
Transitivity in Analytical Exposition Text Selected by Pre-service Teachers: a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates the transitivity in analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers through the application of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory. This study aims to identify the dominant types of processes and explore how processes construct meaning and argumentation in analytical exposition texts. A descriptive qualitative approach and textual analysis were applied in this study. The data analyzed were four analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers from the 2021 cohort. The analysis was conducted manually and utilized UAM CorpusTool to ensure accuracy. The findings indicate that material processes are the dominant process across all texts, followed by relational processes, mental processes, verbal processes, and existential processes, while behavioral processes were absent. Material processes present observable actions and cause-effect reasoning, while relational processes define and classify concepts. Mental processes reveal cognition and emotion, verbal processes cite external authority, and existential processes affirm the presence of issues. Therefore, these process types construct logical, persuasive, and credible arguments. This study has pedagogical implications that pre-service teachers need to comprehend transitivity to design teaching materials that encourage strong argumentation. An understanding of process types helps them to evaluate their writing and supports students' argumentative writing skills.

Keywords: analytical exposition texts, pre-service teachers, transitivity

INTRODUCTION

As pre-service teachers, it is crucial to develop teaching materials that are not only informative but also capable of encouraging critical thinking and logical argumentation. One relevant genre for this purpose is analytical exposition text. Learning this genre requires the ability to clearly convey a position, provide logical justification, and structure arguments in a coherent structure (Emilia, 2014). For pre-service teachers, a deep understanding of the structure and linguistic features of these texts will support them in selecting the appropriate language in selecting teaching materials. This enables them to teach argumentation more effectively and support students in building stronger and more logical analytical exposition texts. Through frameworks such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (Henceforth, SFL) and transitivity analysis, pre-service

teachers can examine how meaning is constructed in analytical exposition texts, so that they are able to provide accurate examples and guide students with effective approaches in the classroom. The theoretical framework that informs the concept of linguistic feature analysis is SFL. Developed by Halliday (1994), the theory views language as a social semiotic system in which meaning is generated through the interplay of linguistic choices in a particular context. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) believe that language represents a system of potential meanings, wherein each linguistic choice signifies a selection from the available options. This theory explains language through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This research focuses on the ideational metafunction, which represents how language reflects the world around it, including human experience (Eggins, 2004). Within this metafunction, the transitivity system plays a crucial role in representing experiences and events.

In SFL, transitivity refers to the system that represents the process of experience in a clause and consists of three elements: the process itself, the participants involved, and circumstances that provide contextual information such as time, place, and manner. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) classify processes into six main types: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential.

Transitivity is applied to analyze analytical exposition text. This text aims to provide a structured argument regarding an issue (Hermayanti and Gunawan, 2024). In addition, analytical exposition texts provide concise and specific information, and present arguments supported by valid evidence to convince readers (Gerot and Wignell, 1995). The generic structure of this genre consists of three stages: thesis, argument, and repetition. The thesis introduces the issue and states the author's point of view, the argument section presents reasons and evidence to support that view, and the repetition reiterates and strengthens the author's position without adding new information.

Several previous studies have conducted textual analysis to examine the transitivity contained in the text. Research within the same genre (Septianti & Kurniawan, 2022; Hermayanti & Gunawan, 2024) found that students' analytical exposition predominantly features material and relational processes, with minimal utilization of mental processes, indicating that students describe facts more than evaluate or reflect. Similar research (Mulyanti, 2015) reported that in the exposition text on the high school national examination that the material process dominates. Moreover, the pedagogical implications involve fostering students' awareness of the purpose of

the writer so that they are able to improve critical thinking to comprehend questions related to the text. In other studies, Yolanda & Zaim (2021) and Fauzi et al. (2024) analyzed different types of genres, specifically hortatory exposition text and narrative text, but with a similar population, namely English study program students. There were findings that material processes were identified as the most frequently used type in student writing, highlighting the tendency towards action in their texts. Emilia and Martin (2023) and Zein et al. (2019) showed that pre-service teachers began to develop variations in the use of transitivity processes, although they still showed gaps in linking facts to critical evaluations. Other studies that analyze variations in other genres include narrative, recount, and descriptive texts (Darong, 2021; Fadiarachmanda, 2024; Mulyanti & Wati, 2022; Nugraha, 2024; Nurwanti, 2022; Senjawati, 2016; Wibowo et al., 2024). From the results of previous studies, it can be seen that the analysis of transitivity in analytical exposition texts is still lacking. In this genre, there is only an analysis of transitivity in analytical exposition texts selected by students. Due to the lack of research on transitivity of analytical exposition texts in the pre-service teacher realm, the researcher conducted research on analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers. This research was conducted to identify the types of transitivity processes used in analytical exposition texts of pre-service teachers, and to understand how they construct the meaning and argumentation in the text. The researcher also expects that this study provides insight into pedagogical implications for pre-service teachers.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the construction meaning in analytical exposition texts through transitivity analysis. A qualitative design was selected to facilitate an in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena description (Creswell, 2014). This study is a textual analysis using the Transitivity theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through this approach, the researcher aims to describe and interpret patterns of processes, participants, and circumstances as they occur naturally in texts selected by pre-service teachers for teaching materials

The data corpus was sourced from pre-service teachers 2021 of the English Education Department. Out of 39 pre-service teachers who participated in teaching practicums in high schools and vocational schools, only four pre-service teachers taught analytical exposition.

Consequently, the study data comprises four analytical exposition texts. The selection of these texts was based on purposive sampling, which is the selection of samples most relevant to the research objectives (Turner, 2020).

Data collection was conducted through documentation. Firstly, the researchers collected data from pre-service teachers teaching analytical exposition. They then obtained permission from the pre-service teachers to access the texts from their teaching practice reports. Each text was extracted from its original document and digitally transferred to ensure clarity and consistency during analysis. Prior to analysis, the texts were carefully reviewed for grammatical errors. Each paragraph was then marked according to its generic structure. Then, each text was manually segmented into clauses to allow for accurate identification of processes and participants.

The data analysis process was conducted using the transitivity framework proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Each clause was examined to categorize its type of process, participants, and circumstances. Analysis was conducted manually and using tools. In manual analysis, the researcher segmented and initially coded words or phrases in a table. Analysis was also conducted using CorpusTool (O'Donnell, 2008) to support consistency and accuracy in the coding process. This software provides computational validation for manual annotations, ensuring reliability across the text. Researchers began by entering each text into the tool, annotating the processes and participants, and comparing the results with manual analysis to correct any discrepancies. This analysis was conducted individually. Although the analysis used tools, researchers also validated with linguistic experts to strengthen the analytical data obtained. Furthermore, the total processes for each text were calculated. This revealed the dominant processes for each text and the overall text. This analysis also interpreted how these linguistic choices contributed to the construction of meaning and the development of arguments in the text. The interpretation phase involves connecting the types of processes with the generic structure of analytical exposition texts: thesis, argument, and reiteration, to identify how transitivity patterns correspond to rhetorical functions. For example, material processes are expected to dominate the argument section, while relational and mental processes might emerge in the thesis and reiteration stages to express attitudes and evaluations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Dominant Process in Analytical Exposition Text

The researcher analyzed transitivity in four analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers. The findings are presented as follows.

Table 1. Number of Clauses

	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Total
Clauses	34	15	27	29	105

Table 1 presented the number of clauses.

The researcher found a total of 105 clauses in texts 1, 2, 3, and 4. Text 1 contains 34 clauses, Text 2 contains 15 clauses, Text 3 includes 27 clauses, and Text 4 consists of 29 clauses.

The researcher examined transitivity in these clauses utilizing SFL theory. The data is displayed in Table 2 .

Table 2. Process Types in Data

	Material	Relational	Mental	Behavioral	Verbal	Existential
T-1	26	5	2	-	1	-
T-2	7	6	-	-	1	1
T-3	17	8	1	-	1	-
T-4	20	8	1	-	-	-

Table 4.2 showed the number of process types in each text. Text 1 contains 26 material processes, 5 relational processes, 2 mental processes, and 1 verbal process. Conversely, behavioral and existential processes are absent in this text. In Text 2, there are 7 material processes, 6 relational processes, 1 verbal process, and 1 existential process. Mental and behavioral processes are not found in this text. Furthermore, Text 3 has 17 material processes, 8 relational processes, 1 mental process, and 1 verbal process. This text has no behavioral or existential processes. Text 4 contains 20 material processes, 8 relational processes, and 1 mental process. This text has no verbal, behavioral, or existential processes.

Specifically, based on the data above, the researcher represents the dominant process in the figure below.

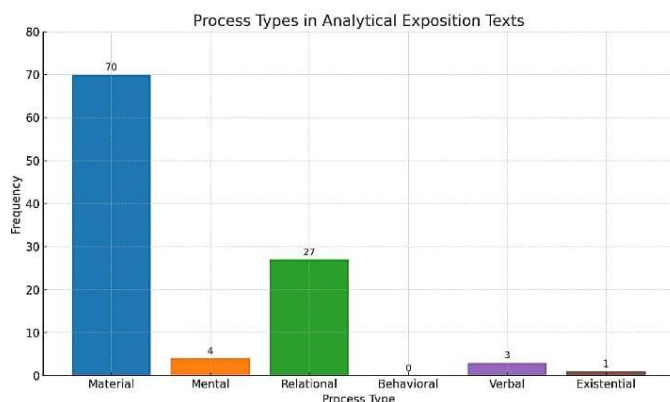


Figure 1. Dominant Process Type

Figure 4.1 illustrates the number of process types across the texts. This indicates that material processes are the most dominant type, with a total of 70 clauses out of 105. Additionally, other types of processes include relational processes with a total of 27 clauses, mental processes with four clauses, verbal processes with three clauses, and existential processes with one clause. No behavioral processes were identified in any of the texts.

Material and relational processes are the dominant process. This pattern appears consistently across all four texts, demonstrating the authors' strong tendency to reveal observable actions, events, and phenomena. However, relational processes establish qualities, classifications, or identities. These processes function to support their arguments and logically persuade readers.

Process Types Constructing the Meaning and Argumentation in Analytical Exposition Texts

1) Material Processes

According to the findings of this study, the material process frequently has 70 data in the text, representing the highest transitivity process. The subsequent findings pertain to material process data inside analytical exposition texts utilized by pre-service teachers, as observed in Texts 1, Text 2, Text 3, and Text 4.

	Saliva	washes	away	food
[1]	Actor Pr: material Circ. Manner Goal			

	Therefore the internet	can help	students	to get more explanation
[2]	Actor	Pr: material Recipient	Goal	

[3]	Second exercise	improves	mental health
	Actor	Pr: material	Goal

[4]	Unlike fossil fuels	renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power	produce	little to no greenhouse gas emissions
	Circ.	Actor	Pr: material	Goal

Clause [1] is taken from the third paragraph of Text 1. The material process is recognizable in the verb “*washes*” which describes the actual activities to the goal. This is equipped with “*saliva*” as the actor and “*food*” as the goal. While the word “*away*” represents the circumstances of manner.

Clause [2] is taken from the second paragraph of Text 2. The material process was identified by the verb “*can help*,” expressing the process of doing. In this clause, there are three participants. First, “*the internet*” acts as the actor. Second, the word “*student*” acts as recipient. Third, the goal marked by “*to get more explanation*.” There is the word “*sometimes*” as the circumstances of time.

Clause [3] from the third paragraph of Text 3. The clause contains a material process indicated by the verb “*improves*.” The participant in this clause is “*exercise*” as the actor, and the goal is “*mental health*.”

Clause [4] is from the second paragraph of Text 4. The material process is represented by the verb “*produce*.” The actor is “*renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power*.” The goal is “*little to no greenhouse gas emissions*.” The phrase “*unlike fossil fuels*” serves as a circumstance of comparison.

Material processes demonstrate concrete actions and cause-and-effect relationships. Using material processes demonstrates observable events, making the argument appear factual and evidence-based. This strengthens the persuasiveness of the text.

2) *Relational Processes*

According to the results of the analysis, the relational processes contained in Text 1, Text 2, Text 3, and Text 4 amount to 27 clauses. The utilization of relational processes is exemplified below.

[5]	However your mouth	is	the entry point to your digestive and respiratory tracts
	Token	Pr: identifying	Value

[6]	The internet	has	a big impact on education
	Carrier	Pr: attributive possessive	Attribute

[7]	our muscles	become	stronger
	Carrier	Pr: attributive	Attribute

[8]	it	is	a necessity	for a sustainable future
	Carrier	Pr: attributive intensive	Attribute	Circ. Purpose

In clause [5], the relational identifying process is identified from the first paragraph of Text 1. This clause deals with the to-be “*is*” which is classified as an identifying process. While “*your mouth*” functions as the token, and “*the entry point to your digestive and respiratory tracts*” acts as the value.

Clause [6] is one of the clauses in the fourth paragraph of Text 2 that shows the relational attributive possessive process. The verb “*has*” is a possessive attributive process, indicating ownership or influence. This clause consists of “*the internet*” functioning as a carrier, while “*a big impact on education*” acts as an attribute.

Clause [7] is an example of relational attributive from the fourth paragraph of Text 3. “*Our muscles*” is the carrier, “*become*” is the attributive process, and “*stronger*” is the attribute that describes the condition of the muscles.

Clause [8] is the relational attributive-intensive process. This clause is taken from the fifth paragraph of Text 4. The clause, with “*it*” as the carrier, “*is*” as the process, and “*a necessity*” as the attribute, and “*for a sustainable future*” as the circumstance that provides additional information about the purpose of the attribute.

Relational processes play a role in establishing definitions, classifications, and generalizations. They also structure arguments by presenting concepts as generally accepted truths or facts, thus creating a strong argumentative structure.

3) *Mental Processes*

The analysis indicates that the mental processes across all data total four clauses. Mental processes are present in Text 1, Text 3, and Text 4. On the other hand, Text 2 revealed an absence of mental processes. This discusses the several data of mental processes within clauses.

[9]	Did you know that your oral health offers clues about your overall health			
	Senser Pr: mental cognition		Phenomenon	
[10]	and [People who exercise regularly] feel more confident about their appearance			
	Senser	Pr: mental emotive		Phenomenon
[11]	In recent years the world has witnessed a growing shift towards renewable energy sources			
	Circ. Time	Senser	Pr: mental perception	Phenomenon

Clause [9] contains clauses from the first paragraph of Text 1 that are identified as mental cognition processes. The clause is an interrogative sentence, which is included in the mental-cognition process because it is marked by the verb “*know*.” The senser of this clause is “*you*” and the phenomenon is “*that your oral health offers clues about your overall health*”.

Clause [10] is a clause consisting of a mental emotive process. This clause is from the fourth paragraph of Text 3. The word “*feel*” indicates the mental emotive process. The senser in this clause is implicitly conveyed by referring to the previous clause, namely “[*people who exercise regularly*].” Then, the phenomenon is “*more confident about their appearance*.”

Clause [11] shows a clause in the first paragraph of Text 4. This clause is a mental perception process that is marked by “*has witnessed*.” The senser is “*the world*” and the phenomenon is “*a growing shift towards renewable energy sources*.”

Mental processes serve to convey opinions, perceptions, and evaluations. These processes help to share cognitive, emotional, or perceptual perspectives that can broaden an argument's persuasive power.

4) *Verbal Processes*

The analysis indicates that the verbal processes in the data comprise three clauses. Text 1, Text 2, and Text 3 contain verbal processes. However, Text 4 contained no verbal process. This clarifies the verbal processes within clauses.

[12]	Studies suggest that oral bacteria and the inflammation associated with advanced gum disease (periodontitis) might play a role in some diseases		
	Sayer	Pr: verbal	Verbiage

[13]	For example teacher can ask students		
		Sayer Pr: verbal Receiver	

[14]	Studies show that people who engage in regular physical activity experience reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety		
	Sayer	Pr: verbal	Verbiage

Clause [12] is a clause in the fourth paragraph of Text 1. The verbal process is marked by “*suggest.*” The sayer in this clause is “*studies.*” Meanwhile, “*that oral bacteria and the inflammation associated with advanced gum disease (periodontitis) might play a role in some diseases*” is verbiage.

Clause [13] displays a clause in the third paragraph of Text 2. The verbal process is marked by “*can ask.*” The participants in this clause consist of the sayer and the receiver. The sayer in this clause is “*teacher.*” The receiver is “*students.*”

Clause [14] is taken from the third paragraph of Text 3. The word “*show*” indicates the verbal process. The sayer in this clause is “*studies.*” Meanwhile, “*that people who engage in regular physical activity experience reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety.*” is verbiage.

Verbal processes are used to include external evidence or authority. The presence of these external sources adds validation to the argument and provides a credible basis.

5) *Existential Processes*

In the analysis results, the researcher found one clause that was identified as an existential process.

[15]	There are many positive things students and teachers can get from it		
	Pr: existential		Existent

Clause [15] presents a clause that contains an existential process. This clause is located in the fourth paragraph of Text 2. The common existential construction includes the phrase “*there are*”, in which “*are*” functions as the process. The participant in the existential process, called

existent, is represented by the phrase “*many positive things students and teachers can get from it.*”

Existential process serves to affirm the existence of a particular phenomenon or issue.

6) Behavioral Processes

The researcher did not identify any clauses with behavioral processes in the four investigated texts. The absence of behavioral processes can be interpreted as a characteristic that analytical texts place more emphasis on logic, classification, and reasoning than on the description of physical behavior.

The analysis of transitivity can be linked to the generic structure of analytical exposition texts, which typically consist of three: thesis, argument, and reiteration. Of the three stages, the most common process is the material process. In the thesis stage, the relational and mental processes often appear after the material process. These used to introduce the issue and highlight its importance.

In the argument stage, material and relational processes are dominant. These demonstrate observable actions and factual proof that support reasoning. Then, clarify relationships or establish logical connections between concepts.

Finally, in the reiteration stage, relational processes are often used to reaffirm the writer's position or summarize the central message. Then, demonstrates how relational processes strengthen the thesis by reaffirming the central claim.

The distribution of processes across these stages illustrates how transitivity choices contribute to the construction of meaning within each structure of an analytical exposition text. Consequently, the thesis structure presents the introduction of the issue concisely. The arguments section presents a strong argument and evidence. Then, the reiteration section clearly summarizes the entire text. In general, the function of analytical exposition text, namely to persuade the readers, is fulfilled by these components.

In addition to manual analysis, the researcher also used the UAM CorpusTool to ensure the accuracy of the manual analysis results. This analysis is automated, following the available transitivity scheme. The researcher attempted to analyze each text individually. The figure 4.2 provides an overview of the analysis using the tool.

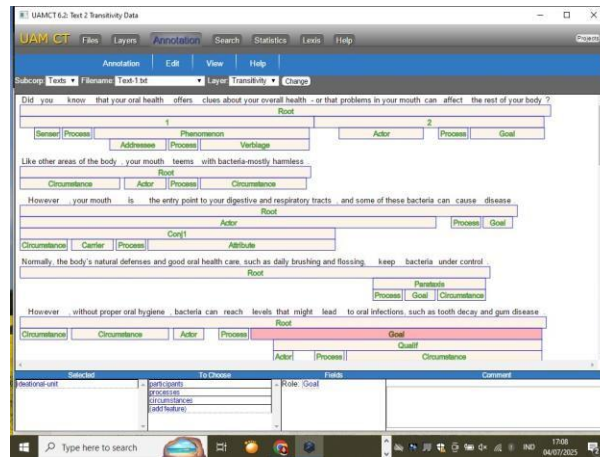


Figure 2 Analysis Using UAM CorpusTool

The results show many similarities between manual analysis and analysis using the tool. However, the analysis using the tool exhibits deficiencies, including incorrect process types, such as unclear attributive or identifying relational processes, empty process type boxes, and undefined participants, requiring modifications by the researcher. This can be seen at the bottom of the 'To Choose' icon.

Consequently, the researcher attempted to validate the analysis's accuracy with experts in transitivity linguistics. The evaluation results indicated that the findings of the analysis were accurate and aligned with Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) SFL theory.

Discussion

This study investigates the dominant processes and explores how processes construct meaning and arguments in analytical exposition texts by pre-service teachers. According to the data findings, among the four analytical exposition texts examined, material processes are the most prevalent processes identified. The data indicates that there are 70 material processes across all examined clauses. This aligns with the purpose of the analytical exposition genre, which aims to present a stance through logical reasoning supported by factual information (Emilia, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2007). Material processes, including “*washes*,” “*can help*,” “*reduce*,” “*produce*,” etc., are used to describe actions or effects that support the author's claims. These processes enable the author to present their points as observable realities or cause and effect, increasing the objectivity and persuasiveness of the text. This aligns with the social function of analytical exposition texts, which is to persuade the reader (Kartini and Fatikah, 2015).

Furthermore, material clauses frequently convey authority and objectivity, which are crucial in convincing academic writing (Zhang, 2017).

In the clause *“second, exercise improves mental health,”* the material process *“improves”* conveys the advantages of physical activity. The arrangement of actor, process, and goal in this and subsequent clauses enables the author to construct a clear, logical, and factual argument that is readily comprehensible to the reader. This pattern illustrates what Eggins (2004) refers to as the experiential function of language, representing actual events in a manner that renders the argument credible and concrete.

Furthermore, the relational process is the second most frequently occurring type of process. The process includes the attributive function, as exemplified by the clause *“it is a necessity for a sustainable future,”* and the identifying function, illustrated by the clause *“However, your mouth is the entry point to your digestive and respiratory tracts.”* These processes are essential for establishing qualities, classifications, or identities, which are crucial in supporting the author's stance. By using relational processes, authors can convey evaluations and construct definitions that enhance the logical structure of their arguments. As noted by Gerot and Wignell (1995), relational processes are effective in articulating claims or values, which are fundamental to analytical exposition texts.

Subsequently, mental processes play a significant role in connecting the writer's and reader's senses. These processes are crucial in articulating cognition, emotions, and perception, which the persuasive appeal by including personal or collective reasoning. There are four clauses contained as mental processes, including the verb *“know,” “can affect,” “feel,”* and *“has witnessed,”* The clause *“people who exercise regularly feel more confident about their appearance”* illustrates an individual's feelings. However, the limited number of mental clauses in this study suggests that pre-service teachers may not yet be fully utilizing the potential of internal evaluations in strengthening arguments.

Verbal clauses were employed selectively to cite expert opinions or research findings. This process aligns with argumentative writing, specifically analytical exposition texts, citing or referring to social discourse to enhance credibility (Martin & Rose, 2007) and also supported by Hood (2010). There are three verbal processes. This is evident in the text, particularly in the verbs *“say,” “suggest,”* and *“show”* that the writers are trying to include others' perspectives,

making their arguments more credible and wide-ranging. Hence, mental verbs are important because they prioritize evidence.

There is an existential clause in text 2. In the clause “*there are many positive things students and teachers can get from it*,” highlights the presence of an issue or problem as that provides a base for an argument. On the other hand, the use of behavioral processes was absent in the four texts identified. Behavioral processes resemble material and mental processes. The verbs include *watch, look, listen, laugh, stare*, etc. (Thompson, 2014). The absence of behavioral processes might suggest a lack of variety in linguistic choices, presumably due to the writers’ limited exposure to or training in functional grammar (Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

In comparison with other studies, these findings support the result of Septianti and Kurniawan (2022). These findings indicated that material and relational processes dominated in students’ analytical exposition texts. Similarly, Mulyanti (2015), Mulyanti and Wati (2022), and Yolanda and Zaim (2021) documented the dominance of material and relational processes across diverse genres, indicating a general tendency among EFL learners to depend on action descriptions rather than evaluative or reflective processes. This study adds a new dimension by focusing on pre-service teachers as the authors. The restricted application of diverse process types signifies a domain for pedagogical enhancement.

CONCLUSION

Using Halliday's SFL paradigm, this study analyzes the transitivity system in analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers, focusing on the experiential metafunction. The aim is to identify the most frequently used types of processes and their roles in constructing meaning and argumentation. Of the 105 clauses in four texts, material processes are the most dominant (70 clauses), followed by relational (27), mental (4), verbal (3), and existential (1), with no behavioral processes. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of pre-service teachers selecting and evaluating teaching materials by paying attention to linguistic aspects, especially the transitivity system. The dominance of material processes indicates the need for learning that fosters critical thinking and argumentative skills. Pedagogical implications in this study are that pre-service teachers need to use their linguistic knowledge to guide students in writing meaningful and persuasive analytical exposition texts, and apply it in the selection and teaching of teaching materials to better align with the communicative objectives of the texts.

These findings emphasize that understanding transitivity can help pre-service teachers guide students in writing more logical and meaningful analytical exposition texts. Research on transitivity in analytical exposition texts selected by pre-service teachers is still limited. This study only analyzed four texts from pre-service teachers from the 2021 cohort. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ larger and more diverse corpus from different cohorts and institutions to achieve greater representative results. In addition, future researchers can utilize a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative tools such as the UAM CorpusTool for initial coding followed by qualitative interpretation may yield more accurate and in-depth analysis into the transitivity patterns of analytical exposition texts.

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