IDEATIONAL MEANING IN IELTS SAMPLE ESSAY INTRODUCTIONS IN LIGHT OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

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Abstract - It is shown that IELTS, which is recognized and accepted by more than 10,000 organizations in the world, has proved its significant role in education and occupation nowadays. In this article, M.A.K Halliday (2004)'s Systemic Functional Linguistics theory of 'Clause as Representation' is applied to investigate how ideational meanings are expressed in IELTS sample essays. By focusing on the transitivity system of the structure of the clauses, particularly the study of process types and the logico-semantic relation, this paper sheds light on the ideational meaning in the introductions of IELTS sample essays. The findings of this article are expected to enable IELTS candidates to take into account the relationship between the transitivity choice of processes, logico-semantic relation and the salient features of high-quality IELTS academic writing introductions to produce their own appropriate introductions, which, in turn, increase their scores in the test.

Key words - ideational meaning; transitivity; process; logico-semantic relation; clause complex

1. Rationale

Nowadays, achieving an international English certificate indicating one's English proficiency level is considered to be one of the most essential requirements in applying for a good job or tertiary education. As a result, the number of candidates all over the world taking part in the international English language tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC, has been increasing more and more. Among these tests, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), involving the assessment of four language skills, namely listening, reading, writing and speaking, has been selected as the preferred test to assess the ability to use language correctly and appropriately in different countries. Getting a high score in this international exam is the key to enable candidates to open the door to their future career.

Among the four language skills of English assessed by IELTS, academic writing occupies a crucial part whether in school or workplace. How to enhance IELTS writing outcomes, therefore, has been a matter of great concern for language researchers and educators in different countries where English is taught as a foreign language or second language. There has been a great amount of research carried out to investigate the IELTS writing tasks. For instance, Bagheri [1] investigates EFL graduate students' IELTS writing problems and students' and teachers' beliefs and suggestions regarding writing skill improvement, while Panahi [6] focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of Iranian IELTS candidates in Academic Writing Task 2. However, the ideational meaning of IELTS sample essays has not been investigated from the perspective of clause as a message. Such research would provide the test-takers with an in-depth description of the linguistic features of IELTS essays in terms of process as well as logico-semantic relation and their connection with the band score. In this paper, the main focus is on the

IELTS sample essay introductions with a view to giving a brief analysis of ideational meaning in the light of functional grammar.

The theoretical framework used to analyse and explain how ideational meanings are expressed in clause structures in IELTS essays' introductions is the Systemic Functional Theory developed by Halliday [4], Halliday & Matthiessen [5]. Halliday [4, p.41] states that "The aim of Systemic Functional Grammar has been to construct a grammar for the purpose of text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written, in modern English". In fact, Halliday's grammar has been acknowledged as "the most widely employed methodology for analyzing texts" Finch [3, p.191]. The ideational metafunction, which is related to 'clause as representation', construes the external and internal experiences of the world. The ideational meanings are further classified into the experiential and logical meanings. The experiential subfunction encodes the experiences while the logical one focuses on the relationships between ideas. The experiential function allows users of language to present the 'content' meaning of 'who did what to whom' through the system of transitivity or process types associated with different participant roles in different configurations. The study investigates the introductions of IELTS sample essays with a focus on experiential meaning in terms of six processes: material processes, mental processes, relational processes, verbal processes, behavioural processes, existential processes, together with logico-semantic relation, thereby making significant methodological and practical contributions to achieving success in IELTS writing essays from the beginning.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The System of Transitivity

The concept of Transitivity, in Halliday's terms, is a central component in interpreting the experiential meaning of the clause in a linguistic text through the study of process types; that is, what kind of event or state is being described (realized by types of verbs) and the roles of participants; the entities involved in the process, such as Actor and Goal; Senser and Phenomenon; Carrier and Attribute (which are part of the nominal group); and the circumstances in which participants and processes are involved (realized by the adverbial and prepositional phrases). As Halliday and Matthiessen [5, p.170] mention, "the transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of process types". Each process type provides its own model or schema for interpreting a particular domain of experience as a figure of a particular kind.

Types of process

Within Systemic Functional Theory, a number of models of process types have also been postulated. However, it can be said that the most comprehensive and perceptive theory for uncovering experience, which most of the descriptive works of English and other languages have drawn upon, is proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen. Halliday [4] and Halliday & Matthiessen [5] states three major process types: that is, MATERIAL, MENTAL and RELATIONAL in the English transitivity system. Apart from the three mentioned, Halliday recognises three other intermediate process types which are located at the boundaries between these process types. These categories, according to him, are not clearly set apart, but, nevertheless, are recognisable in the grammar as intermediate between the different pairs - sharing some features of each, and thus acquiring a character of their own: BEHAVIOURAL process, VERBAL process, and EXISTENTIAL process.

Material process

Material process typically construes 'doings' or 'happening' in the physical universe; that is, concrete and tangible actions in the real world.

Material   Pr: material; + Actor; (+Goal) (+Range) (+Beneficiary)

Mental process

Different from describing actions as the material process does, the mental process represents the meanings of thinking or feeling.

Halliday [4, p.118] divides mental process verbs into three classes: cognition (verbs of thinking, knowing, understanding), affection (verbs of liking, fearing) and perception (verbs of seeing, hearing). A mental process should have two participants involved: the Senser (the one who feels, thinks, perceives), and the Phenomenon (what is felt, thought, perceived).

Mental   Pr: mental; + Senser; + Phenomenon

Relational process

Relational process is a process of being: that is, something is being said to 'be' something else rather than as 'doing' or 'sensing'. There are two different types of relational process: the attributive relational process with the two participants, namely the Carrier and the Attribute, and the identifying relational one consisting of two nominal phrases as participants, namely Token and Value. The identifying one is reversible while the attributive one is not reversible.

a. Identifying: Pr: identifying: +Token; +Value

b. Attributive: Pr: attributive: +Carrier; +Attribute

Behavioural process

Halliday [4] describes a behavioural process as a "half-way house" between material and mental processes or a process of 'physiological and psychological behaviour' Halliday & Matthiessen, [5, p.248]. Being partially like the material process and partially like the mental process, the behavioural process has to be experienced by a conscious being.

Behavioural Pr: behavioural;+ Behaver; (+Behaviour) (Phenonmenon)

Verbal process

Verbal process accounts for the process of 'saying'. There are four participant roles of verbal processes; namely, a Sayer (the one who is responsible for the verbalization), a Receiver (the one to whom the verbalization is addressed), a Verbiage which corresponds to what is said; content or name of saying, and a Target, at which the Verbal process may be directed.

Verbal   Pr:verbal; +Sayer; (+Receiver) (+Verbiage)

Existential Process

Existential process represents something that exists or happens. Eggins [2, p.214] states that "there when used in existential processes, has no representational meaning: it does not refer to a location". Existential processes are typically recognized by the verb 'be' or other verbs to express the existence or happening such as 'exist, remain, arise or occur'. The function of existential processes is to construe being as simple existence, therefore, there is only one obligatory participant known as Existent. An Existent can be an entity, event or action.

Existential   Pr: existential; +Existent

2.2. Unit of Analysis

In systemic functional linguistics, the clause, the highest unit of grammatical analysis has received a special status. English clause can be conceptualized along the dimensions of stratification, rank, and metafunction. According to Thompson [8], a clause is any stretch of language centred on a verbal group.

In Halliday's theory of functional grammar, a sentence can be interpreted as a clause complex: a Head clause together with other clauses that modify it. In the article, a clause complex is a combination of two or more clauses into a larger unit, with their interdependence normally shown by explicit signals such as conjunctions while clause simplex consists of single clause.

2.3. Logico-Semantic Relation

In analyzing the logical structure of the clause, there are two systems that need to be taken into consideration: one of taxis (how two or more adjacent clauses are liked to each other through dependency and interdependency relations) and logico-semantics (the types of meanings that allow adjacent clauses to project or expand on each other).

2.3.1. Taxis System

Taxis system is concerned with interdependency relation between clauses linked into a clause complex. There are two options within the system of taxis: parataxis (where clauses are equally and independently related) and hypotaxis (where one clause is dependent on or dominates another).

Parataxis is the relation between elements of equal status. In other words, the elements are independent. For paratactic structures, a numerical notation (1, 2, 3…) will be used for illustration.

Hypotaxis is the relation between a dependent element and its dominant, the element on which it is dependent.

Hypotaxis will be represented by the Greek letter notation and a single slash in which an alpha (α) is used for dominant clauses and a beta (β) or (γ…) is used for dependent clauses.

2.3.2. Logico-Semantic System

Logico-semantic system refers to the specific type of meaning relationships between clauses. There are two basic types: projection (where one clause is reported or quoted by another clause) and expansion (where one clause develops or extends on the meanings of another).

As far as the projection is concerned, there are two options: locution (where what is projected is speech) and idea (where what is projected is thoughts)

In terms of expansion, there are three main choices: elaboration (by restating in other words, specifying in greater detail, commenting, or giving illustration), extension (by adding new information, giving an exception to it, or providing alternative), enhancement (by embellishing it with some circumstantial features of time, place, cause, or condition).

Expansion:

- elaboration   = (equal)
- extension   + (is added to)
- enhancement   x (is multiplied by)

These symbols combine with those for parataxis and hypotaxis:

$$=2 \quad = ß \quad +2 \quad + ß \quad x\,2 \quad x\,ß \quad "2 \quad "ß \quad '2 \quad 'ß$$
Halliday [4, p. 218]

2.4. IELTS Academic Writing Task 2

The Writing Task 2 of the IELTS Academic Test requires candidates to write an essay to express a view and produce an argument clearly and persuasively in English. The topics in task 2 are of common interest relating to environment, technology, education, media, health, public transport, globalization or traditional culture suitable for and easily understood by candidates. The way to deal with IELTS Writing Task 2 is similar to an academic-style essay on a common topic.

An academic essay has three parts: the introduction, the body and the conclusion. The most common diagram of an introductory paragraph is the 'funnel'. Spencer [7, p.78] illustrates this 'funnel' in the following diagram.

Hook
General statement
Thesis statement
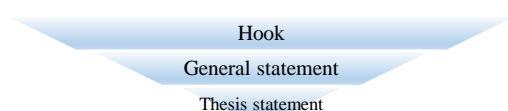
The introduction introduces the topic of the essay, explains the academic problem, and outlines how the writer intends to handle it. It is a general rule that an introductory paragraph should contain the thesis statement, which is generally located at the end of the introduction. In the thesis statement, the writer tells the reader what to expect in the essay.

3. Research Methods

The aim of the article is to investigate the transitivity and logico-semantic relation in order to identify the types of ideational meaning in the introductions of IELTS samples. In order to achieve this aim, different research methods are employed as follows:

The descriptive method is used to give a detailed description of the main areas of ideational meaning, particularly processes and clause relation in the light of functional grammar.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are applied as the purpose of this research is to examine how and to what extent are ideational meaning conducted in the introduction of IELTS sample essays.

The population of the study is 30 essays of which the introductions are picked out to build up the data as as this is a pilot study on a small scale where the primary focus is on the introductions of IELTS sample essays.

Two criteria for selecting samples have been established: 1-IELTS sample essays from books published by Cambridge University Press 2-IELTS sample essays with the band score from 7.5 to 9 or ones prepared by an examiner as an example of a very good model, the level which most candidates would like to achieve.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Logico-Semantic Relation Analysis

The analysis of IELTS sample essay introductions into clauses and clause complexes from SFL perspective can be done as follows:

Sample 1 extracted from Cambridge IELTS 9

(A) Traditionally, children have begun studying foreign languages at secondary school, || but introducing them earlier is recommended by some educationalists. ||| (B) This policy has been adopted by some educational authorities or individual schools, with both positive and negative outcomes. |||

Clause division of the text

CC A   cl.1 |||Traditionally, children have begun studying foreign languages at secondary school, ||

cl.2 || but [[introducing them earlier]] is recommended by some educationalists. |||

cl. 3 [[introducing them earlier]]

CC B   cl.4 |||This policy has been adopted by some educational authorities or individual schools, with both positive and negative outcomes. |||

Logico-semantics

Clause simplexes: 01 (B); Clause complexes: 01 (A)

A |||Traditionally, children have begun studying foreign
1
languages at secondary school, || but [[introducing
+2
them earlier]] is recommended by some
educationalists. |||

Sample 2 extracted from Cambridge IELTS 9

(A) It has been suggested || that high school students should be involved in unpaid community services as a compulsory part of high school programs. ||| (B) Most of the colleges are already providing opportunities to gain

work experience, ||however these are not compulsory. |||
(C) In my opinion, sending students to work in community services is a good idea || as it can provide them with many lots of valuable skills.

Clause division of the text

CC A   cl.1. |||It has been suggested ||

            cl.2 || that high school students should be involved in unpaid community services as a compulsory part of high school programs. |||

CC B   cl.3 ||| Most of the colleges are already providing opportunities ||

            cl.4 [[to gain work experience,]]

            cl.5 ||however these are not compulsory. |||

CC C   cl.6 |||In my opinion, sending students to work in community services is a good idea ||

            cl.7 [[to work in community services]]

            cl. 8 || as it can provide them with many lots of valuable skills. |||

Logico-semantics

Clause simplexes: 0; Clause complexes: 03 (A, B, C)

||| It has been suggested ||that high school students

     α   'β

should be involved in unpaid community services as a compulsory part of high school programs. |||

  ||| Most of the colleges are already providing opportunities

                     α 1

  || to gain work experience, ||however these are not compulsory

      x β   + α 2

||| In my opinion, [[sending students to work in community services]] is a good idea ||as it can provide them with

             α   xβ

many lots of valuable skills. |||

The analysis shows that in 30 introductions, there are 74 sentences, of which 30 sentences consist of clause simplexes, the remainder (44) are clause complexes, including 32 with two-clause complexes and 12 with more-than-two complexes. The writers chose clause complexes over clause simplexes as clause complexes enable language users to construe logical connections between experiential events, thus expressing ideational meaning. It is clear that the choice of clause complexes creating a closer logico-semantic tie between clauses gives fluency to writing. Table 1 represents the clause simplexes and clause complexes of the text.

Table 1. *Distribution of clause simplexes and clause complexes*

Type	Clause simplex	Clause complex		Total No. of CC
		Two-clause complex	*More-than-two-clause complex*	
Total	30	32	12	74
Percentage	40,5%	59.5%		100%

As far as logico-semantic dimension is concerned, projection and expansion are used to show a very wide range of possible logico-semantic relationships between

clauses. In terms of taxis, the clauses in the clause complexes are a mixture of both paratactic and hypotactic sequences, but there are more clauses in hypotactic relation than those in paratactic relation, which shows clauses' dependency. Their semantic relations are mainly of extension and enhancement. The distribution of logico-semantic taxis is given in Table 2.

Table 2. *Logico-semantic taxis of clause complexes*

Logico-semantic taxis	Expansion			Projection		Total
	Elabo ration	*Exten sion*	*Enhance ment*	*Idea*	*Locu tion*	
Parataxis	0	16	0	0	0	**16**
Hypotaxis	3	7	13	11	6	**40**
Total	**3**	**23**	**13**	**11**	**6**	**56**

Although embedded clauses do not participate in the clause-complex structure of the texts, it is found that the number of embedded clauses is frequently used in the introductions with 67 embedded clauses out of the total 204 clauses, accounting for 32.8%. It can be indicated that embedded clauses are used to function as either part of a group constituent structure of a clause (qualifier in a nominal group or postmodifier in an adverbial group) or as a constituent of the clause in their own right (embedded clause as Participant). For instance,

As a result, urban citizens have access to jobs and facilities [[that improve their living standards considerably.]]

Post-modification (qualifier)

[[Indulging children]] has been a common parenting problem

            Participant

in many modern families.

As Eggins [2] states the principle behind embedded is compression; that means embedding is more static. In IELTS writing, the writers tend to use quite a lot of embedded clauses to narrow down the meaning constituents, indicating their forethought in the construction of the clause as Halliday [4] suggests that embedding associates with formal and careful written text.

In terms of the length of the introduction, it is shown that there are 1667 words used in the total of 30 introductions, of which the longest introduction has 98 words and the shortest one has 27 words. The average words used per introduction is about 55 words. In writing an IELTS essay introduction, it is suggested that an introduction should not be too long as the purpose of an introduction is to leave a good first impression of the candidate's essay writing skills on the examiner. It may be a better idea to write a short introduction with a clause complex introducing the topic and another telling the reader what the writer is going to writing about called the thesis statement. A good thesis statement will show the reader how the essay will be structured.

4.2. Transitivity

From the view of transitivity, of the 204 clauses 79 are of relational processes which have been illustrated in Table

3. They are used to present the state of beings with frequently used verbs such as *be, become, mean, have, feature, represent, seem*, as illustrated in the following extracts.

(1) I believe that child-rearing should be the responsibility of both parents and that, whilst the roles within that partnership may be different, they are nevertheless equal in importance.

(2) ... they have Internet access to information in a way that was unimaginable for earlier generations.

73 clauses are material process describing the actions with such verbs as *sell, provide, influence, do, teach, adopt, send, work, stop, travel, give, educate, improve, boost, buy, advertise…* 34 of mental processes projecting the writer's opinion, beliefs or feeling (*believe, choose, decide, reflect, feel, need, view, understand, think, appreciate, mean, find, content…*); 10 clauses which are verbal process, accounting for 4.9 % of the total processes used in the introductions show sayings of the writers. The verbal processes are mainly used to quote sayings from other people, which makes the saying more persuasive, indicating the writer's stance at the same time with verbs like *say, support, be recommended, suggest, agree, argue…* . 6 of existential processes positing that things or people are in existence with the easily identified structure involving the use of the word '*there*'. Only 2 clauses are behavioural processes describing the physiologic and psychological behaviours of the characters. Below are some examples taken from the IELTS samples' introductions.

(3) They also believe that the influence on individuals is wholly beneficial as it is a long established way of ... (mental process, relational process, relational process)

(4) Others believe that highways, busses and regular trains should be improved before new, high-speed lines are added. (mental process, material process, material process)

(5) There is no doubt that some students in schools behave badly and… (existential process, behavioural process)

Table 3. *Transitivity in IELTS sample introductions*

Process types (PT)	Material	Relational	Mental	Existential	Verbal	Behavioural	Total of PT
Total	73	79	34	6	10	2	204
Percentage	35.8%	38.7%	16.7%	2.9%	4.9%	1%	100%

5. Conclusion

From the analysis, we may come to conclusion that functional grammar is proved to be a very useful analytic tool, enabling us to look at the whole text and its characteristic features. By examining the transitivity patterns in the introductions, we can explain how experiential meaning is being constructed and analysing the logical structure of the clause complex which complement transitivity choices, we are able to be aware of logical connections between experiential events.

As shown in the findings, it is suggested that IELTS academic writers should begin the introduction with a general statements, then narrows to the thesis. It is obvious that the writers should choose clause complexes over clause simplexes as clause complex systems provide them with structural resources to construe logical connections between experiential events. It is also recommended that IELTS academic candidates should use different types of interdependency between linked clauses to build on the ideational meanings of the clauses. The test-takers are advised to use paratactic conjunctions to express the logical relationship between two clauses of equal structural status, and hypotaxis to relate one clause to another in a modifying or dependency relationship. Although embedded clauses do not take their place as full constituent partners in the clause complex, it is proposed that an IELTS introduction should involve an intricate mix of both taxis and embedding as embedding associates more with formal, careful written text. In terms of transitivity, the writers have a strong tendency to use two main types of process; namely relational and material processes as an instrument to describe action, events or states of being related to their own experience regarding the topic discussed in the essays.

To sum up, the transitivity system and logico-semantic relation occupy a crucial position in the realization of linguistic features of IELTS sample introductions. It is clear that writing with better awareness of the relationship between the transitivity choice of processes and logico-semantic relationships between clauses may enable non-native English speaking IELTS writers to produce stylistically appropriate IELTS introductions, thus achieving higher score for the test.

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