

Transitivity Patterns in English Native and Non-Native Students Research Articles: A Functional Analysis

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Abstract: This study explores the transitivity patterns in academic writing of English native and Pakistani non-native students by analyzing the process types from a functional point of view based on Halliday's (1985) framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The research describes and compares the process types used by English native and non-native students to transmit their experiences/ideations and fulfill intended purposes. A corpus of research articles written by English native and Pakistani non-native students was compiled and analyzed in terms of clauses and process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavior). The analysis reveals that both student groups prioritize material and relational processes, focusing on physical actions and linking them to associated actors with corresponding qualities. However, the subsequent processes show differences between the two groups. In the native research article corpus (NRAC), verbal, mental, and existential processes are prominent, while in the non-native research article corpus (NNRAC), mental, existential, and verbal processes prevail. Behavior processes are less frequently used in both corpora, indicating a minimal focus on physiological responses. Variation in process type rates reflects students' choices for conveying experiences. This study contributes to understanding how linguistic choices in research articles vary between native and non-native students, shedding light on differences in communication strategies and rhetorical approaches within academic discourse.

Keywords: Research Articles, Process Types, Systemic Functional Grammar, Transitivity Patterns

Introduction

Pakistan is one of the countries where English is used as an official language. According to Siddique, Mahmood, and Ahmad (2022), Pakistanis use English systematically and consistently, which is due to their peculiar cultural features and the influence of their native languages. In addition, they suggest that any systematic and consistent deviation from American or British English or any other form of Standard English does not indicate the error directly but shows how non-native English differs from native English (Anwar, 2012; Leith, 2020; Mair, 2003). Previous research on the topic by Butt and Anwar (2019), Baumgardner (1995), Khan (2012), Kachru (1997), Mahboob (2003), and Sheikh (2012) have addressed this issue and agreed that Pakistani English is a unique kind of English. It goes parallel with other non-native varieties of English (McArthur, 1999, 2001; Schneider, 2013; Wilson, 2005; Wong, 2010). Similarly, Pakistani students differ in their approach to language use when producing research articles concerning transitivity. Systemic functional linguistics, which was developed in the 1960s by Michael Halliday, opens many perspectives on the ways how language is used in academic texts. Transitivity in linguistics pertains to the grammatical quality of verbs, and the choice of verbs plays a vital role in understanding grammar. All the languages require various things from sentences as well as their structure. In the work *Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse*, Thompson and Hopper (2001) provided a detailed analysis of the concept

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of transitivity. They seek to create a base of understanding applicable in any context. Systemic functional linguistics is a comprehensive theory of language proposed by Halliday (1979) that views language as a semiotic system that is shaped by social context. SFL puts language under the analysis as a set of functions, understanding the situations in which language is used to achieve various social objectives. Halliday (1979) suggested the existence of three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational concerns how language constructs and presents human experience and the world; interpersonal is about how language is used to carry out social transactions and mold identity; textual is about the form and flow of connected language. Transitivity is a fundamental concept within this systematic grammar that speaks to clauses and how they structure actors, actions, and the world around them. SFL analysis of transitivity concerns how people employ language beliefs, abstract concepts, and relations.

Systemic functional linguistics assumes that language forms a system of choice and linguistic system from the interaction of several systems, including phonology, lexicogrammar, and semantics (Halliday, 1961). Systemic grammar produces a model for understanding how language users make choices across different limbs of linguistic organization to achieve social objectives through communication. Another discussed subject in SFL is the register. It is the core concept of analysis within SFL. According to the researchers, it is centered on the idea of variation in patterns of language as used in social settings. The analysis of register comprises how lexicogrammatical features correspond to the situational elements of field, tenor, and mode, giving a set of variations for the use of language in diverse contexts. Systemic functional linguistics assists researchers in understanding language as a socially entrenched and evolving phenomenon of meaning-making. Transitivity discloses how language utilizes systems of experiential meaning.

Hopper and Thompson's work (1984) is concerned with the notion of transitivity or the relationship of verbs to the participants in an event within a clause. They analyzed the connection between grammar and discourse, specifically how transitivity patterns affect communication and meaning-making. Therefore, studying transitivity choices in language is an important part of linguistic analysis. This notion is used to conceptualize how verbs act with their arguments in a clause, allowing for meaning creation and accurate communication. Hopper and Thompson's work is innovative due to how it sets up a model for analyzing complex patterns in language, giving critical insight into how language structures interact and shape meaning in various contexts. An analysis of transitivity choices enables researchers to determine the mechanics by which communicators express agency, causation, and interactivity and understand certain phenomena of language usage.

Systemic functional linguistics is a comprehensive model for analyzing language use, developed by Halliday (1961); a unique area of application of this model is academic writing. Within the structure of research articles, the distinction between users with a high level of proficiency and those who are less proficient in English introduces certain nuances in communication, particularly related to the aspect of transitivity. Advanced users, who, as a rule, are more closely involved in the cultural context of the idiosyncrasy of English and form a fairly natural concept of the language, may not feel a need to directly monitor transitivity patterns. Although they make full use of these patterns in their writing, being generally quite capable language users, non-native speakers, even those who are proficient in English, often understand the phenomenon of transitivity differently, depending on the syntactic structures and semantic shades of meanings of their native language. Interaction between users of the contact variety is often the reason for differences in the use of transitivity categories, which affects the readability and coherence of research articles and, consequently, the quality of communication. Therefore, it is relevant to take into account these differences to make research articles accessible to various users and facilitate their dissemination among the world scientific community (Shastri, 2011).

Hopper and Thompson (1984) and Halliday (1979) offered substantial contributions to the research of transitivity. According to Halliday (1995), systemic functional linguistics not only demonstrates the trajectory through which linguistic investigation has passed, but it also has developed into a full-fledged and widely practiced tradition of linguistic research. However, this study aims to investigate the long-existing and substantially intricate phenomena in the field of language studies – transitivity processes. The purpose of this study is to determine the structural mechanisms underpinning the representation of actions and agents in a language, with a special focus on the transitivity process. In other words, this text aims to provide an overview of the intricate relationship between the form and meaning aspects of discourse development. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What types of transitivity patterns are used by English native and non-native students in research articles?
2. How is the writing of English native and Pakistani non-native students different in terms of academic style?

Literature Review

Transitivity analysis is one of the tools a person can use to unveil concealed meanings. Initially, transitivity analysis was limited to literary works, and there have been significant changes over the past few years to analyze discourse genres' categories; the transitivity choices in news discourse, political speeches, and inauguration addresses serve as an example. Transitivity is a noticeable work in the field of linguistics, grammar, and discourse. The work done by Hopper and Thompson (1984) focuses on investigating the actual role that transitivity styles play in language production. Another valuable research on the selection of transitivity was observed in the work of Chung (1978). In this experimental study, a detailed explanation of the transitivity models peculiar to the Mariana Islands' Chamorro language is given. Chung (1978) also demonstrates the data explaining the peculiarities in using the choice of transitivity to form the narrative and several cultural ideologies within the Chamorro society. Transitivity phenomena were given an expanded presentation on the conceptual foundations of English grammar and discourse thanks to Chung's research. The remarkable Haiman (1980) also made a sound contribution to this field. Indeed, his research deviated from the basic structure of existing notions of transitivity through the extensive explanation of emersion grammar. The specific theoretical assumption that Haiman (1980) presents is that transitivity is based on the stress that a conversation places on the interlocutors and communication rather than rigid grammatical rules. It contributes to a better understanding of the function of transitivity in language usage than the use of prescriptive structures typically found. There is no doubt that the transitivity aspect of construction grammar is the one with which Fillmore (1982) is best concerned. Although Fillmore's contribution to scholarship does not necessarily focus on transitivity, his concepts provide a significant analysis of transitivity as a constructional phenomenon in general. Frame semantics is among the principal analyses that Fillmore (1985) proposed involving the notion of transitivity. Fillmore makes it easier for readers to understand the representation of transitivity in language and how certain verbs govern some frames or represent their mental framework. Langacker (2000) thinks that cognitive grammar is a comprehensive theory of language based on understanding language as part of overall cognition. In cognitive grammar, transitivity is not a grammatical fact but a conceptual one – a real-world relationship and an event.

According to Langacker (2000), transitivity is a cognitive process in which events are construed with respect to the subjects and objects of the events at issue, as well as the verbs denoting the actions or processes in question. A transitive construction serves as an indicator of the interpersonal relations between people and processes, conveying or not conveying the information in terms of agency, causation, and impact. The analysis of transitivity in cognitive grammar, on the one hand, is undertaken by considering schema as a pattern of conceptualization. In order to construe and represent events, these schemata make up cognitive frames that put the participants into grammatical roles such as actor, patient, and experiencer. On the other hand, the approach to transitivity introduced by Langacker (2000) presupposes that verbal utterances are flexible and evolvable as the expressions of cognitive commitment systems. The choice of transitivity in the expression is predetermined and mediated by cognitive determinants such as the perspective on a circumstance, the focus of attention, and the conceptualization of events to be demeaned on the side. In other words, cognitive grammar, established by Langacker (2000), is a conceptual apparatus that allows for understanding speaking and construing consciousness transitivity. It epitomizes the set of relevant relationships between language, cognition, and interpretable meaning. Longacre's (2014) work on this notion is most often referred to in connection with his support of RRG. The most prominent article on this subject is discussed: Women – objects, and agents of their safety. Slobin (2014) has made a very significant and important contribution to the field of cognitive linguistics in researching transitivity. Slobin's contribution to this area consists of an analysis of the mechanisms of expression of the category of transitivity in languages and a study of the most characteristic representational strategies in English and Spanish of motion phenomena. This study provides us with an understanding of cognitive mechanisms, which affect the emergence of different transitive preferences in language. Kemmer (2010) has also made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of transitivity. Relying on the use of transitive verbs, the subject of the act is directly marked, as well as the markedness of the introduction of the action from its cause. In addition, the researcher notes that intransitive sentences of causative construction show that the expression of intentions through action often conflicts with the agent of the instrument. There is

also a highly developed understanding of how such transitive choices are made by the speakers themselves. Transitivity has a significant understanding from the point of view of literary scholars.

In addition to literary studies, the transitivity theory has been used to study political discourse and news. One of the studies was conducted by Abdulameer et al. (2019), who analyzed eighty political articles through news channels from the Eastern and Western sides. The transitivity analysis provided the opportunity to indicate the average rate of the most frequent categories of processes. The qualitative research revealed the peculiarity of the group of processes: existential, mental, and relational, and contributed to the better understanding of the interaction between the social actors regarding these events.

Halliday's (1985) systemic functional linguistics paradigm has been applied in various fields, and it is more robust in sociology, education, history, translation, discourse analysis, and language development, among others. Halliday (1986) has been vibrant about its applicability and has endorsed intriguing viewpoints, hence viewing things. Almurashi (2016) elucidates the educational benefits or application of SFL, which relates to language acquisition. The scholastic discourse was integral in the investigation conducted by Martínez (2001) on the transitivity structure of scientific experimental research articles. This study indicated the delicate balance between objectivity and persuasiveness. This study aims to bridge the gap in literature and research by investigating topics that are yet to be explored, demonstrating differentiation in transitivity patterns in research articles produced by NSs and NNSs. It investigates how language proficiency influences the implementation of transitivity structures. The main objective is to examine how transitivity features and choices function in speech across diverse linguistic contexts through a more comprehensive exploration.

Research Methodology

For this research on transitivity patterns, the mixed method has been used. Creswell (2013) gave two primary kinds of mixed methodology: sequential and concurrent mixed methods. We have used sequential embedded mixed methodology on transitivity choices in English native and non-native students' research articles. In this research, the quantitative part is processed by Sketch engine while the qualitative analysis has been done through the SFL framework of Halliday (1985). This use of the qualitative results explains and makes sense of the quantitative results. Samples were taken from both native and non-native English students using a targeted choice sampling method to explore the language choices of both groups.

Research Articles Corpus

The current study compares non-native research articles (NNRAC) with native research articles (NRAC) to capture and analyze transitivity choices using Sketch Engine. For this comparative study, two corpora are used, i.e., non-native academic writing (articles selected from HJRS) and native academic writing (articles selected from British journals of social science). Table 1 demonstrates the selected data with a whole number of words. Basically (NNRAC) is a collection of research articles from the discipline of social science written by Pakistani scholars and published in HEC-recognized journals.

Table 1
Comparable corpora

S. No	Text Type	Domain	No. of Research Articles	Total Number of Words
1	Native Research Articles Corpus (NRAC)	Research Articles	10	48,625
2	Non-native Research Articles Corpus (NNRAC)	Research Articles	10	43,125

Results and Discussion

Based on the patterns of process type distribution resulting from this typology, the following section further reveals a comparison of NRAC to the NNRAC. It offers a comparative analysis of the use of process types to draw parallels and distinctions in the language used by the two groups. Such an approach provides a clear outlook into the matter at hand and a comparison lens to determine how L1 flavors and command levels inform the choice and application of transitivity in academic discourse. The following table shows the frequency and percentage of the use of transitivity patterns in both corpora.

Table 2
Frequency and percentage of process types in NNRAC and NRAC

Corpus	NRAC		NNRAC	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Material	95	78.43	90	47.23
Mental	14	11.38	15	9.33
Relational	52	17.75	36	38.02
Verbal	40	9.22	4	13.17
Existential	5	3.09	11	4.70
Behavioral	3	1.01	3	3.28
Total Processes	209		159	

Material Process

The dominance of material process in both corpora shows that the students of both NNRAC and NRAC are more likely to concentrate on the expression of doing and happening and doers of the acts in the cases where they express their external experiences to the limited extent, they report the events about certain problems. It is obvious that irrespective of the table of authorship, the matrix of thinking, and the situational context of texts, the abovementioned variants center on the material process to provide more action and to achieve the writing aim.

NNRAC: "The researchers conducted a series of in-depth interviews with language learners to gather qualitative data."

Actor: The researchers
Goal: A series of in-depth interviews
Circumstance: with language learners to gather qualitative data

NRAC: "The scholars meticulously analyzed various theoretical frameworks in their comprehensive studies to uncover underlying principles."

Actor: The scholars
Goal: Various theoretical frameworks
Circumstance: In their comprehensive studies to uncover underlying principles

Mental Process

The fact that mental processes predominate in both corpora shows that students belonging to English native and non-native contexts have a high tendency towards the expression of cognition, perception, and the internal activities of thinking and understanding. As evident from the corpora, students use mental processes to present their internal experiences and interpretations of external phenomena. With distinct differences in the students' backgrounds and textual context, mental processes are mainly used in these corpora for the expression of subjective experiences and interpretations influenced by the underlying writing purposes.

The following examples from each corpus exemplify the students' utilization of mental processes to articulate their thoughts, perceptions, and interpretations:

NNRAC: "The authors carefully examined the extensive data sets to draw meaningful conclusions and support their hypotheses."

Senser: The authors
Phenomenon: The extensive data sets
Circumstance: to draw meaningful conclusions and support their hypotheses

NRAC: "The researchers interpreted the observed phenomena in light of existing theories to provide a deeper understanding of the subject matter."

Senser: The researchers
Phenomenon: the observed phenomena
Circumstance: in light of existing theories to provide a deeper understanding of the subject matter

Relational Process

The relational process explains a specific state of being and also explains a particular relationship between two different things/entities.

NNRAC: "The study has the psychological and social contexts of the students, highlighting the impact of these factors on their learning experiences."

Carrier: the study

Attribute: the psychological and social contexts

Circumstance: of the students, highlighting the impact of these factors on their learning experiences

NRAC: "The paper has the dependencies in employability evaluations, illustrating how contextual factors influence job prospects."

Carrier: the paper

Attribute: the dependencies

Circumstance: In employability evaluations illustrating how contextual factors influence job prospects

Verbal Process

Through spoken words, the voices of others come through. Using spoken words allows the researchers to share what someone else has said. The aim is not just to see the words but to hear them as if spoken aloud. Direct speech also helps researchers add drama by using their own way to share someone else's words. This mix allows both the heard voice and the researcher's own voice to blend yet remain clear.

NNRAC: "The researchers expressed their viewpoints on the methodological approaches used in the study, providing a critical analysis of their effectiveness."

Sayer: The researchers

Verbiage: Their viewpoints

Circumstance: on the methodological approaches used in the study, providing a critical analysis of their effectiveness

NRAC: "The authors reported their findings in the context of previous research and attributed the results to specific theoretical frameworks, offering new insights into the topic."

Sayer: The authors

Verbiage: Their findings

Circumstance: In the context of previous research and attributed the results to specific theoretical frameworks, offering new insights into the topic

Behavioral Process

A behavioral process refers to actions or behaviors performed by individuals or entities. It involves describing what someone does. In language, behavioral processes often involve verbs that denote actions, movements, or behaviors. For example, "she ran," "he danced," or "they laughed" are all examples of sentences containing behavioral processes as they describe actions performed by specific actors. In essence, behavioral processes focus on the actions or behaviors expressed through language.

NNRAC: "During the research sessions, the participants frequently interacted with each other to discuss their experiences and share insights."

Behaver: The participants

Behavior: interacted

Circumstance: During the research sessions, they discuss their experiences and share insights

NRAC: "At the academic conference, the professionals highlighted key points from their research, engaging the audience in a dynamic discussion about future directions."

Behaver: the professionals

Behavior: highlighted

Circumstance: At the academic conference, engaging the audience in a dynamic discussion about future directions

Conclusion

The study compares how English native and non-native academic students use language differently, showing clear patterns based on what they research and how they write. NNRAC texts often use action words to show how involved they are in doing research, like carrying out interviews and learning languages, focusing on the hands-on parts of research. On the other hand, NRAC texts use action words to point out how deeply they dive into theory, showing a leaning toward exploring ideas in their academic talks. Also, while NNRAC texts lean on action words to talk about how authors think deeply about data and what it means, suggesting a strong interest in breaking down data, NRAC texts use these words to show how they think about or understand big ideas, pointing to an interest in theory and concepts in their writing. Further, when NNRAC texts talk about relationships, they often focus on how people think and feel and how this relates to student identity and culture within learning spaces. Meanwhile, NRAC texts look at how things depend on each other in settings like jobs, showing how different factors affect results. When it comes to speaking verbs, NNRAC texts talk about sharing views and insights, showing an interest in sharing methods and thoughts, while NRAC texts talk about saying things outright and linking qualities, showing they're more about explaining theories and discoveries. Lastly, the study finds differences in how the two groups describe behavior, with NNRAC focusing on how people interact in their research settings and NRAC on professional dealings in academic and work environments. All these differences highlight how non-native and native academic students see and tackle their work differently.

It has been found that non-native students often use action words to show their direct involvement in research, unlike native students who use these words to highlight their deep dives into theory. It suggests how well non-native students know academic English. They focus on thinking about and breaking down data, while native students use thought-related words for evaluating theories. This shows that non-native students focus on details. Finally, the study notes that how each group uses language affects how easy their research articles are to understand, with non-native students focusing on the social and psychological aspects and native students on professional and situational links. These differences mean that non-native and native students use different ways to communicate, reflecting their unique views, research goals, and reasons for writing, which influences how clear and effective their academic messages are.

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