

Dialogue Analysis of Characters in *A Day's Wait* from the Perspective of Interpersonal Function

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the mood and modality of the dialogues in Hemingway's short story "A Day's Wait". Based on the interpersonal function theory of systemic functional grammar, it aims to reveal the role of the mood and modality system in helping to deeply analyze the relationship between the characters and the personalities of them. This will help readers gain a better understanding of this short story.

Keywords —interpersonal function; mood and modality, dialogue

I. INTRODUCTION

Hemingway was one of the most influential writers in the first half of the 20th century because of his unique writing style, and the length of his short stories fully embodies his literary creation characteristics. His short stories have a unique perspective and convey a profound attitude towards life. Due to the short length, the author's literary attainments are required to be higher and needs more considerations to convey his attitude and meaning.

In numerous studies, we often see the study of Hemingway's iceberg theory and his narrative art, of the image of a tough guy, and of his tragic thoughts. As in the case of the short story "A Day's Wait" studied in this paper, the research is mostly in these directions. No matter how many perspectives and dimensions there are, for literary works, the purpose of our research is to study them based on three tendencies of meaning: the meaning the author wants to convey, the meaning the text carries, and the meaning the reader receives. This paper, on the other hand, attempts to interpret the deeper meaning of the short story from the new perspective of the interpersonal function of Halliday's systematic functional grammar and give

the reader profound thoughts to ultimately empathize with the author.

II. INTERPERSONAL FUNCTION

Halliday's systemic functional grammar holds that language is a potential system of meaning that people can choose to express meaning and perform functions, which is composed of three metafunctions, namely interpersonal function, ideational function and textual function. Among them, interpersonal function focuses on the role and relationship between people in communication. The speaker uses language structures as the means of social communication to involve the speech event: the expression of his comments, his attitudes, his evaluations, and also the relationship he set up between himself and the listener, which are decided by different communication roles he adopts, like informing, questioning and persuading. According to Halliday (1994), the interpersonal function is projected onto context-tenor, which is the participants in the interaction and their social relations and statuses. This communicative function of language is embodied in two forms: mood system and modality system. Mood system indicates the role chosen by the speaker and the role assigned to the listener. It refers to the emotional and

attitudinal performance of the communication between participants, while modality system refers to whether the speaker makes a judgment or whether the sentence is judgmental or speculative.

The analysis of mood and modality can be effectively applied to literary works mainly based on dialogue. In other words, dialogue is a linguistic means of interpersonal communication, which can better reflect the communicative purpose of participants. Therefore, the analysis of mood and modality is undoubtedly a more accurate way to obtain the intentions of dialogue participants, and is one of the effective means to analyze the potential of textual meaning.

This paper will analyze the representative dialogues in the short story “A Day’s Wait” from the perspective of mood and modality, so as to explore the role of language in shaping the relationship between characters and their personalities in the novel, and further understand the deep meaning of Hemingway's language.

III. DIALOGUE ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERPERSONAL FUNCTION

The short story “A Day’s Wait” was written in 1933. It takes place in a daily scenario where a nine-year-old boy finds himself in the early morning with a cold and fever. The little boy did not know the difference between Celsius and Fahrenheit. He thought his temperature of 102 was definitely not a simple cold, and he was probably going to die, so he quietly waited for the arrival of death. In this process his father did not notice the changes that happened to the child. At the end of the day, when the little boy learned from his father that it was all a misunderstanding, he ended his day waiting to die with the simplest words. The novel consists mainly of the dialogue between the father and son. It is as if Hemingway unfolds a painting for the reader without making any comments or explanations, waiting for the viewer to make a sound. Interpersonal functional analysis emphasizes the relationship between characters in the discourse and can produce application value. Mood and Modality system, as the main analytical tools of interpersonal functional theory, can help readers

understand the author's intention and analyze the characters more deeply. So in the paper, we will analyze some dialogues in the text through the system of Mood and Modality.

A. Mood system

Mood in systemic-functional grammar consists of two parts: namely subject and finite. Subject is the originator of proposition and the main carrier of effective information. Finite elements are auxiliary verbs that express tense modality and polarity. The mood is produced by the combination of subject and finite. Mood analysis is usually carried out in two ways, mood type analysis and mood component analysis. Mood type analysis is the analysis of sentence types composed of subject and finite elements to achieve the analysis of meaning. According to Halliday, the random combination of two roles and exchange objects in communication can embody four kinds of speech functions: statement, offer, command and question. The corresponding imperative mood, indicative mood and interrogative mood can fully embody these four functions. Here, we will analyze some typical dialogues in the article by means of mood system and speech function.

A1. The mood of imperative:

- [3] “You better go back to bed.”
- [4] “No. I’m all right.”
- [5] “You go to bed. I’ll see you when I’m dressed.”
- [6] “You go up to bed,” I said, “you’re sick.”
- [7] “I’m all right.” he said.

The speech function employed here the father is command. The excerpts belong to typical clause mood. Although there is the presence of the subject in a few sentences of the excerpt, since it is in the second person and only serves to indicate a request to the listener and strengthen the tone, so we’ll ignore it here and continue to analyze it in terms of the imperative mood. So we can say that the clause [3]“You better go back to bed”, clause [5]“You go to bed” and clause [6]“You go up to bed” above are all imperative clauses. In these clauses, the father attempted to demand something realized in terms of imperative Mood. Clause [3] is the advice given by

the father after he learned that the boy had a headache. Clause [5] is the father's reaction after the boy said he was fine, and the father again suggested the boy to go to bed. Clause [6] was said when the father came downstairs and found the little boy sitting by the fire instead of going to bed.

Since Tenor dimension is realized by looking at who gives and who demand (Eggs, 1994:193). In these three imperative clauses, we can see the language function of commanding more or less. The father's main purpose in using the imperative mood is to demand services from the addressee, ask the listener to do something concrete and visible on his own terms, that is, to get the boy to go to bed at his command. The father, out of concern and love for his child, wanted the child to rest in bed. But the child did not respond as expected, so the father said "go to bed" three times, each time in a stronger tone. From the initial comfort and advice gradually became an order and command, the father hoped that the child would go to bed as he wished and have a rest. In this case, the role of the father is the controller and the role of the child is the subordinate. In other words, they have different social status when they are in that situation.

[25] "Your temperature is all right," I said. "It's nothing to worry about."

[26] "I don't worry," he said, "but I can't keep from thinking."

[27] "Don't think," I said. "Just take it easy."

[28] "I'm taking it easy," he said and looked straightly ahead. He was evidently holding tight onto himself about something.

[29] "Take this with water."

The clause [27] "Don't think. Just take it easy" and [29] "take this with water" are still clauses in the imperative mood. The imperatives consist of a mood element of finite only (no subject), and only a RESIDUE (no MOOD element at all) (Eggs, 1994: 185-185). The boy thought he was going to die when he learned his temperature was 102, so he wouldn't let anyone near him to avoid infecting others. The father, on the other hand, has not yet noticed the change that has taken place in the child's mind and is just trying to tell the child that a mild cold is not a big deal and to reassure him to

take his medicine. The father here uses the imperative mood to achieve two main purposes: 1) to enlighten the addressee by providing a new perspective on a phenomenon, and 2) to get the addressee, the little boy, to accomplish something specific and visible according to his will (to ask the addressee for a service).

The words "think" and "take it easy" in clause [27] are not concrete and visible behaviors, but behaviors that occur in the boy's mind, which are psychologically invisible. In other words, it is invisible to the father whether the child is thinking about his fever or not. Therefore, the use of such imperative mood tends to give specific information to the addressee and provide a new perspective on the problem, rather than repressing the addressee with authority and asking the addressee to provide certain goods and services. When the child is sick, the father reassures the child not to take the illness as a matter of God, not to think nonsense, but to relax. Although the imperative mood is also used in clause [29], it does not function as in clause [27] to indicate that the father wants to offer information or services from a new perspective on a certain phenomenon. Thompson (1996) believes that in interpersonal communication, the use of the imperative mood implies the absoluteness of commands. But this does not mean that the addressee must take orders. Thus, the imperative mood is the speaker's one-way demand for goods or services from the addressee. It is up to the addressee to decide whether he or she needs to provide the goods or services requested. In clause [29], the father wants to ask the boy for a visible "service", which is to complete the action of taking the medicine. The use of this clause is intended to express the father's will to let the boy do something in his own way, which can emphasize his position as a father and as an elder.

To sum up, we can find that the father's repeated use of imperative clauses highlights his function as a father to ask for goods and services from his children, and his role as an elder to provide children with specific information and a new perspective on problems.

A2. The mood of imperative:

- [10] “Do you want me to read to you?”
[11] “All right. If you want to,” said the boy.
[12] “How do you feel, Schatz?” I asked him.
[13] “Just the same, so far,” he said.
[14] “Why don't you try to sleep? I'll wake you up for the medicine.”
[15] “I'd rather stay awake.”
[16] After a while he said to me, “You don't have to stay in here with me, Papa, if it bothers you.”
[17] “It doesn't bother me.”
[18] “No, I mean you don't have to stay if it's going to bother you.”

This is the first set of conversations between the young boy and his father when he is sick and mistakenly believes that he is going to die. We can see that the father's clauses are all in the tone of questioning. Here the mood elements of the clause contain grammatically finite and subject. The structure rule of the interrogative mood, finite always precedes the subject. (Eggins, 1994: 173) Interrogative mood is often divided into “yes/no interrogative” and “wh- interrogative”. Thompson (1996) suggests that the function of yes/no interrogative is that the speaker makes clear to the addressee his or her own attribution of information, i.e., whether he or she holds an affirmative or negative attitude toward an event. So the speech function here is question, that is to say, this question is realized in interrogative mood. It functions to demand information from the listeners (Eggins, 1994: 173). By examining the clauses, this paper finds that the use of the father's questioning tone serves two main purposes: 1) to demand new information and 2) to induce and enlighten the addressee.

In clause [10] “Do you want me to read to you?”, the father demands information from the child by interrogative mood, specifically, clarifying the normalization of information, i.e., “you want me to read to you or not”. The function of this clause is to ask for (accurate) information so that the father can make follow-up arrangements based on the information. As the child's father, he needs accurate information to act so that his child's needs are met.

In clause [12] “How do you feel, Schatz?”, the father asked for information about his child's health to figure out what his next steps as a father caring for his child. In clause [14] “Why don't you try to sleep?”, the father uses WH- interrogative to get the child to think about going to sleep. In functional grammar, the interrogative mood seeks information from the addressee. Here, the father does not ask the child to answer his question, but asks the child to consider going to bed through the interrogative. In the novel, immediately after the example clause, the father adds “I'll wake you up for the medicine.” The father uses such clause to guide the addressee, asking the child to consider going to bed for a while. So here the father is more giving information or services than demanding information.

Now let's look at the child's words. It's all indicative clauses. The boy had become seriously confused about his actual illness, mistaking a common cold for a dying disease. It is difficult for the young boy to accept the fact that he is about to die, but he tries to appear calm. In terms of functional grammar, the indicative mood is simply a statement of objective facts and inner feelings in a calm tone. Here the speech function of statement is realized. Mood analysis of clause [11] “All right. If you want to” and [15] “I'd rather stay awake” [16] “You don't have to stay in here with me, Papa, if it bothers you” and [18] “No, I mean you don't have to stay if it's going to bother you” presented above all indicate that those clauses grammatically consist of mood elements applied to make interpersonal meaning, what Halliday called subject and finite. The mood elements of the clauses are structurally subject followed by finite. In other words, Finite is always preceded by subject. It indicates that those are statement speech functions realized in terms of indicative moods.

Halliday (1994) proposed that the use of indicative mood can give information to the addressee. In the case of the child, the information he conveys falls into two broad categories: 1) the transmission of his own needs and 2) the behavioral expectations of the addressee. In clause [15], the boy is giving information to his father, to enable his father know what he incline to do. Clauses [11] [16] and [18] are giving information to persuade the

father to do something more meaningful. The boy's misunderstanding doomed the meaning conveyed by the author is not placid. The child suffered from the double torture of illness and psychology alone, and in the face of death, he did not sigh or complain about it. So what we see is the image of a tough little guy who is determined and tolerant. Hemingway uses a statement tone that seems to be inconsistent with the inner emotions of the boy to highlight his inner fluctuations, which brings us a great impact.

The dialogues between the father and son seem to have been answered, but all the dialogues are actually one-way information transmission. The content of the two dialogues seems reasonable, but they are parallel without intersection. The indicative mood expresses that the boy is very firm about what he thinks in his mind, which is also destined to cause misunderstanding and foreshadows the feelings for the subsequent misunderstanding.

[30] "Do you think it will do any good?"

[31] "Of course will."

[32] "About what time do you think I'm going to die?" he asked.

[33] "What?"

[34] "About how long will it be before I die?"

[35] "You aren't going to die. What's the matter with you?"

[36] "Oh, yes, I am. I heard him say a hundred and two."

[37] "People don't die with a fever of one hundred and two. That's a silly way to talk."

[38] "I know they do. At school in France, the boys told me you can't live with forty-four degrees. I've got a hundred and two."

[39] "You poor Schatz," I said. "It's like miles and kilometers. You know, like how many kilometers we make when we do seventy miles in the car."

[40] "Oh." he said.

This is the second set of conversations between the young boy and his father in the novel when he learns that he is sick and thinks he is going to die. Unlike the previous dialogue, this part is mainly

about the child asking questions and the father answering them. In this dialogue, the boy's questions dominate the conversation. The interrogative mood of the little boy highlights the desperation inside his heart. It serves two main purposes: 1) to obtain new information, 2) to confirm their own cognition.

In the clause [30] "Do you think it will do any good?", the child asks the father for information through questioning, specifically, to clarify the attribution of information, i.e. "the medicine will do any good or not". The function of such clauses is to ask for (accurate) information so that the child can use the information to decide whether to take his medicine or not and to think about how long he will live based on the information he receives. In the clause [32] "About what time do you think I'm going to die?", the child discusses the length of his life with his father through Wh-interrogative. The child is not only indicating that he knows that "time is short" and is certain about the outcome of death, but also expressing that he has questions about the time of death and hopes that his father can answer the question, which highly refines the meaning that the boy wants to convey. This is followed by the clause [34], "About how long will it be before I die?", in which the boy asks again how long it will be before death. It seems to be a question, but it can fully reflect the fear in the boy's heart. The three interrogative clauses make full use of the speech function of question to push the conflict to its peak and set the stage for the mystery to be uncovered at the end.

And the information conveyed by the father's response is broadly divided into three categories: 1) informing his cognitive judgment; 2) commenting or evaluating the person or event; 3) giving a specific description of the event that has occurred. Through the clause [31] "Of course will." and [35] "You aren't going to die." The father gives information to the child that he will not die because of the fever. The clause [37] "People don't die with a fever of one hundred and two. That's a silly way to talk." reassures the child by giving information and stating his opinion that a fever of 102 will not kill him. Finally, according to the child's ability of cognitive and comprehension, the father used the

clause [39] “You poor Schatz. You know, like how many kilometers we make when we do seventy miles in the car.” to further explain specifically what a fever of 102 means, thus allowing the child to change his perception that he is “dying”. The father gives his message clearly in each of the clause. The speech function of statement is fully demonstrated.

Once again, we enjoy the charm of language and the writing techniques of Hemingway.

B. Mood system

Halliday (1994) believes that modality is a subsystem of the mood system that embodies interpersonal meaning and is one of the means to express the interpersonal function of language. He or she can express his wishes, his obligations to others, his judgments of the way things are going, and so on. Modality, he pointed out, is a transitional region between positive and negative degrees. If the clause plays the function of conveying information, the modality system of the clause is “modalization”, which can be subdivided into highlighting “probability” or “frequency”. If the clause serves to exchange goods and services, the modality system of the clause is “idealization”, which can be divided into “obligation” or “will”.

[16] After a while he said to me, “You don’t have to stay in here with me, Papa, if it bothers you.”

[18] “No, I mean you don’t have to stay if it’s going to bother you.”

[19] “You can’t come in,” he said. “You mustn’t get what I have.”

[26] “I don’t worry,” he said, “but I can’t keep from thinking.”

[38] “I know they do. At school in France, the boys told me you can’t live with forty-four degrees. I’ve got a hundred and two.”

In the whole dialogue of the novel, there are six idealizational clause, which are all spoken by the child, including two low modal operators and four high modal operators. Thus, the frequency of using low modal operators was higher than that of high modal operators, when the boy mistakenly thought he was going to die, which fully reflected the boy’s inner emotional changes and struggles. So in the clauses [16] “You don’t have to stay in here with me,

Papa, if it bothers you.” and [18] “No, I mean you don’t have to stay if it’s going to bother you”, the low modal operator “don’t have to” means “not necessary”, Its use shows that the boy’s attitude is euphemistic and uncertain when persuading his father not to accompany him (passing information or asking for goods and services), which fully reflects the boy’s courtesy, but also reflects the boy’s perseverance and calmness in the face of death. When he was sick or even thought he was going to die, he didn’t ask for anything else from his father. Instead, he told his father it is not necessarily to be with him all the time. Although the little boy is scared and upset inside, but more than that, his sensible. Let’s look at the high modal operators. Li Jie and Zhong Yongping (2002) believe that the use of high modality value operators indicates that the speaker is extremely confident, positive and authoritative when delivering information or demanding goods and services. In clause [19] “You can’t come in. You mustn’t get what I have”, the high modal operator “can’t” means “not allowed” and “mustn’t” means “absolutely not”. When the boy mistakenly thought he was going to die, he used two high modal operators in a row to ask for service and refused to let his family approach him in a strong tone to avoid contracting his disease, which fully reflected the boy’s calmness and the image of a tough boy. The high modal operator can’t in [26] “I don’t worry, but I can’t keep from thinking.” is different from the one just used, meaning “not capable of doing”. The boy mistakenly thinks he is going to die, so he can’t help but think, even involuntarily. The boy’s helplessness to cope with his illness and his complicated internal struggle are reflected here. In [38], “At school in France, the boys told me you can’t live with forty-four degrees”, the high modal operator “can’t” means “not able to do”. The meaning we can get is “if your body temperature exceeds 44, you will die”. This statement is given authority by the word “can’t”, which expresses the objectivity of the common sense of temperature and the subjectivity of the boy’s judgment, causing the boy’s misconception and the development of the whole day’s life.

Different modal verbs express the boy's different attitudes and emotions, reflecting the diversity of the boy's emotions, but also let us see the power of Hemingway's language.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This paper analyzes the dialogue between the father and son in the novel "A Day's Wait" through the mood and modality system of systemic functional grammar, with a view to better analyzing the characters as a feasible and scientific research method. By analyzing the mood and modality of the father and son, and examining the specific functions played by the mood system and the role in shaping the characters' personalities embodied by the modality system, this paper finds that the mood of imperative, indicative and interrogative are all reflected in the novel's dialogue. Hemingway

conveys a deeper meaning to the reader, guiding the reader to explore the relationship between father and son and experience the bravery and fear within the young boy. And in terms of the modal system, the boy uses different degrees of modal operators to reflect his internal mood changes through different degrees of modal operators, thus allowing us to see the image of a tough boy.

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