

Table A. The power hierarchy of participants in descending order

Participants	Explanations	Examples
Actor in transitive material processes	An active participant powerful enough to affect other things/people	<i><u>Snow</u> blocked the road</i>
Actor in intransitive material process	An active participant but not affecting others	<i><u>John</u> went into the room</i>
Sayer in verbal process	Participant who sends a message and affects the consciousness of the receiver	<i><u>Peter</u> told her the time of the bus</i>
Possessor in possessive relational processes	Owner, to whom the possession belongs	<i><u>Mary</u> has a Mercedes</i>
Experience (Phenomenon) in perception mental process	Participant capable of impinging on the consciousness of the sensor	<i>John noticed <u>the bird</u></i>
Experiencer (Sensor) in cognitive/affective mental processes	Participant with an active mental/emotional life	<i><u>James</u> really enjoys Wagner</i>
Existent, Phenomenon in mental process of cognition and affection, or Token or Value in attributive or identifying processes	Neutral	<i>There are <u>five chickens</u> in the yard</i> <i>I knew <u>he was mad</u></i>
Experiencer (Sensor) in perception mental process	Sentient and responsive to outside stimuli but affected by them	<i><u>John</u> noticed the bird</i>
Receiver in verbal process	Receiver of information, affected by it	<i>I told <u>Frieda</u> about the auction</i>
Possession in possessive relational process	A possession under the power of the Possessor	<i>I have <u>three cars</u></i>
Affected (Goal) in material process	A participant who is passive and affected by other participants exerting power over it	<i><u>John</u> was killed by a bus</i>

After Duan Jie *The Discourse of Disease—the Representation of SARS –The China Daily and The South China Morning Post* Unpublished thesis, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. 2007.

A sample of transitivity and vocabulary analysis

Let us see how to apply lexical classifications and grammatical analyses to a longer text, to show the ways in which linguistic patterns can be used, deliberately or not, to construct a version of reality, and reflect ideological conflicts. The chosen text is a comment column taken from the Internet version of the British newspaper The Guardian, for February 3rd 1998. The text runs as follows:

I'm sorry teenagers, you are not the centre of the universe

Whether it's lovers on the Titanic or the White House bimbos, youth isn't so cool

By Linda Grant

Tuesday February 3, 1998

Just as the lights were going down in the Odeon Leicester Square on Friday night, I said, "Who's the hunk factor in this apart from Leonardo DiCaprio?" No one knew. Not Billy Zane, obviously. It turned out there wasn't one. We had to sit through three-and-a-half hours staring at the 10-foot features of a baby-faced 23-year-old whose puppy fat still filled his cheeks. The kid is barely out of zit cream. Where, we wanted to know, was Alan Rickman, smouldering erotically in a pea jacket? Or Sean Connery in captain's cap, head-butting the iceberg for its presumption? Or Liam Neeson in steerage, heavy in his boots in the Irish dancing? Or Sam Shepard as transatlantic gentleman card sharp from Missouri, making his own luck? In Schindler's List you got Liam Neeson and Ralph Fiennes. That's what I call a picture. The next day, the Turkish dry cleaner told me she wasn't going to bother to see Titanic. "What's in it for us?" she demanded. "My daughter here, she's going next week. But she likes Leonardo DiCaprio, don't you?" The girl sighed meaningfully and rolled her eyes. "Ye-es" she breathed. "You see? He's for teenagers. This is a teenage film." I agreed.

In Titanic you see how completely the world has been taken over by adolescents and adolescent values. Here's a blockbuster movie for all the family - enjoyable tosh with great special effects - with absolutely no sex appeal for any woman over the age of 35 and in which no one over the age of 20 has any morality or goodness or courage apart from the unsinkable Molly Brown, here transformed into Young Love's accomplice.

For a good two bum-numbing hours the plot hinges around the escapades of a couple of naughty adolescents trying to evade the authority of the grown-ups in order to have sex, which eventually takes place, as most of it does at that age, in the back seat of a car. Meanwhile the ship plunges on towards its terrible destiny and the teeny-weeny, self-important world of the adolescents is overtaken by events, and indeed, reality.

Does this remind you of anything? Ring any bells? Any resonance here? All last week political commentators with lines and the odd grey hair, giving every appearance of being adults, were asking each other whether the approaching war with Iraq was being got up as a

smokescreen to shift attention away from what really mattered: the US President's sex life. It seemed to occur to no one that it might be the other way round: that the "me, me, look at me," cries of the young women who may or may not have gone down on Bill Clinton were distracting us from potential military action against a mad dictator with an arsenal of chemical weapons. Whether you are for or against war with Saddam Hussein, you have to concede that if there is a burning issue of the moment it isn't the shape of the President's penis. That metaphor about rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic has never seemed so freshly-minted.

Madeleine Albright is touring the Middle East to drum up support for air strikes and here we all are, fixated and focused on Clinton's extramarital affairs with women just about young enough to be his daughters. Like Clinton himself, we are mesmerised by the teenagers. With a grown-up wife beside him in the White House - and smart enough to get him off the hook - he still prefers the fleeting company of bimbos. I know I shouldn't call them that - Monica Lewinsky was a White House intern, after all - but if you spend your time giving blowjobs to older men instead of memorising the US Constitution and its many amendments, that's the label you are going to get stuck with.

The sexual power of young women is a force which seems capable of pulling the whole world off kilter. Adolescence has many, many attractions - one need spend almost nothing on moisturiser (just as well, as the pocket money doesn't stretch to it); you can stay up all night energised by a tab of E and a bag of chips and still look ravishing in the morning; and you can endure the discomfort of a treetop camp for days on end while you stop a bypass. But in the virtues of adolescence lie its faults. Its condition is to see things in black and white, never to be plagued by uncertainty, or submit to expediency and compromise, and never, ever have to worry about mortgages, pension plans, household contents and building insurance or whether or not remembering where you put your keys is an early warning sign of senile dementia.

The downside to this ruthless confidence in the self-evident correctness of whatever moral high ground you have chosen is that it can fall easily into fundamentalist error, such as the date-rape frenzy which took over American campuses a few years ago in which teenage students singlehandedly attempted to abolish the uncertainty of the sexual encounter by the institution of a written code of behaviour.

Teenage radicalism is a product of the mistaken belief that yours is the first generation that ever lived to discern that the world teems with injustice. When Swampy's mum looks at him, does she also see Kevin the Teenager and his ancestral cry - handed down through the genetic pathways and emerging with the first pubic hair - of "It's not fair" and "I didn't ask to be born"? I'm sorry, teenagers, you are not the centre of the universe. I do not care about your doomed love affairs, whether they take place fictionally on board the Titanic, in a cupboard in the White House, or under the concealing darkness of the local bus shelter. I know you think your life will be ruined if you are made to come home no later than midnight by your

cruel and oppressive parents but you don't know what ruined means until you've seen a chemical weapon in action.

Last week Peter Mandelson asked an eight-year-old to hold forth on his views about the contents of the Dome. Hey, why not ask him to run America's foreign policy, too? Put him in charge of the whole shooting match; let those Sony Play Station reflexes zap the baddies. Put Baby Spice in charge of United Nations weapons inspection. Give Kate Moss the presidency of the European Union. If youth is so cool, let them try running a few countries and see if the rubbish gets taken out, the beds made and there's something to eat in the cupboard.

The Iranian Revolution was carried out by the teenage zealots of the Revolutionary Guards, zipping around on motorbikes spray-painting the arms of anyone wearing a T-shirt. Who winds up in cults? Teenagers.

Vocabulary and the population of the text

We noted earlier that vocabulary classifies and categorises, and that texts often invent their own supercategories in order to construct a representation of experience. One important facet of this text is its categorising of the people mentioned in the text, technically called the **text population** (Talbot 1992).

The primary axis of classification is into the young and the middle-aged, or children and parents, with an emphasis on the younger. At one point this amounts to an age divide at the age of 35, though in relation to the characters in *Titanic* the division is set at 20, i.e. teenagers or older than teenagers. A lexical analysis of the text gives us 'teenage' / 'teenager(s)' 12 times, 'adolescent(s)' / 'adolescence' 6 times, 'young' / 'youth' 6 times, 'daughter(s)' twice, 'baby' twice, 'bimbos' twice, and 'kid', 'an eight-year-old', 'girl', and 'puppy' each once. The word *teenager*, by the way, demonstrates quite clearly the arbitrariness of the linguistic categorisation process. There are many possible ways of dividing up the continuum of time, but to take those numbers of years which happen to end in *-een* as a criterion appears quite ad hoc.

The frequency and variety of terms to refer to the young is known as **overwording**, showing 'preoccupation with some aspect of reality—which may indicate that it is a focus of ideological struggle' (Fairclough 1989: 115). Less frequently represented is the older generation with 'adults', 'grown-up' 'older men', 'senile', 'mum', 'ancestral' and 'parents' all occurring once.

Other categories of people are perhaps not so clearly lexicalised, and have to be to some extent inferred. Firstly there are (film) stars: 'Leonardo di Caprio', 'Kevin the Teenager', 'Kate Moss', 'Baby Spice'; 'Alan Rickman', 'Sean Connery', 'Liam Neeson', 'Ralph Fiennes', 'Sam Shepard'. In line with the primary axis of classification by age these can be supercategorised into the young (the first four) and the older (the last five).

Secondly we have politicians: the US President 'Bill Clinton', (5 times), Saddam Hussein (3 times), 'Madeleine Allbright' and 'Peter Mandelson'. These politicians in power are contrasted with teenagers who, in their 'radicalism' and vulnerability to 'cults' have rebelled against authority. These were either the 'teenage zealots of the Revolutionary Guards' who brought about the Iranian Revolution, or those 'teenage students' who campaigned 'to abolish

the uncertainty of the sexual encounter'. Note that the use of plural forms often has connotations of threats, as when in right wing circles during the cold war The Soviet Union would be referred to as *The Soviets* and the communist block as *Reds*. Remember how the letter writer quoted in Activity 15 uses the phrase 'the Jane Fondas, Ramsey Clarks and other '60s hippies'. Does referring to youngsters fighting for power in the plural illustrate a hostility to the young?

A major character in the text population is, of course the writer herself, Linda Grant. She projects herself as in the older population, and belongs to the group she refers to as 'commentators with lines and the odd grey hair'. However, the point of the column is actually to question whether these people are behaving more like teenagers or like adults. 'All last week political commentators with lines and the odd grey hair, giving every appearance of being adults were asking each other whether the approaching war with Iraq was being got up as a smokescreen to shift attention away from what really mattered: the US President's sex life'. Given the choice of identifying with adults or commentators she opts for the former and distances herself from the latter.

Besides the populations of the text we can look at the different social worlds they inhabit and how vocabulary represents these worlds. Three important areas seem to be the public world of geo-politics ('war', 'military action', 'chemical weapons', 'airstrikes', 'US constitution', 'the White House', 'the Middle East', 'foreign policy', 'radicalism', 'Revolution'); the family world of domesticity ('mortgages', 'pension plans', 'insurance', 'household contents', 'beds', 'cupboard', 'rubbish', 'keys'); the private world of sex ('sex' / 'sexual' 5 times, 'affairs' twice, 'erotically', 'penis', 'date-rape' once). The world of film ('Odeon', 'picture', 'film', 'blockbuster movie', 'special effects', 'Titanic', 'plot') makes the fictionally private world of sex public, and the media ('we' ('commentators')) make it political.

Grammar and ideology: transitivity analysis

Now we have identified the major population groups in the text and their social worlds, we are in a position to explore how they function as participants in clauses as parts of those worlds. We will examine, in turn, interesting patterns in the Relational, Mental, Material and Verbal process clauses in this text. The large number of examples quoted and analysed here give you a model for any analysis you may wish to do yourselves, but you might wish to skim over some of them.

Relational Clauses

Relational clauses will be used to describe and explicitly categorise the participants in the text. The relevant kinds of question when we perform a critical reading will be 'what participants attract these relational descriptions?', and 'what kinds of qualities or categories are assigned to them?'.

Along with the overwording, the number of Relational clauses devoted to describing teenagers and the state of adolescence betrays a fascination with the young, and perhaps an attempt to exorcise their power.

Adolescence (Token) **has** many, many attractions (Value)

The fascination, and perhaps envy, focuses, to start with, on their sexuality.

The sexual power of young women (Token) **is** a force which seems capable of pulling the whole world off kilter (Value).

And having acknowledged young people's power in that department proceeds to debunk the adolescents' claims to moral superiority, describing it as simplistic overconfidence, which leads easily into excess or error

But in the virtues of adolescence (Value) **lie** its faults (Token). Its condition (Token) **is** to see things in black and white (Value)

The downside to this ruthless confidence in the self-evident correctness of whatever moral high ground you have chosen (Token) **is** that it can fall easily into fundamentalist error (Value).....

These errors can take the form either of idealistic radicalism

Teenage radicalism (Token) **is** a product of the mistaken belief that yours is the first generation that ever lived to discern that the world teems with injustice (Value)

Or, more sinister, religious deviance:

Who (Token) **winds up** in cults (Value)? Teenagers.(Token)

Obsessively the columnist casts doubt on the superiority of the young and on their importance,

If youth (Token) **is** so cool (Value)

youth (Token) **isn't** so cool (Value)

you (Token) **are** not the centre of the universe (Value)

This last protest, dramatised by its positioning as headline, is paradoxically negated by the column's obsession with adolescents. If not the centre of the universe they are, in this column, the centre of attention.

Mental Processes

Mental processes indicate internal or perceptual processes, which are, strictly speaking, only accessible to the Experiencer. One question to ask is who the Experiencers are--whether the writer claims to know the Experiences of other Experiencers, other characters, as is common

with all-knowing narrators in some kinds of fiction. Another important question might be whether the Mental processes are to do with thinking, feeling, or perception.

Mental processes clauses with teenagers as Experiencers display three clear patterns. Firstly there are Mental processes which teenagers have never experienced.

but you (Experiencer) don't **know** what ruined means (Experience) until you (Experiencer)'ve **seen** a chemical weapon in action (Experience).

Then there are processes which they have experienced but which are misguided or dangerous in some way.

The downside to this ruthless confidence in the self-evident correctness of whatever moral high ground (Experience) you (Experiencer) have **chosen** is that it can fall easily into fundamentalist error

And thirdly, there are Mental processes which they believe are unique to them but which actually adults have experienced too.

Teenage radicalism is a product of the mistaken belief that yours is the first generation that ever lived (Experiencer) **to discern** that the world teems with injustice.(Experience)

We notice that in all these examples the writer is claiming knowledge of the thought processes of the young, which perhaps is rather presumptuous.

When we look at Linda Grant's less presumptuous representation of her own and other adults' Experiences, we notice that she confesses to a fascination with the young:

Like Clinton himself, we (Experiencer) are **mesmerised** by the teenagers (Experience).

However, youngsters are often seen as a dangerous irrelevance:

the "me, me, look at me," cries of the young women (Experience / Actor)...were **distracting** us (Experiencer / Affected) from potential military action against a mad dictator with an arsenal of chemical weapons.

(There is a slight problem in analysing this last example. Some verbs seem to have a foot in more than one process, and so we can label them with pairs of labels. *Distract* is one which seems to be partly Material and partly Mental (perception), as is *endure*, (emotion) analysed below.).

Material Processes

The main reason for analysing Material processes is to uncover who is represented as the most powerful participants in the text. Crudely speaking, if the clause has an Actor and an

Affected, this Actor is being represented as relatively powerful and responsible for the action. If there is only an Actor, and no Affected, the Actor comes over as less powerful. Affected participants come over as passive and powerless.

As we noted when discussing Relational processes, the writer acknowledges the sexual prowess of the young and particularly of young women. The alleged affairs between Clinton/Lewinsky/Jones etc. provide a link between the two generations, the primary groups established through lexical classification, and between the private world of sex and the public world of politics.

if you (Actor) spend your time **giving blowjobs** (Affected) to older men (Affected: beneficiary) instead of memorising the US Constitution

Notice that these alleged sexual acts are portrayed with women rather than Clinton as Actor; for example, this event could have been represented as ‘Clinton taking blowjobs from younger women’. As it stands the President seems more passive and less responsible for the sex, and the young women more active and blameworthy. The writer’s most extreme claims about the power of women’s sex appeal is

The sexual power of young women is a force which (Actor) seems capable of **pulling the whole world** (Affected) off kilter

Women as sexual protagonists affect not only “the most powerful man in the world” but the world itself.

Youngsters’ sexual activity seems to be one aspect of their physical energy and resilience, qualities which the author also recognises and perhaps admires:

And you (Actor/Experiencer) can **endure** the discomfort of a treetop camp (Affected/Experience) for days on end
You (Actor) can **stay up** all night

However, in the political sphere, teenagers are portrayed as not amounting to much. Their actions seem largely to be ineffectual, gratuitous and negative

The teenage zealots of the Revolutionary Guards (Actors) **zipping around** on motorbikes, **spray-painting** the arms of anyone wearing a T-shirt (Affected).

while you (Actor) **stop** a bypass (Affected).

Prefacing the main verb with *try* and *attempt* (*) is a clear signal of potential failure:

Teenage students (Actor) singlehandedly attempted* **to abolish** the uncertainty of the sexual encounter (Affected)

Other clauses suggest they are quite helpless and incapable, whether in the political or domestic sphere:

If youth is so cool, let them (Actors) try* **running** a few countries (Affected) and see if the rubbish (Affected) gets **taken out**, the beds (Affected) **made**

In this last example, and the following ones, the opportunity for teenagers to take political responsibilities is subject to the permission of mature adults, to whom the imperatives ‘let’, ‘give’, ‘put’, and, indeed, the whole article is addressed.

Let those Sony Play Station reflexes zap the baddies.

Give Kate Moss (Affected: beneficiary) the presidency of the European Union (Affected).

Put Baby Spice (Affected) in charge of United Nations weapons inspection.

In fact what we notice is how frequently teenagers are Affecteds in Material process clauses. Often the Actors will be adults, as in the examples above, and sometimes more specifically their parents:

I know you think your life (Affected) will be **ruined** if you (Affected) are **made** to come home no later than midnight by your cruel and oppressive parents (Actor)

Summing up the portrayal of the young in the Material process clauses, we can say that their main prowess, especially of women, is in the sexual field, though they also devote their resilient energies to ineffectual and negative revolutionary or rebellious acts. They are portrayed as ultimately unable to take responsible domestic action, let alone political action, even if adults were to give them the chance. In fact their lives are represented as under adult control. We can add to this what we discovered from Mental and Relational processes, that teenagers are depicted as dangerously misguided, ill-informed and conceitedly, overconfidently, idealistic.

These then are the adolescent values which are symbolised by the film *Titanic*:

In *Titanic* you see how completely the world (Affected) has been **taken over** by adolescents and adolescent values (Actor).

However, the sinking of the *Titanic* reverses this, suggesting that in the end the serious, realistic, world of mature adult values destroys the unreal, frivolous, sexual adolescent world:

the teeny-weeny, self-important world of the adolescents (Affected) is **overtaken** by events, and indeed, reality (Actors).

Verbal processes

What is the point of analysing Verbal processes? One reason is to see who gets to hold the floor, to have their words (Verbiage) reported. Another is to see what kinds of effect the Sayers might have on those listening, whether they come over as dominant, for example, or what speech acts they perform (see also unit 5). Analysis of the Verbiage will also tell us the main concerns of the Sayers, and be an expression of their Mental processes.

In a way the pattern of representation of teenage roles and values we observed in Material and Mental processes applies equally to Verbal. The Verbiage of the young is either an expression of sexual desire, sense of injustice, or, it is implied, ill-informed, a 'mistaken belief'

"Ye-es" (Verbiage) she [the Turkish cleaner's daughter] (Sayer) **breathed**.

"It's not fair" (Verbiage) and "I didn't **ask** to be born" (Verbiage)?

Last week Peter Mandelson asked an eight-year-old (Sayer) ... to **hold forth** on his views about the contents of the Dome (Verbiage).

In the last example, as with Material processes, it is the adult politician, through speaking, who controls the young speaker.

Hey, why not **ask** him to run America's foreign policy, too?

Ideological factors in and behind the Text

The purpose of performing such a detailed analysis of the lexis and clauses of a Text is to reveal patterns which might be cues to the underlying ideology, or ideological conflict. This amounts to explanation, at level 3 in Table 0.1. It is, of course, rather more problematic than pure description of the text's meanings, so my explanation may be highly disputable.

The main ideological areas are the struggle between the rebellious young and the conservative old, and the protest against the ageism and trivialising tendencies of the media.

We have seen that the older generation's obsession with youth and young women is reflected in their overwording. The writer as Experiencer admits that the older generation is, in fact 'mesmerised' by the Experience the young represent. And this obsession is also clear in the frequent relational clauses devoted to the description of the state and values of adolescence. The reason for this obsessive description and overwording might be the threat that the younger generation represents. This perceived threat has a long history going back to the New Comedy of Ancient Greece, where we find the same antagonism between the generations, the younger's (sexual) rebellion against the authority of the elder generation and parents (Frye 1957: 163). As this text puts it 'naughty adolescents trying to evade the authority of the grown-ups'.

The threat or rebellion is constructed as mainly sexual and physical by the Material process clauses with the young (women) as Actors, a distracting interference with the world of adult politics. But is also seen in terms of resisting parental regulations, in terms of morality, and in terms of deviance. While there could be subconscious envy of the young for

their physical resilience and sexual powers, a member of the sixties' generation may also feel some guilt at the way its idealism has fizzled out amongst the mundane concerns like household management and the practical financial matters of insurance and pensions. She may resent the young having idealistically taken the moral high-ground. And an inherent conservatism seems manifest here too.

The detailed analysis has shown how the writer copes with the threat that the younger generation represents. While admitting their sexual prowess the writer insists on how ignorant and ineffectual they are in the political sphere, by the way they are positioned as participants in Mental and Material processes. By so often making them Affecteds the writer reassures herself and the middle-aged reader that the young are, after all, under control. The Mental process analysis also allows the writer to construct them as misguided, mistaken in their beliefs, and prey to the latest cults, rebellious to the extent of zealotry and deviance. The writer's last defence mechanism seems to be the emphatic insistence, in headline form, that, as much as the film industry constructs them as the centre of the universe, in the important affairs of war and geopolitics they are really only marginal.

To represent social groups as marginal, deviant or eccentric is a powerful weapon for conservatives in resisting change. The key words in the passage are probably *zealot* and *cult*. These seem to be an echo of the conservative popular press in England, who demonise non-conformity: unorthodox religious movements and lifestyles such as Scientology, The Children of God, New Age Travellers; or unorthodox sexual practices and family groupings like lesbian parents; or non-mainstream political parties such as the Socialist Workers' Party or more generally "the loony left".

The text can also be seen a site of struggle over the ideologically contentious issue of the role of the media in modern society. Besides the long history of struggle between the generations, there is also a considerable European tradition of conflict over highbrow and popular culture. Often this took the form of the educated despising popular entertainment, for example the poet Juvenal despising the (bread and) circuses which, like sex stories involving Clinton, distracted the Roman population from more important matters (Juvenal Satires viii, 80). More recently, books like Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* have deplored the pernicious effect of television on education and its lowering the level of political thought and debate. Critical discourse analysts, including myself (unit 8), often belong in this tradition and bemoan the ways in which serious political issues are turned into or eclipsed by entertainment in the modern media (Fairclough 1995: 148-9).

Teenagers and the media, the dual butts of the writer's protest, are, of course, linked by the financial realities of the film industry. Media economics recognises the size of the teenage movie-going market, and this explains why *Titanic* is a much greater box office success than more serious films like *The Twilight Zone* about an older generation. Teenagers are a group without the responsibilities of work and family, and considerable leisure time, and, at least for the middle classes, spending power. This economic reality is one symptom of the ageism against which the text most explicitly protests. Grant struggles to insist on the importance of adult political values and concerns. This is why she portrays the young as arrogant in their Mental processes, and as basically ineffectual and irrelevant in Material process terms, whether in the domestic or political sphere. The headline might be glossed 'Teenagers, you've tried to project yourselves, your world, your values, and your sexual activity as most

important, but I'm sorry to say you have been unsuccessful, because you and what you stand for are relatively trivial'.