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“Mrs. Fox’s Wedding”: A Transitivity Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper linguistically analyzes the Jacob Grimm’s children’s story “Mrs. Fox’s Wedding” through the lens of Halliday’s Systematic Functional Theory of Grammar. In the course of communication, people need language to express their thoughts or emotions. Halliday’s theory helps to understand function of the language. The paper tries to investigate how Grimm has made use of the various processes of language and attempts to bring out the hidden meaning behind the words.

Keywords: Halliday, Grimm, Transitivity, Language, Process.

Introduction

Halliday posits that it is only the language through which an individual becomes a part of a communication (*Language* 14). He holds that language in its ideational function represents patterns of experience of world and it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them. This reflective experiential aspect of meaning is called transitivity. Transitivity is a grammatical system and it deals with different types of process which can be found in the language and the structures. Processes consist of process, participants and circumstances (Halliday *Introduction* 171). According to Halliday, here are six types of processes: (1) Material Processes, (2) Mental Processes, (3) Relational Processes, (4) Behavioral Processes, (5) Verbal Processes, and (6) Existential Processes (171). The processes expressed through language represent our conception of the world.

I

Paragraph

Once upon a time, there was an old Fox with nine tails who believed that his wife was not faithful to him, and wished to test her. He stressed himself out under a bench, did not move a limb and behaved as if he were stone dead. Mrs. Fox went up to her room, shut herself in while her maid, Miss Cat, sat by the fire and did the cooking. (193)

Analysis

Once upon a time (Circumstance: Location, Time), there was (Process: Existential) an old Fox (Existent) {an old (Attribute) Fox (Carrier)} with nine tails (Circumstance: Extent) who (Sensor) believed (Process: Mental) that his wife was not faithful to him (Phenomenon, Fact) {his wife (Carrier) was not (Process: Intensive) not faithful (Attribute) to him (Circumstance: Cause)}, and Fox [Sensor] wished (Process: Mental) Mr. Fox (Actor) to

test (Process: Material) her (Goal). He (Actor) stretched (Process: Mat-) himself (Goal) out (-erial) under a bench (Circumstance: Location, place), he [Actor] did not move (Process: Material) a limb (Goal), and he [Behaver] behaved (Process: Behavioural) as if he were dead stone (Behavior) {as if (Circumstance: Manner) he (Carrier) were (Process: Intensive) a dead (Attribute)}. Mrs. Fox (Actor) went up (Process: Material) to her room (Circumstance: Location, Spatial), She [Actor] shut (Process: Material) herself (Goal) in (Circumstance: Location, Spatial) while (Circumstance: Location, Time) her maid, Miss Cat, (Actor) sat (Process: Material) by the fire (Circumstance: Location, Spatial) and She (Actor) did (Process: Material) the cooking (Range).

II

Paragraph

When it became known that the old Fox was dead, woovers presented themselves. The maid heard someone knocking at the door. She went and opened it, and it was the young Fox, who said, "What are you up to, Miss Cat? Did I catch you sleeping?" (193)

Analysis

When it became known (Circumstance: Location, Time) that the old Fox (Carrier) {Old (Attribute)} was (Process: Intensive) dead (Attribute), woovers (Actor) presented (Process: Material) themselves (Goal). The maid (Sensor) heard (Process: Mental) someone knocking at the door (Phenomenon) {someone (Actor) knocking (Process: Material) at the door (Range)}. She (Actor) went (Process: Material) and opened (Process: Material) it (Goal) and it (Carrier) was (Process: Intensive) a young Fox (Attribute), who (Sayer) said (Process; Verbal), "What are you up to, Miss Cat?, Did I catch you sleeping?" (Verbiage) {What (Circumstance: Man) are (Process: Intensive) you (Carrier) up to (-ner)? Did (Process: Mat-) I (Actor) catch (-erial) you (Goal) sleeping (Circumstance: Manner)? }

III

Paragraph

She answered, "I am not sleeping, I am awake. Do you know what I am making? I am boiling warm bear with butter so nice. Would you like to have some?"

" No, Thank you, Miss," said the Fox. "What is Mrs. Fox doing?" (194)

Analysis

She (Sayer) answered (Process: Verbal), "I am not sleeping, I am awake. Do you know what I am making? I am boiling warm bear with butter so nice. Would you like to have some?" (Verbiage) {I (Actor) am (Process: Mat-) not sleeping (-erial), I (Carrier) am (Process: Intensive) awake (Attribute). Do (Process: Men-) you (Sensor) know (-tal) what I am making (Phenomenon) <what (Circumstance: Matter) I (Actor) am making (Process: Material)> I (Actor) am boiling (Process: Material) warm bear (Goal) with butter (Circumstance: Manner) so nice (Circumstance: Manner). Would (Process: Men-) you (Sensor) like (-tal) to have (Process: Material) some (Circumstance: Extent)? }

" No, Thank you, Miss," (Verbiage) said (Process: Verbal) the Fox (Sayer). "What (Circumstance: Matter) is (Process: Mat-) Mrs. Fox (Actor) doing (-erial)?"

IV

Paragraph

The maid replied, "She sits all alone, with a cry and a moan, weeping her little eyes red, because old Mr. Fox is dead".

"Please tell her, Miss, that a young Fox is here who would like to woo her."

"Certainly, young Sir". (194)

Analysis

The maid (Sayer) replied (Process: Verbal), " She sits all alone, with a cry and a moan, weeping her little eyes red, because old Mr. Fox is dead" (Verbiage). {She (Actor) sits (Process: Material) all alone (Circumstance: Manner), with a cry and a moan (Circumstance: Manner) she (Behaver) weeping (Process: behavioral) her little eyes red (Circumstance: Manner) because old Mr. Fox is dead (Circumstance: Cause). }Mr. Fox (Carrier) is (Process: Intensive) dead (Attribute)}

He (Sayer) said (Process: Verbal) to Miss Cat (Receiver), "Please tell her, Miss, that a young Fox is here who would like to woo her." (Verbiage)

You (Sayer) tell (Process: Verbal) her (Receiver) that a young Fox is here who would like to woo her (Verbiage)

{A young (attribute) Fox (Carrier) is (Process: Intensive) here (Circumstance: Location) who (Sensor) would like (Process: Mental) to woo (Process: Material) her (Goal)}

Miss Cat (Sayer) to young Fox (Receiver) " Certainly, young Sir". (Verbiage)

V**Paragraph**

The cat goes up the stairs trip, trap. The door she knocks at tap, tap, tap, "Mistress Fox, are you inside?"

"Oh yes, my little cat," she cried

"A wooer he stands at the door out there."

"Tell me what he is like, my dear? Does he have nine tails as beautiful as those of the late Mr. Fox?"

"Oh, no", answered the cat, "he has only one". (194)

Analysis

The cat (Actor) goes up (Process: Material) the stairs (Circumstance: Location, Place) trip, trap (Circumstance: Manner). The door (Range) she (Actor) knocks at (Process: Material) tap, tap, tap (Circumstance: Manner).

Miss Cat (Sayer) said (Process: Verbal) to Mrs. Fox (Receiver), "Mistress Fox, are you inside?"(Verbiage)

"Oh yes, my little cat," (Verbiage) she (Sayer) cried (Process: Verbal).

"A wooer (Attribute) he (Actor) stands (Process: Material) at the door (Circumstance: Location, Place) out there (Circumstance: Location, Place)," said (Process: Verbal) Miss Cat (Sayer).

Mrs. Fox (Sayer) asked (Process: Verbal) "Tell me what he is like, my dear? Does he have nine tails as beautiful as those of the late Mr. Fox?"(Verbiage){ You (Sayer) tell (Process: Verbal) me (Receiver) what (Circumstance: Man-) he (Carrier) is (Process: Intensive) like (-ner, Comparison). Does (Process: Po) he (Carrier/ Possessor) have (-s-session) nine tails (Attribute: Possessed) as beautiful as those of the late Mr. Fox? (Circumstance: Manner, Comparison)".

"Oh no," (Verbiage) answered (Process: Verbal) the cat (Sayer), "he (Carrier) has (Process: Intensive, Possession) only one (Attribute: Possessed)".

VI**Paragraph**

"Then I will not have him." Miss Cat went upstairs and sent the wooer away. Soon afterwards there was another knock, and another fox was at the door who wished to woo Mrs. Fox. He had two tails, but he did not fare better than the first. After this still more came, each with one tail more than the other, but they were all turned away, until at last one came who had nine tails, like old Mr. Fox. (194)

Analysis

Mrs. Fox (Sayer) said (Process: Verbal) “Then I will not have him” (Verbiage) {Then (Circumstance: Location, Time) I (Carrier) will not have (Process: Intensive, Possession) him (Attribute, Possessed)}. Miss Cat (Actor) went (Process: Material) downstairs (Circumstance: Location, Place) and she (Actor) sent (Process: Material) to wooer (Goal) away (Circumstance: Location, Place). Soon afterwards (Circumstance: Location, Time) there was {Process: Existential) another knock (Existent), and another Fox (Carrier) {another (Attribute)} was (Process: Intensive) at the door (Circumstance: Location, Place) who (Senser) wished (Process: Mental) to woo (Process: Material) Mrs. Fox (Goal). He (Carrier) had (Process: Possession) two tails (Attribute, Possessed), but he (Actor) didn’t fare (Process: Material) better than the first (Process: Manner, Comparison). After this (Circumstance: Location, Time) still (Circumstance: Location, Place) more woosers (Actors) came (Process: Material), each (Possessor) had (Process: Possession) with one tail more (Attribute: Possessed) than the other (Circumstance: Manner, Comparison), but they (Goal) were (Process: Mat-) all turned away (-erial) by Mrs. Fox (Actor) until at last (Circumstance: Location, Time) one (Actor) came (Process: Material) who (Possessor) had (Process: Possession) nine tails (Attribute, Possessed), like old Mr. Fox (Circumstance: Comparison).

VII**Paragraph**

When the widow heard that, she said joyfully to the cat, “Now open the gates and doors all wide and carry old Mr. Fox outside.”

But just as the wedding was going to be solemnized, old Mr. Fox stirred under the bench, beat the crowd with a club, and drove them and Mrs. Fox out of the house. (194-95)

Analysis

When the widow heard that (Circumstance: Location, Time) {the widow (Senser) heard (Process: Mental) that (Phenomenon)} she (Sayer) said (Process: Verbal) joyfully (Circumstance: Manner) to the cat (Receiver), “Now open the gates and doors all wide and carry old Mr. Fox outside.” (Verbiage){Now (Circumstance: Time) You (Actor) open (Process: Material) the gates and doors (Goal) all wide (Circumstance: Manner) and You (Actor) carry (Process: Material) old Mr. Fox (Goal) outside (Circumstance: Location, Place).

But just as the weeding was going to be solemnized (Circumstance: Location, Time), Mr. Fox (Actor) stirred (Process: Material) under the table (Circumstance: Location, Place), He (Actor) beat (Process: Material) the crowd (Goal) with a club (Circumstance: Manner) and He (Actor) drove (Process: Material) them and Mrs. Fox (Goal) out of the house (Circumstance: Location, Place).

Table:

Types of Processes	Participants	No. of Frequency of Participation	Participant Roles	
			Actor	Goal
Material	Mr. Fox	9	6	3
	Mrs. Fox	10	5	5
			Existent	
Existential	Mr. Fox	1	1	
			Behaver	
Behavioural	Mr. Fox	1	1	
	Mrs. Fox	1	1	
			1	

Relational			Carrier
	Mr. Fox	4	4
	Mrs. Fox	2	2
Mental			Senser
	Mr. Fox	2	2
	Mrs. Fox	1	1
Verbal			Sayer
	Mr. Fox	0	0
	Mrs. Fox	4	4

Interpretation:

The story explores male-female relationship in a patriarchal setup. In this story, Mr. Fox wishes to 'test' his wife. Mrs. Fox is the Goal (Target) of Mr. Fox's action. Mr. Fox appears as Goal three times, whereas Mrs. Fox is targeted as a Goal for five times. Further analysis reveals that Mr. Fox is mainly Goal of his own actions- "He stretched himself" and "He didn't move his limb" (193). No outer agency seems to be powerful enough to target him as a Goal. He is also Goal in Mrs. Fox's verbiage (Which is only a talk, not actual action.)- "carry Mr. Fox outside" (195). In reality, he is immune to be any outer agency's Goal; this is the power of being male in a male dominated society. On the other hand, Mrs. Fox, when a Goal of her own action, does not 'stretch' herself like Mr. Fox, but she 'shut herself in'. Mr. Fox's 'stretch' reveals the assertion of his identity, whereas Mrs. Fox's 'shut herself in' refers to self-abnegation/evasion in the context of gender inequality. Mrs. Fox is Goal in the actions of others for four times: Mr. Fox wishes to 'test' her; A young Fox would like to 'woo' her; another fox wishes to 'woo' her and finally, Mr. Fox drives 'Mrs. Fox out of the house'. To be tested, to be wooed, and to be driven reveal the susceptibility and objectification of the fair sex.

Mr. Fox is Actor for six times, while Mrs. Fox appears Actor for five times. Mrs. Fox's two Material Processes- "went up to her room" and "shut herself in" show her passivity against Mr. Fox's Material Processes- 'to test', 'stretched', 'stirred', 'beat the crowd' and "drove them out" (193-94). Mrs. Fox appears as Actor in the verbiage of a Wooer and Cat - "What is Mrs. Fox doing?" and "she sits all alone"- which delimit Mrs. Fox's scope for real action (194). On the other hand, Mr. Fox appears as Actor for five times in reality and one time in his Mental Process. Notably, he is not Actor in the verbiage of any other character. This makes the story male dominated. Mrs. Fox appears to be strong Actor only in one case when she turns away the wooers- "they were all turned away by Mrs. Fox"(194). According to traditional grammar, in this passive sentence 'they' is more important than 'Mrs. Fox'. Moreover, this much of Action appears too weak to face Mr. Fox's five strong Material Processes. Mr. Fox may seem to be passive in his one Material Process- 'didn't move'. But the Material Process when seen in the context of his plan to 'test' his wife reveals his determination and planning. His Material Process, though negative, shows his strength.

Mrs. Fox does not have any Existential Process, against the Existential Process of Mr. Fox: 'there was an old fox'. It shows the lack of space to Mrs. Fox as an Existent in this narration (193).

As Behaver, Mrs. Fox 'weeps' and Mr. Fox pretends "as if he were dead". Mrs. Fox's Behavioural Process reveals her weakness as a character, whereas Mr. Fox's Behavioural Process shows his control over himself (193).

To analyse Relational Processes, 'Old' is the attribute of Mr. Fox, whereas 'not faithful' is the attribute of Mrs. Fox. Age has matured Mr. Fox who plans and takes action. On the other hand, Mrs. Fox's attribute 'not faithful' is only Phenomenon of Mr. Fox's Mental Process. It refers to the helplessness of archetypal female who is alleged of being tainted in a discourse created by male. Another attribute of Mr. Fox is 'dead' which is ironical

in the light of his Material Processes. Mrs. Fox's Intensive Process and Attribute –'will not have him' as it does not have nine tails- reveals her to be a demanding female (194)

Mr. Fox appears as Sayer twice- "who believed his wife was not faithful" and "Fox wished to test her" (193). As Sayer, he emerges as the one who has power to 'believe' and 'wish to test'. On the other hand, the only Mental Process of Mrs. Fox is 'heard' which appears too weak against Mr. Fox's Mental Processes.

As a Sayer, Mr. Fox appears not at all as he believes in action. He dominates through his actions. On the other hand, Mrs. Fox appears as a Sayer for four times. Her verbiage- "What he is like" and "then I will not have him"- portrays her as a demanding fox when her husband is dead. She seems to be inclined towards physical appearance (194). Her verbiage is not supported by her Material Process. In the Verbiage, she asks Cat to "open the gates and doors all wide and carry Mr. Old Fox outside" (194). She simply says and performs no action.

Conclusion:

After close scrutiny of the text, it has been concluded that transitivity forms the focal point of all creativity. Unconscious or conscious choice of Processes decide the meaning of narrative in a text, and transitivity indicators minimize the significance of all other parts of speech. Material Processes reveal that Mr. Fox is very active; Verbal Processes show that Mrs. Fox speaks more and performs less. As it is said that actions speak louder than words, the story is dominated by Mr. Fox. Mrs. Fox reminds us of the archetypal wife who has to undergo a test to prove her loyalty and truthfulness (as in the case of Sita). Existential Process keeps Mr. Fox at the centre. Mental Processes reveal that Mr. Fox thinks, but Mrs. Fox. 'hears'. Behavioural Processes present Mrs. Fox as a weak person and Mr. Fox as the one who has control over himself. Relational Processes reflect that Mr. Fox is the carrier of experience, while Mrs. Fox does not carry such a quality. In the light of this transitivity theory, it may be said that a man is known by his actions or actions delineate a man.

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