

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a broad outline of the study in terms of its research area, aim, research questions, rationale, significance, delimitation and directions for further study. The data for this study consists of six different biographical texts on three music composers: Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. The present study analyzes biographical texts of music composers using the System of Transitivity. The experiential meanings are uncovered using the System of Transitivity. The present study also looks at the Schematic Structure of the genre of biographies. The Schematic Structure uncovers stages of discourse development in a text. The study conducts a Transitivity analysis and Schematic Structure analysis in the biographies in order to uncover how field meanings are represented in this genre.

1.1 Statement of the Research Area

Biographies are considered one of the most enjoyed reading texts of all time. Biographical texts have also been used for academic reading in schools. These forms of texts have been introduced even to younger readers and have been enjoyed by readers of all ages. Gittings (1978, p.15) believes that biography has become one of the most satisfying and established achievements of the present age. People enjoy reading biography as it describes a real person's life. Roberts (2002, p.30) notes that biographies describe the detail on all aspects of the subject's life where they talk about personal character, habit, effects of personal life on work and the intimacies of relationship with

minutiae of the subject's daily life. Readers try to relate and understand the subject's life through biography.

There have been many studies done on biographies. These studies include educational biographies, adult biographies, biographies on women, biographies on politicians, to name a few. Dominicé (2000) who has carried out studies on educational biography reports on some of the early studies dating back to the 1950's, Robert Havighurst and 1960's, Bernice Neugarten. However, little studies have been done on biographical texts from a linguistics point of view where analyses focus on the context and not just the content. The current study gives a linguistic analysis on biographical texts grounded in the Hallidayan School of thought also known as Systemic Functional Linguistics. A survey carried out using the search engines, www.yahoo.com, www.altavista.com and www.google.com showed that there were no published account on analyzing biographical texts using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. As there is no research done in analyzing biographical text using the SFL approach, this study will fill the gap: A Systemic Functional investigation into Experiential meanings in the biographies of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert.

Following the thoughts expressed by Srinivass (2003, p.143), that "One way of understanding the relationship between text and context is by drawing on a transitivity analysis of written products of texts selected from an authentic source", the present study will investigate the various process types, participants and Circumstantial Elements used to convey experiential meaning. The study will also investigate the Schematic Structure of biographical texts.

The System of Transitivity analyzes what goes on in the text. The System of Transitivity will show how the biographer states his views and feelings based on his experience and how he goes about giving his readers the idea that they are reading a biography book.

Using the transitivity system, the study attempts to find out the patterns of linguistic choice used by biographers. Halliday (1994) suggests that an investigation of the lexico-grammatical stratum of language reveals the kinds of internal patterns of clause structures which are highly favored for interpreting experience. The Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approach, which is built on Halliday's three metafunctions are the experiential or ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. These three metafunctions of language can be used simultaneously to analyze clauses for different functional meanings. As this study focuses on the experiential meaning, the Transitivity Analysis and the Schematic Structure analysis are carried out.

Using the experiential theoretical framework by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Eggins (2004), Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Thompson (2004), the present study conducts a Transitivity Analysis on the data to show how biographers express their thoughts in biographical texts by the choices of process types, participants and Circumstantial Elements. This experiential metafunction is investigated by means of the lexico-grammatical features in the texts that express or realize meaning in the ideational dimension. "The term lexico-grammatical in SFL is used to refer to features of vocabulary and syntax-lexis and grammar found in the text" (Bloor and Bloor, 2004, p.2).

"Identifying the purpose of a text clues readers in how to 'read' and therefore interpret the (sometimes indeterminate) meanings of the texts" (Eggins, 2004, p.55). This is related to the concept of genre where the principles of relating social processes to each other have to do with texture - the ways in which field, mode and tenor variables are faced together in a text (Christie & Martin, 1997, p.12).

The present study will look at the experiential meanings where the Transitivity Analysis will be used as a tool to show how biographers express their thoughts in their biographies. The study will also look at the Schematic Structure analysis to show how

biographies are structured by the biographer in order to bring forth the genre of a biography. Using the Schematic Structure theoretical framework by Eggins (2004), the present study conducts a Schematic Structure analysis on the data to specify the stages involved in a biographical text. Each stage will be further interpreted to give better understanding as to how a biographer structures a genre of biography as he expresses his views in it.

1.2 Aim

The aim of the present study is to give prominence to experiential meanings in the genre of biographies of music composers. This is mainly to find out how biographers express their views in their biographies. This may be carried out using the Transitivity Analysis in the ideational metafunction by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Eggins (2004), Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Thompson (2004). This study will attempt to identify the process types used to show how biographers express their views in writing a biography. The study will also attempt to specify the participants and the Circumstantial Elements represented in the sentences that are important for Transitivity Analysis.

The study also aims to analyze Schematic Structure by Eggins (2004). The study will also attempt to look at how biographies are structured and formed in a particular way to enable readers to recognize the genre of biographies. The study will also attempt to interpret each stage in determining how genre of a biography is being conveyed.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the research aim, this present study would also like to answer some questions to give a better understanding about this research. The research questions are:

- i) What is the System of Transitivity underlying the biographical texts?
- ii) What is the Schematic Structure underlying the biographical texts?
- iii) How does the Schematic Structure inter-relate with the System of Transitivity for the expression of meanings?

1.4 Rationale of the Study

Biographies are one of the most popular reading materials to readers of all ages as they describe and interpret the life of a person. A biography brings out the value of life as it gives information about a particular person. Readers would get an understanding of a person or a subject based on the biography. It also acts as a medium in establishing a certain bond between the reader and the subject and this happens through the biographer.

The data of this study may contribute in giving a better understanding to students and readers as to how to interpret the meaning of the text in the genre of biography once they have identified it well. As noted by Gittings (1978):

In the past, biographies have been returned to teach aspects of good life where it looked on man as an adjunct to religious example and precept of moral conduct. Later the content of the biography gradually moved to portray as its subject, the individual man or woman. It also has moved from the official to the unofficial where a simple human being has been made into the subject of the biography. (p.39 - 40).

There has been a great interest in knowing and understanding human beings of all walks of life. People read the biography of a person known or unknown for many reasons mainly to understand life and its value. Biographies are important as it acts as a medium in influencing people mainly readers about a subject in a biography. They give information and interpret a subject's life according to the biographer. Biographies have

been written in many languages and many films have been produced out of them. With these taken into account, biographies have been a “gold mine” to biographers when a certain, well-known person is the subject of the biography.

Research in the genre of biography using the SFL approach is limited. Thus, this study could be an attempt to fill the gap in this research area.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant to text analysts, discourse analysts, corpus linguist and Systemic Functional linguists as it brings out how experiential meanings are expressed in authentic data in this case, biographies. It also brings out how the Schematic Structure stages a genre such as biography. The study is also significant to language teachers, students and all those in the educational field as well as journalists, writers, and researchers.

1.6 Delimitation and Directions for Further Research

This present study limits itself to biographical texts of three music composers: Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert of the 18th century. All texts were written by different biographers. As the texts covers biographies of music composers, future SFL research can be carried out using biographical texts of other personalities such as politicians, royalties and even criminals.

This study focuses on one of the three metafunctions proposed by Halliday; the experiential metafunction using the System of Transitivity within SFL. The analysis of interpersonal, textual and logical metafunctions may contribute different aspects of meaning in the genre of biographies.

This study also analyses the texts in terms of Schematic Structure. Other in-depth study using the information structure can also be carried out such as thematic progression and rhetorical structure analysis.

1.7 Organization of Thesis

The current study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One gives an introduction to the study focusing on the statement of the research area, aim, research questions, rationale, significance, delimitation and directions for further research. Chapter Two will look at the literature review pertaining to the study. Chapter Three will present the theoretical framework and the methodology used in the study. Chapter Four will provide the findings and results of the study. The experiential meaning will focus on the process types, participants and Circumstantial Elements, while the analysis on the Schematic Structure will focus on stages in the text and its interpretations. Chapter Five will conclude the findings of the study.

1.8 Chapter Summary

In summary, Chapter One has presented the background and the underlying premises for this study. It has also shown the significance of the System of Transitivity and Schematic Structure in uncovering the goings-on and the structure of biographical texts. This serves as the starting point for later chapters which will present these concepts in greater detail.