

A Brief Analysis of Interpersonal Relationship in The Great Gatsby -- An Analysis of Interpersonal Function Based on Systemic Functional Grammar

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Abstract: In Fitzgerald's hands, the Great Gatsby presents readers with a true picture of the prosperity of the United States in the 1920s, or the lively "jazz Age". In the both stylistics and literature field, it has been a famous classical work. With respect to three meta functions of language from linguistic perspective, Halliday's systemic-functional Grammar gets widely used in China. Studies on the Great Gatsby from the view of Halliday's meta-functions of language theory turns out great innovation and get numerous findings in various facets of this classic. This research continues this topic, focusing on some fragments of dialogue in the climax chapter VII of this work, aimed at seeking for a possible insight of the interpersonal relationship between the main characters, using MOOD system, which is one of the members in interpersonal function of language proposed by Halliday's theory in order to enrich the analysis perspective of studies on this field and make a corresponding complement for the application of MOOD system in literary classical works in discursal analysis.

Keywords: Systemic and Functional Grammar; Interpersonal function; MOOD system; The Great Gatsby

1. Introduction

Systemic Functional Grammar proposed by M.A.K Halliday (1925-2018) derives from Firth's theories, which is a sociologically oriented functional linguistic approach. It is also one of the most influential linguistic theories in the 20th century, greatly imposing on various disciplines related to language, such as language teaching, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, stylistics, and machine translation^[2]. Two inseparable components consist of Systemic Functional Grammar: On the one hand, Systemic Grammar and Functional Grammar. The goal of Systemic grammar is to explain the internal relations, based on the idea that language is a system network, or meaning potential. And this network is made up of subsystems from which language users make choices. On the other hand, Functional grammar tries to demonstrate language as a means of social interaction, based on the stance that language system and the forms that make it up are inescapably determined by the uses or functions which they serve^[2]. There are three meta-functions of language proposed in this theory: Ideational function, which is related to ideology and contain TRANSITIVITY system containing six processes (material, mental, relational, existential, behavioral, verbal), Interpersonal Function which will be described in detail in the next paragraph, and Textual Function which deals with the question about the coherence and cohesion of discourse.

So far in China, Halliday's Systemic and Functional Grammar has been widely used, especially those three meta-functions of language applied to discursal analysis. According to Halliday himself, one of the goals of establishment of the Systemic and Functional Grammar is to provide a theoretical framework for discursal analysis^[1]. Among the three linguistic meta-functions, interpersonal function is particularly responsible for describing the way people use to establish and maintain the relationship with other people, influencing other people's behavior by language and, at the same time, expressing his own thinking about the world (both physical and mental) or even changing it^[6]. One essential constituents of interpersonal function are MOOD system. It is the grammatical resource for realizing an interactive move in dialogue^[5]. Its concrete manifestation is described as following.

As mentioned above, people use language to establish and maintain the relationship with others in everyday communication, in which people continuously exchange their communicative roles. However, there are only two primary communicative roles: giving and demanding, for something which can be metaphorically understood as commodity, referring to either information or goods-&-service. And communicative roles plus commodity, these four, all together constitute four speech roles furtherly proposed by Thompson (2000)^[3] (cited by Huang, 2002).

In Halliday's theoretical framework, MOOD system is another category, consisting of three elements: Subject and Finite, Mood Adjuncts and Comments Adjuncts^[9]. And with respect to latter two, between which there is hard to draw a line to differentiate. Halliday divides these two into adjuncts of modality, temporality and mood. The subject can be realized by nouns, noun phrases and clauses, and the finite element can be done by a small number of verbal operators which has three functions or expressions: tense, modality, polarity^{[7][8]}. The latter two of elements in MOOD system. can be integrated into a unified notion called residue, while the former one is Mood.

As illustrated by Martin (2010)^[5], the basic distinction within the grammatical system of MOOD arises between imperative and indicative mood types. And each has its own subcategories. Indicative can be further divided into interrogative (questions) and declarative (statements); Moreover, yes/no type and wh-type make up interrogative and exclamative and non-exclamative are included in declarative. Besides, imperative also has different kinds. (Verb + adjuncts; Let/Let's-type).

Studies using interpersonal function to analyze some literature works are well-limited, as mentioned above that most have been devoted to political texts. Further, researches study the Great Gatsby using Systemic and Functional Grammar are much more restricted.

Based on what has been introduced above, this paper makes use of MOOD system, focusing on the choice of subjects, the modality taken by finite verbs, and some other analysis factors to try illuminating the relationship among Daisy, Tom and Gatsby, for the ultimate purposes of enriching the analysis perspective of studies on this field and making a corresponding complement for the application of MOOD system in specific research topics in discursal analysis.

2. Textual analysis

The interpersonal relationship in the Great Gatsby is also intriguing and, insightfully, complex. It's obvious to see that the couple, Daisy and Tom, are seemingly in harmony but actually at variance just from their dialogues in some aspects like vocative expressions.

The not good relationship of this couple is evidently expressed by the phone call from Tom's mistress in the first dinner of Nick with Daisy, Tom and Jordan after he moves to West Egg, as well as Daisty's teasing to Nick about Tom after that dinner. Nevertheless, paying more attention to the usual communication between this couple to look into their relationship is a more direct way. This disharmonious relationship gets worse and linguistically more obvious when Gatsby is going to negotiate with Tom about the divorce of him and Daisy. The following is some extracted fragments from Chapter VII.

Daisy: "It's so hot," she complained. "You go. We'll ride around and meet you after." (The Great Gatsby, 2018, pp. 82)^[4]

Tom: "We can't argue about it here", Tom said impatiently, as a truck gave out a cursing whistle behind us. "You follow me to the south side of Central Park, in front of the Plaza." (The Great Gatsby, 2018, pp. 82)^[4]

Daisy: "Open another window," commanded Daisy, without turning around" (The Great Gatsby, 2018, pp. 83)

Tom: "The thing to do is to forget about the heat," said Tom impatiently. "You make it ten times worse by crabbing about it." (The Great Gatsby, 2018, pp. 83)^[4]

In terms of the speech role carrying by Daisy, she is definitely demanding using lots of imperatives and declaratives with intense modal auxiliaries. Firstly, the use of subjects between they two indicates their variance of relationship. They call each other "you", instead of "honey" or "sweetie" like a normal couple or lovers. We also can call "you" to strangers or someone whose status is inferior to us. Therefore, it seems distant and cold with respect to interpersonal relationship, especially with couples if Daisy and Tom call each other in this way. And most importantly and noticeably, when Daisy says "we will ride around...", the subject pronoun refers to she and Gatsby. If we assume that a wife gets on a car of a male friend instead of her husband's, she also can say "Gatsby and I." to avert suspicion. But she uses "we", as if she and Gatsby were together like a couple, and draws a line with her real husband, Tom.

Turning to the finite verbs, it tells that in the communication between Daisy and Tom the modal verbs obviously outnumber lexical verbs (and most lexical verbs are used in imperative way, as the following analyzed). The use of modal auxiliaries expresses intense emotions and un/willingness^[7]. It can be easily seen that the use of these modal verbs is to express either emotionally unhappiness and unwillingness or a tone of command and distance. For example, as mentioned above, in this sentence "we will ride around..." "will"

expresses an unchangeable decision to inform you but not to consult with you. Daisy says to her husband in this way with Gatsby, which apparently indicates that the relationship with Daisy and Tom are not harmonious.

From another factors like mood types and speech roles, it sees that here are more imperative expressions between Daisy and Tom in their communication in addition to that sentence “it’s so hot” because it’s not said to Tom. This is not common for a couple who have a good relationship. And with respect to the speech roles, correspondently, there are more demanding constructions. What’s more, here is an interesting expression which is worth noting, Daisy’s “it’s so hot” is not an exclamative but a declarative, and she repeats this sentence many times in the following plots. The declarative tone represents what is really hot is not the weather in perception, but the Daisy’s emotion. Her heart is restless, which implies the failure of Gatsby’s negotiation with Tom in the subsequent plot and further gives a hint about her relationship with Gatsby.

3. Conclusion

This paper conducts a discorsal analysis with respect to the well-known classical work, the Great Gatsby, from the perspective of Systemic and Functional Grammar. This research chooses interpersonal function among those three meta-functions as methodology to make a qualitative analysis about the interpersonal relationship among three main characters of this story: Daisy and Tom. The specific theoretical tool this paper adopts is primary MOOD System. During the analysis of some extracted sentence fragments, this paper is mainly engaged in the choice of subject, the use of finite (taking different tense and modality). In addition, this paper also counts in the mood type (declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative) and speech role (giving and demanding), to help our analysis.

In conclusion, MOOD System (interpersonal function) can definitely be used to discorsal analysis of works in literature, not just political lectures, relatively autonomously. This kind of application of MOOD system, and more generally, interpersonal function to the literary discorsal analysis is totally possible. The key is the degree of compatibility. More scholars are needed to devote themselves to this research in the future.

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