

# A Functional Linguistic Approach Towards Analysis of Soliloquies

Dr. Subhanan Mandal  
Central Institute of Indian Languages, India

## Abstract

The soliloquies in dramatic discourse form the most fascinating section that lets one not only understand the speakers' real intention but also their perception about the social constructs. Moreover, the application of the Systemic Functional Linguistic model to the corpus brings out the linguistic traits of general conversational speech which in turn helps in deciphering the 'mood' and 'transitivity' features associated with the clausal structure. The analysis presented in this paper is a part of the larger study that has been made to comprehend the social, psychological and linguistic factors associated with Elizabethan language and society. This paper specifically focuses on the soliloquies of Shakespearean dramatic discourse of Macbeth and tries to highlight the key character traits and pattern of clausal constructs that are marked as typical Elizabethan features.

**Keywords:** Soliloquy, Discourse, Functional, Macbeth, Drama

## Introduction

The functional perspective of soliloquies in the discourse of the play Macbeth reveals the actual thought processes and interpretations of the concerned speakers about the surrounding social circumstances. The dominant linguistic features are brought forth through tagging of the lexical items in the spoken discourses of the speakers of soliloquies in accordance with the mood structure and transitivity model. The prominent linguistic characteristics, the process combinations, lexical arrangements and frequency of subsets of criteria within the meta functions of language, prescribed in the Systemic Functional Linguistic Module have been considered for better understanding of the actual semantics operating in the discourse as well as getting a psychological insight into the minds of the speakers. The mood structure coupled with the transitivity process effectively brings out the actual purpose and orientation behind the delivered speech in solitude and the motivated content due for expression of a message respectively.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the soliloquies in the play Macbeth are spoken by the tragic hero Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth. Only one self-talk was found to be uttered by Banquo who incidentally was Macbeth's dear friend turned obstacle to his path of attaining the power of supremacy. Having been influenced by the prophecies of the witches and thereafter, subjected to constant mental disturbances, being under the provocative emotional torments exhorted by Lady Macbeth and boosted by his own greed for power, Macbeth's frequent resort to self-talk is quite understandable. Lady Macbeth's soliloquies are majorly representations of her interpretations about Macbeth's overall character and her calls to the evil forces to help her bring about a change in her normal feminine attributes so that she is prepared mentally and can persuade Macbeth to commit the heinous crime of murdering King Duncan and attain glory. Banquo, on the other hand, deciphering Macbeth's evil motifs had engaged in a soliloquy wherein he expressed his fear about the path adopted by Macbeth to rise to power. His self-talk also clearly exhibits his psychological orientation towards the oracle of him being the father to a 'line of kings'. Being aware of Macbeth's growing greed to achieve the ultimate power and his determination to overthrow everything in his way to gain complete supremacy of the land not only for himself but also for his future generations, Banquo's speech discourse is characteristically featured more with apprehension, suspicion and questioning.

## Mood Structure Based Inferences

A total of 10 soliloquies were found across the discourse of the play Macbeth. In case of ‘Asides’ wherein the speakers convey certain messages without the knowledge of the other participants in conversation, are not taken into consideration because the concerned speaker is not alone. Only such representations of spoken discourse have been taken into account for analysis where the speaker is completely by himself with none sharing the social space with him/her. The lexemes/phrases used in these particular soliloquies were tagged based on the categorizations prescribed in the mood structure model of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistic Module. The expressed mood in a particular clause of a soliloquy conveys the speaker’s real intentions which are often shielded in everyday conversation. The intonation and speech texture are very much revealed through the understanding of mood. Furthermore, it helps in understanding the actual semantics that are aimed to be expressed through such self-talks, thereby making the characteristic traits of the speakers transparent to the readers.

162 clauses were selected for mood-based structuring and tagging. The minor clauses were excluded as they neither do indicate mood nor transitivity process because of the lack of proper lexical elements that determine the fixation of system types in both the above-mentioned ideological functions of language. From the 10 sets of soliloquies that were identified based on these criteria, Macbeth, the main protagonist of the play, was found to engage in 7 self-talks, Lady Macbeth resorted to speaking in solitude 2 times and Banquo’s soliloquy appeared only once. Declarative mood structure formed the majority of the total clauses marked in the soliloquies. Imperative and Interrogative mood formations were a total of 17 and 10 respectively. No exclamatory remarks were found to be tagged for data representation.

SL. NO.	SOLILOQUY SPEAKER	CORPUS LOCATIONS	DECLARATIVE	INTERROGATIVE	EXCLAMATORY	IMPERATIVE	TOTAL CLAUSE
1	MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 3: 127-141	9	2	0	0	11
2	LADY MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 5: 15-30	19	0	0	1	20
3	LADY MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 5: 37-53	8	0	0	9	17
4	MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 7: 1-28	22	0	0	0	22
5	MACBETH	ACT 2 SCENE 1: 33-64	23	4	0	1	28
6	BANQUO	ACT 3 SCENE 1: 1-10	9	2	0	0	11
7	MACBETH	ACT 3 SCENE 1: 49-73	20	1	0	2	23
8	MACBETH	ACT 4 SCENE 1: 143-155	11	1	0	2	14
9	MACBETH	ACT 5 SCENE 3: 19-29	8	0	0	1	9
10	MACBETH	ACT 5 SCENE 5: 19-27	6	0	0	1	7
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>162</b>

Table 1. Frequency distribution of Mood element in soliloquies of Macbeth

Macbeth's speech discourse of the soliloquies dominates in declarative mood structure with infrequent shifts in between to interrogative remarks. A very small percentage of the clauses in his soliloquies showed instances of imperative remarks, thereby indicating his inhibition to impose anything on anybody else. The evidence of limited interrogative moods in between the dominated declarative clauses in the soliloquies indicate his inquisitiveness to the uncertainty his future beholds and lack of clarity and thought. Amidst declarative mood structures, the presence of interrogatives, although very few, also point towards his lack of confidence to act according to his set purpose and inability to judge between the differences of morality and immorality. The greater number of declarative moods reveal his own honest and true views on the situations around him and how he resolves himself to face them.

The soliloquies tagged in datasets bearing serial numbers 1,4,5,7,8 are results of Macbeth being influenced by the prophecies of three witches, his psychological wrestle between good and evil actions and of being chastised by Lady Macbeth to screw his '*courage to the sticking place*'. He majorly recounts in solitude what has already been done, gathers his strength psychologically by speaking to himself about what must be done in future and reacts to the illusionary visions that he sees as his mind gets completely occupied with thoughts of murdering King Duncan and setting his supremacy firmly without any interference of a probable foe already existing or in the making.

The final two soliloquy sets marked with serial numbers 9 and 10 indicate Macbeth's shift of perception and belief from what was initially expressed in the previously mentioned group of soliloquies. Herein, the spoken clauses in solitude exhibit signs of panic, fright and unhappiness. His declarative acceptance of having 'lived long enough' is a clear indication of him knowing his inevitable defeat. Further to this, in the final soliloquy, Macbeth puts forth his judgement about life in a defeatist yet composed manner after hearing the news of his wife's death. According to him, life is nothing but a stage where people experience cruelty only to finally meet the inescapable death.

Lady Macbeth's two soliloquies on the other hand dominate only in declarative function in the clausal structures. It highlights the grit and determination of her character which is rigid to fulfil the long-cherished desire to attain ultimate power, even if it took her through the path of cruelty and bloodshed. The clausal structures adopted by Lady Macbeth in her soliloquies are direct and emphatic without any hint of confusion and expression of thoughtfulness which are generally portrayed through interrogative and exclamatory formations respectively.

Out of the 11 identified clauses in Banquo's only soliloquy, 2 bear the interrogative mood structures while the remaining 9 have declarative formations. The declarative utterances in solitude are pronouncements of his 'fear' about how he believes Macbeth might have acted 'most foully' to accomplish his goals. His statements indicate his gradual confidence that had built up in the witches' foretelling post Macbeth's rise to supremacy. Banquo declares to himself as to how the prophecies have come true for Macbeth and it is very likely that him becoming the 'father of many kings' is very much possible. The only interrogation Banquo has involved himself with is whether the predictions about him will also come true given the fact that Macbeth's success has been absolutely in accordance with the utterances of the witches. However, the texture of the interrogative clause puts forth a shade of doubt that he is carrying in his heart. Banquo is worried about the probability of whether he is being deliberately set up 'in hope' by the witches.

### **Transitivity Processes**

Michael Halliday's transitivity framework has been employed to identify the world-experiences of the speakers of soliloquy by categorizing the lexico-grammatical elements that they have chosen in their speech. The experiential function of language makes interpretation of spoken discourse easier. It comes to great use when the intended semantic connotation is sometimes wrongly elucidated which blocks communication

comprehension. A detailed tagging of soliloquies in Macbeth based on the transitivity model would thus be beneficial and expose the functional and participant’s target-oriented features.

Amongst the 162 clauses tagged for study, the ‘Material’ process type occurs most frequently followed by ‘Relational’, ‘Mental’, ‘Verbal’, ‘Behavioural’ and ‘Existential’. Macbeth resorts to the usage of soliloquies (7 out of 10) the greatest number of times, whereas Lady Macbeth and Banquo have gone into solitude and spoken their minds out 2 out of 10 and 1 out of a total 10 soliloquies identified across the conversational discourse of the play, Macbeth. The following table shows the distribution of transitivity process types that were found to be used by the speakers.

SL. NO	SOLILOQUY SPEAKER	CORPUS LOCATION	MAT-ERIAL	MEN-TAL	RELAT-IONAL	BEHAV-IOURAL	VER-BAL	EXIST-ENTIAL	TOTAL CLAUSES
1	MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 3: 127-141	5	0	4	0	2	0	11
2	LADY MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 5: 15-30	8	3	7	1	1	0	20
3	LADY MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 5: 37-53	12	3	1	0	1	0	17
4	MACBETH	ACT 1 SCENE 7: 1-28	10	5	4	1	0	2	22
5	MACBETH	ACT 2 SCENE 1: 33-64	11	8	4	3	1	1	28
6	BANQUO	ACT 3 SCENE 1: 1-10	5	1	3	1	1	0	11
7	MACBETH	ACT 3 SCENE 1: 49-73	13	5	4	0	1	0	23
8	MACBETH	ACT 4 SCENE 1: 143-155	10	1	2	1	0	0	14
9	MACBETH	ACT 5 SCENE 3: 19-29	4	2	1	0	2	0	9
10	MACBETH	ACT 5 SCENE 5: 19-27	3	1	2	0	1	0	7
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>162</b>	

Table 2. Transitivity Process Types in soliloquies of Macbeth

The participant roles were occupied by not only the speaker himself but also third persons and other nominal syntactic roles. As is evident from the grouping of process types, the ‘Material’ category, wherein the active participant undertook several tasks related to ‘doing’, had the most frequent occurrences in soliloquies. This was the major characteristic feature of the soliloquies in Macbeth where the speakers greatly engaged in thoughts of what could have possibly been done or must be done in future. Secondly, speech in solitude also reflected attribution of features to self, a known individual or on the visuals of inanimate objects that characters like Macbeth often turned to talking which were nothing but constructions of a disturbed mind. Such speech patterns manifested in ‘Relational’ process type where the role of ‘Carrier’ or ‘Identifier’ was taken up by the constituent in the subject position. Thirdly, the feature that characterises soliloquies the best is the ability to bring out the actual mental perception of the speakers. It enables to penetrate deep into the mind and realise how the psyche is actually functioning. It clears the reasons behind the differences in thought and action, if any. This entire aspect is indicated by the ‘Mental’ process type which is the third most prominent transitivity kind found in the discourse of the soliloquies. The ‘Verbal’, ‘Behavioral’ and ‘Existential’ transitivity process types, on the other hand, occupy comparatively less prominence among the clauses in soliloquy.

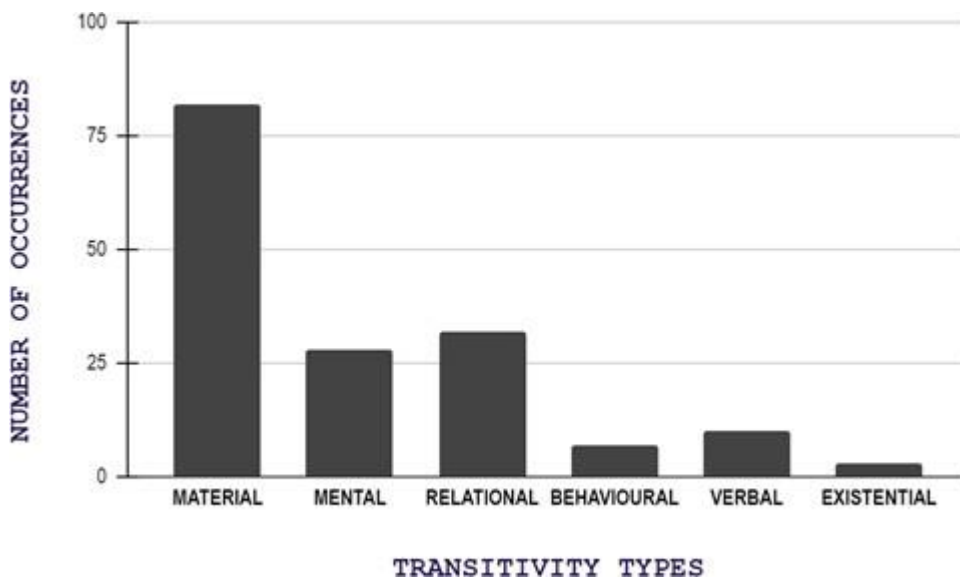


Chart 1. Transitivity Types distribution across soliloquies in Macbeth

### **Analytics of Participant Roles**

The discourse of the soliloquies shows various characters/things occupying the main subject position. However, in order to understand the speakers’ perspectives more accurately, a micro level analysis of the soliloquies was conducted wherein the main subject position in the spoken discourse referred to the speaker himself.

Accordingly, the transitivity process analysis of the tagged data sets revealed that the soliloquy speakers undertook the ‘Actor’ participant role in most of the clauses. This accounts for 18 out of the 36 participant roles which were identified. The clausal structure wherein no participant is observed due to reference-based continuity of sentence structures, were not taken into consideration for this count. The trend revealed 50% active occupancy of ‘Actor’ roles by the soliloquy speakers in total. The other categories of participants in accordance with the frequency of occurrences are ‘Senser’ with 12 identified roles and ‘Sayer’, ‘Identifier’, and ‘Carrier’ occupying 2 roles each.

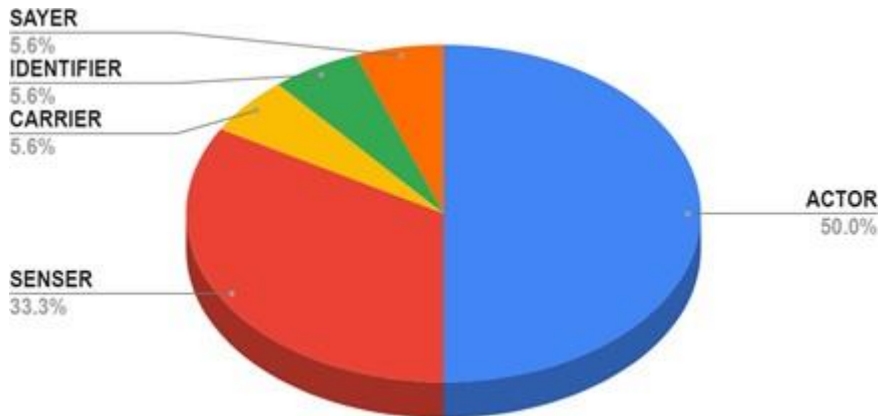


Chart 2. Participant Role share across soliloquies in Macbeth

The number of ‘Actor’ roles adopted by and for the speakers indicate their psychological intention of ‘doing’ something which they intend to but may not have been able to due to social and emotional hurdles. Macbeth’s indulgence in most of soliloquies with ‘Actor’ participant role for himself is a clear indication of how he was eager to act towards not only his path of glory but also to retain the supremacy.

The next major participant role taken up by the soliloquy speakers is ‘Senser’ which accounts for 33.33% of the total identified categories. Soliloquies are motivated by interpretations and perceptions which one feels inhibited to share. The ‘Senser’ role influenced by the mental factors of perception, affection and cognition is brought to the forefront by the speakers’ perspectives discussed in the Tagged Data Analysis Section (III.3.4.). The minor participant roles viz., ‘Carrier’, ‘Identifier’ and ‘Sayer’ add further to the understanding of the mental framework of the speakers. They specifically indicate the role the speaker is attributing to the self through his/her spoken narrative. This helps in perceiving the speaker’s wish to convey a thought from his/her own mental orientation and the identities he/she sets for himself/herself in this soliloquy-based genre of discourse influenced by the interpersonal and ideational functions of language communication. The following chart gives a representation of the participant roles the speakers Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Banquo adopted for themselves.

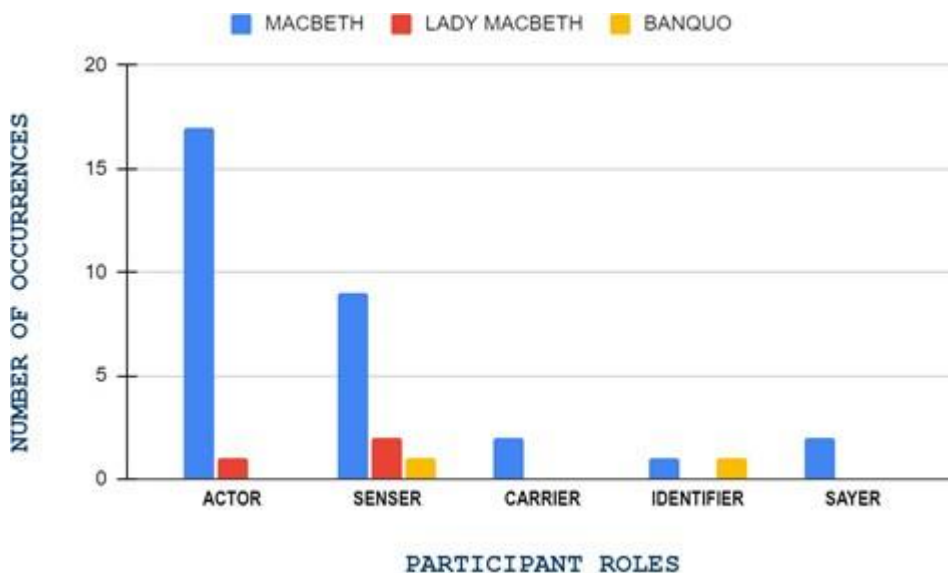


Chart.3. Participant Roles by speakers of soliloquies in Macbeth

## Observations

A systemic analysis of the soliloquies in Macbeth based on transitivity and mood structure model resulted in understanding the actual communicative motives, the role of active participants, the social experiences and the concerned individual's psychological features. The concerned tagged data and character-analysis based on the prior have been stored and can be accessed on request. Due to the hugeness of the data, it was not possible to include the entire tagged dataset in this paper. However, the distinct features of spoken discourse in solitude, that have been exposed and not limited to, include:

1. Declarative Mood is inclusive of Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioural, Existential and Verbal Transitivity types.

2. Interrogative Mood is inclusive of Material, Relational and Mental Transitivity types. 3. Imperative Mood is inclusive of Material and Verbal Transitivity types.

4. Certain clauses with Declarative Mood Structure have shown evidence of specific syntagmatic arrangements in the ordering of lexemes which is typical of Elizabethan spoken discourse. The ordering types are:

a) Complement-Subject-Finite | Act IV Scene I | Line 149  
b) Finite-Predicate-Subject | Act III Scene I | Line 70

c) Transitivity oriented deviation from the norm: Identified-Identifier-Process: Relational | Act I Scene V | Line 15

5. Imperative Mood Structure is characterised by Material Transitivity Process where clausal analysis reveals a beginning with Verbal lexemes.

6. Locative Adjuncts are found to be occurring in sentence initial positions. a) Act I Scene V | Line 49

b) Act I Scene VII | Lines 6-7

c) Act III Scene I | Line 60

8. Complements are found to occupy the initial positions of certain clauses. a) Act IV Scene I | Line 149

b) Act V Scene III | Lines 24-26

Aux-Subject-Verb order (typical in Interrogative structures) has been found with a Declarative Mood Structure.

7. In case of utterances characterised by passive structure, the Subject position corresponding to Mood Structure is equivalent to categorization of Goal for the Transitivity Process.

8. Note: *All the instances from the discourse (referred in the observations) are as per the location within the text from the version 'The Arden Shakespeare Macbeth (2015): Edited by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason. New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing India'.*

## References

1. Clark, Sandra and Mason, Pamela (2015). *The Arden Shakespeare Macbeth*: Edited by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason. New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing India.
2. Gilbert, Sky. (2017). "Macbeth- A Language Obsessed Heretical Play". *The Oxfordian*, Vol 19, pp45-68.
3. Halliday, M.A.K. (1970). *Language Structure and Language Function* in John Lyons(ed) *Horizons in Linguistics*. London: Penguin Books.
4. Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *Introduction to functional grammar*. London: Arnold.
5. Halliday, M.A.K. and Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. (2000). *Construing experience through meaning: a language-based approach to cognition*, Open linguistics series, Continuum International.
6. Halliday, M. A. K., and Christian, M. I. M. (2014). *Introduction to functional grammar* (Fourth ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.

7. Karam, Khaled. (2018). "A Critical Appraisal of Shakespeare's Creative Conceptual Blending of the Supernatural and the Human in the Dramatic Composition of Macbeth". *Shakespeare Review*. 54.3.009, pp1-20.
8. Verity, A.W. (1939). *Macbeth*: Edited by A.W. Verity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.