

## Ideational Meaning in Joel Osteen's Sermon *The Power of I Am*:

### A Transitivity Analysis

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#### Abstract

This research attempts to explore how meanings are construed in the sermon *The Power of I Am* by Pastor Joel Osteen through the transitivity system proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Applying Descriptive Qualitative method, six types of processes are identified and analyzed to highlight the ideational meaning in the sermon through the transitivity analysis. Different from previous researches which were conducted on the transitivity analysis of literary and multi-modal texts, this study sets its focus on the transitivity system of a religious text, revealing how the pastor intentionally conveys and presents his ideology to the audience in a church setting. Results show that the dominant use of four principle processes; relational, material, verbal and mental processes, can help construct ideational meaning in the sermon and make clear the preacher's religious and motivational purpose and the underlying relationship between positive beliefs and possible outcomes.

**Key Words:** ideational meaning, process, sermon, transitivity

#### Introduction

Language can be used as an instrument for social integration. Language use in oral communication can be recognized through speech, lecture, talk, interview, podcast, etc. In delivering an oral discourse, thoughts are uttered in the form of words that are spoken to the audience. Speech is a kind of spoken discourse and expresses information and sways attitudes of its listeners. Sermons are a kind of speech, either in oral or lecture form, addressed by a preacher about biblical, spiritual or ethical topics which usually illuminate on a type of belief, law, or behaviour within a context.

Discourse analysis is the study of written and verbal texts in a social context, observing both language form and language function (McCarthy and Carter, 2001 as cited in Guswita and Suhardi, 2020). Halliday (1985) states that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can be used in discourse analysis.

Halliday (2014) claims that there are three kinds of metafunction in discourse analysis: textual, interpersonal and ideational metafunctions. In textual metafunction, clauses are seen as message and interpretation of experiences. Interpersonal metafunction is concerned with clause as exchange and expresses the correlation between speaker/writer and hearer/reader, in association

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with the situation. Ideational metafunction has to do with clause as representation, emphasizing the language when talking about internal and external experiences of the world (as cited in Kurnia, 2018).

The focus of this research is on ideational meaning. Ideational meaning comprises two constituents; experiential meaning and logical meaning. With reference to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the experiential meaning denotes the linguistic choices that help create meanings and is recognized by the transitivity system, whereas logical meaning states the logical relation between clauses. Halliday (1985) declares that transitivity study in any text is investigating language at the clause level. In transitivity analysis, experiences are indicated by means of six processes, namely, material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential processes.

### **Aim and objectives**

The aim of this research is to investigate how meanings are interpreted in a spoken discourse through the transitivity system; in this case, a sermon by Joel Osteen called *The Power of I Am*. The objectives are to identify the processes used in the sermon, illustrating their linguistic functions and to explore how transitivity system is employed by the speaker to convey his ideology to the audience. This research applies Functional Grammar proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) in which he identifies processes into six types.

### **Literature Review**

Transitivity analysis has been broadly used to understand what speakers/writers are trying to say implicitly in verbal/written texts and to reveal that certain meanings and experiences are presented through language structures. The relation between meaning and choice of processes in a text can be exposed in the light of transitivity analysis.

Joel Osteen is an American televangelist, theologian, speaker, author and [pastor](#) of Lakewood Church which is attended by 5,000 to 43,000 people. As of 2018, several millions of people from over 100 countries have seen Osteen's televised sermons. It is estimated by Lakewood Church that services are watched by 7 million viewers weekly. Osteen has also written several best-selling books including *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to living at Your Full Potential* (2004) and *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day* (2007). (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joel\\_Osteen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joel_Osteen), <https://www.joelosteen.com>)

*The Power of I Am* is such a powerful sermon that it refreshes one's soul and inspires the audience to grow an intimate relationship with God. It is about the creative power of words and places emphasis on the reasons why one should speak affirming words about oneself. It guides the audience how to use positive statements in their lives and provides beautiful messages that keep the listeners on the path of positive philosophy and spiritual development.

Although many researches have been done on transitivity analysis in exploring how language structures yield certain meanings and thoughts in literary and multi-modal texts, there have been few transitivity studies on religious texts. Therefore, a sermon was chosen for the present research, emphasizing on the choice of processes which the pastor used to deliver his gospel.

### Theoretical Background

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the transitivity system interprets experiences into process types. Three components in transitivity system are process, participants and circumstances. In transitivity system, circumstantial elements are almost always optional augmentations of the clause whereas participants are essential in the process. In experiential metafunction, clauses can have participants up to three. This research only explores types of process which can be identified into six types: material, mental relational, behavioral, verbal and existential processes.

**1. Material Clauses.** Material clauses show doing and happening and are concerned with experiences and physical actions. Material clauses may represent not only concrete, bodily events but also abstract doings and happenings. In a material clause, the one doing the deed is the Actor and the participant affected by the process is the Goal. A material process can also involve other participant roles such as Scope, Recipient, Client and Attribute. (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 224)

E.g. I (**Actor**) did (**Pr: Material**) a book called Sand Rivers (**Goal**).

**2. Mental Clauses.** Mental clauses are processes of sensing and are associated with consciousness. Halliday identified four different subtypes of sensing: perceptive, cognitive, desiderative, and emotive. In mental clauses, there is always one participant, Senser who can sense, feel, think, want, or perceive. The other participant is the Phenomenon, the one which is felt, thought, wanted or perceived. (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 245)

E.g. You (**Senser**) recognize (**Pr: Mental**) him (**Phenomenon**)?

**3. Relational Clauses.** Relational clauses are processes of being and having. They characterize and identify participants. Three main types of relation are intensive, possessive and circumstantial; and each type has two distinct modes of being - attributive and identifying (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 263).

The attributive process shows the attribute of an entity whereas the identifying process describes the identity and individuality. The distinction between them is that identifying clauses are reversible but attributive clauses are not. The participant roles are Carrier and Attribute in

relational attributive process and Token and Value in relational identifying process. The following table shows the distinction between two modes.

**Table 1: The principle categories of 'relational' clause**

	(i) Attributive 'a is an attribute of x'	(ii) Identifying 'a is the identity of x'
(1) intensive 'x is a'	Mary is beautiful.	Mary is the frontrunner; The frontrunner is Mary.
(2) possessive 'x has a'	John has a car.	The car is John's; John's the car.
(3) circumstantial 'x is at a'	The party is on a Monday.	Tomorrow is the 9 <sup>th</sup> ; The 9 <sup>th</sup> is tomorrow.

(Source: **Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 265**)

**4. Behavioral Clauses.** Behavioral clauses are processes of physiological and psychological behavior such as looking, listening, sneezing singing, frowning and murmuring. Among six process types, they are the least distinct due to having no clearly defined characteristics of their own; rather they are partly material and partly mental. The participants in behavioral clauses are Behavior and Phenomenon (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 301).

E.g. She (**Behaver**) is yawning (Pr: **Behavioral**).

E.g. She (**Behaver**) sang (**Pr: Behavioral**) a song (**Behavior**).

**5. Verbal Clauses.** Verbal clauses are process of saying. Existing between mental and relational process, they cover symbolic exchange of meaning. The participants are Sayer (the one who speaks), Receiver (the one to whom the saying is directed), Verbiage (the name of the saying or the content of what is said) and Target (the entity which is targeted by the process of saying). (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 302)

E.g. She (**Sayer**) tells (**Pr: Verbal**) me (**Receiver**) a story (**Verbiage**).

E.g. He (**Sayer**) criticizes (**Pr: Verbal**) my teaching ability (**Target**).

**6. Existential Clauses.** Existential clauses signify that something exists or happens and are normally led by the word 'there' and have the verb 'be'. Participant in an existential process is branded as Existent which denotes the entity or event which is being said to exist.

(Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; 309)

E.g. There was (**Pr: Existential**) a burglary (**Existent**) in the house (**Circumstance**).

### **Related Research**

In *Persuasive style and its realization through transitivity analysis: A SFL perspective*, Laya Heidari Darani (2014) examined how language structures and socially constructed meaning are

related in a literary text based on Halliday's transitivity theory, revealing the convincing style of the short story titled *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. It attempts to discover how the ideational meaning is realized through the use of processes. Findings show that the frequency difference between material process and other processes is drastic. Of all the six processes, material process is the most dominant one; highlighting the fact that persuasion was conveyed through acting out what the characters were told to. Conclusions can be drawn from results that performing an action is found to be more effective than expressing feelings and thought process.

Mengyan Zhao and Yi Zhang (2017) conducted a research called *A Transitivity Analysis of American President Donald J. Trump's Inaugural Address* in accordance with transitivity system in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. The distribution and functions of six transitivity process in the inaugural address are explored using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Results pointed out that out of six processes; the speech is highly dominated by material process (68.6%). Relational process comes second at (15.7%), followed by existential processes (6.4%), behavioral processes (5.0%) and mental processes (3.6%). Verbal process is found the least in the speech at (0.7%). The study highlights the fact that through the extensive use of material processes, President Trump depicts an unfavorable portrait of America and describes new movements and plans for America through relational processes.

### **Research Methodology**

The data were collected from the sermon *The power of I Am* by Joel Osteen in harmony with Transitivity system proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) as the theoretical framework. Six types of process were identified using descriptive qualitative method to explore ideational meaning in the sermon and to discover how transitivity system is employed by the speaker to deliver his ideology to the audience through the application of processes. The following table shows sample analysis of process types found in the sermon *The Power of I Am*.

**Table 2: Sample Analysis of Process Types found in the sermon *The Power of I Am***

Sr. No.	Line No.	Clause	Process						
			Ma	Me	Re		Be	Ve	Ex
					Att	Id			
1	26	You <b>may not feel</b> up to par but when you <b>say</b> , "I <b>am</b> healthy," health <b>starts</b> heading your way.	√	√	√			√	
2	31	Don't ever <b>say</b> , "I <b>am</b> so unlucky. I <b>never get</b> any good breaks".	√		√			√	
3	45	When you <b>get up</b> in the morning <b>look</b> in the mirror, instead of complaining you <b>should be saying</b> , "I <b>am</b> fearfully and wonderfully <b>made</b> . I <b>am</b> attractive. I <b>am</b> getting younger".	√ √		√ √		√	√	
4	135	Now every time someone <b>said</b> , "Good morning, Sarah," they <b>were saying</b> , "Good morning, princess".						√ √	
5	248	That's why there <b>are</b> forces constantly trying to make us feel intimidated, inferior, unqualified.				√			√

### Findings and Discussion

The sermon consists of 327 sentences and processes are found in 320 sentences. The frequency and percentage of process types found in the sermon are shown in Table 2.

**Table 3: Process Types found in the sermon *The Power of I Am***

Sr. No.	Process types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Material Process	214	31%
2	Mental Process	70	10%
3	Relational Process	304	44%
4	Behavioral Process	9	1%
5	Verbal Process	83	12%
6	Existential Process	13	2%
	<b>Total</b>	693	100%

As it is clear from Table 3, relational process stands on top with 44% of occurrence. Results point out that the pastor uses relational process to describe the relationship between choice of words and creative power of words, and to impose optimistic thoughts in people's minds. With the

maximum use of relational process, he is able to influence his Christian audience and tell all the people who come to his church to believe that positive declarations will change their lives for the better.

There are many relational attributive processes in the sermon used to describe and classify one's sense of self. Throughout the sermon the preacher can be heard using an excessive number of "I Ams" to change the mind-sets of people into positive affirmations as in "I **am**: average, blessed, broke, clumsy, disciplined, focused, fresh, healthy, old, overweight, prosperous, radiant, strong, slow, talented, unattractive, unlucky, vibrant, worn out, wrinkled, young, etc."

Although the use of relational identifying process is significantly low in comparison with the highest expenditure of relational attributive process, it still helps Joel Osteen preach and inflict his ideology about self-help and positive psychology as described in the following extracts.

*You **are** his prize. (Line 75)*

*To him you **are** the most beautiful woman in the world. (Line 76)*

*My encouragement **is** never say negative things about yourself. (Line 187)*

It can clearly be seen that through the practice of relational processes the pastor is able to give prominence to the relationship between positive beliefs and possible outcomes and thus makes the thought process logically accepted by the listeners and gives them confidence to overcome any trials and tribulations and reconstruct a new sense of self.

Material process is the second most dominant process, amounting to 31%. It shows that the content of the sermon expresses tangible actions that the pastor would like his audience to do and not to do. Some examples are presented below.

*Don't ever say, "I am so unlucky. I **never get** any good breaks". (Line 31)*

*Do us all a favour; **stop** inviting that. (Line 44)*

*Don't give intimidation an invitation. (Line 252)*

All through his sermon, Joel Osteen can be heard, implanting his teaching and positive belief system into the audience's mind with the help of action verbs by stating the fact that what one thinks or says is what one will always get. The following samples exemplify physical activities.

*The "I Ams" that are coming out of your mouth **will bring** either success or failure. (Line 5)*

*You self-image **begins** to improve and you'll **start** carrying yourself like you're someone special. (Line 83)*

*As long as you're saying, "I am a 'C' student," you're **not going to make A's**. (Line 220)*

The repetition of concrete actions makes his sermon more convincing and powerful, gives the church-goers a sense of potentiality and power, and expresses what the preacher is trying to hand over to the audience.

Verbal process takes up the third place with 12%. Joel Osteen when referring to the scriptures, used verbal process to reinforce his view that being positive will make everything turn out well in

life. He makes use of direct quotation to give a more reliable sermon by citing words from the Bible and team up with straight-from-God statements as shown below.

*God **said** in Ephesians, "You are my masterpiece". (Line 96)*

*The scripture **says**, "Let the weak say, 'I am strong'." (Line 202)*

*See, it **says** in Romans 4:18 to, "Call the things that are not as if they already were". (Line 209)*

Mental process comes fourth at 10%. The use of mental process may be linked with the speaker's consciousness of optimism, enabling the listeners to be mindful of the fact that what is going on in their mind will come out as results in their real lives. Since the sermon is about motivation, self-help and spiritual growth, it can be said that with the support of mental process, Joel Osteen succeeds in bringing a fresh perspective to his teachings as in the following instances.

*I've **learned** you've got to change on the inside before you'll **see** change on the outside. (Line 169)*

*I **hate** to say it, but I **think** it found him. (Line 197)*

***Notice** just the opposite. (Line 203)*

The low use of existential process with the occurrence of 2% agrees with the findings of previous researches because it indicates the mere existence of something. Presented below are some of existential processes found in the sermon.

*There **will never be** another you. (Line 105)*

*There **is** a treasure on the inside. (Line 245)*

*There **were** some of the ten spies. (Line 309)*

As the above examples point out, Joel Osteen seems to favour expressing physical actions and relationship between two concepts or things rather than indicating mere existence. It can be concluded that he tends to use existential process as low as possible to draw his audience's attention by avoiding monotony in his sermon.

Out of all the process types, Behavioral process has the lowest frequency, representing only 1%. This type of process mainly defines physiological and psychological actions and that may not be the focus of the sermon. The minimum quantity of behaviors in the sermon shows that the research is in agreement with the theory in which Halliday and Matthiessen (2014; 301) state that they are the least distinct among the six process types due to having no clearly defined characteristics of their own. The following examples are taken out to explain behaviors in the sermon.

***Listen**, ladies. (Line 72)*

***Meditate** on them. (Line 322)*

*If you will invite the right things into your life, the Creator of the universe **will breathe** in your direction. (Line 326)*



As ideologies and agendas are instilled in his sermon, it is evident that the pastor's choice of processes in his preaching reflects and represents his beliefs and philosophies on the creative words with reference to stories in the scripture. The study of transitivity in the selected sermon through process types makes known the speaker's religious and motivational purpose and the underlying correlation between ideology and power of language.

### **Conclusion**

This study attempts to explore ideational meaning used by Joel Osteen in his sermon "The Power of I Am", throwing a light on how the relationship between language and ideology is signified through processes based on the transitivity system by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Results show that the sermon is dominated by relational process with the occurrence of (44%), followed by material process (31%). Verbal and mental processes occur with similar rates of recurrence at (12%) and (10%) respectively. Existential and behavioral processes are found the least in the sermon, presenting (2%) and (1%) individually. Thus, it can be concluded that with the greater extent of various processes, the sermon follows a persuasive style, motivating and convincing the audience that words can curse or bless their future. Moreover, it makes clear the use of process types as an aspect of representing linguistic functions and experiences of the speaker/writer to listener/reader in any form of discourse. The choice of processes shows stronger relationship between linguistic functions and social contexts. The understanding of transitivity processes is perceived to be a cause for successful communication and thought presentation when producing a discourse. It can be decided that Joel Osteen used key transitivity processes such as relational and material processes to unveil belief, power and persuasiveness in his sermon. By doing so he was capable of motivating his audience and change their way of thinking on the subject of self-help, Christianity and positive psychology.

The present research is limited to process types in transitivity system without taking into account the other two components; participant and circumstance. Future researchers are suggested to analyse all three transitivity components to uncover a complete presentation of ideational meaning in literature or any social settings. This research can be used as a reference in teaching Discourse Analysis to the students. It can possibly help teachers and learners of English become more aware of process types in transitivity system and use them appropriately to represent their experiences and ideologies both in speaking and writing. Considering the results of this research, it is advisable that alternative learning sources should be used when teaching language functions and choices.

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