

Analysis of the Protagonist's Character in the Film *The Shawshank Redemption* Based on the Interpersonal Function

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Abstract: One of the core ideas of Systemic Functional Grammar is based on the three meta-language functions proposed by Halliday. Among them, interpersonal function is one of the three meta-language functions. Interpersonal function, as one of the three meta-language functions, refers to the fact that people use language to interact with others, establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, and express judgments and evaluations of the world, which are mainly realized through the mood and modality systems. In this thesis, the author selects the characters' dialogues and stream of consciousness in *The Shawshank Redemption* as the analytical corpus, and analyzes the performance of the main character Andy's interpersonal function in the dialogues as a way to deepen the understanding of the characters' and roles' relationship in the film.

Keywords: interpersonal function; mood system; modality system; *The Shawshank Redemption*

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1.Introduction

The Shawshank Redemption is a prison film with a strong sense of humanity, which had a strong reaction once it was released and was nominated for seven Oscars in 1995. The success of this film lies in the appropriate use and treatment of the film language, in shaping each character, the role of the film language plays a role in supporting and mirroring is particularly prominent, presenting a warm and infectious scene to the audience, and each character in the film is deeply rooted in the audience's mind. The description of the film is completely focused on the character and plot development, no spectacular special effects, no strong emotional elements, completely highlighting the portrayal of the story, thus reflecting the protagonist's desire for freedom and hope. Therefore, this selection analyzes the protagonist's performance of interpersonal functions through these forms to gain a fuller understanding of his character traits, which in turn leads to a better understanding of the film's connotations and artistic value.

2.Research Review

Interpersonal function is a key element of systemic functional grammar, involving interaction and relationship building in discourse while reflecting the speaker's identity, motivations, and attitudes. Halliday initially proposed four functions of grammar, later summarized into three meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Eggins and Slade (1997) and Lemke (1995) contributed to interpersonal function, analyzing casual conversations and socio-cultural shifts. Thompson and Thetela (1995) studied written advertisements, concluding that creating a reader stimulates buying desire. In China, scholars like Hu Zhuanglin (1989) and Peng Xuanwei (2000) made significant contributions, with Hu filling the research gap and Peng conducting comparative studies. Ma Lei (2003), Chen Yu (2004), Chen Min and Wang Xiaobin (2005) also contributed to the field. Liu Shisheng suggested interpersonal comments can be manifested in various ways. China's growing global influence has expanded the academic impact of its systemic functional linguistics research.

2.1 Mood and modality system

2.1.1 Mood system

Halliday sees the interpersonal function as an exchange of information with distinct roles for speakers/writers and listeners/readers. The core of language as a communication tool lies in interaction, including giving and demanding. The mood system includes statements, questions, exclamations, and imperatives, which convey different messages and intentions. By choosing different moods, speakers can express their intentions and attitudes and develop various communicative relationships. Mood fulfills the interpersonal function grammatically. The mood of a

clause is divided into the subject and the finite element, with the residue comprising the predicator, complement, and adjunct.

2.1.2 Modality system

The modality system is an important part of interpersonal meaning, and in Halliday's analysis, modality is partially subordinate to mood, as can be seen in his description of the components of mood. In functional linguistics, modality refers to the judgment made by the speaker about the success and validity of the proposition he or she says, or the obligation he or she asks the other party to assume in a command, or the personal will to be expressed in a proposal. The modality system in a broad sense also includes the state of mind. If the thing to be exchanged is a message, modality refers to the reliability of the message from the point of view of probability or usualness, and if the thing to be exchanged is an item or service, modality refers to the speaker's confidence in the eventual success of the exchange. Since the modal meaning of the exchange is different, the modality is subdivided into "modalisation" (when it involves messages) and "modulation" (when it involves goods and services). Modality and attitude express the middle between the affirmation and negation poles, while the modality itself can also express the three degrees of magnitude. Halliday also divides modal orientations into four types: explicit subjectivity, explicit objectivity, implicit subjectivity, and implicit objectivity.

2.2 Analysis of the Protagonist's Character in the Film from the Perspective of the Mood and Modality System

2.2.1 Mood system in the film

The language of the protagonists in *The Shawshank Redemption* is roughly divided into two main types: character dialog and stream of consciousness, each of which takes up half of the film's text. Character dialogues are mostly simple declarative sentences and parallel phrases and interrogative sentences. The article mainly analyzes Andy's dialogues and explores the character image and personality traits embodied in the dialogues.

Example 1: Andy: I'd only ask three beers a piece for each of my coworkers.

A man working outdoors feels more like a man if he can have a bottle of suds. That's only my opinion, Sir.

Example 1 shows Andy using a declarative sentence to make a request, reflecting his innovative and resourceful mind. He helps prison guards with financial issues and asks for beers for his cellmates. This use of declarative mood fulfills the function of giving information. Andy's act of sharing the beer conveys a zest for life and encourages hope and positivity among inmates, demonstrating generosity and sharing.

Example 2: Andy: What's the matter with you?

This is my chance to get out!

Don't you see that? It's my life!

Don't you understand? It's my life!

In the dialogue, Andy uses three interrogative moods. The first is a wh-question with a descending tone, typical in English. However, Andy's questions are not for specific information but to express desires and dissatisfaction. The other two are "don't you" questions, common in spoken or informal written English, used for rhetorical questions, confirmation, or emphasis. Andy's interrogative mood conveys a demand for information. His questioning of the warden about killing Tommy shows his desperation to know the details, which is his only hope to overturn the case.

Example 3: "I read it. You know how to read, you ignorant fuck?"

This example is taken from Andy's words when he faces the bullying of the Three Sisters again after his imprisonment and starts to fight back. Although it is in a questioning tone, it is a statement of Andy's true inner thoughts. It shows that Andy is a very brave and determined person. He is not afraid of authority and evil forces, and he is not controlled or influenced by others.

Example 4:

Red: "That kid's long gone, and this old man is all that's left. I got to live with that." Rehabilitated? It's just a bullshit word.

Red, reflecting on his past, expressed no regrets to the officer. The sentence consists of two parallel clauses and one independent clause, connected by the parallel conjunction "and". The first parallel sentence "That kid's long gone" is a complete sentence with the subject "That kid" and the predicate "is long gone", using the present perfect tense to indicate that some past action or state has continued into the present. The second parallel sentence "this old man is all that's left" is also a complete sentence. This declarative sentence Red is simply stating his inner thoughts, both in response to the officer's questioning and in response to giving an answer to his younger self, showing that his current self is able to accept the unknowns of life. It also expresses Andy's helplessness towards reality and nostalgia for the past. Red excelled in prison and was a calm man, earning the trust of the warden. He has repeatedly petitioned the warden for parole, but has been denied. However, when he applied for the last time, he was not as nervous as usual, but smiled indifferently, because he had obtained the long-awaited freedom through his own efforts.

2.2.2 Modality system in the film

Example 4: Andy: Perhaps it's the time you tried a new profession.

What I mean is, you don't seem to be a good thief. Maybe you should try something else."

In a dialogue between Andy and Tommy, Andy advises Tommy to pursue a high school education instead of stealing, using the medium modality verb "should." This advice helps Tommy, a recidivist, obtain a high school diploma while in prison. The evolution of "should" from Old English to Modern English reflects linguistic adaptation and societal changes, with functions including making suggestions and guiding thinking. Andy is portrayed as a nonconformist with an open, progressive mindset, encouraging Tommy to step into the unknown and seek new opportunities. His innovative spirit and belief in Tommy's potential inspire others to overcome limitations. Andy's genuine concern for Tommy's well-being extends beyond words, revealing his compassionate and understanding character, making him a beacon of hope and positivity.

Example 5: Andy: What was his name?

What did you say? I was just wondering if anyone knew his name. So put the knife down. Brooks, just look at me. Put the knife down.

In this example, Andy uses the medium modal adverb "just" twice, showing his concern and compassion. In the first segment, Andy asks for the name of the executed person, demonstrating his kindness. In the second segment, after Brooks' parole, Andy tells Brooks to put down the knife and look him in the eye, showing his care for Brooks' emotional state. Andy's calm and sensible exhortation aims to de-escalate the tension and avoid further conflict, highlighting his wisdom.

Example 6:

Andy: Remember, Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things.

And no good thing ever dies.

In the letter Andy left for Red, he uses the low-value modal word "maybe," which indicates possibility, euphemism, and emphasis. This shows Andy's optimism; despite injustice and hardship, he maintained a positive attitude, believing he could overcome difficulties. His hope and optimism were key to his perseverance and eventual escape from prison. Even if the tunnel wasn't dug, Andy would find another way to freedom.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, after the analysis of interpersonal function, we can observe that the main character, Andy, is a resilient and intelligent man, who has a relentless pursuit of freedom and has no fear of the forces of evil, and when he faces all kinds of difficulties and injustice in prison, he always maintains an optimistic mindset and firm beliefs, and constantly seeks for chances and ways to achieve his goals. As far as the mood system analyzed first in this

paper is concerned, in the mood system, the realization of providing information is mainly the declarative mood; the realization of demanding information is mainly the interrogative mood. From Andy's character's dialogues we can find that Andy is good at stating facts, which means that he uses more declarative mood, but also some interrogative mood. Andy is a highly educated person, and his use of modality verbs and adverbs is mostly out of politeness and respect for others.

Through the above analysis we can see that using interpersonal function to analyze film dialogues can not only deepen our understanding of colloquial discourse in film dialogues, but also help us to better utilize the guiding significance of interpersonal function on characterization. In our daily life, we should have faith in everyday and be honest with everyone, we can still choose to be Andy, and the real redemption can only be brought by ourselves.

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