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Transitivity in English Recount Text: A Study on SMP English Textbooks

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Abstract

This study examines the transitivity system in recount texts in the English textbook English for Nusantara for eighth-grade junior high school students. It focuses on three aspects of the transitivity system: process types, participant roles, and circumstance types. A mixed-methods content analysis design was used. Data were obtained from six recount texts purposively selected from the textbook. The data consisted of 1,252 tokens analyzed across 203 clauses. Of these, 202 clauses contained processes, while one clause was a minor clause without a process; therefore, the process percentages in this study were calculated from 202 processes. The analysis was conducted based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity system by identifying, classifying, and calculating the frequency and percentage of each transitivity element. The results showed that there were five types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, and existential, while behavioral processes were not found. Material processes were the most dominant, with 113 occurrences (55.94%). In terms of participants, actors were the most dominant role, with 81 occurrences (28.22%). Meanwhile, in terms of circumstance, location was the most dominant type, with 76 occurrences (71.03%). These findings indicate that recount texts in the textbook mostly represent experiences through actions or events carried out by characters, with information about time and place helping to organize events chronologically. Previous studies have largely examined student-written recount texts or general reading texts; fewer studies have specifically analyzed recount texts in the eighth-grade English for Nusantara textbook using a mixed-methods content analysis that integrates process, participant, and circumstance analysis. This study addresses that gap by providing a focused transitivity analysis of six textbook recount texts. Thus, the transitivity system in recount texts can help explain how experiences are represented through language choices in English textbooks for junior high school students.

Keywords: Transitivity System, Recount Text, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Process, Participants, Circumstance.

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INTRODUCTION

English textbooks are important learning resources in the English language learning process, especially for junior high school students. Textbooks not only provide vocabulary and grammar but also present various types of texts that can help students understand the use of language in specific contexts （Pratiwi et al., 2023; Emilia, 2014）. One type of text students learn is the recount text, which aims to retell experiences or events that have occurred. In a recount text, experiences are conveyed through a series of events arranged chronologically （Derewianka, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Knapp & Watkins, 2005）. Therefore, analyzing the language in a recount text is important to understand how experiences and events are

represented through language choices （Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Martin & Rose, 2003; Rose & Martin, 2012）.

One approach that can be used to analyze language use is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the transitivity system is part of the ideational metafunction that explains how language is used to represent human experience. This view is also developed in SFL literature (Halliday, 1967; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Downing & Locke, 2006; Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2014). The transitivity system consists of three main elements: process, participant, and circumstance. The process indicates the action, event, feeling, thought, or state represented in the clause, while the participant refers to the person or thing involved in the process. Meanwhile, the circumstance provides additional information about the event, such as the time, place, manner, and reason for an action （Kholiq, 2021）.

The transitivity system is relevant for analyzing recount texts because this type of text focuses on conveying experiences and a series of past events. The material process, for example, can indicate the actions or activities carried out by characters in the story. Participants, such as Actor and Goal, help explain who performs the action and who or what is involved as the target of that action. Furthermore, circumstantial location can provide information about the time and place of events, allowing readers to understand the sequence of experiences more clearly. By analyzing these three elements, the linguistic characteristics of recount text can be explained more systematically （Llinares & McCabe, 2023）.

Previous studies relevant to this research were conducted by Fadiarachmanda (2024), Almira and Yulistianti (2024), Khalil et al. (2022), and Elsie and Suarnajaya (2020). Fadiarachmanda (2024) analyzed 150 clauses from recount texts written by eighth-grade students and found that material processes were the most dominant. Almira and Yulistianti (2024) examined transitivity processes in recount texts written by English education students and also reported the prominence of material processes. Khalil et al. (2022) analyzed an English textbook for tenth-grade students and showed that transitivity analysis can reveal how textbook texts construct meaning through process and participant choices. Elsie and Suarnajaya (2020) examined the recount texts of eleventh-grade vocational high school students and found six types of transitivity processes, with the material process being the most dominant. Different from these studies, this study specifically analyzed six recount texts in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for eighth-grade students, focusing on process types, participant roles, and circumstance types using a mixed-methods content analysis design. This focus is important because previous studies have not sufficiently explained how recount texts in this textbook integrate actions, participants, and time–place information to support students' understanding of chronological experience.

Based on the research gap and referring to the transitivity analysis approach developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), this study analyzes the transitivity system in recount texts in the English textbook *English for Nusantara* for grade VIII. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify the types of processes found in recount texts, (2) identify the roles of participants in each process, and (3) identify the types of circumstances used in recount texts. This analysis was conducted on six recount texts selected from the book using a content analysis approach and a mixed-methods

design. The results of this study are expected to provide an empirical picture of how experiences and events are represented through the transitivity system in recount texts in English textbooks used by grade VIII students.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods design with a content analysis approach. The qualitative component was used to identify and classify process types, participant roles, and circumstance types because these categories require interpretive coding of clause meanings. The quantitative component was used to calculate frequencies and percentages so that the distribution of each transitivity element could be described systematically. The two components were complementary: the qualitative analysis explained how meaning was constructed in each clause, while the quantitative analysis showed which transitivity patterns were dominant across the six texts (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Butt et al., 2000).

The data source was the first edition of *English for Nusantara*, for junior high school students for eighth grade, published in 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (ISBN 978-602-427-941-7). This study analyzed six recount texts purposively selected according to the research focus and established criteria. The texts were taken from the specified textbook and fall into the recount text genre, are written in English, and contain clauses that can be analyzed through the transitivity system. The selected texts were "*A Parade in My Hometown*" (p. 42), "*SMP Merdeka's School Parade*" (p. 43), "*JAKARTA'S OLD CITY TOUR*" (pp. 123–124), "*An Elephant and His Friends*" (pp. 109–110), "*A School Parade*" (p. 50), and "*Independence Day Celebration in SMP Merdeka*" (p. 54). No human participants were involved as the data consisted of written textbook texts.

Data collection was conducted through documentation. First, relevant recount texts were found in textbooks. Second, six recount texts that met the selection criteria were collected. Third, each text was broken down into clauses to establish the unit of analysis. The research instruments consisted of a data selection checklist and a transitivity analysis sheet. The analysis sheet was used to record clauses, identify processes, label participant roles, and record existing circumstances.

To reduce subjectivity in coding, the researcher conducted repeated coding at two different times and rechecked the coded clauses against the transitivity criteria of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). The researcher also discussed problematic clauses with a supervisor or peer for verification. No second coder was used; therefore, reliability was maintained through intra-coder consistency, explicit coding criteria, and re-examination of clauses in which process, participant, or circumstance categories were ambiguous.

The data were analyzed in several stages. First, the selected texts were segmented into clauses. Second, each clause was examined using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity framework. Third, the type of process was classified as Material, Mental, Verbal, Relational, Behavioral, or Existential; participants were classified according to their role in the relevant process; and circumstances were categorized based on their semantic function. Fourth, the coded data were tabulated and counted. Finally, frequencies and percentages were calculated and interpreted in relation to the function of the recount texts and relevant previous studies. The corpus contained 1,252 tokens across 203 clauses. Of these, 202 clauses contained

processes, while one clause was a minor clause without a process; thus, the total number of processes analyzed was 202. The percentage for each category is calculated by dividing its frequency by the total number of occurrences in the corresponding transitivity category and multiplying the results by 100.

The percentage for each category is calculated by dividing its frequency by the total number of occurrences in the corresponding transitivity category and multiplying the results by 100. Thus, the process percentage uses the total occurrences of the process as the denominator, the participant percentage uses the total occurrences of the participant, and the circumstances percentage uses the total occurrences of the circumstances. The findings are presented descriptively, not as a test of cause-and-effect relationships.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Process Types in the Recount Texts

The analysis identified five of the six types of processes in the selected recount texts: material, mental, relational, verbal, and existential. Behavioral processes were not found. A total of 202 processes were analyzed. Material processes occurred most frequently, with 113 occurrences (55.94%). Relational processes followed with 42 occurrences (20.79%). Mental and verbal processes each occurred 22 times (10.89%), while existential processes occurred three times (1.49%).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Process Types

Texts	Material	Mental	Behavioral	Verbal	Relational Attributive	Relational Identifying	Existential
Text 1	11	8	0	1	7	0	0
Text 2	21	3	0	1	2	1	1
Text 3	15	2	0	1	5	2	0
Text 4	21	6	0	15	12	0	1
Text 5	23	2	0	2	3	0	1
Text 6	22	1	0	2	8	2	0
Total	**113**	**22**	**0**	**22**	**37**	**5**	**3**
Percentage (%)	**55.94**	**10.89**	**0.00**	**10.89**	**18.32**	**2.48**	**1.49**

The dominance of material processes indicates that these texts primarily represent experiences through the actions and events performed by characters. This pattern is consistent with the recount text genre, which retells events that occurred in the past. Clauses describing activities such as joining a parade, visiting a place, walking, participating in a game, or announcing a winner contribute to the chronological development of the story. Within Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) framework, material processes construct actions and events within the experiential world, making their high frequency appropriate for recount texts.

Relational processes were the second most frequent category. Their presence allows the text to describe states, qualities, and relationships, such as how a character feels or what a place or event is like. Mental processes represent experiences such as remembering, seeing, feeling, or wanting, while verbal processes convey dialogue and reported speech between characters. Existential processes are rare, and no behavioral processes were identified in the analyzed data. The absence

of behavioral processes should be understood as a characteristic of this particular corpus, not as a characteristic of all recount texts.

The finding of the dominance of material processes is in line with Fadiarachmanda (2024), Almira and Yulistianti (2024), and Elsie and Suarnajaya (2020), who also reported a high frequency of material processes in recount texts. Khalil et al. (2022) also found that material and relational processes were prominent in textbook texts. This study adds a focused analysis of six recount texts from an eighth-grade textbook and considers process types together with participant roles and circumstances. In short, the distribution indicates that the selected texts primarily construct past experiences through actions and events, supported by other processes describing states, thoughts, and utterances.

Participant Roles in the Recount Text

Participant analysis identified twelve roles in the selected texts: Actor, Goal, Carrier, Attribute, Senser, Phenomenon, Identified, Identifier, Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage, and Existent. Scope, Recipient, Client, and Behaver were not found. With a total of 287 participant-role occurrences, Actor was the most frequent participant role, with 81 occurrences (28.22%), followed by Goal, with 60 occurrences (20.91%). Carrier and Attribute were also relatively frequent, with 39 and 40 occurrences respectively. The total of 287 is used as the denominator for all participant percentages in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Participant Roles

Participant Type	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	Text 6	Frequency	Percentage
Actor	7	14	10	14	16	20	81	**28.22%**
Goal	7	14	10	7	12	10	60	**20.91%**
Scope	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Carrier	7	3	5	11	3	10	39	**13.59%**
Attribute	7	3	7	11	3	9	40	**13.94%**
Recipient	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Client	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Senser	8	1	2	4	1	1	17	**5.92%**
Phenomenon	4	3	2	5	1	1	16	**5.57%**
Identified	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**	**0.35%**
Identifier	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**	**0.35%**
Sayer	1	1	0	13	2	0	17	**5.92%**
Receiver	1	0	1	4	1	0	7	**2.44%**
Verbiage	1	1	0	1	1	1	5	**1.74%**
Behaver	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Existent	0	1	0	1	1	0	3	**1.05%**
Total	**43**	**41**	**39**	**71**	**41**	**52**	**287**	**100.00%**

The high frequency of Actors is related to the dominance of material processes. Actors are participants who perform actions in material clauses, so they frequently appear in texts that recount sequences of activities. These texts include human characters and groups such as "*I*," "*we*," students, classmates, and named characters who perform actions that move events forward. Goals are the second most frequently appearing role and represent entities affected by or involved as targets of

an action. Together, Actor and Goal demonstrate how recount texts often construct experiences through actions and their impacts.

Carriers and Attributes support another function of recount texts: describing people, places, and experiences. Carriers are associated with qualities or states expressed through relational attributive processes, while Attributes represent those qualities or states. Sensers and Phenomena are associated with mental processes and represent the experiences and what they feel, think, or perceive. Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage occur in verbal clauses and help represent communication between characters. Identified and Identifier express identifying relationships, while Existent occurs in existential clauses.

The participant patterns generally align with those of Fadiarachmanda (2024), Almira and Yulistianti (2024), and Elsie and Suarnajaya (2020), whose analyses of recount texts also emphasize the importance of the role of Actors and Goals in representing past actions. Khalil et al. (2022) also identified Actors as important participants in textbook reading texts. The current findings suggest that participant choice is closely related to process choice: when material processes occur frequently, Actors also tend to appear frequently. In short, Actors and Goals are central to the representation of action in the selected recount texts, while other participant roles provide description, mental experience, utterance, identification, and existence.

Circumstance Types in the Recount Text

Six types of circumstances were found in six recount texts: Location, Manner, Cause, Accompaniment, Role, and Extent. Location was the most frequent, occurring 76 times (71.03%) out of 107 circumstances. The total number of circumstances was 107; therefore, the percentage of Location was 76/107 = 71.03%. Manner appeared 11 times (10.28%), Cause 7 times (6.54%), Accompaniment and Role 5 times each (4.67%), and Extent 3 times (2.80%). Contingency, Matter, and Angle were not found. In Table 3, the row for Angle has been corrected to 0 because Angle was not found in the data; this correction makes the table total consistent with the reported 107 circumstances.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Circumstance Types

Circumstance Type	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	Text 6	Frequency	Percentage
Extent	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	**2.80%**
Location	9	12	8	13	11	23	76	**71.03%**
Manner	4	1	1	2	2	1	11	**10.28%**
Cause	0	0	2	5	0	0	7	**6.54%**
Contingency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Accompaniment	0	0	1	0	1	3	5	**4.67%**
Role	0	1	0	0	3	1	5	**4.67%**
Matter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Angle	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Total	**16**	**14**	**12**	**20**	**17**	**28**	**107**	**100.00%**

Circumstances of location provide information about when or where an event occurred. Their strong presence indicates that the text repeatedly establishes the time and place of the experience, using expressions related to school, hometown, Jakarta, Independence Day, and stages in an event. This information helps readers follow the

sequence of events and understand the background. This is consistent with the communicative purpose of recount texts, which organize past experiences chronologically (Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

Circumstances of manner describe how an action was performed, while circumstances of cause provide information about the reason or purpose. Accompaniment indicates who takes part in an activity with another participant, Role indicates the capacity or function in which an entity participates, and Extent indicates duration or distance. Although these categories appear less frequently than location, they enrich the accounts by explaining how actions occurred, why they occurred, or who was involved. The absence of Contingency, Matter, and Angle means only that these categories were not identified in this particular set of texts.

The prominence of location resembles the pattern reported by Elsie and Suarnajaya (2020) and Kholiq (2021), who also identified location-related circumstances as important in recount texts or textbook texts. This similarity suggests that temporal and spatial information is a recurring feature in texts recounting experiences. This study provides a specific explanation of the distribution of circumstances in six eighth-grade recount texts and shows that background information is the most prominent source of circumstances. In short, location circumstances help anchor narrated actions in time and place and support a coherent chronological organization.

Pedagogically, the dominance of material processes, Actors, and location circumstances can help eighth-grade students recognize that recount texts are built mainly through action sequences set in particular times and places. Teachers can use this pattern to guide students to identify who did what, when, and where in each clause before writing their own recount texts. Textbook writers and material developers can also design tasks that make these features explicit, such as matching clauses with process types, labeling participants, and distinguishing temporal from spatial circumstances. In this way, transitivity analysis is not only a descriptive tool but also a pedagogical resource for supporting students' reading and writing of recount texts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the transitivity system in six English recount texts from the English textbook *English for Nusantara* for eighth-grade junior high school students. Regarding the first research question, five process types were identified—material, mental, relational, verbal, and existential—while behavioral processes were absent; material processes were the most dominant. Regarding the second research question, Actor was the most frequent participant role, followed by Goal, while other roles supported description, mental experience, utterance, identification, and existence. Regarding the third research question, Location was the most frequent circumstance type, followed by Manner, Cause, Accompaniment, Role, and Extent. Taken together, these findings indicate that recount texts in the textbook primarily construct experiences through actions and events performed by characters, with time and place information anchoring the chronological organization of events. This pattern is consistent with the linguistic purpose of recount texts and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity framework.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings suggest that teachers could use transitivity analysis to help students examine how clauses construct meaning in recount texts. For example, students could identify process types, determine participant roles, and distinguish temporal from spatial circumstances in selected clauses. Textbook writers and material developers could consider including activities that make these language features explicit. Future research could examine additional grades, textbook editions, genres, or linguistic features and could compare textbook texts with recount texts written by students. Since this study analyzes only six texts from one textbook, its implications should be interpreted within that limited scope.

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