



International Journal of Systemic Functional Linguistics

Journal Homepage: <https://pusatpublikasi.com/index.php/ijlsfl>

Literature Review Functional Linguistic Approach: Analysis of Transitivity, Lexical Metaphors, and Textual Meaning in Multimodal Discourse

Yohanes Tresno Kurnianto

Bali Business School

Email: yohanes@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This literature review examines how Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is applied to analyze meaning-making in multimodal discourse, focusing on transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning. Using a qualitative analytical-critical approach, the study reviews scholarly works from journals, books, theses, and conference papers to identify patterns in SFL-based analyses across cultural, political, educational, and public health contexts. The findings show that material processes dominate transitivity analyses, reflecting action-oriented discourse, while mental and relational processes express thought, perception, and identity. Lexical metaphors function as key semiotic strategies that clarify abstract ideas, evoke emotional responses, and enhance persuasion, often reinforced through visual elements. Textual meaning is shaped by theme-rheme structures that support coherence and emphasis. The review also highlights the role of gestures, facial expressions, layout, color, and camera framing as essential non-verbal modes that interact with language to create richer meanings. Overall, SFL provides strong analytical tools for understanding how multimodal texts shape interpretation and audience perception.

ARTICLE INFO

How To Cite:

Kurnianto, Yohanes. (2025).
Literature Review Functional
Linguistic Approach: Analysis of
Transitivity, Lexical Metaphors,
and Textual Meaning in
Multimodal Discourse.
*International Journal of Systemic
Functional Linguistics*. 7(2). 47-54

Article History:

Received dd mm yyyy
Revised dd mm yyyy
Accepted dd mm yyyy

*Keywords: Multimodal discourse;
transitivity; lexical metaphor;
textual meaning; material
processes;*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of meaning-making in language has increasingly emphasized the need to analyze discourse not only at the level of structural grammar but also through its functional relationship with context. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), pioneered by Halliday,

provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how linguistic choices reflect and construct social reality. Within this paradigm, grammar is viewed as a network of meaning potentials, enabling analysts to explore how texts represent experience, organize information, and negotiate interpersonal relationships. As

contemporary communication grows more complex often involving visual, verbal, and spatial modes SFL offers critical analytical tools for examining multimodal discourse.

A substantial body of research within the SFL tradition has explored various metafunctions and their contributions to discourse. The three metafunctions of SFL representational, interactional, and compositional are essential for analyzing meaning in multimodal contexts, such as in political imagery (Hadidy, 2013). MDA enables a comprehensive examination of how different semiotic resources contribute to meaning across various media, including both print and digital formats (Knox, 2012).

The transitivity system serves as a key component of the ideational metafunction, explaining how processes, participants, and circumstances encode human experience. Meanwhile, lexical metaphor extends the interpretive range of language, allowing texts to convey abstraction, evaluation, and conceptual reclassification. Lexical metaphor functions as an important tool in shaping public perception, especially in political discourse, where such metaphors are used to legitimize agendas (Guṭu, 2025).

In addition, textual meaning plays a crucial role in shaping the coherence and flow of discourse by organizing information into meaningful patterns. These three dimensions transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning operate synergistically to build a text's overall meaning. Transitivity extends beyond verbal elements to include visual components, influencing the construction of meaning in texts such as editorials (Souza & Santos, 2016). In the era of digital communication, discourse is increasingly multimodal, requiring linguistic analysis to move beyond traditional verbal texts. Multimodal discourse analysis, when integrated with SFL principles, allows researchers to examine how images, layout, typography, color, and other modes interact with linguistic resources to convey meaning. Existing studies highlight the importance of analyzing multimodal texts holistically, yet there remains a need for systematic synthesis of how SFL-based tools are applied in such contexts.

This literature review aims to map and critically examine scholarly work employing SFL approaches particularly transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning within multimodal discourse. By identifying theoretical patterns, methodological tendencies, and analytical insights across existing studies, this review seeks to demonstrate how the SFL framework enriches our understanding of meaning-making in contemporary communication. Ultimately, this study contributes to strengthening the interdisciplinary dialogue between functional linguistics and multimodal discourse analysis, offering a consolidated foundation for future research in the field.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative literature review with an analytical-critical approach grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). A well-conducted literature review contributes to the quality of research outcomes by clarifying the research objectives and methodology (Ridwan et al., n.d.). Researchers are expected to engage critically with the literature, synthesizing information rather than merely collecting it (Karuru, 2013). It systematically identifies, examines, and synthesizes previous research on transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning in multimodal discourse.

The data consist of secondary scholarly sources including journal articles, conference papers, books, theses, and reputable online publications selected based on relevance and academic credibility. Data collection was conducted through keyword searches in major academic databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate), followed by screening using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The analysis employed thematic synthesis guided by SFL principles, focusing on how transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning are conceptualized and applied in multimodal studies. Validity was strengthened through source triangulation and critical evaluation of methodological rigor, while transparency in the review process ensured reliability. Ethical standards were maintained by acknowledging all

sources and relying solely on publicly available literature without involving human participants.

III.RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Representing Spiritual and Cultural Experience through Transitivity and Metaphor

Based on the result discussion from article (Rahim et.al., 2024), The transitivity analysis of the doangang data shows that the linguistic structures used in these texts contain the three main process types in Systemic Functional Linguistics, namely relational, mental, and material processes. These processes function not only grammatically but also represent the internal experiences, cultural identity, and spiritual relations of the Makassar community. The relational process appears in clauses such as “I nakke minne Ana’ I lalang mate’ne” (“I am a happy child”), where the speaker constructs self-identity by asserting attributes attached to themselves.

This indicates that doangang serves not only as a medium of prayer but also as a means of shaping self-image and expressing spiritual reflection. Meanwhile, the mental process found in the clause “Mammuji Mangngamaseang aseng ri nakke” (“Everyone loves and cares for me”) reflects the speaker’s affective experience related to social relationships and acceptance from their surroundings. This mental process signifies that doangang represents harmonious interpersonal relations as part of spiritual experience. The material process appears in the clause “Kukangkangmi anne linoa” (“I have grasped this world”), which shows a physical action, although metaphorical in nature. The act of “grasping the world” is not interpreted literally but symbolizes inner strength, self-control, and readiness to face life. Thus, the transitivity system in doangang demonstrates an integration of physical, spiritual, and cosmological experiences that reflect the cultural practices of the Makassar people.

In terms of lexical metaphor, doangang exhibits highly symbolic and poetic language. The expression “Dunia ini sudah kugenggam” (“I have grasped this world”) stands as a strong metaphor that depicts inner empowerment and spiritual awareness upon waking. This metaphor links physical and psychological aspects while also

containing theological dimensions. Similarly, the metaphor “Luruskanlah jalan hidupku” (“Straighten my life’s path”) conveys a request for moral and spiritual guidance. This phrase is an orientational metaphor that associates straightness with goodness, symbolizing the relationship between humans and God. Furthermore, the expression “Tanah yang aku injak” (“The land I step on”) shows that “land” is not just a physical space but also symbolizes a foreign land, new hope, and the cultural-spiritual transitions experienced by the speaker. Collectively, these lexical metaphors not only enrich the aesthetic quality of doangang but also build deeper layers of meaning that connect the body, nature, and spirituality into a unified discourse.

The textual meaning in doangang is realized through a systematic organization of theme and rheme. The use of unmarked topical themes in clauses such as “I nakke...,” “Kukangkangmi...,” and “Kupasapu...” indicates that sentences place the subject at the beginning to ease comprehension and create clarity of meaning. This structure aligns with the nature of prayers that require a simple and direct flow. Conversely, marked topical themes such as in the clause “I kau Butta kuonjo” are used to provide emotional emphasis and respect through the presence of an interjection. Overall, textual cohesion is built through the repetition of pronouns (ku/aku), the parallelism of clause structures, and the progression of information from statements of experience to supplication and spiritual affirmation. This theme–rheme structure produces a narrative rhythm characteristic of prayers and mantras, strengthening the ritualistic function of doangang.

Furthermore, although doangang is presented as a verbal text, the analysis reveals that it contains multimodal dimensions essential to its meaning. When recited, doangang is typically accompanied by solemn facial expressions, specific intonation, bodily gestures, and ritual contexts that frame its performance. The rhythm of chanting and the spiritual atmosphere in which doangang is uttered contribute to its meaning, making it inseparable from its performative context. Thus, doangang is a form of multimodal discourse that integrates language, emotion,

bodily movement, and cultural ritual into a coherent whole.

Overall, the findings show that the transitivity processes in doangang represent the speaker's spiritual, social, and ritual experiences. The lexical metaphors enrich the text with deep cultural symbolism, while the textual meaning is constructed through rhythmic and coherent theme–rheme organization. Within the framework of multimodal discourse, doangang emerges as a cultural performance that unites language, voice, gesture, and spiritual values embedded within Makassar society. These findings affirm that doangang is not merely an oral literary text but a complex cultural phenomenon rich in meaning.

4.2 A Systemic Functional Analysis of Experiential, Interpersonal, and Textual Meanings in COVID-19 Advertisements

Based on the article from (Yoviana et.al., n.d.) the result is the transitivity analysis of COVID-19 advertisement discourse demonstrates that the clause structures consistently represent human experience through various types of processes, participants, and circumstances as formulated within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. Of the 63 verbal clauses analyzed, material processes dominate with 42 clauses or 66.7%, followed by mental processes with 12 clauses (19%), relational processes with 8 clauses (12.7%), and one existential clause. Meanwhile, verbal and behavioral processes are nearly absent.

The dominance of material processes such as spreading, infecting, washing, preventing, and disposing indicates that COVID-19 advertisements are linguistically designed to emphasize preventive actions that the public must undertake. Statements such as “The virus can spread...” and “We can prevent the spread of the virus...” reflect linguistic strategies used to highlight the urgency of action, raise awareness of risks, and guide viewers toward following health protocols. Although less frequent, mental processes play a crucial role in encouraging viewers not only to know but also to understand and internalize health messages cognitively. Relational processes, as seen in statements such as “COVID-19 is a virus that spreads quickly,” function to provide factual information about the virus's characteristics, thereby strengthening the

legitimacy of the message conveyed. The use of implicit actors such as we and you serves to create communicative proximity and position viewers as responsible agents. Conversely, the virus is represented as an actor or goal that poses a threat, producing a linguistic representation of danger that must be collectively recognized.

At the level of lexical metaphor, the discourse of COVID-19 advertisements displays the use of both visual and verbal metaphors that reinforce meaning construction and public health messages. The representation of the virus as “green particles,” visible when someone coughs, handles money, or touches a railing, serves as a visual metaphor illustrating how abstract concepts such as viruses are materialized into concrete and recognizable forms. This metaphor enables viewers to visualize an invisible threat, thereby enhancing intuitive understanding of the transmission process. Viral transmission is also depicted through the metaphor of a “chain,” as in the phrase “The virus can spread in a chain,” which presents transmission as a sequence of interconnected events. This metaphor underscores the importance of breaking the chain of transmission as a key step in pandemic control. Additionally, preventive instructions such as covering the mouth, washing hands, and disposing of tissues are framed as forms of “self-defense,” portraying the public as active agents confronting a health threat. These metaphors not only clarify abstract concepts but also enhance the persuasive force of the advertisements through the combined symbolic meanings of verbal and visual elements. Textual meaning in the COVID-19 advertisements is constructed through systematic theme–rheme patterns.

Most clauses employ unmarked topical themes by placing the subject in the initial position, as seen in statements such as “The virus can spread...” or “We can prevent...”. This pattern creates a linear and easily comprehensible flow of information, aligning with the characteristics of instructional texts that require clarity and precision. Parallel structures such as “The virus can...” and “We must...” strengthen cohesion and help viewers recall important messages. Furthermore, the use of circumstances such as without us realizing, in a chain, and with soap clarifies situational contexts related to time,

manner, and reason, thereby reinforcing the logical structure of the message. In this way, theme–rheme structures and circumstances work together to produce discourse that is coherent, logical, and highly persuasive.

From a multimodal perspective, COVID-19 advertisements do not rely solely on verbal language but also utilize visual elements, gestures, color, camera framing, and nonverbal interaction as integral components of meaning-making. Most visuals use the offer type, in which characters do not make direct eye contact with viewers, thereby presenting information objectively. The dominance of medium shots enables the depiction of everyday actions clearly while fostering social proximity with the audience. The use of frontal angle and eye-level shots creates a natural and realistic impression, allowing viewers to feel as though they are witnessing real-life events. The multimodal strength becomes evident when material processes in verbal text are reinforced by visuals that depict preventive actions concretely, while viral transmission is visualized as recognizable green flows. These elements collectively produce a persuasive and comprehensive discourse.

Overall, this discussion shows that COVID-19 advertisement discourse, from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, represents preventive actions as dominant processes through transitivity analysis, enriches meaning construction through lexical metaphors, builds logical messages through theme–rheme patterns, and enhances persuasive power through multimodal integration. This underscores that COVID-19 advertisements are not merely informational texts but multimodal discourses strategically designed to shape public awareness and behavior in responding to the pandemic.

4.3 Meaning Construction Through Transitivity, Metaphor, and Theme–Rheme in Jokowi’s Speech

The analysis literature review from (Assyuya & Anwar, 2021) the transitivity analysis of President Jokowi’s speech shows that the discourse contains 57 transitivity processes, dominated by material processes at 54 percent, followed by mental processes at 19 percent, relational processes at 11 percent, and smaller

proportions of behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. The dominance of material processes indicates that the speech focuses on concrete actions taken by the government and the public in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, such as handling, controlling, and monitoring the situation. This choice of processes underscores the urgency of taking action, portrays the government’s responsiveness, and directs the public to participate actively. Meanwhile, mental processes which include activities such as understanding, realizing, and paying attention function to build collective awareness, demonstrate the government’s empathy toward public conditions, and encourage society to internalize health messages. Relational processes are used to explain facts and describe the pandemic situation objectively, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of government policies and the information conveyed. Additionally, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes enrich the overall meaning of the speech by representing psychological actions, delivering appeals, and asserting the existence of the virus and its consequences.

From the perspective of lexical metaphor, President Jokowi’s speech also employs several conceptual metaphors that reinforce its persuasive intent. The pandemic is constructed as a “threat” or a “common enemy” that must be addressed and fought, thereby promoting national solidarity and heightening the sense of urgency. Economic stability is described through structural metaphors such as a “foundation” or “pillar” that must be protected, illustrating that the impacts of the pandemic extend beyond health issues to the sustainability of the economic system. The government is portrayed as a “guide” and “protector” through the use of material processes such as providing, ensuring, and taking specific measures. These metaphors reinforce the image of the state as an authoritative entity that leads and safeguards the public during the crisis.

Textual meaning in the speech is constructed through systematic theme–rheme patterns. Most clauses employ unmarked themes by placing the subject at the beginning such as the government, we, or the virus allowing messages to be communicated clearly, directly, and logically. The use of the theme “we” becomes an

effective rhetorical strategy to build a sense of togetherness, reduce the distance between the government and the people, and encourage public involvement in the collective effort to confront the pandemic. Cohesion is further strengthened through parallel structures such as “We must...”, “The government will...”, and “I request...”, which create a persuasive rhythm and aid listeners in remembering key points. Moreover, the dominance of locative circumstances shows that the speech attempts to describe the pandemic in concrete spatial contexts, such as affected regions, hospitals, and areas of government response, thereby clarifying the severity and geographical spread of the crisis.

From a multimodal perspective, if delivered through audiovisual media, the meaning of the speech is further reinforced by nonverbal elements such as serious intonation, firm facial expressions, hand gestures, institutional settings like the State Palace, and national symbols such as the flag and the Garuda emblem. These multimodal elements enhance the authoritative tone, increase the credibility of the message, and intensify its persuasive effect. Thus, President Jokowi’s speech is not merely a verbal text but a multimodal communicative act strategically designed to build public awareness, strengthen solidarity, and guide societal responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, this analysis demonstrates that the choice of linguistic processes, the use of metaphor, and the textual organization work together cohesively to deliver a strong and effective national message.

4.4 Transitivity Patterns, Metaphoric Realizations, and Theme–Rheme Organization

The analysis literature review from (Dwipayana et.al., 2023) the transitivity analysis in the discourse reveals that the system of transitivity within the SFL framework represents human experience or ideational meaning through three main components: processes, participants, and circumstances. The general analysis of the discourse indicates a strong dominance of material processes, which portray concrete actions or physical activities. Such processes are commonly found in procedural texts, instructional speeches, public campaign discourse, and narrative texts. The prominence of material

processes suggests that the discourse emphasizes direct action, initiative, situational change, and movement from one condition to another. Alongside material processes, mental and relational processes also appear significantly. Mental processes, which include sensing, understanding, knowing, and believing, indicate that the discourse encourages not only action but also internalization of meaning. Through these processes, writers or speakers aim for audiences to comprehend and emotionally engage with the message. Relational processes are used to define entities, express attributes or identities, and establish logical relationships, making them common in academic, instructional, and argumentative discourse. Meanwhile, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes appear in smaller proportions. Verbal processes express messages or quotations, behavioral processes represent semi-physical psychological actions, and existential processes denote the existence of certain phenomena. Although limited, these processes enrich the representational structure of the discourse.

The analysis of lexical metaphors demonstrates their crucial role in shaping interpersonal and descriptive meanings. From the perspective of SFL and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson), multimodal discourse often employs metaphors to visualize abstract concepts, reinforce messages through symbolic representation, and evoke emotional resonance. Orientational metaphors frequently appear, such as up = good or down = bad, and dark = danger or light = knowledge. Structural metaphors also emerge, portraying problems as “burdens,” pandemics as “enemies,” or education as a “path.” Ontological metaphors, which turn abstract concepts into seemingly concrete objects or actors, are also evident, such as “growing hope” or “a crisis that strikes.” In multimodal discourse, these lexical metaphors are typically strengthened by visual elements, making their meanings clearer, more concrete, and more persuasive.

The textual meaning of the discourse is constructed through systematic theme–rheme organization. Most clauses begin with unmarked themes, typically a subject or actor, creating a linear flow of information, message clarity, and ease of comprehension. Marked themes are used

strategically to emphasize important points, foreground specific contexts, or build a sense of urgency. These thematic choices highlight key information, frame the context of actions, and capture the reader's attention. Cohesion across the discourse is strengthened through repetition, syntactic parallelism, and the recurrence of key phrases, all of which enhance persuasiveness and help audiences retain essential messages.

The multimodal discourse analysis shows that meaning is constructed through the integration of verbal, visual, gestural, spatial, color, typographic, and layout elements. Visuals function to reinforce verbal meaning by providing concrete representations of metaphors or abstract concepts. Emotional appeal and credibility are built through facial expressions, gestures, and symbolic colors such as red, blue, and green. Interaction is shaped through features like gaze, camera distance, angle, and framing, which illustrate power relations, social proximity, and communicative intent. Altogether, these multimodal resources interact to create a more persuasive, informative, and accessible discourse.

In conclusion, based on the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the discourse demonstrates that the transitivity system effectively represents actions, perceptions, and conditions with a strong inclination toward material processes. Lexical metaphors enrich interpersonal and conceptual meanings by concretizing abstract ideas. Textual meaning is organized through consistent theme–rheme patterns that promote coherence and argumentative rhythm. Finally, multimodal integration enhances the persuasiveness and clarity of the discourse, particularly through supportive visual elements.

IV.CONCLUSION

This literature review shows that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is an effective framework for analyzing meaning-making in multimodal discourse. Studies on transitivity, lexical metaphor, and textual meaning demonstrate how language and other semiotic resources work together to construct experiential, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Material processes dominate transitivity patterns, emphasizing concrete actions in various genres,

while mental and relational processes shape identity, emotion, and understanding.

Lexical metaphors play a key role in expressing abstract ideas and ideological messages, strengthened further by multimodal elements such as visuals and gestures. Textual meaning is built through theme–rheme organization and cohesive devices, ensuring clarity and coherence. Overall, meaning in modern communication is multimodal, integrating linguistic and visual resources to influence audience perception.

The review concludes that SFL provides strong analytical tools for understanding how verbal and non-verbal elements create meaning. It also encourages future research integrating linguistic and semiotic approaches to better capture the complexity of meaning-making in contemporary discourse.

REFERENCES

- Assyruza, M. F., & Anwar, M. (2021). Kajian Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik: Analisis Hubungan Sistem Transitivity dan Konteks Situasi dalam Pidato Presiden Jokowi Soal Penanganan Virus Corona. *Jurnal CULTURE (Culture, Language, and Literature Review)*, 8(1).
- de Souza, M. M., & da Silva Santos, F. R. (2016). A transitividade em palavras e imagens no gênero editorial. 16(1), 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.35572/RLE.V16I1.640>
- Dwipayana, I. kadek A., Bahri, S., Yoniatini, D. M., & Suandi, I. N. (2023). Analisis Wacana Dalam Pidato Gibran Saat Deklarasi Capres-Cawapres 2024: Kajian Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional Dan Relevansinya Dalam Pembelajaran Analisis Teks . *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* , 13(4).
- Guțu, I. (2025). Analiza multimodală a discursului în predarea limbilor specializate: instrumente pentru dezvoltarea manipulării politice. *Studii Și Cercetări de Onomastică Și Lexicologie*, 17(1–2), 301–311. <https://doi.org/10.52846/scol.2024.1-2.14>
- Hadidy, Y. (2013). Multi modal discourse analysis of time and Newsweek extracts from systemic functional linguistics and

- semiotics perspectives Yaser Hadidy.
1(1).
- Karuru, P. (2013). Pentingnya Kajian Pustaka Dalam Penelitian. 2(1), 1–9.
- Knox, J. S. (2012). Multimodality and Systemic Functional Analysis. 801–811.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.WBEAL0836>
- Rahim, A., Nursalam, & Nurhikmah. (2024). Refresentasimaknadalamdoangangsebag aikajian Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik. Jurnal Lingue : Bahasa,Budayadansastra, 6(2).
- Ridwan, M., AM, S., Ulum, B., & Muhammad, F. (n.d.). Pentingnya Penerapan Literature Review Pada Penelitian Ilmiah.
<https://doi.org/10.36339/jmas.v2i1.427>
- Yoviana, D. R., Gunawan, W., & Wirza, Y. (n.d.). Analisis Penggunaan Bahasa dalam Iklan TV Terkait Pemberitaan Covid 19 Sebuah Studi Multimodal . Edusentris, Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran .