



Transitivity Analysis of The Poem *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai*

Chen Su

School of Foreign Languages, Heilongjiang University of Science and Technology, Harbin,
Heilongjiang, China

suchen6662024@163.com

Abstract. The transitivity theory put forward by Halliday is the core of systemic functional grammar and one of the important manifestations of experiential function. Based on the six processes of transitivity theory, this paper attempts to analyze the famous poem *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai* written by Yue Fei, aiming to explain the feasibility of applying the transitivity theory to the analysis of classical Chinese poetry and to appreciate Yue Fei's patriotism in the face of his country's fluctuation and fall. The present study indicates that the transitivity theory has a strong explanatory power to interpret the classical Chinese poetry and has certain guiding significance for people to understand the profound connotations and feelings of it.

Keywords: systemic functional grammar; transitivity; *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai*

1 Introduction

Yue Fei was a famous anti-Jin general, strategist, national hero and poet in the Southern Song Dynasty and ranked first among the four "resurgence general" of the Dynasty. The poem *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai* was written when Yue Fei received an edict from Emperor Gaozong to stop attacking the enemy country Jin and lead Yue's army to retreat, expressing Yue Fei's loyalty and love for the country and nation, as well as his grief and indignation towards the enemy.

The reasons why this paper chose Yue Fei's *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai* as its topic are twofold. First, this poem ranked first in the comprehensive ranking of classical poetry in Song Dynasty and ranked second in modern times^[1], which shows its high literature and research value. Second, the film *Man Jiang Hong* directed by Zhang Yimou that used the aesthetics of Oriental poetry to tell a Chinese story successfully combined Chinese culture with audience's feelings^[2]. The film was greatly popular and countless people were deeply moved by the scene of thousands of people chorusing the poem *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai*. Therefore, the uniqueness of the clauses and the true feelings revealed behind it is worth interpreting and appreciating. Based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar, this paper uses transitivity theory to systematically

interpret the clauses of Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai and appreciate the poet's true feelings behind them, aiming to demonstrating the feasibility of transitivity theory for the analysis of ancient poetry.

2 Transitivity Theory

Based on systemic functional linguistics, language is the product of human social activities. As a tool of human communication, it is multifunctional. According to Halliday, the metafunctions of language consist of ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function.^[3] Among them, the ideational function consists of experiential function and logical function, and transitivity is one of the important grammars to realize experiential function. Its function is to represent what people see, hear and do in the real world by several “processes”, that is, to categorize experience through grammar. The “participants” and “circumstantial elements” associated with the various processes are also specified.^[4] It is held that the representation of human experience could be divided into six distinct processes through transitivity system, namely, material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process.^[5] Material process is a process of doing something, involving the “Actor” and the “Goal” of the action; mental process refers to the process of “perception”, “cognition”, “affection” and “desideration”, which typically has two participants, the “Senser” and the “Phenomenon”; relational process can be divided into two types, namely “attributive” and “identifying”; behavioral process is a process of behaving in a physiological activity such as sighing, crying, laughing, which usually has only one participant, and that is the “Behaver”; verbal process refers to the process of communicating information through speech, and the participants are the Sayer, the Verbiage and the Receiver, among which the Sayer is not necessarily a person; existential process is a process of existing, and there is an Existent in every existential process. In addition to these six processes, Halliday also put forward the meteorological process in his later studies, which is a special process about weather phenomena between the existential process and the material process^[6]. It represents our direct experience of events relating to weather, and there are no participants involved. In these processes, the subject may be either “it” or “there”, which has no function in transitivity.

3 The Transitivity Analysis on Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai

3.1 Data Statistics

According to the statistics, the poem Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai has 93 words in total and it contains 19 clauses.

The first clause “*nù fā chōng guān*” belongs to the material process, portraying the poet's feelings of indignation towards the country that has been bullied by the enemy. The second clause “*ping lán chù*” is a material process clause, depicting the poet's act of climbing the steps of Donglin Temple in Mount Lu and leaning on the railings to

look far into the distance. Then, “xiāo xiāo yǔ xiē” is a meteorological process clause, depicting the cessation of light rain, joining the previous clause in portraying the surrounding environment. The fourth clause “tái wàng yǎn” is a mental process clause with the verb “tái” to express feelings. The fifth clause, “yǎng tiān cháng xiào,” embodies a behavioral process, portraying the poet’s uncontrollable wails and sighs, fueled by intense inner sorrow. The sixth clause “zhuàng huái jī liè” is a relational process clause. The ambition of serving the country at this moment was full of mind of the poet. The seventh clause “sān shí gōng míng chén yǔ tǔ” is a relational process clause, in which the poet viewed his three decades of fame as fleeting as dust. The eighth clause, “bā qiān lǐ lù yún hé yuè”, represents a material process, depicting the poet who committed to defend his country, battling against the enemy day and night without respite. The following ninth and tenth clauses are material and mental process clauses. In fact, these two clauses fully convey the poet’s sincere exhortation to seize the time, make contributions to the country, and not to waste the youth by waiting until old age. Finally, the last nine clauses from the eleventh to ninetieth are all material process clauses, expressing the poet’s determination to serve the country faithfully and his optimism to recover the territory. The main ideas of them are as follows: the burning shame of Jingkang remained unwashed. How can the generals extinguish their vengeful flames! The poet yearned to drive his chariot and crush the enemy’s lair in the Helan Mountain. Should hunger strike, he would feast on the flesh of his foes; in moments of triumph, he would quaff their blood. Only when the territories are fully recovered will he return to report the victory to the emperor.

In summary, the above offers a concise interpretation of each clause in the poem from the perspectives of transitivity and meaning. The specific analysis is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Statistics of six processes in *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai*

Process Types	Material Process	Mental Process	Relational Process	Behavioral Process	Verbal Process	Existential Process	Meteorological Process
Number	13	2	2	1	0	0	1
Percentage	68.4%	10.5%	10.5%	5.3%	0	0	5.3%

As can be seen from Table 1, the whole text consists of 19 processes, including 13 material processes, 2 mental processes, 2 relational processes, 1 behavioral process and 1 meteorological process, which account for 68.4%, 10.5%, 10.5%, 5.3% and 5.3% of the whole text respectively.

From the table above, *Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai* involves five types of processes, namely, material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process and meteorological process. Among them, the material process accounts for the largest proportion, followed by the mental and relational processes, while the behavioral and meteorological process account for the lowest proportion. Professor Huang Guowen^[6] held that some of the processes expressing narrative meaning are material processes, while others expressing descriptive meaning are relational processes, existential processes and mental processes. Consequently, the total number of the processes repre-

senting narrative meaning in this poem is 79% while the descriptive meaning is 21%, which manifests that the poem is more inclined to have the characteristics of a narrative discourse. The tone of the poem is grieved and indignant, but full of hope in the end.

To sum up, the whole text primarily uses the material process, mental process and relational process, which account for 89.5% of all processes. With the help of dynamic verbs, the poem focuses more on the depiction of poet's inner emotions. And the following will be the more specific from each clause to analyze the poem.

3.2 Transitivity Interpretation of Man Jiang Hong·Xie Huai

The poem is majestic, fervent, and heroic, conveying Yue Fei's outrage at the enemy, his confidence in reclaiming lost lands, and his profound love for his homeland. The poetry comprises two parts: the first indicates the poet's grief and indignation towards the enemy country, his regret for his inability, but he actively determined to make contributions to his motherland; while the second part voices hatred for foes, determination for revenge, and an ardent hope for territorial recovery and national unity.

3.2.1 nù fà chōng guān, píng lán chù, xiāo xiāo yǔ xiē.

As is shown in Table 2, the text here contains three processes: two material processes and one meteorological process. The first clause "nù fà chōng guān" is stemmed from Lian Po and Lin Xiangru Bibliographies in Shi Ji, China's pioneering chronological general history, where it originally appeared as "nù fà shàng chōng guān". Though it is a material process clause, it contains a kind of state that the poet was so angry that his hair went straight up to the crown, which dynamically shows the poet's resentment to the Jin. "xiāo xiāo yǔ xiē" begs why the rain stopped? Perhaps the poet's resentment reached its peak at that time, and even the rainwater failed to quell it.

Table 2. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(I), nù fà, guān	material process: chōng	
(I), lán	material process: píng	
xiāo xiāo yǔ	meteorological process: xiē	

3.2.2 tái wàng yǎn, yǎng tiān cháng xiào, zhuàng huái jī liè.

As can be seen from Table 3, the text here comprises three processes: a mental process, a behavioral process and a relational process. The verb "tái" echoes "nù fà chōng guān", reflecting the poet's resentment. Then the verb "yǎng" deepens it. Subsequently, the verb "xiào" not only performs the poet's inner umbrage against the enemy's invasion, but also expresses his heroic aspirations. Finally, "zhuàng huái" is the carrier, while "jī liè" is the attribute, highlighting the poet's unwavering passion and commitment to serve the country.

Table 3. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(I), wàng yǎn	mental process: tái	
(I)	behavioral process: xiào	yǎng tiān, cháng
zhuàng huái	relational process: (is)	

3.2.3 sān shí gōng míng chén yǔ tǔ, bā qiān lǐ lù yún hé yuè.

According to Table 4, the part here encompasses a relational process and a material process. “yún hé yuè” is the verb, which means working very hard from morning till dust. “sān shí gōng míng” and “bā qiān lǐ lù” are the interlacing of time and space, enhancing poetry’s aesthetics. Here, the poet used huge numbers and magnificent images like “sān shí”, “bā qiān lǐ”, “chén yǔ tǔ”, “yún hé yuè” to recall his past and imagine his future. He regarded the achievements and fame he has built over the past 30 years as dust, implying his indifference to the accomplishments. Furthermore, it signifies that the road to achieve the great cause of recovering the motherland’s territory was still very long, fraught with great challenges, and necessitated even greater efforts. These two clauses harmoniously complement each other. On the one hand, they express the poet’s reflection on the past and indifference to fame; on the other hand, it underscores the poet’s aspiration to contribute, his firm belief in resisting Jin and salvaging the nation, and his steadfast determination to forge ahead with unyielding resolve.

Table 4. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
gōng míng, chén yǔ tǔ	relational process: (is like)	sān shí
bā qiān lǐ lù	material process: yún hé yuè	

3.2.4 mò děng xián, bái le shào nián tóu, kōng bēi qiè.

As Table 5 shows, the text here consists of two processes, namely a material process and a mental process, reflecting the poet’s lament over his country’s invasion and territory’s plunder. His use of “mò děng xián” (be sure not to spend the hour idly) embodies a powerful exhortation, urging himself to seize the moment and contribute to the nation. Additionally, it admonishes people to cherish time and seize opportunities: do not wait until you are an old man with white hair to begin grieving and regretting in solitude. This section stands out as the most renowned part of the poetry.

Table 5. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(we)	material process: mò děng xián	
(we)	mental process: bēi	bái le shào nián tóu, kōng

3.2.5 jìng kāng chǐ, yóu wèi xuě. chén zǐ hèn, hé shí miè.

According to the analysis in Table 6, the text here reveals two material processes. “jìng kāng chǐ” refers to the 1127 Jin invasion of Dongjing, collapsing the Northern Song Dynasty. As a loyal minister, the poet was in the face of rampant foreign enemies, destroyed country and the tragic situation, so deep hatred how he dared to forget! The clauses “jìng kāng chǐ, yóu wèi xuě” and “chén zǐ hèn, hé shí miè” employ an anti-thetical structure, pairing noun phrases with verb phrases. The rhetorical question “hé shí miè” intensifies the tone, while the fourth tone “miè” at the end signifies the poet’s unwavering determination against the enemy. This section expresses the poet’s yearning for national reunification and faith in rejuvenation, embodying a patriotic fervor that resonates deeply with readers, as loyalty and love for the motherland are timeless virtues cherished by the Chinese people.

Table 6. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
jìng kāng chǐ	material process: wèi xuě	yóu
chén zǐ hèn	material process: miè	hé shí

3.2.6 jià cháng chē, tà pò hē lán shān quē.

As can be seen from Table 7, two material processes are covered here. “cháng chē” is the chariot, and “hē lán shān” is now located in Hebei Province of China, which is a very important strategic position for the Southern Song to fight against the enemy nation. “hē lán shān” is a metaphor for the lair of the Jin. The verbs “jià” and “tà” express the degree of the poet’s resentment to it and his determination to smash its lair.

Table 7. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(I), cháng chē	material process:jià	
(I), hē lán shān quē	material process:tà	pò

3.2.7 zhuàng zhì jī cān hú lǚ ròu, xiào tán kě yǐn xiōng nú xuè.

According to Table 8, this part includes two material processes. They are quoted from “jī shí lǚ ròu, kě yǐn qí xuè” in The Biography of Wang Mang, volume 99 of Han History. “cān” and “yǐn” are verbs, while “hú lǚ ròu” and “xiōng nú xuè” correspond to each other. The poet called the enemy “hú lǚ” and “xiōng nú”, suggesting his contempt for the enemy. This part creates the image of an extremely heroic general, expressing the poet’s deepest hatred for the invaders and his ardent hope of unifying the motherland. This part also reflects the optimism and positivity of the poet.

Table 8. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(I). hú lǚ ròu	material process:cān	ī
(I). xiōng nú xuè	material process:yǐn	kě

3.2.8 dài cóng tóu, shōu shí jiù shān hé, cháo tiān què.

As shown in Table 9, this part contains three material processes. It summarizes the poet's evolving mood from anger and sorrow to optimism, showcasing his determination and loyalty. "shōu shí" and "cháo" are arranged in chronological order, marking the poet's confidence in reclaiming victory and loyalty to his court. The poet transformed abstract victory into concrete imagery with "shōu shí jiù shān hé", enriching the poem with more poetic depth and imagination. At the end of the poem, it embodies the poet's patriotism, heroism, defiance, and optimism.

Table 9. Transitivity Analysis

Participant	Process	Circumstantial element
(I)	material process: dài cóng tóu	
(I). jiù shān hé	material process: shōu shí	
(I). tiān què	material process: cháo	

4 Conclusions

The application of transitivity theory to the analysis of Yue Fei's *Man Jiang Hong-Xie Huai* provides an insightful perspective into the poet's complex emotions and profound sentiments expressed in the poem. This method allows us to delve deeper into the poem's meaning, uncovering the hidden emotions, thereby verifying the application and operability of the transitivity theory in the study of poetry and its value in interpreting classical Chinese poetry.

References

1. Zhang, X.(2022, May). Frequency in Chinese Ballad Song Lyrics: A Quantitative Morpheme-Based Study. In Workshop on Chinese Lexical Semantics (pp. 83-95). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
2. Wang R. (2023) *Man Jiang Hong: exploring the poetic expression of oriental aesthetics*. Journalism Research Guide, 14(08): 239-242. 10.3969/j.issn.1674-8883.2023.08.076.
3. Halliday, M.A.K. (2000) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Foreign Language and Research Press, Beijing.
4. Hu Z L, Zhu Y S, Zhang D L, Li Z Z. (2005) *Advances in functional linguistics in China*. Peking University Press, Beijing.
5. Mackenzie, J. L. (2022). What is Functional Grammar?. *Handbook of Pragmatics*, 625.
6. Huang G W. (2001) *Theory and Practice of Discourse Analysis—A Study of Advertising Discourse*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

