Analysing the Short Story "The Open Window" by Saki Using the Functional Approach

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Abstract

One of the basic functions of language is to communicate with each other. Communication is the process by which people exchange information or express their thoughts and feelings (Hornby, 2011). The functions of language play an important role in communication. This research aims to analyse the functions of interpersonal meanings in the short story "The Open Window" by Saki. Types of interpersonal meanings: giving and demanding information, demanding goods and services asserted by Butt et al. (2012) were used to classify the different kinds of interpersonal functions in the dialogues of the short story. Then, to identify what types of sentences were used in performing interpersonal functions, the sentence types described by Eastwood (2005) were used. Finally, to find out the effectiveness of the interpersonal functions in building the plot development of the story, the elements of the plot: exposition, complication, crisis, falling action and resolution by Pickering & Hoeper (1986) were used. It was found out that there are three types of interpersonal functions: demanding information, demanding service and giving information based on 33 statements, 8 questions, and 2 exclamations. It is hopeful that this research will be helpful to some extent for English specialisation students in their study of language and literature.

Keywords: interpersonal functions, giving and demanding information, demanding service, sentence type, plot

Introduction

Language, a medium of communication, is used to perform certain kinds of functions. The three main functions of Language are to make meanings about our experiences of the world and about the way we relate these experiences to each other, to make meanings that enable us to interact with others and to express a point of view, and to make meanings that tie the two previous types of meanings together into a comprehensible and coherent whole. Halliday (1985, 1994) termed these three functions as ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction. Short stories are also meant to interact or communicate with the reader. It is a communication between the reader and the author. This research aims to analyse the short story "The Open Window," using interpersonal functions. First, the dialogues were identified to classify types of interpersonal functions and their effectiveness on the plot development of the story. An analysis had been done in order to identify the types of interpersonal functions of the dialogue. The author is communicating with the readers through written text, including dialogues and at the same time the plot is developed. By analysing the types of functions and their effectiveness on the plot development, it is hopeful to be helpful to English Specialization Students in their studies to some extent. This research is only focused on interpersonal functions for communication purpose.

Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to analyse the short story "The Open Window" by Saki using the interpersonal functions. To serve this purpose, some objectives had been set as follows –

i.   to classify the kinds of interpersonal functions in the dialogues,
ii.   to identify different types of sentences in the dialogues, and

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    iii.   to find out the effectiveness of the interpersonal functions in building the plot of the short story.

Literature Review

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

According to Butt et al. (2012), systemic functional grammar includes analysing language according to their class, using box diagrams as in traditional grammar. However, meaning and choice are the main concerns in systemic functional grammar. Systemic functional grammar is

"An approach that concentrates on meaning and choice and requires a big picture of grammar and of language. One of the 'big-picture' truths about language is that any language is a huge system with a great number of choices available to its users, depending on the meaning the speaker or writer wishes to make." (Butt *et al.,* 2012)

Butt *et al.,* (2012) stated that "Language is a system like a railway journey, and all the choices in the system are meaningful. If we understand the choices speakers and writers make, we can follow their meanings from the starting point to their destination. Hence, this grammar which traces the choices made from system is called systemic."

"Another of the big-picture truths about language is that speakers and writers use their choices to make meanings; that is, we, as speakers and writers, use language to simultaneously do three different things for us:

- we use it to express and connect ideas

- we use it to interact with others

- we manipulate it to organize our ideas and interactions in texts so that they are coherent and take into account the needs of our readers or those to whom we speak."

Halliday (1985) termed these three functions as metafunctions: ideational functional including experiential metafunction and logical function, interpersonal function and textual function. Butt *et al.,* (2012) expressed the functions and their meanings in their book "Using Functional Grammar: An explorer's guide (2012)" as follows.

How speakers represent the world: exploring experiential meanings

The experiential function is one part of the ideational metafunction. Language has an experiential function, so it has experiential meanings. Experiential function is used to encode our experience of the world; that is, we use it to convey a picture of reality.

How speakers interact with language: exploring interpersonal meanings

Language has an interpersonal function, so it has interpersonal meanings. Language is used to encode our interaction. Interpersonal meanings covers two main areas: one concerns the type of interaction taking place and the kind of commodity being exchanged, and the other concerns the way speakers take a position in their messages.

One of the most basic interactive distinctions concerns the kind of commodity being exchanged; that is, the difference between using language to exchange information and using it to exchange goods and services. A second distinction concerns the type of interaction taking place; that is, the difference between demanding and giving. In other words, we can demand information or we can give it, and we can demand goods and services or give them.

i.   Giving and demanding information

Giving and demanding information are speech functions at the semantic level of language.

How many miles to Babylon? (demanding information)

Three score miles and ten. (giving information)

ii.   Demanding goods and services

In contrast to the exchange of information, the exchange of goods and services involves using language to get things done, either by offering to do them ourselves or ordering someone else to do them.

From Circular Quay, follow the waterfront for a short distance... (demanding service)

How speakers organise their message: exploring textual meanings

Language has a textual function: so it has textual meanings. We use it to organise our experiential and interpersonal meanings into a linear and coherent whole.

Sentence Types

According to Eastwood (2005), there are four sentence types. They are statement, question, imperative and exclamation. Among them, statement, question and imperative can be negative.

Statements are mainly used to give information. Besides the main use, many different uses of statements can be found. For example,

There will be tutorial next week. (giving information)

I want to know your address. (asking for information)

I want you to reply the email. (giving orders)

To ask for information, questions are used. However, questions can be used in other ways. For example,

What is your name? (asking for information)

Can I help you? (offering to help)

Shall we take the bus? (A suggestion)

Imperatives are used to order or request. Other uses of imperatives can be seen in the following example sentences.

Have a nice weekend. (Good wish)

Mind you don't fall. (Warning and reminder)

Go straight on and turn left. (Instruction and direction)

Any phrases or sentences spoken with emphasis and feeling can be referred to as exclamations. They express a feeling. In writing, an exclamation mark (!) is used. For example,

Oh, my God!

Stop!

The Elements of the Plot

According to (Pickering & Hoeper, 1986), there are five elements of plot. They are exposition, complication, crisis, falling action and resolution.

Exposition: The exposition is the beginning section in which the author provides the necessary background information, sets the scene, establishes situation, and dates the action. It may also introduce the characters and the conflict, or the potential for conflict. The exposition may be accomplished in a single sentence or paragraph, or, in the case of some novels, occupy and entire chapter or more some plots require more exposition than others. A historical novel set in a foreign country several centuries ago obviously needs to provide the reader with more background information than a novel with a contemporary setting.

Complication: The complication, which is sometimes referred to as the rising action, breaks the existing equilibrium and introduces the characters and the underlying or inciting conflict (if they have not already been introduced by the exposition). The conflict is then developed gradually and intensified. The crisis is when the plot reaches its turning point.

Crisis: The crisis (also referred to as the climax) is that moment at which the plot reaches its point of greatest emotional intensity; it is the turning point of the plot, directly precipitating its resolution.

Falling Action: Once the crisis, or turning point, has been reached, the tension subsides and the plot moves toward its appointed conclusion.

Resolution: The final section of the plot is its resolution; it records the outcome of the conflict and establishes some new equilibrium or stability (however tentative and momentary). The resolution is also referred to as the conclusion or the denouement, the latter a French word meaning "unknotting" or "untying".

Summary of the Short Story "The Open Window"

The short story "The Open Window" was written by Saki. The story is about a man named Mr Nuttel's visit to Mrs Sappleton's house which is situated in rural area. Mr.Framton Nuttel who is suffering from mental illness, visits the Sappletons with letters of introduction from his sister. He is entertained by Vera, a fifteen year old young lady before Mrs Sappleton comes down. Then, Vera learns that Mr Nuttel doesn't know much about her aunt. Thus, she makes up a story based on the open window in the living room. According to the story by Vera, Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers were engulfed in the bog three years ago. They used to go shooting together with their little brown spaniel. They used to come back from the open French window, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' The French window in their living room is kept open in the hope of her lost or dead husband and brothers' come back from their snipe shooting. When Mrs Sappleton finally appears, she explains why the window is open, apparently confirming Vera's story. Then, the people in Vera's story came home through the open window. Mr Nuttel thought that he saw ghosts and fled away. Vera made up another story about Mr Nuttel. Mr Nuttel had a horror of dogs as he was once hunted by a pack of pariah dogs. Romance at short notice was Vera's specialty.

Research Methodology

The dialogues from the short story "The Open Window" by Saki were first collected and classified using the interpersonal functions: giving and demanding information, demanding goods and services. Then the different types of sentences were identified. Finally,

the elements of the plot were used to find out the effectiveness of interpersonal functions in the dialogue in portraying the plot of the story.

Data Analysis and Data Interpretation

        Table (1) presents the total number of dialogues found in the exposition of the plot and their functions. In the exposition of the story, nine dialogues were found. Three kinds of interpersonal functions: giving information, demanding service, and demanding information could be seen in the dialogues. To give information and to demand service, statements were used. Questions were used to demand information.

Table (1)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in exposition of the story.

No.	Plot	Text	Interpersonal functions	Sentence Types
1		"My aunt will be down presently, Mr Nuttel,"	giving information	statement
2		"in the meantime you must try and put up with me."	demanding service	statement
3		"I know how it will be,"	giving information	statement
4		"you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping."	giving information	statement
5	Exposition	"I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there."	giving information	statement
6		"Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."	giving information	statement
7		"Do you know many of the people round here?"	demanding information	question
8		"Hardly a soul, my sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."	giving information	statement
9		"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?"	demanding information	question

        Table (2) presents the total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in complication of the story. In the complication, twenty four dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the complication were giving information and demanding information. Statements were used to give information and questions were used to demand information.

Table (2)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the
            dialogues found in complication of the story.

No.	Plot	Text	Interpersonal functions	Sentence Types
10		"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago,"	giving information	statement
11		"that would be since your sister's time."	giving information	statement
12		"Her tragedy?"	demanding information	question
13		"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon,"	giving information	statement
14		"It is quite warm for the time of the year,"	giving information	statement
15		"but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"	demanding information	question
16		"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting."	giving information	statement
17		"They never came back."	giving information	statement
18		"In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog."	giving information	statement
19		"It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning."	giving information	statement
20		"Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it."	giving information	statement
21	Complication	"Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do."	giving information	statement
22		"That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk."	giving information	statement
23		"…she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, …"	giving information	statement
24		"Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window"	giving information	statement
25		"I hope Vera has been amusing you?"	demanding information	question
26		"She has been very interesting,"	giving information	statement
27		"I hope you don't mind the open window,"	demanding information	statement
28		"my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way."	giving information	statement
29		"They've been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets."	giving information	statement
30		"So like you menfolk, isn't it?"	demanding information	question
31		"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise,"	giving information	statement
32		"On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement,"	giving information	statement
33		"No?"	demanding information	question

   Table (3) presents the total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence
types of the dialogues found in crisis of the story. In the crisis, three dialogues were found.
The interpersonal functions found in the crisis is giving information and demanding
information. Exclamations and statements were used to give information.

Table (3)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the
            dialogues found in crisis of the story.

No.	Plot	Text	Interpersonal functions	Sentence Types
34		"Here they are at last!"	giving information	exclamation
35	Crisis	"Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"	demanding information	question
36		"Here we are, my dear, fairly muddy, but most of it's dry."	giving information	statement

Table (4) presents the total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in falling action of the story. In the falling action, three dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the falling action were giving information and demanding information. Statements were used to give information and a question was used to demand information. The tension of the plot subsided as Mrs Sappleton's husband asked who was the man and why he had run away. This gave the reader the information that Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers were still alive and Vera's story was a made-up one.

Table (4)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in falling action of the story.

No.	Plot	Text	Interpersonal functions	Sentence Types
37	Falling Action	"Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"	demanding information	question
38		"A most extraordinary man, a Mr Nuttel, could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of goodbye or apology when you arrived."	giving information	statement
39		"One would think he had seen a ghost."	giving information	statement

Table (5) presents the total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in the resolution of the story. In the resolution, four dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the falling action were giving information. Statements were used to give information. Vera made up another story about Mr Nuttel based on why he had run away when he saw the three men and a dog.

Table (5)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types of the dialogues found in resolution of the story.

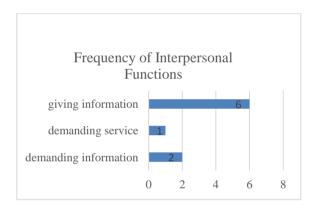| No.	Plot	Text	Interpersonal functions	Sentence Types
40	Resolution	"I expect it was the spaniel,"	giving information	statement
41		"he told me he had a horror of dogs."	giving information	statement
42		"He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him."	giving information	statement
43		"Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."	giving information	statement

Findings and Discussion

In the short story "The Open Window" by Saki, three kinds of interpersonal functions: demanding information, demanding service and giving information were found. In order to perform these interpersonal functions, three types of sentences: statement, question, and exclamation were used. Out of ten demanding information functions, there were one statement and nine questions. So, it was found out that to demand information, questions were mainly used. There was only one function of demanding service and a statement was used to demand service. The most prominent interpersonal function in the dialogues was giving information. Out of thirty three items of giving information, there were thirty one statements and two exclamations. The total number of interpersonal functions and the sentence types found in the short story are shown in table (6).

Table (6)   The total number of the interpersonal functions and the sentence types .

Sentence types	Interpersonal functions			Total
	Demanding information	Demanding service	Giving information	
Statement	1	1	31	33
Question	9			9
Exclamation			1	1
Total	10	1	32	43

Besides, these interpersonal functions in the dialogues were effective in the plot development of the short story. According to Freytag, there are five stages in the plot of the story: exposition, complication, crisis, falling action and resolution. To find out the effectiveness of the interpersonal functions in the dialogues, the dialogues were categorized into exposition, complication, crisis, falling action and resolution.

In the **exposition** of the story, nine dialogues were found. Three kinds of interpersonal functions: giving information, demanding service, and demanding information could be seen in the dialogues. To give information and to demand service, statements were used. Questions were used to demand information. Figure (1) shows the total number of the kinds of interpersonal functions and figure (2) shows the type of sentences found in the exposition of the story.

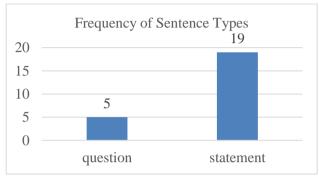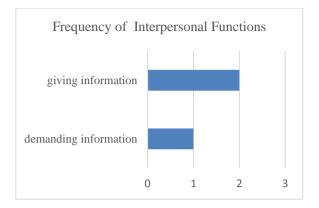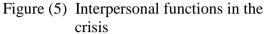
Figure (1) Interpersonal functions found in exposition.

Figure (2) Sentence types used to perform interpersonal functions.

In the exposition, we found that the author introduced the characters and setting of the short story through their dialogues. The story started with the scene of Mr Nuttel visiting Mrs Sappleton's house and being received by Mrs Sappleton's niece, Vera. It was found out that the most prominent type of interpersonal functions was giving information and statements were mainly used to give background information of the characters and the setting. The statement: "My aunt will be down presently, Mr Nuttel," gave readers the information that Mr. Nuttel was a visitor who visited Mrs Sappleton's house. The statement: "in the meantime you must try and put up with me." was used by Vera to demand service. The question "Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" was used by Vera to demand information. Mr Nuttel's answer "Hardly a soul…of the people here" to Vera's question "Do you know many of the people round here?" led the plot to complication as Vera made up the story about her aunt concerning the open window.

In the **complication**, twenty four dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the complication are giving information and demanding information. Statements were used to give information and questions were used to demand information. From these two interpersonal functions, the conflict of the story was developed and led to the turning point of the story. Figure (3) shows the total number of the kinds of interpersonal functions and figure (4) shows the types of sentences found in the complication of the story.

Figure (3) Interpersonal functions found in complication

Figure (4) Sentence types used to perform interpersonal functions

In the complication, more characters were introduced through Vera's story. Vera made up a story based on the open window in the living room. According to Vera, Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers were engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog three years ago. She narrated that they used to come back from their snipe-shooting through the open French window. Mrs Sappleton kept the window open in the hope of her husband and brothers' comeback. At that time, Mrs Sappleton arrived in the living room, kept looking at the open window and informed Mr Nuttel that her husband and brothers would be home from their shooting. We found that Mr Nuttel was told a made-up story by Vera. It seemed to be that Mr Nuttel was confused concerning the arrival of Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers. This led to the climax of the story. Since Vera was telling the story to Mr Nuttel as well as to the reader, it was found out that statements were mainly used to give information.

In the **crisis**, three dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the crisis were giving information and demanding information. A question, a statement and an exclamation were used to give information. By giving information of the arrival of Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers, the reader might wonder whether they were the ghost or the human beings. Figure (5) shows the total number of the kinds of interpersonal functions and figure (6) shows the types of sentences found in the crisis of the story.

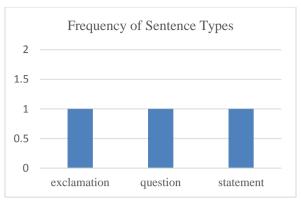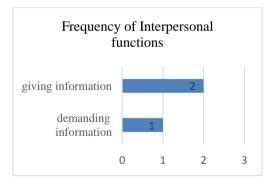Figure (5) Interpersonal functions in the crisis

Figure (6) Sentence types used to perform interpersonal functions

The plot reached its point of greatest emotional intensity when Mrs Sappleton announced the arrival of her husband and her two younger brothers. This caused Mr Nuttel ran away as the people he knew to be dead came home through the open window.

In the **falling action**, three dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the falling action were giving information and demanding information. Statements were used to give information and a question was used to demand information. The tension of the plot subsided as Mrs Sappleton's husband asked who was the man and why he had run away. This gave the reader the information that Mrs Sappleton's husband and her two younger brothers were still alive and Vera's story was a made-up one. Figure (7) shows the total number of the kinds of interpersonal functions and figure (8) shows the types of sentences found in the falling action of the story.

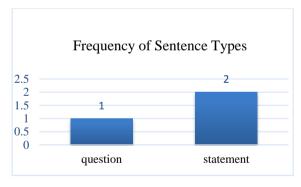Figure (7) Interpersonal functions found in falling action

Figure (8) Sentence types used to convey interpersonal functions

The tension of the plot subsided after Mr Nuttel had run away. Mrs Sappleton, her husband and her younger brothers wondered why Mr Nuttel had run away.

In the **resolution**, four dialogues were found. The interpersonal functions found in the falling action was giving information. Statements were used to give information. Vera made up another story about Mr Nuttel based on why he had run away when he saw the three men and a dog. The story ended when Vera made up another story about Mr Nuttel describing him as a man who was afraid of dogs. Figure 9 shows the kind of interpersonal functions found in resolution.
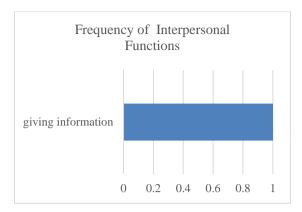
Figure 9. Interpersonal functions found in resolution

Conclusion

The three main functions of language are to make meanings about our experiences of the world and about the way we relate these experiences to each other, to make meanings that enable us to interact with others and to express a point of view, and to make meanings that tie the two previous types of meanings together into a comprehensible and coherent whole. This research analysed the functions of interpersonal meanings in the dialogues of the short story "The Open Window" by Saki. It was found out that there are three types of interpersonal functions: demanding information, demanding service and giving information based on 33 statements, 8 questions, and 2 exclamations. The most significant kind of interpersonal functions is giving information and statements are mainly used to give information. Moreover, the effectiveness of the interpersonal functions can be found in building the plot development of the story. It is hopeful that this research will be helpful to some extent for English specialisation students in their study of language and literature.

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