

Research Article

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**Representation of Anxiety in *The Thing Around Your Neck*
by C. N. Adichie**

(A Study of Transitivity)

Avissa Chaerinda Yahya^a, Deli Nirmala^b

^aEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia

^bEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia
deliundip@gmail.com

Abstract

This study discusses a short story entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The purpose of writing this study started from the curiosity of the researcher to find out the anxiety that is reflected in the contents of the short story. As stated in the title of the story, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the word *thing* is described as a symbol of anxiety experienced by the narrator, Akunna. Akunna is one of the main characters in the short story. She is described as a Nigerian-women who is traumatized by her life in America, exhibiting many psychological problems in the form of anxiety. Akunna shows worry, loneliness, helplessness in all life situations that she has to live in. The aims of this study are: 1) to conduct a transitivity analysis to find out how much anxiety is depicted in the story; 2) to explain the anxiety that occurs in the story. The researcher applies descriptive qualitative methods in conducting research and used a non-participant observation method as the data collection method. The data analysis that the researcher used in this study is referential technique. The results of the study show that: 1) there are 5 transitivity processes that represent anxiety in the story, 2) Akunna's anxiety is caused by the helplessness and stereotypes she receives from the people around her, both Africans and Americans.

Key words: Systemic functional linguistics; anxiety; short story; transitivity

1. Introduction

Literature is a form of fiction that is very beautiful and can touch the soul of the reader. Fiction tells various problems of human life in their interactions with the environment and

others, their interactions with themselves, and their interactions with God [1]. Fiction is the result of dialogue, contemplation, and the author's reaction to the environment and life. Even though the actual stories and events in literary works never happened, but through the depiction of the story, it is as if the story actually happened. Literary works contain stories that are able to make the reader's heart dissolve in feelings that are in accordance with the feelings being experienced by the characters in the story. Wellek and Warren says that the reality in fiction is an illusion of reality and a convincing impression that is displayed, but it is not always an everyday reality [1].

As a result of one's imagination, literary works can function as entertainment for their readers. In addition, literary works can also provide experiences for readers. Literary works can be group into three types namely prose, poetry, and drama. In this study, the researcher chose short stories as the object of study to be studied. Short stories are included in the type of prose in literature. Edgar Allan Poe, a well-known writer from America, said that a short story is a story that is finished reading in one sitting, approximately between half to two hours—something that would be impossible for a novel [1].

The short story that will be the object of this study is entitled *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. This short story is included in a collection of short stories by Adichie with the same title. As a female writer who was born and raised in Nigeria, the themes in her short stories and books often reflect the problems of black people in Africa, or how they live in other countries and adapt to these cultural differences. *The Thing Around Your Neck* is told from a second-person point of view. The female narrator, Akunna, wins the American visa lottery and moves from Nigeria to Maine. Akunna had a difficult adjustment to American life. One night, her uncle sexually assaults her, and she leaves on a one-way bus ticket to Connecticut. There, she worked as a waitress and struggled to make ends meet. She began to feel uneasy and felt helpless with her life in America. One day, Akunna received a letter from her family informing her that her father had passed away. She flew back to Nigeria and wasn't sure if she would return to America. Judging from the synopsis of the story above, the elements of loneliness and anxiety appear in the short story, this is what prompted the researcher to examine the anxiety in the short story through transitivity analysis.

Many previous researchers have been conducted a study on transitivity. Some researchers have established a study in analyzing transitivity system in the short stories. Nguyen applies Halliday's SFL theory to explore transitivity system to identify and explain how the main character's personality is shown through the use of language in *Heroic Mother* by Hoa Pham. This study shows that the main character's personality in the story is portrayed as a character who had a difficult time when she was young [2]. The prominent process that arises from reflecting the main character's personality is mental, relational, and behavioral processes. Furthermore, Darani elaborates transitivity processes in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* story using corpus-based analysis. The purpose of the study is to express the author's persuasive style, that is showed from the characters' actions in the story. From the result of the study, it can be seen that the material process is what mainly

appears in the author's style [3]. Another study in stylistics which reveal the characterization of the main character in short stories was conducted by Manggala and Nurhayati. Manggala analyzes the protagonist's personality in the folklore *Tom and Nam*, while Nurhayati conducted a study on the short story *I Stand Here Ironing*. Both of them adopt Halliday's SFL theory by analyzing the transitivity system conceived in the author's language [4-5].

The study of transitivity on songs was also conducted by Agatha, Mehwish Zahoor and Fauzia Janjua, and Harbi, et al. They examined the transitivity process in the Cinderella (2015) soundtrack song, I am Malala, and The Beatles popular song. Agatha, Zahoor and Janjua used transitivity analysis to explore the characterization in the songs they studied. Zahoor and Janjua express that Malala, the main character, is the same as a girl in her age. A girl who is shy, weak, and incompetent [6]. While, Agatha in her study successfully found seven ideational meanings that represent Cinderella's spirit, such as optimistic mind, having believe, struggling, having hope, self-spirit, keep dreaming, and being kind-hearted [7]. Unlike the two previous researches, the study on songs carried out by Harbi, et al only discussed how The Beatles used different processes in writing the lyrics of their popular songs to communicate their experiences about the world. The six types of transitivity processes were found in the popular songs selected from the data analyzed. Three main processes that is found in the selected songs are material, mental, and relational processes [8].

Transitivity analysis has also been conducted on novels and films. Mahya and Ahangari (2016) analyze Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*. This study aims to represents how opinions and ideologies are described in literary texts by using Halliday's SFL theory. Based on the results of the study, they establish that the analysis of ideational meaning presents the author's ideas explicitly [9]. Meanwhile, Qasim, Talaat, Khushi & Azher conducted a study on Hamid's *Moth Smoke* to reveal the characterization of the main character in the novel and to analyze how the author conveyed his ideology to the reader [10]. Furthermore, Meltarina Sihura applies the theory of transitivity analysis by Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter. This study analyzed the transitivity processes occurring in *Frozen (2013)*. She found six types of transitivity processes that appear in the movie, which are material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes [11].

Although there have been several researches related to transitivity system in literary works, yet, this study is different from the other earlier studies in the object of the study, there is only a small amount of transitivity analysis that has been conducted in *The Thing Around Your Neck* by Adichie. To fill this gap, the researcher conducted this study to examine the transitivity system used in Adichie's story to discover anxiety that is depicted in the short story. Thus, this study's specific objectives are first, to describe the transitivity processes that appear in Adichie's short story and second, identify and explain how the Anxiety is presented in the story based on the transitivity analysis.

2. Methods

This study used descriptive qualitative as the methods of study. This study provides a descriptive explanation of the transitivity processes produced in the story. While, qualitative analysis is carried out to analyze data using words. The researcher used the short story *The Thing Around Your Neck* as primary data in this study. The data are taken from the clauses in the short story. Besides, the secondary data was taken from literary review from others publication such as journal, thesis, and books. The sampling techniques used in this study is purposive sampling techniques. This method uses criteria that have been selected by the researcher in selecting samples. The sample selection criteria are inclusion criteria, where the sample is chosen according to the purpose of the study. It is purposive since the selected clauses are included to finds out the transitivity processes occurred in the short story to express *Anxiety* in the short story.

In this study, the researcher used the non-participant observation method to collect the research's data. It is a method where the researcher is the observer and does not include or produce the text and narrative. Therefore, this method is an appropriate method to do because this study analyzes the narrative text and the researcher takes the data from the subject directly. While, in analyzing the data, the researcher used the referential method by Sudaryanto. This method is used since the data needs to be analyzed by referring to some linguistic units [12]. Since this study concerns with analyzing how *Anxiety* are depicted in the short story which uses a transitivity system in research, this method shows a referent on its identification to reach *Anxiety* according to the process that happened in each clause.

3. Results

The researcher found there are five transitivity processes used to representing *Anxiety* in the short story. From 36 samples, the researcher found the total of transitivity processes which reflects *Anxiety* in the short story is 40 clauses. The following table illustrates clearly the number and percentage of each type of transitivity process represented *Anxiety* in the short story.

Table 1. Types of Process Represented Anxiety in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

No	Process Type	Frequency (Data)	Percentage (%)
1	Mental	18	45
2	Material	13	32.5
3	Relational	5	12.5
4	Verbal	3	7.5
5	Behavioural	1	2.5

Total

40

100

Based on the results obtained, it shows that the type of transitivity process that is most widely used in short stories is mental processes with a percentage of 45%. This proves that the author uses mental processes more often than other processes in describing how anxiety is shown in short stories. This process appears to express anxiety through the process of feeling, thinking, and perceiving.

From the results of the analysis, the researcher found that there are 18 mental processes in a clause that reflected *Anxiety*. These processes are identified by participants, processes, and circumstances. Mental processes have 3 types of processes, namely perceptive, cognitive, and affection. Furthermore, the processes contained in the short story are *wanted, did not want, felt, and fell* which are categorized in perceptive; *did not know, mystified, realized, wondered, knew and though* categorized in cognitive; *likes* are categorized in affection.

The second process that is widely used to express anxiety that appears in the short story is the material process with a total of 32.5%. This percentage shows that the anxiety that appears in the short story is expressed through the actions and events carried out by the characters. Through the findings of the existing data, it can be seen that anxiety is shown through Akunna's actions. From the results of the analysis, the researcher found 13 clauses that indicate the material process in the data. The verb phrases shown in this process are *left, would work, could never afford, still pay, let, would do, didn't write, wrote, would wrap, started, did, choked, and turned away*.

Then, based on table 1, it can be seen that the relational process also appears in the text. 12.5% of the relational process is used to reflect anxiety in the story. This percentage arises because the author uses a relational process in expressing anxiety through being and having something. The researcher found 5 clauses that are included in the relational process that expressed anxiety in the short story. The data were identified using transitivity analysis by examining participants, processes, attributes/values, and circumstances. This process is used to connect one entity to another which is divided into two types, namely attributive and identification. However, the researcher only found attributive type processes in short stories such as *was, were, and didn't have*.

After the relational process, the verbal process ranks fourth with 7.5%. This process shows anxiety which is expressed through several utterances spoken by the characters. Based on the data obtained, the researcher found 3 clauses that indicate the verbal process that identifies anxiety that appears in the short story. The process that belongs to the verbal process contained in the story are *told, called, and said*. Last, Anxiety is shown through a behavioral process. From all the data, the researcher only found one clause which indicated a behavioral process. The verb that shows this process is *smiled*.

4. Discussion

Anxiety is a normal thing to feel when a person faces a situation or hears news that causes fear or worry. Anxiety is a feeling of being nervous or restless. Usually, people will experience it when dealing with certain situations that are considered less comfortable. It can appear at any time in human life. Anxiety is usually caused by problems that arise around us, such as family, friends, the environment, and even our own psychological condition. Anxiety is the body's natural reaction to stress, which actually helps us to be more careful and alert. However, it can actually be dangerous if it is felt too much.

The thing around your neck is told from a second-person point of view, which puts the reader in the story. This point of view allows readers to feel the emotions experienced by the narrator and see through the narrator's perspective in the story. This story is a short story that tells the story of a young Nigerian woman named Akunna, and her struggles while migrating to America. Akunna is a Nigerian girl who won the visa lottery to America. She went to America hoping for a better life, in other words, she was trying to achieve the American dream. However, she has complicated problems with her life in America. She left her uncle's house because her uncle almost raped her. She was forced to drop out of her college community. Akunna also had to be able to make a living in America by working as a waitress in a low-paying restaurant. She also often gets discriminatory actions from people in her workplace and those around her.

Based on the results of the analysis described earlier, we can see that anxiety is reflected in material processes, mental processes, relational processes, verbal processes, and behavioral processes. The mental process is the highest process compared to other processes that appear in the short story that reflect anxiety. Mental processes are actions or activities whose events cannot be observed empirically but can be felt. Mental processes involve cognition, emotion, and perception that occur within humans themselves. The high percentage of existing mental processes indicates that this short story tells about the emotional state experienced by the narrator, namely Akunna.

As the word implied in the title, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the word *thing* is a symbol of anxiety or worry. The story opens with Akunna's departure to America, she imagines how life in America is by thinking that Americans have houses, cars, and a gun. America's visa lottery may have been the beginning of her inner anxiety because the author chose not to emphasize Akunna's reactions, but on those of her family and relatives. She left home with anticipation from her family to achieve the American dream: "In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house" [13].

Her family in Nigeria hopes that her life in America will be successful act as a prelude to how she will feel the anxiety, where she feels depressed and embarrassed by her hopeless life in America. After escaping from her uncle's house, she feels like she has "something on her neck", keeping her awake at night - this image is repeated frequently throughout the story, symbolizing Akunna's anxiety and helplessness, lack of self-control, and inner restlessness in her new environment-foreign land.

She experienced anxiety, depression, and loneliness when she decided to leave her uncle's house. Akunna is forced to live independently and she is ashamed that her life in America is not as good as her family in Nigeria had hoped. Anxiety appears as a picture of the whole story, the main character in the story experiences unwanted events that cause her to experience loneliness, isolation, and disappointment.

One of the experiences that contributed to her psychological burden was the battle with stereotypes and generalizations. Stereotypes and generalizations are familiar features of all immigration stories about how common they are. Akunna's anxiety and helplessness when confronted with the racist and stereotypical views she encounters in America: "At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep".

Akunna felt something strangling her neck. She experienced various kinds of events that she never imagined and took her by surprise. Akunna was almost raped by her uncle who was supposed to take care of her so she decided to live independently in America. Akunna worries about how she will succeed in America. She also has concerns about her relationship with her boyfriend who has a very contrasting background. Akunna couldn't understand her boyfriend's special attitude. She compares his situation to her own, where she had to see her father humiliate himself for a rich man's car.

In addition, the anxiety described in this story is caused by the racist attitude that Akunna receives from people around her. Some of the girls in her college questioned her hair that looked different. Akunna's employer thought she would be a good worker because she was an immigrant. She also earns lower wages than other employees. In addition, people thought that Akunna and her boyfriend couldn't be a couple because of racial differences. A waiter at Chang doubts that Akunna is her boyfriend's girlfriend. It seemed to be based on her belief that the maids judged her by the color of her skin. Akunna herself suspects that people who like Africa are the same as people who don't like Africa.

Her anxiety also stems from the lack of choice, the consequences of being a woman and an immigrant. She could have chosen to leave her abusive uncle - and she did - but in doing so she lost other privileges, such as going to school. Now that she has to make her own way, she is hampered by finances. She didn't have a chance to choose because she had to accept what she got. The choice requires courage and independence, so surviving a bad situation is more comfortable than choosing one's own desires but not having the means of support.

In the end, she found disappointment with her life in America. Akunna hoped for instant success when she arrived. Instead, she is attacked by her uncle, has to flee to a place where she can't afford school and feels ridiculed. She didn't write to her family because she didn't want to admit how badly she had failed when America had let her down. At the end of the story, Akunna clearly gave up on her American dream. It could be said that Akunna had difficulty adjusting to the environment she encountered in America. She had spent her time in America unhappy and unsure of where her life was going. The American dream that she

and her family imagined was not as beautiful as they knew it to be, even the dream brought Akunna down so that she felt disappointed, hurt, and restless.

5. Conclusion

Based on the result of the analysis the researcher found that there are five transitivity processes that reflects Anxiety in the short story. Those processes are material, mental, relational, behavioral, and verbal processes. Mental processes are found as the dominant process that reflect anxiety in the short story. It means that the author shows the anxiety by the psychological condition of the character.

Through the title of the story itself, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the word “*thing*” represents the anxiety felt by the narrator, Akunna. Therefore, the psychological condition experienced by Akunna is often described as feelings of anxiety, isolation, hopelessness, and helplessness. She experienced anxious, fear, and loneliness when she decided to leave her uncle’s house in America. Akunna is forced to live independently and she feels ashamed that her life in America is not as good as what her family in Nigeria expected.

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