

The Dual Meaning Potential of Prepositional Grammatical Metaphor in Prose Fiction

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Received: 2017.9.17

Accepted: 2018.4.27

Online publication: 2018.7.1

Abstract

From a Systemic Functional perspective, Grammatical Metaphor (GM) as is taken to be a chief driving force in the discourse of different genres, an important adult language machinery for ideational meanings to be semantically cross-mapped and realized through a different form in the stratum of the lexico-grammar, in order to convey changed meanings and tinker with the discursive flow and development of text in real time, mainly through nominalization of adjectives and verbs. Using a number of established works of the English novel as data, this study draws upon the author's previous model for the categories of GM used in modern prose fiction, with the main focus placed on one of the six categories, Prepositional GM (PGM). PGM figures with a very high frequency in fiction and occurs when a GM is preceded by a preposition. This study finds that the language of prose fiction in English deploys some of these PGMs in either of two different meaning of the adverbial, varying according to context. Again, as seen to be the hallmark of GM by many, GM is found to open up vast ideational meaning potentials in the semantics stratum, from which the lexico-grammar makes choices according to context and intended meaning. As argued elsewhere in the literature and here, and as backed up by the author's own experience of the advanced teaching of writing and reading, broadened understanding of GM is a critically important component to writing instruction and its effectiveness, as seen in the large-scale horizons and agendas for effective teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Iran and beyond.

Keywords: systemic functional linguistics, grammatical metaphor, prose fiction, prepositional grammatical metaphor, advanced reading and writing instruction

Introduction

Grammatical Metaphor (GM) is an insightful and useful concept put forward within Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). To understand the phenomenon of Grammatical Metaphor, we must first put in a few lines on the theory underlying it, that is, Systemic Functional Linguistics. First of all, Systemic Functional linguists place considerable emphasis on the idea of choice. They view language as a large network of interrelated items, from which speakers unconsciously select when speaking (Martin, 2001). Their focus is on paradigmatic relations – on what you say in relation to what you could have said. But for other schools of linguistics, the syntagmatic perspective is dominant – what you say in relation to what you said before and what you are going to say next. Systemicists formalize choices by means of systems (hence the name of the theory). The way in which the systems bundle together gives systemicists an insight into how language is related to the contexts in which it is used; this is where the second distinctive feature of systemic linguistics comes into the picture.

The theory and this school of thought are greatly interested in the relation between language and context. They have always argued, following Malinowski (1923), that you cannot understand the meaning of what someone says or writes unless you know something about the context in which it is embedded. Or, looking at this the other way round, if you understand a text, you can also figure out a great deal about the context in which it occurred.

Transitivity is the grammar of processes: actions and events, mental processes and relations. It is that part of grammar which constitutes a theory of ‘goings-on’. The ideational semantic resources construe our experience of the world that is around us and inside us (e.g., Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, 2004; Martin et al, 1997). One essential task of such a semantics is that of modeling a particular phenomenon of the meaning potential that is known as Grammatical Metaphor. This is the phenomenon whereby a set of agnate (related) forms is present in the language having different mappings between the semantic and the grammatical categories (Thompson, 2004).

A central thrust of Systemic Functional thinking is that the phenomenon of GM is fundamental to adult uses of language. Halliday and Matthiessen (1999) believe that one way to demonstrate the validity and power of the theory is by using it to handle GM, and to show how this pervasive aspect of the lexicogrammar expands the meaning potential. GM comes about when actions, which would usually be described by a sentence such as *we study economics*, are presented in a noun phrase such as *the study of economics*. At its most simple, activities or processes, which would naturally be expressed by verbs, become things (or *nouns* in a traditional non-systemic nomenclature).

To put it simply, something that is not metaphorical is called a ‘congruent’ semantic configuration or version of things. The term can be informally glossed as “closer to the state of affairs in the external world” along with “felt to be more natural and basic” (Thompson, 2004, p.84), not to say that ‘the congruent mode’ has ‘semogenetic priority’ (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). In simple terms, nouns congruently encode things, and verbs congruently encode happenings. We can therefore give a provisional definition of GM as: the expression of a meaning through a lexicogrammatical form that originally evolved to express a different kind of meaning. The expression of the meaning is metaphorical in relation to a different way of expressing the ‘same’ meaning, which would be more congruent (Thompson, 2004).

Further Background Theory underlying GM

Nominalization is the single most powerful resource for creating GM (Knowles & Moon, 2006; Halliday, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, among others). By this device, processes (congruently worded as verbs) and properties (congruently worded as adjectives) are worded metaphorically as nouns; instead of functioning as Process or Attribute in the clause, they function as Thing in the nominal group.

One major advantage of presenting other elements as entities is that things can be described, classified and qualified in ways not available to other elements. Susinskiene (2004) states that the pragmatic usefulness of the process of metaphorization can be accounted for by the fact that it allows us to make more participants. The use of such participants has the effect of condensing information within the sentence; it contributes to language economy and often serves as a means of cohesion. The transference of functions involved in GM brings about a textual reorganization as well. GM constitutes a powerful resource in the construction of a message and its influence can be perceived in its textual organization. It is one of the ‘more sophisticated operations involved in a writer’s exploitation of the meaning potential of a language (Halliday&Matthiessen, 1999).

Semogenesis, the creation of meaning, as a ‘guiding principle’ in the presentation of a Systemic Functional theory of language, means that language has within itself the resources by which people can create new meanings. As the text unfolds, patterns emerge some of which acquire added value through ‘resonating with’ other patterns in the text or in the context of situation. The text itself is an instance; the resonance is possible because behind it lies the potential which informs every choice made by the speaker or writer, and in terms of which these choices are interpreted by listeners and readers. Halliday

and Matthiessen (1999) provide the perception of Semogenesis we draw upon. They believe that since semogenic processes take place through time, one needs to identify the time frames, of which there are three.

There are three major processes of semohistory, through which meanings are continually created, transmitted, recreated, extended and changed (as discussed in Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, p.17). First, there is the evolution of human language (and of particular languages as manifestations of this). Known histories represent a small fraction of the total time scale of this evolution, perhaps 0.1 %; they become relevant only where particular aspects of this evolutionary change have taken place very recently, for example, the evolution of scientific discourse. This is the phylogenetic time frame. Secondly, there is the development of the individual speaker. This is the ontogenetic time frame. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly for text and discourse analysis, there is the unfolding of the act of meaning itself: the instantial construction of meaning in the form of a text. This is a stochastic process in which the potential for creating meaning is continually modified in the light of what has gone before; certain options are restricted or disfavored while others are emboldened or opened up. This is the logogenetic time frame.

Many useful and insightful studies have been undertaken, especially ones aiming to look comparatively into the operations and nature of GM in different genres being compared although most still stick to the paramount presence of GM in science and the operation of GM in literacy and science. These provide better mediums through which one can understand nominalizations and GM, at textual and discursive play, in better, faster and deeper ways. Good examples of such research include Kazemian and Behnam (2013), Martin (1993), Rose (1997), Simon-Vandenberg (2004), O'Halloran (2003), Heyvaert (2003), among many others.

Hoping that this brief overview has been helpful, a warning is in order; the theory cannot be treated adequately within the scope of the present work. The sources used above can be referred to for a more intimate theoretical familiarity. GM is a rather recent discursive phenomenon of modern Systemic Functional Linguistics; such outlook, in Halliday and Matthiessen's (1999) words, starts not from the overt categories and markers of the grammar, like case and case inflections, but from the often covert, cryptogrammatical relations that are less immediately accessible to conscious reflection, yet constitute the real foundation on which the grammar construes the world of our experience.

Method and Category of Analysis: Prepositional Grammatical Metaphor

In line with the way Farahani and Hadidi's model (Farahani & Hadidi, 2008) was presented, this study draws mostly upon the conceptualizations of

GM by Thompson (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (1999). The six categories of GM in modern prose fiction proposed by Farahani and Hadidi (2008) included a category provisionally called Prepositional GM (PGM). It was found to be the most frequent type of GM in the genre, acting like something of a textual mainstay for not only the other five GM categories in the genre, but also for the non-SVO adverbial elements of the sentences in the genre in general.

These six GM categories, their frequencies, semantic, stylistic, textual, cognitive, aesthetic, and discursive characteristics and implications made for very interesting findings with regard to what seemed to loom large as a prominent textual machinery in modern fictional texts. The details of what we did back in 2008 are beyond the scope of the present article. Interested readers can refer to the work, which could very well help with the one at hand. But to get a quick textual/structural picture, here is how it works, basically. If the GM does not occur as Head Noun in a nominal group designating the participant roles (subject or object) of the clause, it would be a PGM acting as circumstantial elements in the clause. It is so pervasive that it governs other types of GM in this genre. In sentences like:

- *Malfoy was almost beside himself with glee at Gryffindor's defeat.*

The writer makes liberal use of the device, with two consecutive PGMs. Coordination comes in to enhance further creativity and complexity:

- *With many bitter sidelong looks and some sullen muttering, the class opened their books.*

What we do below in this study is to look at instances of PGM that exhibit added semiotic potentials of this textual device, as a result of the interesting dual-meaning ambiguity accompanying some PGMs. To this end, we will look at a random selection of an array of classic and modern works of fiction, to be as representative as possible.

PGMs with Dual Meanings

What Farahani and Hadidi (2008) found intriguing was the manner in which MPF writers break the mould and make use of GMs which grow into two or more types at once, thus attaining multiple cognitive effects and discursual imprints at one go. Examples of this in MPF are legion. Even when there is a multiple instance of some other type of GM, PGM easily squeezes itself in. In the following sentence, for instance, there are three uses of EGM (Existential Grammatical Metaphor), with a PGM one interposed, which is underlined differently with double lines:

- *There was a jumble of indistinct male voices, a silence and then, without warning, the unmistakable swish and thud of an axe.*

These seem to come in very useful for writers of the genre to devise circumstantial elements and adverbials, by way of achieving stronger textual and cognitive effects. Yet again, alternative systemic choices for congruent versions fall far short of the intended textual effect. Unpacking the GMs in, for instance:

- *his teeth were bared in a grin;*
- *he stopped abruptly at the sight of their faces;*
- *Harry stood there in a panic;*
- *his jaw had gone rigid with anger*

Would leave us with:

- *his teeth were bared since he was grinning;*
- *he stopped abruptly when he saw them;*
- *Harry stood there because he'd panicked a lot;*
- *he was so angry that his jaw had gone rigid.*

A fundamental consideration, related to our PGM concern here, is that there is inherent ambiguity in the metaphoric shift; since the relaters, cohesive ties and logical elements are lost in the metaphorical version, it is not clear if the unpacking should include *his teeth were bared since he was grinning* or *he was grinning so his teeth were bared*. Furthermore, it is crucial to realize that some meanings do not lend themselves to any lexicogrammatical realization other than GM. In *he was watching with an air of vindictive pleasure*, it is difficult to arrive at any unpacked congruent alternative that would properly achieve the semantic and textual load of the metaphorical. As mentioned frequently in SFL, the metaphoric shifts are also multi-tiered: from Epithets to Things, from Logical elements to Things, from Processes to Things, Relaters to Things, etc.

Further Textual Instances of PGMs with Dual Meanings

Interestingly, a rewarding analysis, an analysis and reading more rewarding for and relevant to the purposes of TEFL (especially advanced instruction of writing and reading) would fall in line with the model proposed in Hadidi (2016) for elliptical non-finite adverbials (so called due to the fact that non-finite adverbials are, by nature, mostly 'elliptical', that is, some marker of dependency has been left out of them; the model points to the two meanings of AS – because and while) since a PGM would be an adverbial most of the time, or something in the spirit of the non-finite, that is, an infinitive or gerundive non-finite, etc (something related to the verb most of the time).

Thus, the conceptual intermediateness of the stages of congruency conceivable for a GM changes here towards ambiguity between two meanings; the congruent alternatives of a GM do NOT, in principle, exhibit ambiguity among each other (disparity of meaning so much as to be called a case of ambiguity: completely different interpretations, NOT agnates, paraphrases,

congruent versions, of one another). But here in this article, the argument is that some PGMs do carry two DIFFERENT meanings, each of which will have to be furnished with a separate set of congruent versions. Below are some examples to help understand these PGMs. It is interesting and noteworthy that both classic prose fiction, 18th and 19th century types, and modern 21st century prose fiction, exhibit this sort of PGM (the PGM is the underlined part):

- 1) *We ate in silence.*
- 2) *Some parents employ overly drastic measures in their desperation.*
- 3) *I stormed out of the room in anger.*
- 4) *She stood firm in incredulity, and felt in no danger of a hysterical fit, or a swoon.*
- 5) *Miss Bates, in her real anxiety for Jane, could hardly stay even to be grateful, before she stepped forward and put an end to all farther singing.*
- 6) *Mrs. Weston came out, in her solicitude after her son-in-law, to inquire if he were come.*
- 7) *Serious she was, very serious in her thankfulness, and in her resolutions.*
- 8) *She did not think too much had been said in his praise.*
- 9) *He was warm in his reprobation of Mr. Elton's conduct.*
- 10) *She could not flatter herself with any idea of blindness in his attachment to her.*
- 11) *I swiftly looked away and threw the truck into reverse, almost hitting a rusty Toyota Corolla in my haste.*
- 12) *I hadn't even checked the clock in my hurry to get outside.*
- 13) *I'd given more information than necessary in my unwilling honesty.*
- 14) *I searched for some logic, some binding motif the collection had in common, but I found nothing in my hasty examination.*
- 15) *I thought about it, my eyebrows pulling together in mystification.*

In 1 (*We ate in silence*), an unpacking towards the congruent would leave us with two meanings, two suggested unpackings towards the congruent, either of which could obtain depending on context:

- 1a) *We ate while we were silent.*
- 1b) *We ate silently/in a silent manner.*

This is the interesting aspect of GM; the prepositional phrase, the PGM *in silence* would either relate to the verb as a traditional adverb, or would grow into an elliptical non-finite adverbial clause (Hadidi, 2016) *while we were silent*.

In 2 (*Some parents employ overly drastic measures in their desperation*), the PGM can again be unpacked in line with Hadidi (2016):

- 2a) *because they are desperate*
- 2b) *while they are desperate.*

In 3 (*I stormed out of the room in anger*), the same course of analysis applies: an elliptical non-finite clause ambiguous between either of the following:

- 3a) *because I was angry*
- 3b) *while I was angry.*

In 4, (*She stood firm in incredulity*), again an elliptical non-finite clause ambiguous between the following:

- 4a) *while she was incredulous*
- 4b) *because she was incredulous.*

In 5, (*Miss Bates, in her real anxiety for Jane, could hardly stay even to be grateful*), the same story holds for the PGM, where there can be two readings to the Grammatical Metaphor, proving the semantic re-mapping from a process to a Thing (from a verb to a noun):

- 5a) *because she was really anxious for Jane*
- 5b) *while she was really anxious for Jane*

In 6, similarly, the PGM (*Mrs. Weston came out, in her solicitude after her son-in-law, to inquire if he were come*) can be interpreted in two ways:

- 6a) *because she was solicitous after her son-in-law*
- 6b) *while she was solicitous after her son-in-law*

In 7, there are two PGMs in one clause (*Serious she was, very serious in her thankfulness, and in her resolutions*), related to each other by coordination, hence, a stylistic device called ‘parallelism’ (Simpson, 2004). The fact that GMs can occur in parallelism is something interesting that needs to be explored in literature-text; if it is found that they do, it will be argued that such parallelisms give rise to ‘foregrounded’ patterns in the syntax of the clause, as they recur in rather orderly, repeated and significant (prominent and foregrounded) ways, which is a hallmark of literature (Leech & Short, 2007). The clause also exhibits ‘extra-posing’ (Green, 2006; Ward & Birner, 2006), the otherwise unmarked syntactic layout (*she was serious*) being replaced by a marked one through a pre-posed adjective (*serious*), deeply changing the information structure of the sentence. This means that another area worth exploring is the relationship between information structure and Grammatical Metaphor, something that some other researchers have also talked about (e.g., Ravelli, 2003), but looking at it in other texts and genres may bring out other powers and dimensions to GM as yet hidden to us.

As regards the dual possible meanings to this clause, interestingly, we have two different readings here than the above non-finite readings:

- 7a) *she was very serious when thanking people and when she resolved to do things*
- 7b) *she was very serious to be thankful and to resolve to do things*

In 8, (*She did not think too much had been said in his praise*), the same interesting duality of interpretation as in 7, the ambiguity between two different meanings, obtains:

- 8a) *when praising him*
- 8b) *in order to praise him*

In 9 (*He was warm in his reprobation of Mr. Elton's conduct*), like the above cases, there can be two congruent readings for the PGM, that are, again, as different from each other as to make for a case of ambiguity:

- 9a) *He was warm when reprobating Mr. Elton's conduct*
- 9b) *He warmly reprobated Mr. Elton's conduct*

In 10 (*She could not flatter herself with any idea of blindness in his attachment to her*), the PGM *in his attachment to her* can be interpreted in two different ways (maybe more) in the context of this sentence:

- 10a) *when feeling attached to her (when feeling in love with her)*
- 10b) *about feeling attached to her (about feeling in love with her)*

In 11 (*I swiftly looked away and threw the truck into reverse, almost hitting a rusty Toyota Corolla in my haste*), the PGM is ambiguous between the following two, adverbial, senses:

- 11a) *because I was hasty*
- 11b) *when I was being hasty*

In 12 (*I hadn't even checked the clock in my hurry to get outside*), similarly, there are two senses possible, ambiguous between two adverbial meanings:

- 12a) *because I was hurrying to get outside*
- 12b) *while I was hurrying to get outside*

In 13 (*I'd given more information than necessary in my unwilling honesty*), a path of ambiguity analysis similar to the above is applicable:

- 13a) *because I was unwillingly honest*
- 13b) *while I was unwillingly honest*

In 14 (*I searched for some logic, some binding motif the collection had in common, but I found nothing in my hasty examination*), a similar duality of interpretation obtains for the PGM:

- 14a) *because I was examining it hastily*
- 14b) *when I examined it hastily*

Finally, in 15 (*I thought about it, my eyebrows pulling together in mystification*), the same potential for the PGM to carry two disparate meanings, each of which can have a different set of congruent versions, can apply, leading to a case of ambiguity:

- 15a) *because I was mystified*
- 15b) *while I was mystified*

Conclusions

To revisit the original foundations of a Systemic Functional outlook on nominalized grammatical metaphor, on the essential relation between the semantic re-mapping inherent in grammatical metaphor and the syntactic phenomenon of nominalization, it can be said that looking at prepositional phrases with a nominalized element stemming from a verb in this light, calling it a Prepositional Grammatical Metaphor, enables the semantic ‘presence’ of the verbal element (the Process) in every act of conscious reading and writing. And as such, this verbal-then-nominalized element, accounted for semantically through the notion of GM in SFL, lends itself to the variable play of this nominalized part of the prepositional phrase in line with the syntactic elements before it, determining whether the PGM is open to one or more interpretations.

What this means is that the PGM *in my consent* in the sentence *He seemed to feel the challenge in my consent* carries one meaning, even though, as is inherent in the concept of GM, there are always degrees of, and therefore more than one, congruent wording that can be envisaged for the grammatical metaphor (*he seemed to feel the challenge in my consenting with him* or *he seemed to feel the challenge in the way I agreed/consented with him*). But it remains obvious that this PGM, or, for example, the one in *I knew I talked in my sleep* are more simply processed and comprehended than those in sentences like *I stormed out of the room in anger* (open to two disparate and, therefore, ambiguous senses of *because I was angry* or *while I was angry*).

All the same, these processing hierarchies of GMs can be a good area of research, to see if they fall in line with the congruent versions for one GM, where one version is congruent in respect of the main GM, but metaphorical in respect of another congruent version and so on (for the GM in *He seemed to feel the challenge in my consent*, the congruent *he seemed to feel the challenge in my consenting with him* is more metaphorical than *he seemed to feel the challenge in the way I agreed/consented with him*).

As seen above, the conceptual intermediateness of the stages of congruency conceivable for and typical of a GM changes in such PGMs as discussed here to the presence of ambiguity between two disparate meanings. The argument made here, then, is that congruency seems to be in complementary distribution

with ambiguity. The congruent alternatives of a GM do NOT, in principle, exhibit ambiguity among each other (disparity of meaning so much as to be called a case of ‘ambiguity’: completely different interpretations, NOT agnates, paraphrases, congruent versions, of one another). But here in this article, the argument made follows with the finding that some PGMs do carry two DIFFERENT meanings, each of which will have to be furnished with a separate set of congruent versions. The examples provided help understand these kinds of PGMs. What is interesting and noteworthy is that both classic prose fiction, 18th and 19th century types, and modern 21st century prose fiction, exhibit this sort of PGM.

Implications and Suggestions

The concept of ‘Grammatical Metaphor’ in literature-text in general, and prose fiction, in particular, has stood inadequately treated and its potentials for and contributions to a better understanding of such discourse have not been dealt with as deserved and required. Studies like Simon-Vandenberg (2003) do touch upon some aspects of the sort of GM which occurs in MPF, but these do not set out to bring out and lay out the whole gamut of such GM; Simon-Vandenberg (2003), for instance, studies what is, in effect, Generic GM of the second type in Farahani and Hadidi (2008), and calls it ‘Lexicogrammatical Metaphor’. However, in this regard, she argues along interpersonal lines and her corpus is different.

Other projects have mostly dealt with GM in scientific discourse, subsuming discourses like history, economics, philosophy, and media under science. Most studies do touch upon what are categorized as Generic GMs. Susinskiene (2004), for instance, looks at Farahani and Hadidi’s (2008) Generic type; however, she goes on and mentions our Existential type as well, but not as a type that would appear with higher frequency in MPF. She divides GM into two types irrespective of any specific genre: inherent (obligatory), and non-inherent (non-spatial and spatial), and argues that non-inherent semantic functions are more common in scientific discourse. As her main objective, she concentrates on ‘nominalized nongerundive material processes’ (p. 18), that is, the most fundamental and unmarked type of GM identified by Halliday (1985). Her study does not enter into the evolutionary aspect of metaphorical processes in the grammar from the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) perspective, that is, semogenesis. Again, she proclaims her corpus to be ‘drawn from different genres of scientific discourse’ (p. 19) and political discourse. Moreover, they are based on either syntactic analysis or Systemic Functional one; there is no attempt to introduce requisite simultaneous and hybrid analysis of both

syntactic and Systemic Functional views into the corpus, along with aspects of semogenesis that constitute an important consideration in modern SFG. Most research on GM does recognize that important as GM is, GM has not been given a comprehensive treatment.

There is actual compelling evidence for the contributions of GM and SFL to TEFL. One such work is Hadidi (2012), detailing a potential role of GM as a yardstick for raising awareness in upper-intermediate and advanced writing instruction. As a suggested scenario practicable in all such classes, the strategies widely used with the students in class lined themselves up nicely and subtly with GM; in that, almost all such cases calling for the sort of involved and contextualized paraphrase-making aimed at occurred when GM of one of the categories of modern prose fiction was employed, for the purposes of raising students' consciousness before the act of writing and observing its effects after their writing tasks. This falls in tune with the general trend and strategy of paraphrase-making, known altogether to be a good EFL teaching strategy (e.g., Widdowson, 2003; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Ellis, 1994; McCarthy & Carter, 1994, etc) and finds its equivalent in SFL as 'agnation'. Heyvaert (2003) lends support to this line of thinking, coming so far as to look upon 'agnation' as 'the relationship of a nominalization and its non-nominal equivalent' (p. 68).

In studies such as this, there would be a great number of implications, as well as ideas for further research. These include the hands-on classroom strategies for the purposes of TEFL, teacher awareness, intermediate-to-advanced student's consciousness raising for intermediate-to-advanced reading and writing instruction, critical pedagogy, the well-attested and immutable contributions of literature and literary texts to the EFL and ESL classroom, etc.

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Biodata

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