

## WHEN VERBS BECOME NOUNS: GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC TEXTS

Refnaldi

Universitas Negeri Padang  
refnaldi@yahoo.com

### Abstract

The major challenge, according to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), for students in writing courses is the frequent use of grammatical metaphor in academic texts. Grammatical metaphor is the key element of academic discourse and a "single most distinctive characteristic" (Halliday, 2004) of written language compared to spoken language. This study is focused on the use of grammatical metaphors in students' abstracts. Using content analysis as data collection technique, this study examines 20 students' thesis abstract. The finding shows that the use of grammatical metaphors is not yet optimal due to students' lack of understanding of grammatical metaphor functions in written English. The conclusion is there is a need for students on the improvement concerning the use of grammatical metaphors.

**Keywords:** grammatical metaphor, systemic functional linguistics, academic writing, abstract

### Introduction

Metaphor came into prominence research interests when Lakoff and Johnson (1980) published *Metaphors We Live By*. In this book, they view metaphor as ubiquitous in the representation of human experience and in the formation of mental models, schemata and presuppositions of social groups. However, their interests in metaphor were limited on lexical metaphor, which is very closely related to cognitive linguistics and other schools. It was Halliday who introduced the notion of grammatical metaphor in his systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as an extension of this interest in metaphor in the representation of human experience. Although grammatical metaphor differs in meaning and application to lexical/conceptual metaphor, both have one similar characteristic, both involve making a choice between a more straightforward and a more oblique realization of meaning; both involve transference or transportation of meaning from one domain of reference to the other.

There have been a great many of researches on grammatical metaphor in linguistic areas since Halliday for the first time advanced the grammatical feature of "grammatical metaphor" in 1985. The studies are mostly on the characteristics of grammatical metaphor; types, functions and the representation of metaphorical forms; metaphor in spoken and written language; the nominalization and identification of English grammatical metaphor and discourse analysis; grammatical metaphor and stylistic features of English science writing; cognitive effects and semantic analysis of grammatical metaphor; and nominalization in English and its discourse function. Grammatical metaphor as non-congruent ways of encoding language is the characteristic of all adult discourse, written English and science writing. As foreign language learners, having awareness of the grammatical features of the target language and learning how to use them to develop their spoken and written communication are more important than just analyzing or describing the language phenomenon.

### Grammatical Metaphors

Metaphor, as we know, is a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, its original referent. Some people mistakenly believe that the use of metaphors is limited to special forms of language only, such as literature. Yet metaphor is really quite common in most ordinary varieties of language.

In traditional literary criticism, metaphors are distinguished from similes. A metaphor states that something is equivalent to another thing which is not usually associated with it. A simile states that something is like another thing which it is not usually associated with. For example, '*The man is a lion*' is a (lexical) metaphor, while '*The man is like a lion*' is a simile. Other lexical metaphors are a *dead metaphor* (only animate beings can live or die), *comfortable feet* (feet don't have feelings – their possessor does!), and *blood bank* (bank → a place where something valuable is kept)

Foley (1997) states that the basic idea about metaphor is the information we have about one known domain (source domain) is used to structure an assertion about the property of another less known domain (target domain). Source domains are usually well-known every day experience or things which are physical world, such as animals, plants, and things, while target domains are generally more abstract, such as a person

character or behavior. Moreover, the choice of figurative language for some domains is not merely random, but gives the reflection of some basic cultural understanding one has of that domain.

Discussions of metaphor often begin not with what is called basic conceptual metaphors, but rather with a supposed definition of metaphor. This 'definition' says that when two things share salient properties, one can be used as a metaphor for the other in order to evoke our recognition of some of those shared properties. Metaphor is thus *defined* as an expression of similarity, and the definition presupposes that the relevant properties that are shared and that constitute the similarity are already embodied in our conceptual representations.

Halliday and Matthiessen (1999 and 2004) say that the traditional approach to metaphor is to look it 'from below' and ask what does a certain expression mean. They also state that there are two types of metaphors, lexical metaphors and grammatical metaphors. The above explanation of metaphor is all about lexical metaphors. Grammatical metaphor is another kind of metaphor that is especially characteristic of written language.

Whereas traditional lexical metaphor transfers a dominant quality/attribute of one thing onto another – that is, from the "source domain" to the "target domain" (as in ARGUMENT IS WAR), grammatical metaphor transfers meaning from one grammatical status/class to another, for instance, from verb – (Process) – to noun – (Participant). Whereas lexical metaphor is on one word/idea instead of another, grammatical metaphor involves one grammatical form instead of another. Grammatical metaphors are created through the grammatical process of derivation by which a verb or an adjective is converted into a noun, or vice versa. For example:

Hasnah **acts** silly (verb)

Hasnah's **actions** are silly (noun created by derivation=grammatical metaphor)

Martin (1992) says that lexical and grammatical metaphors are not two different phenomena; they are both aspects of the same general metaphorical strategy by which we expand our semantic resources for construing experience. The main distinction between them is one of delicacy. Grammatical metaphor involves the reconstrual of one domain in terms of another domain, where both are of a very general kind. Lexical metaphor also involves the reconstrual of one domain in terms of another domain; but these domains are more delicate in the overall semantic system.

The approach to metaphor stated by Halliday's (1985/1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) does help to highlight the fact that metaphors are more prevalent in language than is often assumed. The term Halliday and Matthiessen use in relation to grammatical constructions that are not metaphorical is *congruence*. They assume, in their discussion of grammatical metaphor, that some constructions which are now congruent or apparently congruent were metaphorical at one time in the history of the language. Although this may create the difficulty of demarcating what is and what is not metaphorical at which particular point in the history of English, it does indicate that in the English language, there is a consistent movement towards metaphorization for some grammatical constructions, and a concomitant counter-movement against metaphorization for others which were once regarded as metaphorical in the history of the language.

According to Halliday, there are 2 main types of grammatical metaphor in the clause: metaphors of mood (including modality) and metaphors of transitivity. In terms of model of semantic functions, these are interpersonal metaphor and ideational metaphor.

#### *Interpersonal metaphors*

Functional linguistics held that interpersonal metaphors are one of the devices to realize interpersonal meaning. Interpersonal metaphor involves non-congruent ways of informal spoken language which concerns with establishing and maintaining relations with other people enacting interaction correlated with a tendency to draw on the resources of interpersonal metaphor involved. Interpersonal metaphor includes metaphor of modality and metaphor of mood.

The first type of interpersonal metaphor is *metaphors of modality*. The modality feature can be construed as a proposition. A projecting clause is involved if modality is expressed metaphorically, which usually has a word or proposition to indicate belief, likelihood, certainty or other features connecting with modality. Interpersonal metaphor of modality encourages people to use the grammar metaphorically. People can say "I think", when they mean probably; or "I believe", when they mean almost certainly; or "don't you think", when they mean definitely. The author may have the following possibilities if people express the likelihood of Jamaan having gone to Bandung already:

- (1) Jamaan *must have gone* to Bandung.
- (2) Jamaan will *certainly have gone* to Bandung by now.

- (3) *I think* Jamaan has already gone to Bandung.  
 (4) It is very *likely* that Jamaan has already gone to Bandung.

Clauses (1) and (2) show that the same meaning of likelihood is realized by a modal verb "must" in clause (1) or a modal adverb "certainly" in clause (2). Halliday called these expressions metaphors of modality which occur within the clause structure itself. While in (3), (4), the modal meaning of certainty in different degrees are decided by the verbs like "think" in clause (3), or particular types of adjectives "likely" in clause (4). Halliday (1994: 354) called such expressions interpersonal metaphors of modality, because the modal meaning is realized outside the clause (in contrast with the standard encoding by means of modal verbs or adverbs, which lie within the clause structure). In English writing, interpersonal metaphor is a tactful language device to realize the intention of the writer and to have a great insight into the theme of the text.

The other main type of interpersonal metaphor is the metaphors of mood. According to Halliday (1994: 363), mood expresses the speech functions of statement, question, offer and command. The choice between these different mood types enables people to give information by means of statements, using the declarative mood; to ask information by means of questions, using the interrogative mood; to put forward something to be considered and accepted or refused by means of offers, using the interrogative mood; or to ask for something to take place by means of commands, using imperative mood.

- (1) The car is in the garage.  
 (2) Where did you park the car?  
 (3) Show me the car!

Clauses (1) and (2) illustrate the expressions of statement and question, and they are fairly straightforward, but with regard to command in clause (3), a large variety of expressions can be used to express the same command.

- (1) Tell me where you parked the car, please.  
 (2) Could you tell me where you parked the car, please?  
 (3) I would advise you to tell me where you parked the car.  
 (4) You are kindly requested to tell me where you parked the car.  
 (5) It is recommended that you tell me where you parked the car.  
 (6) It is advisable to tell me where you parked the car.

According to Halliday (1994: 363), the various expressions in the above example are under the heading of the notion of interpersonal metaphor of mood, because they are considered as metaphorical and deviated from the standard, most straightforward realization of a command by means of the imperative mood. Interpersonal metaphor is mostly associated with mood which expresses the speech function.

#### *Ideational metaphors (Metaphors of transitivity)*

Ideational metaphor is an incongruent representation of the experiential meaning. It is mainly represented by the transitivity system. In the English transitivity system, there are 6 main types of process: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential processes, and these can be found in the grammatical categories. A process consists of 3 components: (1) the process itself; (2) participants in the process; and (3) circumstances associated with the process. The transformations can be between the processes or a shifting of participants and circumstances and this is what Halliday revealed grammatical metaphor. Metaphors of transitivity are the ways of making people's speech or writing not too flat or too artificial and contrived; therefore, getting to know the metaphors of transitivity is necessary for foreign language learners. Metaphors of transitivity are italicized in the following example.

- (1) a. Hilma saw something wonderful.  
     b. Hilma *came upon* a wonderful sight.  
     c. A wonderful sight *met* Hilma's eyes.  
 (2) a. Jonai put the nail into the plank *with a hammer*. (Circumstance: manner)  
     b. *The hammer* put the nail into the plank. (Participant)  
     c. Jonai *hammered* the nail into the plank. (Material process)

Clauses (1)b and (1)c are interpreted as metaphorical variants of (1)a. In (1)b, the mental process "saw" has been represented as a material process "came upon" and the perception has been turned into a "participant" "a sight". In clause (1)c, the process has been split up into Actor "a sight", material process "met" and goal "eyes"; and "Mary" represented simply as the possessor of the eyes. In clause (2)a, the circumstance of manner is represented by "with a hammer". In clauses (2)b and (2)c, "hammer" represents the participant and material process.

Halliday offers a general theory of the phenomenon of nominalization, which he refers to as grammatical metaphor (the situation where meanings typically realized by one type of language pattern get realized by other less typical linguistic choices. Basically, his idea is that meanings and the ways we word them have unmarked correlations which evolved first in our culture, which we develop first as children, and which tend to unfold first in texts. Some of the most important of these unmarked correlations are as follows:

- Nouns encode participants (people, places, things...)
- Verbs encode processes (actions, thoughts, feelings...)
- Adjectives encode qualities (size, shape, color...)
- Conjunctions encode logical relations (time, cause, contrast...)

But meanings and their wordings do not always correlate in this way. Here's a short checklist of some of the ways in which meanings can be moved around:

- a. **'quality' as noun** (instead of adjective). For example, 'unstable' as *instability*
- b. **'process' as noun** (instead of verb). For example, 'transform' to *transformation* [event], 'will/be going to' to *prospect* [tense], 'try to' to *attempt* [phase], 'can/could' to *possibility/potential* [modality]
- c. **'logical relation' as noun** (instead of conjunction). For example, 'so' to *cause/proof* and 'if' to *condition*
- d. **'logical relation' as verb** (instead of conjunction). For example, 'then' to *follow*, 'so' to *cause*, 'and' to *complement*
- e. **'logical relation' as preposition** (instead of conjunction). For example, 'so' to *because of/in light of*, and 'if' to *in the event of*

Halliday interprets these marked codings as metaphors because they have to be read on two levels--literally in terms of the actual grammatical class of the item under question, and figuratively in terms of the 'underlying' meaning that is being encoded. This means that in order to fully understand a nominal group, like *the need for more land due to the growth of population*, we have to interpret *need* as a noun linked to the noun *growth* by the preposition *due to*, and in addition interpret *need* as a process which is causally related to the process behind *growth*. So when we unpacked *the need for more land due to the growth of population as population grew and so people needed more land above*, we were focusing attention on these two levels of interpretation.

Population in the city grew rapidly and so people needed more land



The need for more land due to the rapid growth of populous city

The above example shows that the processes (*grow* and *need*) are realized metaphorically through the participants (*the need* and *the growth*). This is what we call nominalization. Moreover, the participant (*population*) which is normally realized through a noun or a noun phrase is now realized through an adjective (*populous*). This grammatical metaphor is known as adjectivisation. Finally, the logical relation (*so*), which is normally realized through conjunction, is now metaphorically realized through preposition (*due to*). This is the example of changing from conjunction into preposition.

Most of us find the de-nominalized version easier to understand. It is simpler in the sense that its meaning and wording match--nouns encode participants, verbs encode processes and conjunctions encode logical relations. This is the way young children talk, especially before puberty, and the way people in general chat with their friends, in casual conversation. But it is not the way educated people write argumentation, where information is packaged differently. Powerful written language in our culture usually involves a great deal of grammatical metaphor--and one reason for this is that it makes it easier to construct the rhetorical structure of the text.

### Academic Writing

Academic writing encompasses all writing tasks that are the product of thorough research, investigation or enquiry used for the advancement of knowledge in academic or professional settings. In the educational institutions, this may be of two kinds: firstly, professional research writings which are the prerequisites for annual appraisals of academics who must "publish or perish". The second is the student academic writing which involves writing of term papers, research projects, theses and dissertations.

Because academic writing is a depersonalized discourse, it is more consistently ideational in its orientation as it concentrates on the field of discourse, the subject matter or the content of research findings. It follows a conventionalized format with specifications on the number of pages and length of report. It therefore requires a specialized pattern of information packaging and texture in ways which not only makes

for economy of words, but also retains the sophistication and erudite touch which mark a particular text as an academic discourse.

One of the systemic strategies for achieving information density in academic writing is through grammatical metaphor of the ideational type. Our concern in this paper is to highlight the salutary effects of ideational metaphor especially nominalization in achieving word economy and information density in the writing of research abstracts.

An abstract, according to Bhatia (1993), is a description or factual summary of the much longer research report. It is meant to give the reader an exact and concise knowledge of the full report. It contains information on the following aspects of the research that it describes: what the author did (purpose/objectives); how the author did it (methodology); what the author found (findings/results) and what the author concluded (conclusions). This format is regarded by Bhatia as the generic or the cognitive move structure of a well-written abstract. A standard abstract in most academic journals and conference proceedings is usually specified between 200 – 250 words and in a few instances up to 300 – 350 words. Some applications for fellowships would even limit the applicants to as low as 100 – 150 word abstracts. These specifications demand the greatest economy in textual organization and information packaging.

A cursory look at some abstracts especially those written by graduates of State University of Padang display a total lack of knowledge of the systemic resource of grammatical metaphor with the result that most of them are too verbose and the word counts exceed standard specifications. An attempt is made in this paper to demonstrate the application of nominalization in writing abstracts and how these nominalized versions helped to achieve lexical economy and information density in the selected abstracts. At this juncture, let us first of all explore the concept of grammatical metaphor as explicated by Halliday with particular emphasis on ideational metaphor and nominalization.

### Finding and Discussion

After selecting, observing, classifying, and studying 20 abstracts written by graduate students majoring in English Language Teaching, the use of grammatical metaphors can be presented as follows:

	Types of Grammatical Metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
Experiential and logical Metaphors	'quality' as noun (instead of adjective)	15	22%
	'process' as noun (instead of verb)	49	71%
	'logical relation' as noun (instead of conjunction)	3	4%
	'logical relation' as verb (instead of conjunction)	2	3%
	'logical relation' as preposition (instead of conjunction)	0	0%
Interpersonal Metaphors	Modality Metaphor	0	0%
	Congruent relationship between mood and speech function	0	0%
	Total	69	100%

The above table shows that the frequency of using *'process' as noun (instead of verb)* is the highest among the types of grammatical metaphors (71%), followed by *'quality' as noun (instead of adjective)*. This implies that the students try to implement the language features of academic writing, characterized by the dominant use of nominal groups, and the use of a wide variety of modality and modulation.

Nominalization is the dominant feature of grammatical metaphors. It has two (main) textual advantages (Eggins, 2004). First it allows us to get away from the dynamic and usually real world sequencing that goes with speaking. By nominalizing actions and logical relations, we can organize the text in terms of ideas, reasons, causes, etc. Rhetorical organization made possible by nominalization only becomes an option because written text is rehearsed, polished, redrafted. Second, nominalization also allows us to pack in more lexical content, which relates to the potential of nominal group in English. The nominal group is the part of clause that contains nouns and the words that can accompany nouns.

The following examples are some grammatical metaphors used in the master thesis abstracts:

- *Group work implementation*
- *Due to lack of understanding of the basic principles of group work*
- *Target language complexity*
- *There is an interaction between ..... and .....*
- *Using a writing test as a techniques of data collection*

However, the frequency of grammatical metaphor occurrences is significantly low. There are only 67 nominalizations in 20 abstracts. It means the average nominalization in each text is 3.3. In addition, the occurrence of other grammatical metaphors, such as verbalization, adjectivisation, modality, and others, is much lower than that of nominalization. The fact that grammatical metaphors are used minimally implies that students' abstracts are still written in spoken mode. Their writings are still dominated by the use of dynamic structure, grammatical complexity, lexical sparse, human actors, action processes, and dynamically related clauses. Finally, it can be stated that the needs for improving students' ability in making use of grammatical metaphors in their abstracts is very demanding.

One strategy that can be used in improving students' ability to use grammatical metaphors in academic writings, especially in abstract, is to let them practice transferring the congruent forms to metaphorical forms. The following example shows how the congruent forms are transferred into metaphorical forms.

Congruent Form	Metaphorical Form
This research was aimed to know how English teachers of MAN 1 Padang implement group work in teaching speaking.	This study is focused on group work implementation by English teachers of MAN 1 Padang in teaching speaking, the problem of group work implementation, and the causes of the problems.
The purposes of this research are to describe the way the English teachers implement the group work, to find teacher's problem in implementing group work, and to explain the factors causes the problem in implementing group work.	
This research is descriptive qualitative research	Using observation and interview as data collection techniques, this descriptive qualitative study involved all English teachers of Grade X at MAN 1 Padang.
The data were collected by using observation and interview.	
Observation was done before interviewing the participants, then interview was done after teaching and learning process in implementing group work	
The participants of this research were all English teachers in class X at MAN 1 Padang	
The findings showed that the English teachers had not implemented group work optimally, due to lack of understanding of the basic principles of group work.	The findings shows that group work implementation is not yet optimal due to teachers' lack of understanding of group work basic principles and lack of creativity, time management, class size, material resources, inability to improve students' motivation, and students' low responsibility in teaching and learning process.
The teachers found some difficulties in implementing group work for students	
Besides, the teachers found difficulties in managing time, lack of teacher's creativity, class size, material resources, teachers' ability in giving motivation, and students' responsibility in teaching and learning process	
It can be concluded that English teachers of MAN 1 Padang need more improvement concerning the implementation of group work, especially in teaching speaking	The conclusion is there is a need for English teachers at MAN 1 Padang on the improvement concerning the group work implementation in teaching speaking.

### Concluding Remark

The above discussion leads to two considerations that can be made: First, in metaphoric transformation there is a general drift towards 'thingness'. The direction of metaphor in a move towards the concrete and the noun is the most metaphorically attractive category. Second, there is a close relationship between the two aspects of the metaphorical process; the shift in rank and the shift in function/class. Moreover, the more we use grammatical metaphors in our writing the closer we are to the ideal written language used in academic writing. However, too much use of grammatical metaphors can also lead to vagueness of the message that we intend to offer, and the minimum use of grammatical metaphors will result in the spoken language in the written form.

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