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Using Functional Grammar to Develop Interpretations of Literary Texts

Anne Tokunaga

Introduction

For students who are beginning their studies in applied linguistics it is difficult to know where to begin when undertaking the task of a linguistic textual analysis. A linguistic analysis needs to be objective and based on evidence from the text, and students have to be able to either find a motivation for the particular choices that authors have made or explain how the language and linguistic patterns have led to a particular interpretation of its meaning. This means that an analysis should not just be concerned with listing or describing linguistic features, but instead, it should look for a way to explain these features and build them into a wider sense of meaning.

This analysis will explore some grammatical features of a short narrative text for children, focusing on genre, clause types and patterns to examine how they are used to construct register to build representations of people, places and events, and of roles and relationships.

The Text

In this study, I have chosen a text from a children's picture book, "*Piggybook*". For second language learners new to this type of analysis it is important to choose easy-to-comprehend texts as it would be hard for any person, let alone a language learner, to do an analysis of a text that they don't understand well. As picture books reinforce meaning through the interplay of text and illustrations, using two meaning-making resources: visual illustrations and language, it is relatively easier to understand elements of the story such as the theme, message, characterization, and plot structure.

Piggybook is a well-known children's picture book which was written and illustrated by the English author and social critic, Anthony Browne, and first published in 1983. It is a book that cleverly uses both language and visual images to communicate its theme of gender inequality prevalent in family roles. The

message is that women are burdened by having to do more than their fair share of the housework, and this is depicted on the cover page of the picture book through a visual pun portraying Mrs. Piggott, looking very unhappy, while carrying or ‘piggy-backing’ her contented, smiling husband and two sons.

In my study I will draw on the work of previous analyses using Systemic Functional Grammar of the text by Martin (2000) and in the work of Ruth French and Joan Rothery, as related by Williams (2000). I will develop their work on Transitivity features of the text, while also doing a Generic analysis and exploring Mood and Theme and Rheme patterns in order to gain a deeper understanding of how meaning gets inside texts.

Using Functional Grammar

Some important theoretical aspects of Systemic Functional Linguistics are genre, register, field, tenor and mode. Genre refers to the culturally expected structure of types of texts. Register is used by Systemic Functional linguists as a bridge between context and language (Coffin et al., 2009). In Systemic Functional Grammar any social situation, referred to as the ‘context of situation’, influences the kind of language people use in relatively predictable ways. SFL posits that there are three main contextual variables: field, tenor, and mode. The field concerns what the “language is being used to talk about.” The tenor concerns the “role relationships between the interactants.” Finally, the mode concerns “the role language plays in the interaction,” whether it’s written or spoken (Eggins, 2004). These three variables determine what Halliday calls the three metafunctions in language (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

These three metafunctions characterize the “resources of the lexico-grammar of every language” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). The Ideational metafunction enables users to represent their experiences, and the world. In regards to language we are concerned here with participants, typically expressed as nouns, who do various processes, typically expressed as verbs, under certain circumstances, typically expressed as prepositional and adverbial phrases. The Interpersonal metafunction enables users to enact relationships, engage interpersonally and exchange points of view. In regards to language, we are concerned here with speech function (the grammatical choice of the mood of a clause) and modality. Finally, the Textual metafunction enables users to create cohesive text to express their message. In regards to language, we are concerned with the clause structure and the way in which the Themes are developed.

By carrying out a systematic analysis of the context of a text, analysts are able to

make predictions about language use. Alternatively, by carrying out an analysis of the language and patterns found in the text, it is possible to extract meanings about the context, which is constructed through language use. This relationship can be seen in Table 1 below and the questions associated with each register variable can be found in Table 2:

Table 1. The Relationship between language, metafunction and register

Register Variable	Metafunction	Lexico-grammar (systems)
<p>Field (what the text is about). Covers the following aspects of a situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social activity taking place • The topic being discussed • The angle of representation 	<p>↔ Ideational ↔ (meaning about the world/s – perceived or imagined)</p>	<p>TRANSITIVITY (Participants, Processes and Circumstances)</p>
<p>Tenor (the relationship between the interactants). Covers the following aspects of a situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social roles and relative social status in terms of power, expertise, or authority • The social distance, i.e. the degree of social connection or closeness • Speaker/writer persona, i.e. General stance and assumed degree of alignment between interlocutors 	<p>↔ Interpersonal ↔ (meaning about the relationship between interactants)</p>	<p>MOOD (Speech function) and Modality</p>
<p>Mode (whether the text is spoken or written). Covers the following aspects of a situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The degree of interactivity • The degree of spontaneity • The communicative distance in time and space from the events discussed • The role of language, i.e. the degree to which it interacts with other meaning-making resources such as visual image 	<p>↔ Textual ↔ (meaning about the text we construct in interaction)</p>	<p>THEME-RHEME (Information structure; Cohesion including exophoric/anaphoric reference; lexical density)</p>

Adapted from Coffin et al. (2009)

Table 2. Questions about the text, and how they relate to each metafunction

Metafunction	Language System	Questions to ask
Experiential 'construes human experience'	processes participants circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of processes and participants occur? • What is the nature of the verbs involved are they about actions, feelings, saying, possessing, identifying or attributing? • What are the relations between participants? (Who is doing the acting, what kinds of action do they undertake [who gets to talk] and who or what if anything, do they act upon?) • Are there any changes in these patterns as the text evolves and what is the significance of this change? • What are the participant roles of the main protagonists and the process types they are engaged in? • Are the verbs transitive or intransitive? • Which participants are more active and in control – which are more stative and being controlled. • Who/what initiates the process? • Who/what is affected by the process? • Are the participants animate or inanimate? Concrete or abstract? Metaphorical? • What are the circumstances of the process?
Interpersonal 'enacts human relationships'	Mood, modality, Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the roles of the protagonists? • Does their conversation correspond to their respective social roles? (Mr. Piggott, husband and father; Simon and Patrick sons; Mrs. Piggott wife and mother.) • Is the process modulated or modalized? (i.e. where are we in the space between yes and no?) • What are the attitudes expressed?
Textual 'creates discourse'	Theme – Rheme Information structure Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the message organized? • What is the distribution of given and new information? • How are clause complexes related to each other?

Linguistic Analysis of *Piggybook*

Before starting a linguistic analysis it is useful to write down one's initial reactions and interpretation of the meaning of the text. After completing the analysis, we can then explore whether the linguistic patterns uncovered in the analysis support our initial interpretation.

In this analysis I will explore the Genre structure, together with the linguistic realization of Experiential, Interpersonal and Textual meanings in the narrative, "Piggybook".

The Narrative Genre

Narratives are stories that involve characters (usually people) engaged in unusual problematic events. Stories have a number of stages. They often will begin with an Orientation stage that presents a familiar situation, and then go on to describe a situation in which the familiar and expected events are disrupted (the Complication), creating tension and leading to a response to that disruption – a 'new' normal which might be a Temporary Resolution or a final Resolution, with neither offering an exact mirror of the situation described in the Orientation. A stage which is optional, but which creates a sense of finality is the Coda stage. This will often refer back to the theme and sometimes make an overall statement about the text.

The narrative picture book, *Piggybook* progresses through some reasonably distinct stages in order to fulfill its purpose. The first stage is an Orientation (clauses 1-2), followed by a Complication phase 1 (clauses 3-24), Complication phase 2 (clauses 25-34), Temporary Resolution (clauses 35-56), Complication phase 3 (clauses 57-60), the Resolution (clauses 61-65) and the Coda (clauses 66-67).

The Orientation presents information about the situation and a description of a prototypical family of husband, Mr. Piggott, and two sons, Simon and Patrick as living in a "*nice house with a nice garden, and a nice car in the nice garage*" (clause 1). The repetition of the word "*nice*" to describe the house and its contents conveys the third-person narrator's verbal irony and foreshadows the change of circumstances. In the illustration that accompanies the narration, Mr. Piggott and his two sons are positioned in the centre of the picture, directly facing the viewer, standing proudly erect, with their legs spread apart and their arms crossed. Mr. Piggott's unnamed wife is unseen and secluded, "inside the house" (clause 2).

The Complication presents the problems for the characters to solve. This stage starts by describing the apparently normal daily routine of breakfast, going to work and school; Mrs. Piggott then doing the housework, before going off to work and

then arriving home before her children return home from school. They then eat a dinner prepared by her, and she then continues to do all the household tasks alone. The male family members leave *all* the cooking and housework up to Mrs. Piggott, while Mr. Piggott “*went off to his very important job*” (clause 5) and Simon and Patrick “*went off to their very important school*” (clause 8). The repetition of “*very important*” (clauses 5, 8, 16 and 19) to describe Mr. Piggott’s work and Simon and Patrick’s school contrasts with the description, in clause 13, of Mrs. Piggott, who after doing all the housework, “*then went to work*”. There is no positive evaluation used to describe her job.

The use of so much repetition reinforces the fact that these events are unusual and intensifies the action which is being performed by just one of the four protagonists. In addition, there is the use of exaggerated modifiers such as ‘all’. These words also intensify the actions (Toolan 2001:155) and send a message to readers that in fact this is not right. Moreover, the visual representations consolidate the gender inequality by showing the husband and boys relaxing, comfortable and contented, their brightly-coloured images filling up the whole space of the picture and staring confidently at the audience, while Mrs. Piggott is depicted in a number of small darkly-coloured pictures engaged in various types of housework. In contrast to her husband and sons, we never see her face and she remains faceless up until the very end of the story.

The second phase of the Complication occurs when there is a crisis in the Piggott family. The boys arrive home to find that Mrs. Piggott is not there, and that she has left them, after writing a note proclaiming, “You are pigs”. This is a disparaging and insulting epithet which alludes to the fact that they have behaved like ‘chauvinist pigs.’

This event gives rise to what could be argued is a Temporary Resolution stage, where on their own, Mr. Piggott and his sons are forced to attempt to do the household tasks but soon transform into pigs, which are symbols of gluttony, greed, squalor and slothfulness in English-speaking countries, and the house descends into a pigsty.

This transformation is foreshadowed by the author in his visual illustration of pig’s feet replacing the flowers on the wallpaper, portraits becoming pigs, the door handles and light switches all looking more pig-like and the kitchen turning into a pigsty. Soon, the transformation is complete, and Mr. Piggott and his sons give up behaving as people, with the author describing how the characters speak: *the boys squealed* (clauses 49), *Mr. Piggott grunted* (clause 51), *Mr. Piggott snorted* (clause 56), and *they snuffled* (clause 59); together with what they do: *root around and find*

some scraps (clauses 54-55).

The third Complication phrase is the climax of the story. Mr. Piggott and the boys are at their lowest, with no food to eat when Mrs. Piggott walks in and they beg her to return, and she does.

Finally the Resolution stage sees a new, normal state of affairs in the Piggott household where everyone shares in the housework and where they even enjoy it. In the visual representation, Mr. Piggott and his sons turn back into people.

The Coda or end of the story describes Mrs. Piggott as happy in an illustration in which we finally see her smiling face, smudged in oil after having been involved in an activity, mending the car, which takes her outside the house.

The unstated message from the theme of gender in/equality is that all members of a household need to share the work to ensure that the household runs smoothly and its members are happy.

Exploring Experiential Meanings

The first primary function of meaning making resources such as language or images is to enable users to construct representations of the world, which is about presenting seemingly natural pictures of the world and the people and things in it. Within Systemic Functional Grammar this function is referred to as the ‘Experiential’ or ‘Ideational metafunction’. Representing the world gives us information about who does what to whom, in what circumstances.

Grammar, particularly the nature of the verbs chosen, plays an important role in constructing and representing a sense of reality. Transitivity is the system used for construing (in other words, interpreting) and expressing experiential meaning – meanings about the world outside and inside the speaker. An analysis of Experiential meanings can determine what participants (typically expressed using nouns) are undergoing which processes (typically using verbs) under which circumstances (typically using adverbs or prepositional phrases).

The construction of literary figures in *Piggybook* can be explored by attending to what actions they are undergoing (the processes), their semantic roles (e.g. Agent, Actor and Goal) together with the circumstances in which they are involved.

This kind of analysis can help to determine who or what is presented as most ‘agentive,’ that is, who is active, effective or dynamic, and, on the other hand, who or what is presented as most ‘affected’ – that is, most passive, unmovable or acted upon.

In *Piggybook* there are 35 clauses in which the main protagonists, Mr. Piggott, Simon and Patrick are in the –er participant roles of Agent, Actor, Sayer, Senser

and Carrier, compared with 22 clauses where Mrs. Piggott is a participant in –er roles (see Tables 1, 4, 5 and 6). Unlike the male protagonists, Mrs. Piggott is never a Sayer or Senser. We never hear her speak and she is silenced throughout the story, apart from a reference to a note which she wrote, declaring that her husband and sons are pigs.

Since the story is focalized through the male protagonists, what she thinks, feels or perceives is never stated, although it can be inferred through the illustrations, in which she looks depressed. In them, she is represented by what she wears – drab, dull clothes; where she is – in a dreary, sombre setting; and what she does – engaged in tiresome housework.

Mr. Piggott and Simon and Patrick are the Agent in 12 clauses, which is the same number as Mrs. Piggott. However, the kinds of way that they are involved in these processes differ as to the stage of the story that they occur in. Mrs. Piggott positively acts on only inanimate things from mostly one semantic domain of housework. The fact that she is represented as an Agent doesn't make her a dynamic character in the story because the things that she acts on – the Goals – are not valued in most cultures, including English-speaking ones which look down on manual work, and the workers, and their role in the end-production of goods and services. If on the other hand, we read that she washed her brushes and prepared her canvas, or she made a million dollars or she designed the new smartphone, our sense of Mrs. Piggott as a character would be different. Characters are constructed through what they do – the Processes – and the Goals they act on.

Mr. Piggott and the boys do and say things in the beginning of the story, but they don't act on anything. Instead we find them as participants in intransitive clauses. By the Temporary Resolution stage they are also acting on mostly inanimate objects such as types of housework, but are portrayed as not successful in this activity. We learn that “*Mr. Piggott, Simon and Patrick tried to look after themselves*” (clause 44), and “*They never washed the dishes*” and “*They never washed their clothes*” (clause 45 and 46). Whereas in the Resolution stage they act positively on the dishes, beds and ironing. Notwithstanding, the male characters are more dynamic even though they are often participants in intransitive clauses from the Orientation stage to the beginning of the Temporary Resolution stage. This can be partly explained by the fact that they do more, and are the only ones

¹ The term ‘transitivity’ refers to the distribution of processes, participants and circumstances, and contrasts to the traditional terms of ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive,’ which refers to verbs occurring with or without a direct object.

who speak; being Sayers in 10 clauses. They are also involved in things outside the home, as seen in the circumstances of their activities: “to his very important job” and “to their very important school” (clause 5 and 8).

Exploring Interpersonal Meanings

The male protagonists appear more powerful because they adopt a certain role and relationship relative to Mrs. Piggott. Roles and relationships and social distance are components that make up the Tenor of the situation. This section will explore how the lexico-grammatical choices from the Mood system realize Tenor and contribute to making certain Interpersonal meanings in this text.

The two grammatical features which play a major role in making Interpersonal meanings are the Subject and the Finite. They combine to make the Mood of the clause. The order of the Subject and Finite is a sign of the kind of exchange taking place. We can give information by using the declarative mood, ask questions by using the interrogative mood, or demand goods or services by using the imperative mood. The relative power of the interactants can often be ascertained by who demands the information in questions, or demands goods and services using imperative commands. Through demanding goods and services and information, people can control both the activity and the conversation.

In *Piggybook* it is the male protagonists who use the bare imperative to order Mrs. Piggott to do things for them. She is ordered to “Hurry up...” with various meals. There is no attempt to soften the order and to make it more indirect by employing a conventionally indirect request, such as “Could you hurry up with the meal?” This even sounds too strong, highlighting just how inappropriate and rude it is to use the bare imperative in this context, since it is Mrs. Piggott who is providing a service that benefits them, and moreover, she is in the process of doing so.

In addition, the use of bare imperative mood, “Hurry up...” is inappropriate due to the relative power distance between the characters. In English-speaking cultures married couples share similar power while they have more power than their children. For example, one context in which the order, “Hurry up with the meal” could occur is in the case of an employer demanding a recalcitrant underling. In the context described in *Piggybook* of a family who are close in regards to social distance, it would be more appropriate for the father and sons to use a very indirect strategy – that of using hints such as, “*I’m really hungry!*”, which allow the mother who knows them so well, to guess what they mean.

Instead Mr. Piggott, Simon and Patrick use the direct order four times which just amplifies how inappropriate it is, and Mr. Piggott uses vocatives such as ‘dear’

and ‘old girl’ when giving the order to address Mrs. Piggott. This has the effect of making him sound superior because he exercises the right to use a proliferation of terms to address her, while these terms are demeaning towards Mrs. Piggott.

Exploring Textual Meanings

In English the first position in the clause is used to signal to the audience what the message is about – in other words, English is structured ‘to put first things, first.’ In Systemic Functional Linguistics, this is referred to as the ‘Theme,’ which is defined as “the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 64). This first position contains Textual meanings because it signposts the development of a text.

Piggybook displays a range of features found in simple narratives. One example, is that the main Themes are often “and ” and “then” (clause 13, 24, 39, 42, 55, 57 and 64). In addition there are circumstances of time and location, for example, “before” (clause 5 and 8), “after” (clause 9), and those specifying time, as in “one evening” (clause 25), and location, “on the mantelpiece” (clause 31). Experiential Themes also include the main participants, such as “Mrs. Piggott” (clause 10, 21 and 57) and “Mr. Piggott” (clauses 1, 4, 18, 32, 44, 51, 61 and 63). The author has foregrounded time and participants as topical Themes throughout the text, to organize characters and events in time, chronologically. In addition, there are also a lot of elided Themes, where the experiential element has been omitted because it is easy to recover. These occur in clauses 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, and 24, but interestingly, the participant who is omitted in all cases is “Mrs. Piggott,” which has the effect of subordinating and marginalizing her character in the story.

Conclusion

A functional grammatical approach to the analysis of texts can help increase students’ language awareness while also allowing them to explore the effects of language patterns for the ways that texts mean. If students are able to identify grammatical features and their significance when they are analyzing a text and link these to the kinds of meanings which are being made in a text, then they will become more confident and able to provide a critical interpretation that is supported by evidence from the text. As Williams (2000) suggests, language teachers need to move away from “conceiving grammar as merely basic descriptive work on parts of speech in isolated sentences” or just “listing language features.” Instead, students “need to develop thinking about the effects of language

patterns” (Williams, 2000) and find the motivation for their use, and this can be achieved through a meaning-oriented, functional grammar.

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Appendix

1. Generic Staging and Theme Analysis

GENERIC STAGES	<i>Piggybook</i>
ORIENTATION	1. Mr. Piggott lived with his two sons, Simon and Patrick, in a nice house with a nice garden, and a nice car in the nice garage. 2. Inside the house was his wife
COMPLICATION	3. “Hurry up with the breakfast, dear,” 4. he called every morning 5. before he went off to his very important job. 6. “Hurry up with the breakfast, Mum,” 7. Simon and Patrick called 8. before they went off to their very important school. 9. After they left the house, 10. Mrs. Piggott washed all the breakfast things, 11. made all the beds, 12. vacuumed all the carpets, 13. and then went to work. 14. “Hurry up with the meal, Mum,” 15. the boys called every evening 16. when they came home from their very important school. 17. “Hurry up with the meal, old girl,” 18. Mr. Piggott called every evening 19. when he came home from his very important job. 20. As soon as they had eaten, 21. Mrs. Piggott washed the dishes, 22. washed the clothes, 23. did the ironing, 24. and then cooked some more
COMPLICATION (CRISIS)	25. One evening when the boys got home from school, 26. there was no one to greet them. 27. “ Where’s Mum?” 28. demanded Mr. Piggott 29. when he got home from work. 30. She was nowhere to be found. 31. On the mantelpiece was an envelope. 32. Mr. Piggott opened it. 33. Inside was a piece of paper. 34. (It read) You are pigs.
TEMPORARY RESOLUTION	35. “ But what shall we do?” 36. said Mr. Piggott. 37. They had to make their own meal. 38. It took hours. 39. And it was horrible. 40. The next morning they had to make their own breakfast. 41. It took hours. 42. And it was horrible. 43. The next day and the next night and the day after that , Mrs. Piggott was still not there. 44. Mr. Piggott, Simon and Patrick tried to look after themselves. 45. They never washed the dishes. 46. They never washed their clothes. 47. Soon the house was like a pigsty. 48. “ When is Mum coming home?” 49. the boys squealed after another horrible meal. 50. “ How SHOULD I know?” 51. Mr. Piggott grunted. 52. They all became more and more grumpy. 53. One night there was nothing in the house for them to cook. 54. “ We ’ll just have to root around 55. and find some scraps,”

	56. snorted Mr. Piggott.
COMPLICATION (CLIMAX)	57. <i>And just then Mrs. Piggott</i> walked in. 58. <i>P-L-E-A-S-E</i> come back,” 59. They snuffled. 60. <i>So Mrs. Piggott</i> stayed.
RESOLUTION	61. Mr. Piggott washed the dishes. 62. Patrick and Simon made the beds. 63. Mr. Piggott did the ironing. 64. <i>And they</i> all helped with the cooking. 65. <i>SOMETIMES they</i> even sort of enjoyed it.
CODA	66. Mum was happy too. 67. She mended the car. (403 words)

Key to Analysis of Theme

Theme is underlined

Interpersonal Theme: in CAPITALS

Textual Theme: in italics

Topical Theme in **bold**

2. Table 1. Transitivity Analysis of Piggybook

Participant-er roles			Process	Participant-ed roles	Circumstance		
	1	2	Agent	Medium Initiator	(what happens)	Medium (i.e. Affected)	Circumstance
1		M		Mr P (A)	lived (Pm)		with his two sons... (Cp) in a nice house (Cl)
2		F			was (Pe)	his wife (X)	inside the house (Cl)
3	I	F	[Mrs. P] (Ag)		hurry up (Pm)		with the breakfast (Cp)
4	I	M		he (Mr) (Sy)	called (Pv)		every morning (Cl)
5	I	M		he (Mr) (Ac)	went off (Pm)		before.(Cl) to his ...job (Cl)
6	I	F	[Mrs. P] (Ag)		hurry up (Pm)		with the breakfast (Cp)
7	I	M		Simon & Patrick (Sy)	called (Pv)		
8	I	M		they (S/P) (A)	went off (Pm)		to their... school (Cl)
9	T	M		they (Mr/S / P) (A)	left (Pm)	the house (R)	
10	T	F	Mrs (Ag)		washed (Pm)	all the breakfast ...(G)	
11	T	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		made (Pm)	all the beds (G)	
12	T	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		vacuumed (Pm)	all the carpets (G)	
13	I	F		[Mrs] (A)	went (Pm)		then...(Cl) to work (Cl)
14	I	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		hurry up (Pm)		with the meal (Cp)
15	I	M		the boys (Sy)	called (Pv)		every evening (Cl)
16	I	M		they (the boys) (A)	came (Pm)	home (R)	from their school (Cl)

17	I	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		hurry up (Pm)		with the meal (Cp)
18	I	M		Mr (Sy)	called (Pv)		every evening (Cl)
19	I	M		he (Mr) (A)	came (Pm)	home (R)	from his ...job (Cl)
20	I	M		they (Mr/ S/P) (A)	had eaten (Pm)		
21	T	F	Mrs (Ag)		washed (Pm)	the dishes (G)	
22	T	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		washed (Pm)	the clothes (G)	
23	T	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		did (Pm)	the ironing (R)	
24	T	F	[Mrs] (Ag)		cooked (Pm)	some more (food) (G)	
25	T	M		the boys (A)	got (Pm)	home (R)	one evening...(Cl)
26					was (Pe)	no one (X)	to greet them (Cc)
27		F		Mum (Mrs) (C)	's (Pr)		where (Cl)
28	I	M		MrP (Sy)	demanded (Pv)		
29	T	M		Mr P (A)	got (Pm)	home (R)	from work (Cl)
30		F		Mrs P (C)	was (Pr)		no where ... (Cl)
31					was (Pe)	an envelope (X)	on the mantelpiece (Cl)
32		T	Mr P (Ag)		opened (Pm)	it (the envelope) (G)	
33					was (Pe)	a piece of paper (X)	inside (Cl)
34				you (Mr/S&P) (C)	are (Pr)	pigs (At)	
35	T	T		we (Mr/S/P) (A)	shall do (Pm)	what (G)	
36	I	I		MrP (Sy)	said (Pv)		
37	T	T	they (Ag)		had to make (Pm)	their own meal (G)	
38				it (making a meal) (C)	took (Pr)		hours (Cx)
39				it (the meal) (C)	was (Pr)	horrible (At)	
40	T	T	they (Ag)		had to make (Pm)	their...breakfast (G)	the next morning (Cl)
41				it (making a meal) (C)	took (Pr)		hours (Cx)
42				it (the meal) (C)	was (Pr)	horrible (At)	
43		F		Mrs P (C)	was (still not) (Pr)		there (Cl) ... the next day ...after that (Cl)
44	T	M	Mr/S/P (Ag)		tried to look after (Pm)	themselves (Mr+) (G)	
45	T	M	they (Ag)		(never) washed (Pm)	the dishes (G)	
46	T	M	they (Ag)		(never) washed (Pm)	their clothes (G)	
47				the house (C)	was (Pr)		like a pigsty (Cm)
48	I	F		Mum (A)	is coming (Pm)	home (R)	when (Cl)
49	I	M		the boys (Sy)	squealed (Pv)		after ...meal (Cl)
50	I	M		I (Mr) (S)	should know (Pme)		

51	I	M		Mr (Sy)	grunted (Pv)		
52		M		they all (Mr/S&P) (At)	became (Pr)	grumpy (At)	
53					was (Pe)	nothing (X)	in the home (Cl)
54	I	M	we (Mr+) (Ag)		will have to root (Pm)		around (Cl)
55	T	M	[Mr/S/P] (Ag)		find (Pm)	some scraps (G)	
56	I	M		Mr (Sy)	snorted (Pv)		
57	I	F		Mrs (A)	walked in (Pm)		then (Cl)
58	I	F		[Mrs] (A)	come back (Pm)		
59	I	M		they (Mr/boys) (Sy)	snuffled (Pv)		
60	I	F		Mrs (A)	stayed (Pm)		
61	T	M	Mr (Ag)		washed (Pm)	the dishes (G)	
62	T	M	P&S (Ag)		made (Pm)	the beds (G)	
63	T	M	Mr (Ag)		did (Pm)	the ironing (R)	
64	I	M	they all (Ag)		helped (Pm)		with the cooking (Cp)
65	T	M		they (S)	enjoyed (Pme)	(cooking) it (P)	sometimes (Cl)
66		F		Mum (Mrs) (C)	was (Pr)	happy (At)	
67	T	F	she (Ag)		mended (Pm)	the car (G)	

Key to Analysis of Transitivity

Column 1: T = Transitive Clauses

I = Intransitive clauses (or functioning as intransitive in this instance)

Column 2: M = Male Protagonist (Mr. Piggott, Simon and Patrick)

F = Female Protagonist (Mrs. Piggott)

Table 2. Summary of process types and participant roles

	Process types	Participants
1	Pm=material (action, doing, happening) Function: to construe the material world of doin	A=Actor (doer) G=Goal (affected) R=Range (not affected)
2	Pme=mental (thinking, feeling, liking, knowing, wanting, perceiving) Function: to construe and may project the inner world of consciousness	S=Senser (doer) Ph=Phenomenon
3	Pr=relational attributive (having, being) Function: to construe relationships of description	Cr=Carrier (thing described) At=Attribute (description)

4	i=relational identifying (having, being) Function: to construe relationships of identification and equation Restrictions: none	T=Token (form) V=Value (function or role)
5	Pv=Verbal (saying) Function: to construe saying	Sy=Sayer (doer) Vb=Verbiage (said)
6	Pe=Existential (there is, there are) Function: to construe existence	X=Existent

Adapted from Butt et al. (2000: 63)

Table 3. Examples of different Circumstances

	Circumstance type	Subcategory	Answers the question	Examples
1	Cx=Extent	temporal spatial	How long? How many times? How far?	(for) two hours five times a week (for) two kilometres
2	Cl=Location	temporal spatial	When? Where?	after dinner in the garden
3	Cm=Manner	means quality comparison	By what means? / How? What with? How? What like	by car with a stick quietly like a pig
4	Cc=Cause	reason purpose behalf	Why? For what purpose? What for? On whose behalf?	because of the rain for a rest for my friend
5	Cp= Accompaniment	comitative additive	With whom? / What with? And who else? But not who?	with a friend as well as Julie instead of Colin

Adapted from Butt et al. (2000: 65)

Table 4. The –er roles in the story

-er roles	Mrs. Piggott	Mr. P., S & P	Total
Agent	12	12 (includes 2x negative and 1x 'tried')	24
Actor	5	10	15
Sayer	0	10	10
Senser	0	2	2

Carrier	1x Attribute 2x CI	1	4
Existant	2	0	2
Total	22	35	57

Table 5. The –ed roles in the story

-er roles	Mrs. Piggott	Mr. P., S & P	Total
Goal	7x housework 1x car	8x housework 2x negative	18
Total	8	10	18

Table 6. Transitive and Intransitive Comparisons

	Mrs. Piggott	Mr. P., S & P	Total
Intransitive clauses	9	19	28
Transitive clauses	8	15	23
Total	17	34	51

Abstract

Relying on one’s initial responses and intuitions when it comes to reading and analyzing texts can often lead to wrong conclusions and confusion about the meanings in a text, particularly literary texts. Descriptive linguistics can provide a way into the study of all texts including short stories, novels and plays and a textual analysis of literary texts can help uncover the meaning of these texts. This study is of a short text from a children’s picture story, “Piggybook”, by Anthony Browne. It focuses on a linguistic textual analysis using the framework provided by Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore how meanings are realized in the text. Through using the concept of register, the study explores the meanings that are created when different situations, related to what is going on and the relationships that exist between characters, converge. The situation or context creates an expectation for language use and in turn the language influences what meanings about the situation are made. The aim of the analysis is to demonstrate how students can become more independent readers of texts – especially literary texts – through understanding not just what a text means, but why it means that, and through understanding how these particular meanings get into a text.