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### A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF SHORT STORY 'REUNION' BY JOHN CHEEVER USING NVIVO

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to find the process type found in the short story titled 'Reunion' by John Cheever and identifies which process types are dominant in the text. The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. Data collection involves obtaining the text from the online source, segmenting it into clauses, coding techniques, and analyzing the data. The researcher applied the systemic functional linguistic theory presented by Halliday for transitivity analysis of the text. Clauses from the short story were coded and analyzed using NVivo software to ensure systematic classification. The findings reveal five types of transitivity processes: Material (35 clauses), Verbal (21 clauses), Relational (19 clauses), Mental (18 clauses), and Existential (2 clauses). Therefore, Material process is the dominant used type process in the short story text which means this text contains many actions or physical activities and events carried out by the characters in it. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how transitivity patterns construct meaning in literary texts and demonstrate the usefulness of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) for literary discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** short story, systemic functional linguistics, transitivity, type process

## INTRODUCTION

'Reunion' is a short story written by the American writer John Cheever in 1962. In the story, a young man meets up for a reunion with his father, but his father's rude manner leads to their reunion being a failure. Despite not seeing his dad for three years, Charlie is excited and hopeful about their meeting, for he expects a typical reunion of joy and connection. In "Reunion," the theme of expectation versus reality illustrates Charlie's internal struggle and highlights his ultimate realization about his father. Story theme is a major concept in literary studies, characterized by being subjective, social, and multi-faceted (Li Han-bing, 2018). In the text 'Reunion', John Cheever emphasizes on symbolism, background information, to show the hardships of trying to rebuild a relationship. This short story conveys a powerful message about failed connection and the fragility of human relationships. As a narrative text, it presents a rich linguistic

structure reflecting characters' actions, emotions, and interactions, suitable for linguistic analysis using network-based modeling and text analysis methods (Min & Park, 2019).

In linguistics, narrative texts are studied not only for their storyline but also for the way language creates meaning. One of the famous frameworks used for this purpose is Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), especially the transitivity analysis. Halliday's framework is applied to analyze transitivity patterns in literary texts, revealing its usefulness in understanding the interplay between language, ideology, and identity (Hussain et al., 2023). Transitivity analysis explains how writers use different types of processes to show actions, events, thoughts, and conditions in a story. By examining transitivity processes (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral), researchers can see how a text represents experiences and shapes characters and themes through language use (Manggala, 2017). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), language is a system of meaning in the concept of SFL. This meaning, which is referred to as a metafunction, is divided into three categories: textual, interpersonal, and ideational.

The ideational function in SFG represents experience and is divided into experiential and logical functions (Adha, 2018). The experience refers to the features that can be thought of as representing the real world as it is received by people's experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The point of the system involved in experiential meaning is called transitivity. Transitivity is part of the ideational function, where clauses represent patterns of experience through a system of transitivity (Alaei & Ahangari, 2016). Transitivity has three aspect structures; the first is the process, that expresses the activity that calls a verbal group. Second is the participant, which is a subject involved in the process that is called a nominal group. Third is the circumstances, that are the elements that provide a piece of information about "how, when, where and why" of a process happening that are called an adverbial group and proposition.

Transitivity has been studied by several researchers with different object research. One of which was the study conducted by Mishra (2022). This article examines the use of transitivity patterns in selected short stories by Jhumpa Lahiri, a renowned Indian American author. Then, a study was by Saraç-Durgun et al., (2023). They explored the relationship between transitivity patterns and character development in selected short stories by Alice Munro, a Canadian author renowned for her mastery of the short story form. Also, study by Eliza Barroso and João Pessoa (2020) examines how Borges' use of transitivity processes and participant roles reflects and shapes ideological perspectives on themes such as identity, time, and reality, contributing to the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of his work.

Despite the growing interest in transitivity analysis in literary contexts, studies focusing on John Cheever's 'Reunion' remain limited. Most existing research on Cheever's works examines psychological themes or narrative structure, while linguistic studies of 'Reunion' are scarce. Recent transitivity studies in narrative texts reveal that material processes frequently dominate, shaping narrative action and experiential meaning (Mareta, 2025; Sabiri, Rubab & Naseem; Jelimun et al., 2020). Moreover, the use of digital qualitative tools such as NVivo in analyzing literary texts is still relatively underexplored. NVivo is a multifunctional software useful for qualitative data analysis and literature reviews, offering tools like coding and autocoding for analyzing literary texts (Bakla, 2021). The use of digital qualitative tools like NVivo in literature reviews is supported by a structured approach that helps explore large textual documents to

identify patterns (O'Neill et al., 2018). NVivo enables systematic coding of linguistic features, allowing for more efficient identification of patterns and increasing the transparency of qualitative analysis. Therefore, applying transitivity analysis using NVivo provides a methodological contribution in addition to expanding the scope of linguistic research on short stories.

To address these gaps, the present study analyzes the types of processes used in 'Reunion' by applying Halliday's transitivity framework and identifies which process types are dominant in the text. The text was coded using NVivo to classify material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on transitivity analysis in literary texts by extending the application of Halliday's transitivity framework to 'Reunion' by John Cheever. The study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how transitivity process types contribute to meaning construction, characterization, and narrative representation in literary discourse. It also offers a systematic approach to literary text analysis that may support future research in Systemic Functional Linguistics and contribute to language and literature education by demonstrating how transitivity analysis can enhance text interpretation and linguistic awareness.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Systemic Functional Linguistics**

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an approach of linguistic analysis that tries to understand how a text's meaning develops from its specific context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Systemic functional linguistics, in particular, provides a descriptive framework for understanding language as a social semiotic system. Context is one of the key problems because it plays such an important role in the entire process of meaning production. Language is viewed as a social semiotic system by SFL, which emphasizes on its role in social situations and the choices made by language users. It is built on three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction deals with the representation of experience, the interpersonal metafunction handles social relationships, and the textual metafunction concerns the organization of the text itself.

### **Meta Function**

Halliday (1993), as cited in Darani (2014), categorizes metafunctions into three types: (a) textual, linking language to situational features; (b) ideational, conveying "content" or the speaker's experience of reality, including inner consciousness; and (c) interpersonal, which facilitates the establishment and maintenance of social relationships. Fowler (1996) cited in Darani (2014) suggests that the ideational metafunction interprets, organizes, and classifies discourse subjects by representing perceptions of the world. The ideational function includes processes, participants, and circumstances.

Halliday developed the terminology metafunctions in Systemic Functional Grammar. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) define language as the text structure, meaning, and function of language. The text structure describes the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships in the text. Metafunctions connect language to the reflection of the external environment. According to SFL, language has three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational function represents experience, the interpersonal function reflects personal and social relationships and roles, and the textual function focuses on the structure of the text or discourse. These metafunctions

are interconnected and may usually be utilized to comprehend the structure and meaning of a text.

### **Ideational Meaning**

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), ideational meanings are concerned with the construction of an experiential model. It can be claimed that ideational meanings are expressed through a system of transitivity or process type, with the process chosen involving associated participant roles and configuration. The transitivity system realizes the ideational meaning pattern. The participant, process, and circumstance configurations are the building blocks of the transitivity system, representing real-life experiences such as who is doing what, to whom, when, where, why, and how. The ideational metafunction formulates ideas and experiences. The interpersonal metafunction establishes social roles and power relations; and the textual metafunction organizes the flow of information to ensure coherence and cohesion in extended discourse (Halliday as cited in Gebhard and Accurso, 2020).

### **Transitivity**

Transitivity analysis is frequently applied to comprehend the language used by speakers and writers. Transitivity analysis reveals that linguistic patterns can convey specific meanings and concepts that may not be immediately apparent to users. The aim of transitivity analysis is to elucidate the relationship between meaning and language, which explains the correlation of linguistic features within a text (Ahmad, 2019). The concept of transitivity has been utilized by various linguists to enhance the understanding of language use in an academic context. Transitivity provides a framework for analyzing ideational meanings. Transitivity delineates that our experiences constitute a reality, encompassing processes of sensing, doing, saying, being, and having. Transitivity comprises three main components: the process, the participant, and the circumstances. (Syed et al., 2021, as cited in Jaelani et al., 2023).

Transitivity is an important concept in functional systemic linguistics that refers to how meaning is represented in clauses. This concept was first introduced by M.A.K. Halliday in his book "An Introduction to Functional Grammar" (1993). According to Halliday (1993), every clause consists of three main components, namely process, participant, and circumstantial. Process refers to the activity or event described in the clause. Participants refer to the entities involved in the process, and circumstances provide additional information about the process, such as time, place, manner, and reason. Halliday divides processes into six main types: material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral. Each type of process has a distinctive pattern of participants and reflects a different way of representing human experience.

Halliday defines six main types of transitivity processes used in the interpretation of human experience through language. To start with, the Material Process which is a way of describing things that happen in the real world. For example, "*He wrote a letter*" or "*The storm destroyed the houses*". In material processes the two most important participants are typically the Actor, the one who does the action, and the Goal, the entity affected by the action. Instead, this type of process is typically associated with real, observable events, as opposed to interior states, and thus constitutes an important element of stories of physical activity. In the following illustration, "*Justin*" is the Actor who performs the act of bringing, "*the book*" is the Goal, and "*to the library*" is the destination that is specified by the circumstantial circumstances.

**Table 1. The example of material process**

| Clause |                   |          |                |
|--------|-------------------|----------|----------------|
| Justin | brings            | the book | to the library |
| Actor  | Process: material | Goal     | Circ: location |

The second type is the Mental Process which describes cognitive activities like thinking, feeling or perceiving as in "*He is thinking about his plan*" or "*I Like that music*". In the mental processes, there is the *Senser*, the conscious being who is experiencing the cognition, perception or emotion. Also, there is the *Phenomenon* which is the entity or event being sensed. Unlike material processes, mental processes foreground a character's inner experience rather than her outward action, making them especially important for representing reflection, desire or judgment. In the example below, "*Jeremy*" is received by *Senser* as *Phenomenon*, i.e. "*strange noises*".

**Table 2. The example of mental process**

| Clause |                 |                |
|--------|-----------------|----------------|
| Jeremy | heard           | strange noises |
| Senser | Process: Mental | Phenomenon     |

The third process is known as the Relational Process. It is used to define the relationship that exists between two entities, such as "*He is a teacher*" or "*That book belongs to me*." The *Carrier*, which is the entity that is being described or classed, and the *Attribute*, which is the quality, identity, or categorization that is attributed to it, are the participants associated with this process. The purpose of relational processes is often to establish states of being, identity, or possession rather than to establish dynamic events. Furthermore, relational processes frequently serve the purpose of characterizing individuals or situating them within a further context. As seen in the following illustration, the attribute "*a student in red uniform*" is assigned to "*Andy*" in his role as *Carrier*.

**Table 3. The example of relational process**

| Clause  |                     |                          |
|---------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Andy    | is                  | a student in red uniform |
| Carrier | Process: relational | Attribute                |

The Verbal Process is the fourth process. The verbal process refers to the act of communicating or speaking for the purpose of transmission. As an illustration, "*he explained that...*", "*The book provides an explanation regarding....*" Verbal processes typically involve three participants: the *Sayer*, who is the conscious being that controls the verbal process by speaking or uttering something; the *Receiver*, who is the person who listens or for whom the verbal process is performed; and the *Verbiage*, which is the nominal

content of what is said. This process is especially significant in narratives that are mostly comprised of speech because it exemplifies the manner in which characters convey their intentions, conflicts, or the intricacies of their relationships. "Harry" is the receiver in the following example, and Sayer explains "something" to me as verbiage.

**Table 4. The example of verbal process**

| Clause |                 |           |          |
|--------|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| Harry  | explained       | something | to me    |
| Sayer  | Process: verbal | Verbiage  | Receiver |

The Existential Process is the fifth type of process, and it is used to indicate the presence of something. For instance, "There was a man there" or "There was a problem with the machine" are examples of this type of process. Existential processes are characterized by the presence of a single participant, known as the Existent, and are often indicated by its construction of "there is/are." It is common for this type of process to occur much less frequently in action-driven narratives than material, verbal, or relational processes. This is due to the fact that it only affirms that something exists without attributing any action or relation to it. In the following illustration, "a book" serves as the Existent, while "on the table" is used to define the placement of the circumstantial.

**Table 5. The example of existential process**

| Clause |                      |          |                |
|--------|----------------------|----------|----------------|
| There  | Is                   | a book   | on the table   |
|        | Process: existential | Existent | Circ: location |

The sixth category is known as the Behavioral Process, and it functions to explain bodily or psychological actions that are normally carried out by a conscious individual. For example, "He laughed" or "The dog barked" are examples of behavioral processes. A single participant, known as the Behaver, is often involved in behavioral processes. This individual is the conscious person that is responsible for carrying out the activity. As a result of the fact that it depicts behavior that is visible to the outside world but is yet anchored in an internal or instinctive state, such as breathing, dreaming, or laughing, this sort of process holds a position that is between that of material processes and mental processes. The following illustration illustrates how "I" functions as the Behaver who is experiencing the behavioral act of dreaming, and how "a ghost" functions as the Phenomenon that is dreamed about.

**Table 6. The example of behavioral process**

| Clause  |                     |            |
|---------|---------------------|------------|
| I       | dream of            | a ghost    |
| Behaver | Process: behavioral | Phenomenon |

Halliday emphasizes that each type of process has a distinctive pattern of participants and reflects a different way of representing human experience. Transitivity analysis helps understand how language is used to convey meaning and represent experience in various contexts. In addition to the six main types of processes, Halliday also recognizes the existence of more complex or mixed processes, such as causal processes that combine material and mental elements.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, detailed in "An Introduction to Functional Grammar" (1993), emphasizes transitivity. Halliday says every language sentence represents a process with specific participants and circumstances. The clause's method, participants, and circumstances, location, manner, and cause describe the activity or event. Halliday stressed that a clause's transitivity patterns indicate both the speaker's or writer's ideological perspective on the event and its depiction. By examining transitivity patterns, we can learn how language encodes meaning and experiences.

## METHOD

This study employs qualitative descriptive methodology. The data were collected by obtaining the short story 'Reunion' by John Cheever from an online source. The text was then segmented into clauses because the clause served as the unit of analysis in this study. Each clause was assigned a code to facilitate identification and classification for being analyzed using NVivo software. This study uses NVivo to uncover the various types of processes present in the narrative and what types of processes are most dominant in the short story 'Reunion' by John Cheever. NVivo supports qualitative research by helping to organize data, facilitating analysis, and improving rigor through systematic coding and verification (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

This study integrates systemic functional linguistics into its methodology, focusing on the analysis of the transitivity system. This research analysis focuses on how clauses are organized within the data, the various types of processes involved, and the segmentation analysis as it relates to the transitivity system. This study includes a number of interconnected stages. In the beginning, the structure of the text was examined at the clause level, with each clause being considered the fundamental unit of transitivity analysis. The second step was to classify the Participant and Process elements that were found in each clause into groups that corresponded to the six different types of processes that Halliday described. Third, the statistical software NVivo was utilized to quantify the items that were grouped in order to ascertain their frequency and distribution. Following the completion of the quantification process, the fourth step involved the application of an interpretation through the lens of ideational meaning and narrative genre. As the last step, the segmentation analysis of each process type was provided in the discussion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports and discusses the results of transitivity analysis of John Cheever's "Reunion" based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics framework. NVivo 14 was conducted to code clauses and visualize process patterns. The NVivo analysis supports the qualitative researcher but never takes over their manual and theoretical work (Mortelmans, 2025). The findings are presented in relation to the two research questions.

## Types of Transitivity Processes in "Reunion"

The first research question examines the types of transitivity processes used in the short story. A clause-level analysis identified 95 clauses, which were coded into five transitivity process types. The distribution of process types is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Frequency and percentage of transitivity processes in "Reunion"**

| Process Type | Clauses | Percentage |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| Material     | 35      | 36.8%      |
| Verbal       | 21      | 22.1%      |
| Relational   | 19      | 20.0%      |
| Mental       | 18      | 18.9%      |
| Existential  | 2       | 2.1%       |

Table 1 shows that the most frequent type of process found in the "Reunion" document is the Material process with 35 clauses or 36.8% of the whole. This clustering of physical action phrases is in line with previous work on transitivity in narrative fiction: In the same vein, Zein et al. (2019) found that material process was dominant in the narrative texts of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. They argue that material clauses are the principle means by which narratives communicate to the reader 'what is actually happening'. The similar trend is also found in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf* (Hanifa & Ardi, 2023) in which the number of material clauses (120 occurrences) outnumbered the mental (35) and relational (49). They attribute this to the story having more of an emphasis on visible events than it did on reflection.

Thus, the predominance of Material processes in "Reunion" situates the text within a broader trend in short fiction to produce meaning through action instead of reflection. This is a pattern common in short fiction; in Cheever's case, it reinforces the story's focus on superficial activity (ordering drinks, moving venues) rather than emotional resolution between Charlie and his father.

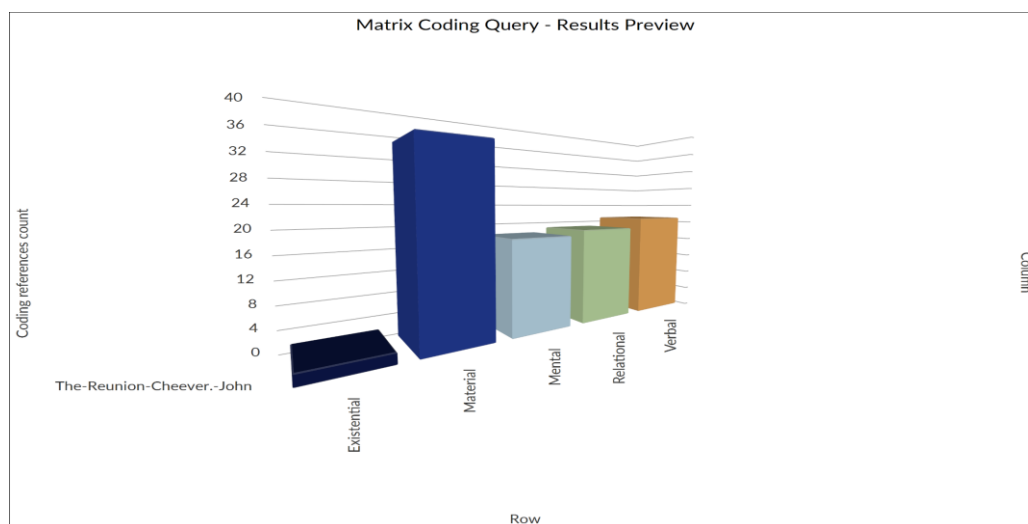
The second most frequent type is the Verbal process with 21 clauses, representing 22.1% of the total. The relatively high frequency of speech-act clauses is consistent with the findings of Ahmad (2019) in "The Happy Prince," where verbal processes (17.04%) were among the three most prominent types of processes, with material (43.41%) and relational (20.26%) processes. This illustrates the importance of dialogue-driven moments for narrative even in texts where the primary action type is physical action.

Verbal processes dominate "Reunion" thematically. Much of the conflict that arises between Charlie and his father is not about the things they do, but about how the father talks to other people, including waiters, Charlie, and others. The frequency of verbal processes is a linguistic signal of the father's dominant communicative style, which is a driver of the central disappointment of the story.

The third type is called relational process, which has 19 sentences, sentence that assigns a quality or identifies a character or situation. Relational processes are generally used to create identity, categorization or status, not dynamic events (Alaei & Ahangari, 2016). The relatively low frequency of these processes in this narrative suggests that the narrative, despite its action-driven nature, allows for characterization of Charlie's father and the emotional climate of their meeting. This is similar to the work that done by Haryani and Putry (2020) on the analysis of "Fruit Passion" where they found that relational phrases are used to construct stable descriptive ground on which more dynamic processes emerge.

The fourth type is mental process category which contains 18 clauses (18.9%). The relative rarity of mental processes in comparison to the frequency of material and verbal processes supports the reading of "Reunion" as externalizing Charlie's emotional experience through his father's behaviour rather than through direct narration of Charlie's inner state. This interpretation fits with the observation made by Hussain et al. (2023), that low frequency of mental-process in character-driven narratives often signifies that internal conflict is expressed indirectly, through action and dialogue, rather than stated outright.

The fifth category is the Existential process. This is the least frequent type with only two clauses (2.1%). For example, a "there is/are" phrase that sets up a setting detail. The minimum presence is evident in the story's lack of lengthy scene-setting, as the narrative moves quickly from place to place and conversation to conversation, rather than lingering in static description. It should be noted that the Behavioral process, the sixth category in Halliday's (1993) framework, was not present in any of the coded data. That we don't have this is a big finding in and of itself: The absence of behavioural processes in 'Reunion' implies that even moments of emotional reaction are depicted through material or verbal processes (acting, speaking) rather than through involuntary behavioural expression. This points to the story's overall externalized, action-oriented mode of representation. This is suggested by the fact that behavioral processes are almost always semi-conscious physiological behavior (laughing, sighing, breathing) and are never completely absent.



**Figure 1. NVivo's matrix coding query result**

From the idea's context, these findings suggest that experience in "Reunion" is largely realized through doing and saying, rather than sensing or being.

### **Dominant Process Type and Narrative Implications**

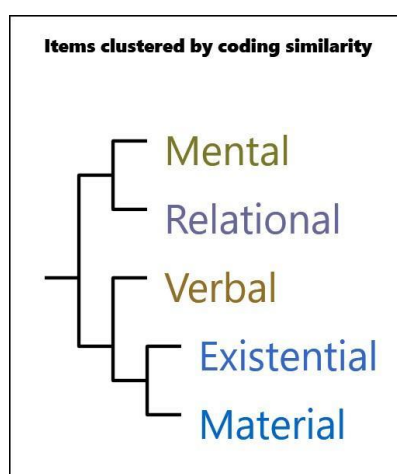
The second research question concerns the dominant process type in the text. As shown in Table 1, Material processes dominate the whole text, accounting for 36.8% of all clauses. NVivo's "Items Clustered by Coding Similarity" visualization supports this finding further, showing items grouped based on code similarity, the results show that Mental and Relational processes often appear together in the text, while Verbal processes show a partial relationship. Material processes are grouped separately along

with Existential processes, indicating that physical actions and expressions of presence tend to function together, in contrast to internal and relational meanings.

This dominance of Material processes is thematically significant. The story's core revolves around a series of rapid, failed interactions in New York clubs and restaurants that focus on superficial activity versus meaningful connection. Charlie and his father constantly moving, ordering, speaking to, and demanding from waiters (Material and Verbal processes), these action-oriented clauses overshadow moments of emotional reflection, which are mainly expressed through less frequent Mental processes.

This pattern of Material process dominance, combined with relatively low Mental process frequency, is similar to findings reported in a number of previous transitivity studies of short fiction. Likewise, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the negotiation of the protagonist Changez's identity was achieved mainly through Material and Verbal processes, rather than introspective Mental clauses. This means that some stories build character through external action because a direct statement of emotion would destroy the ambiguity of the story. This configuration was discovered in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hussain et al., 2023). In "Reunion" a similar dynamic seems to occur: rather than speaking directly about Charlie's disappointment, Cheever implies it through the buildup of his father's words and actions, so that the emotional power of the failed reunion is implicated in what is said and done rather than in what is felt.

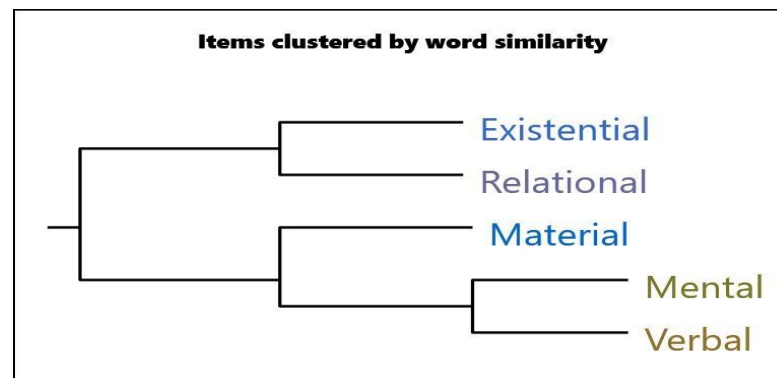
Moreover, this finding is consistent with the central claim of Halliday (1993), namely, transitivity patterns are indicative of the ideological stance a text adopts towards experience. Material and Verbal processes all relate to the father's behaviour - ordering, demanding and rudely addressing waiters. Linguistically this places the father as the locus of agency at the centre of the narrative. Charlie, on the other hand, as the character who is the focus of the story, is relatively underrepresented as an Actor or Sayer. This asymmetry in the roles of the participants provides a transitivity-based account of the reading of the story as a story of disempowerment rather than empowerment, since Charlie's hope and expectation (mental processes) are present in the narrative but marginal in terms of grammar, in contrast to his father's control of the clause structure.



**Figure 2. Items clustered by coding similarity result**

In a comparison of items grouped based on lexical similarity, NVivo's output shows that the Existential and Relational processes occur in similar lexical

environments, while the Mental and Verbal processes are also closely grouped due to the use of similar vocabulary related to cognition and communication. However, the Material process displays a more distinct lexical pattern, dominated by action-oriented language, indicating a different linguistic function within the narrative.



**Figure 3. Items clustered by word similarity result**

The rare appearance of relational and existential processes further indicates the absence of stability in relationships or shared realities between the characters. Thus, the transitivity patterns directly realize the thematic clash between expectation (Mental/Relation) and disappointing reality (Material/Verbal). Furthermore, the findings of this study are in general agreement with the findings of Zein et al. (2019) that material process dominance is a recurrent characteristic of narrative discourse in general and is not exclusive to the article "Reunion". What sets Cheever's story apart from others is its structure, which linguistically encodes a narrative world marked by transaction and confrontation, not by reflection, atmosphere, or involuntary emotional display. This configuration is characterized by a particular combination of high Material and Verbal frequency and low Existential and absent Behavioral actions.

## CONCLUSION

This research is descriptive qualitative research, with the purpose to find the type process in the short story text, where the short story titled "Reunion" (1962) by John Cheever. This research used the concept transitivity element based on Halliday Theory as a theory for analysis and collected the data research. The result of this study indicates that the source text has 5 types of transitivity elements, there are Material process (36.8%), Mental process (18.9%), Relational Process (20.0%), Existential process (2.1%), and Verbal process (22.1%). As from the finding research the dominant process typically used in this text in text story is Material Process (36.8%). This means this text contains many actions or physical activities and events carried out by the characters in the story. At the same time, some previous research that analyzed the same object, the result study also found that material process is also the dominant process used in the text. For future research, especially for English learners or students that have an interest in this field, the researchers hope the other researcher will develop deeper or more detailed research through similar topic research or different focus of the research, and the similar research object or the different research object.

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