in the storyline. These descriptions help construct the social and emotional contexts within the text.

The verbal process also constitutes 16% of the total, focusing on acts of communication such as speaking, requesting, and replying. These processes are evident when Bunny Rabbit speaks to his friends and when they respond to his pleas for help. For instance, utterances like “Dear friend, some wild dogs are chasing me” and responses such as “I am busy” or “I am hungry” reflect interpersonal exchanges that are central to the plot. Verbal processes are essential in illustrating the characters’ interactions and highlight the theme of dependency and rejection, as Bunny realizes that none of his friends are willing to assist him.

Interestingly, the analysis reveals that there are no behavioral or existential processes in the story, with both accounting for 0% of the data. Behavioral processes typically describe physiological or semi-mental actions like smiling, coughing, or watching, while existential processes state the presence or existence of something, usually introduced with “there is” or “there are.” The absence of these processes suggests that the narrative is more concerned with overt actions, internal emotions, and relational states rather than reflexive behaviors or descriptions of existence. This focus enhances the directness of the story, emphasizing character choices and emotional responses rather than atmospheric or philosophical reflections.

To support the result as stated in the figure one, here the researchers present sample of data analysis. The sample can be seen in the following.

Bunny Rabbit		lived	in the florest
Actor		Process : Material	Circumstance loc. spatial
One day	Bunny Rabbit	hear	the loud barking of the wild dogs
Circumstance Loc. temporal	Actor	Process : Material	Goal
He	quickly	went	to his friend dear
Actor	Circumstance manner	process: material	circumstance ex. spatial
You		chase	them
Actor		Process : Material	Goal
You	ask	bear	for help
Actor	Process : Material	Goal	Circumstance Purpose
Bunny Rabbit		ran	to bear

Actor	Process : Material	Circumstance location
Some wild dogs	are after	me
Actor	Process : Material	Goal
Poor Bunny	went	to the monkey, elephant, goat and all his friends
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

Based on the data analysis above, the researcher figured out that the types of processes that exist in the story consist of four types. It can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. The types of process

NO	Ideational process	Persentase
1.	Material Process	40%
2.	Mental Process	16%
3.	Relational Process	28%
4.	Verbal Process	16%
5.	Behavioral Process	0%
6.	Existence Process	0%

The table above indicates that the material process (40%) is a dominant type in the ideational process.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, particularly the ideational metafunction, is very effective in analyzing the representation of meaning in literary texts such as short stories. By utilizing transitivity analysis-which includes processes, participants, and states-this study successfully identifies different types of linguistic processes used in Michiwichi's "Friends" story. The findings indicate that material processes are the most dominant, reflecting the protagonist's physical actions and efforts to resolve conflict. In addition, relational, mental, and verbal processes are employed to express emotions, relationships, and communication among characters. These elements not only support the narrative progression but also reinforce key themes such as fear, disappointment, dependency, and self-awareness. The study affirms that even a brief narrative text can serve as a valuable resource for functional linguistic analysis.

The implication of this research lies in its dual contribution to both academic inquiry and practical application. Academically, it broadens the scope of literary discourse studies by demonstrating how linguistic features shape meaning in short narratives. Practically, it provides a reference for language educators, students, and researchers who seek to apply SFL in analyzing digital or contemporary texts, including children's literature and online stories. However, the study is not without limitations. The analysis is based solely on one short story, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The limited length and simplicity of the narrative may also influence the range of process types observed. Future research is encouraged to apply similar frameworks to longer or more complex literary works or to compare multiple short stories across genres and cultural contexts. Additionally, incorporating the interpersonal and textual metafunctions of SFL may provide a more holistic understanding of how language constructs meaning in literature.

REFERENCES

- Agustina, M., & Suarnajaya, W. (2021). Transitivity Analysis of EFL Students' Narrative Text in Vocational High School. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Undiksha*, 9(3), 298. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpbi.v9i3.38314>
- Alaei, Mahya, and Saeideh Ahangari. "A Study of Ideational Metafunction in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart

- of Darkness': A Critical Discourse Analysis." *English Language Teaching*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2016, p. 203, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n4p203>.
- Carey Jewitt, K. O. (2004). *Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Systemic Functional Perspectives* (2 ed., Vol. 27). (K. L. O'Halloran, Ed.) Continuum. doi:10.1093/applin/aml00 <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/aml002>
- Coleman, P. (2014). Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide (3rd edition) [Book Review]. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 57. <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=437195221237012;res=IELHSS>
- Dull, E., & Reinhardt, S. P. (2014). An analytic approach for discovery. In *CEUR Workshop Proceedings* (Vol. 1304, pp. 89–92).
- Fa, Kinza. *Ambiance of Ideational Meta-Function in the Short Stories 'The Tell - Tale Heart' and 'The Necklace.'* no. 2, 2024.
- Halliday & Matthiessen. (2004). *9780203783771_Googlepreview Systematic Functional Grammar*.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Arnold.
- Harahap, Risma Sabrina, et al. "A Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Analysis on Short Story Cindelas by Cerita Rakyat from East Java." *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2024, pp. 34–43, <https://doi.org/10.52622/joal.v3i2.187>.
- Hutabarat, E., Herman, H., Silalahi, D. E., & Sihombing, P. S. R. (2020). An Analysis of Ideational Metafunction on News Jakarta Post about Some Good Covid-19 Related News. *VELES Voices of English Language Education Society*, 4(2), 142–151. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v4i2.2526>
- Jewitt, C., & O'Halloran, K. L. (Eds.). (2004). *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic functional perspectives* (Vol. 27). Continuum.
- Jelimun, M. O., Suarnajaya, I. W., & Sri Adnyani, N. L. P. (2020). Lexicogrammatical Analysis of Narrative Texts Written by First Semester Students at Unika ST. Paulus Ruteng. *Journal of Education Research and Evaluation*, 4(1), 27. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jere.v4i1.23600>
- Kapau, Humphrey M., et al. "The Characterisation of Mathilde in the Ideational Metafunction of Guy Demaupassant's The Necklace: A Monogeneric CorpusBased Analysis." *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, no. 7, 2019, pp. 24–36, <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0707004>
- Mulyanti, W., Wati, S., Keguruan, F., Pendidikan, I., & Perjuangan Tasikmalaya, U. (2022). Transitivity System in Narrative Texts for Junior High School. *JPE (Jurnal Pendidikan Edutama)*, 9(1), 133–146. <https://doi.org/10.30734/jpe.v9i1.2252>
- O'Halloran, K. L. (2007). Systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA) approach to mathematics, science and technology. *Text & Talk*, 27(5–6), 635–675.
- Putra, F. R., Zulprianto, & Sawirman. (2024). An Ideational Metafunction Analysis of President Joko Widodo's Speech on Crude Palm Oil (CPO) Policies. *SALÉE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 5(1), 344–365. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v5i1.1065>
- Rahman Nur, Dedi, and Pratomo Widodo. "Critical Discourse Analysis of Jokowi Tweets Based on the Ideational Meta-Function Systemic Functional Linguistic Meta-Function." *Script Journal: Journal of Linguistics and English Teaching*, vol. 7, no. 01, 2022, pp. 196–205, <https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v7i01.1528>.
- Rohmat, N., Nurhaeni, N., & Anggraeni, A. (2018). Transitivity Analysis of Tenth Grade Students' Descriptive Text. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 1(3), 295. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v1i3.p295-302>
- Sayukti, Ni Kadek Heny, and Eri Kurniawan. "An Analysis of Student'S Recount Text in Systemic Functional Linguistic Perspectives." *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 53–59, <https://doi.org/10.22225/jr.4.1.466.53-59>.
- Schleppegrell, M. J. (2004). *The language of schooling: A functional linguistics perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410610317>

- Sihura, Meltarina. "Transitivity Process in Frozen Movie: A Study of Systemic Functional Grammar." *International Journal of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2019, pp. 79–85, <https://doi.org/10.55637/ijlsfl.2.2.1480.79-85>.
- Thapliyal, D., Verma, S., Tewari, K., Bhargava, C. K., Sen, P., Goel, S., Ghoshal, G., Verros, G. D., & Arya, R. K. (2024). Introduction to Functional. *Functional Coatings*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394207305.ch1>
- Tiara Aulia, et al. "Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) Analysis on Short Story Geri, The Forgetful Elephant." *Journal of Classroom Action Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2024, pp. 18–26, <https://doi.org/10.52622/jcar.v3i1.203>.
- Zein, T. T., Sinar, T. S., Nurlala, N., & Yusuf, M. (2019). *Process Types of Transitivity System in English Department Students' Narrative Texts*. 276(Icoelt 2018), 149–155. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icoelt-18.2019.21>