

## TEMPORAL CHANGE IN ROBERT FROST'S POEM

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### Abstract

*This article concerns with a systemic stylistic analysis on a poem in terms of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Verbal Art Semiotics. The writing uses library research, qualitative data, documentary study, descriptive method and intrinsic-objective approach. The semantic analysis results in both automatized and foregrounded meanings. Then the automatized meaning produces lexical cohesion and in turn, it produces subject matter. Meanwhile, the foregrounded meaning produces the literary meaning and in turn, it creates theme. Finally, the analysis indicates that the subject matter is about the singing bird, the literary meaning is about temporal change and the theme is about natural law.*

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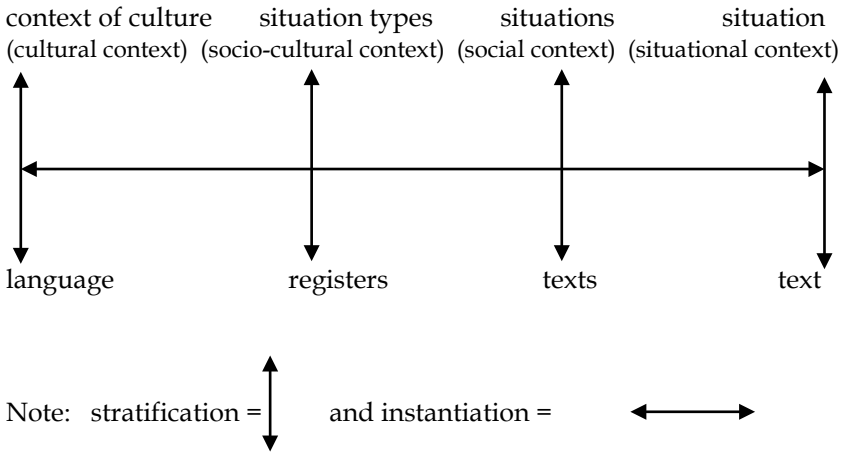
**Keywords:** *automatized meaning, foregrounded meaning, subject matter, literary meaning, and theme*

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### Introduction

Generally, there are several theories of stylistics namely formal, functional, feminine, pragmatic, affective, cognitive, pedagogical and critical (Webber, 1996). Particularly the functional stylistics includes Functionalism, Systemic Functionalism, Tagmemics, Prague School Functionalism and West Coast Functionalism (Matthiessen, 1995). Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, language can be ordered in contexts with cline of instantiation (actualization over time): context of culture and language, situation types and registers, situations and texts, and situation and text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), moreover, context of culture (cultural context) concerns with meaning potential (overall meaning), and context of situation (situational context) deals with the actualization of meaning potential (actualized meaning potential). Meanwhile, Kluckhohn (1953) claims that culture (cultural context) refers to notions, values and norms, whereas the domain of socio-cultural context corresponds to universal categories such as language, art, science, technology, economy, social organization and religion. The language order is outlined in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: The Interrelatedness of Context, Language, Situation and Text



In fact, a text is a semantic unit and a clause is a grammatical unit (Halliday, 1994). Then, semantics is an interface between context of situation and lexicogrammar; in this sense the semantic systems are related “upward” to contextual systems and they are related “downward” to lexicogrammatical systems (Halliday, 1993). The contextual systems are Field, Tenor and Mode. The semantic systems are Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual Meanings. The lexicogrammatical systems are Complexing, Transitivity, Mood and Theme. In addition, the semantic systems are related “sideways” to discoursal systems (Eggin, 1994). The discoursal systems are structural conjunction, lexical cohesion, conversational structure and grammatical cohesion. The interrelationship of situation, discourse, semantics and lexicogrammar is diagrammed in Table 1.

Table 1: The Relation of Context, Text and Clause

Context	Situation	Field Subject Matter		Tenor Role Relation	Mode Rhetoric
Text	Discourse	Structural Conjunction	** Lexical Cohesion	Conversational Structure	* Grammatical Cohesion

	Semantics	# Logical Meaning	# Experiential Meaning	Interpersonal Meaning	Textual Meaning
Clause	Lexicogrammar	Complexing	Transitivity	*** Mood	Theme

Note: # Logical Meaning & Experiential Meaning = Ideational Meaning  
 \* Including Reference, Substitution, Ellipsis and Cohesive Conjunction  
 \*\* Including Reiteration & Collocation  
 \*\*\* Including Polarity and Modality

Moreover, literariness is defined as the difference between automatization or background and defamiliarization or foreground (Jefferson, 1995: 37). Background is also called ground, automatization, familiarization, and the normal, habitual, canonical, common, automatized or familiarizing pattern, whereas foreground(ing) is also called figure, deautomatization, defamiliarization, and the foregrounded, motivated, prominent, dominant, deautomatized or defamiliarizing pattern (Jefferson 1995, Hasan 1985, Halliday 1971). Then, the concept of background and foreground is used by Hasan (1985: 99) to propose the semiotic system of verbal art. The verbal art semiotics deals with verbalization, symbolic articulation and theme, and verbalization itself is the semiotic system of language concerned with phonology, lexicogrammar and semantics. Especially, Verbalization – the lowest stratum – is where the point of primary contact with work reveals the meaning of language (the deep level of meaning). Symbolic articulation – the middle stratum – is where the deep level of meaning functions as a sign, symbol or metaphor for the deeper level of meaning. Finally, Theme – the highest stratum is where the deeper level of meaning creates the deepest level of meaning.

This article is concerned with a stylistic analysis on a poem of Robert Frost as follows.

### **The Bird**

It's a singer everyone has heard  
 It's a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird  
 Who make the solid tree trunks sound again.  
 He says that leave are old and that for flowers;  
 Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.

He said that the early petal-fall was past;  
 When pear bloom went down in the showers;  
 On sunny days, a moment seemed fast.  
 Other season comes and we name the fall.  
 The bird will cease and do as other birds  
 So he knows in singing is not to sing;  
 The question that he asks in all words  
 Is to think of a diminished thing.

(Robert Frost)

### The Semiotic System of Language

#### *Logical Meaning, Logical Metafunction or Logical Semantics*

Logical meaning is a resource for constructing logical relation (Halliday, 1994: 36) and the logical meaning describes a clause type (clause complex). In fact, the poem is realized by 5 clause complexes consisting of 5 main clauses and 15 expanding clauses. Out of 15 expanding clauses, there are 5 expanding paratactic clauses, 4 projected hypotactic clauses, 3 enhancing hypotactic clauses, 2 elaborating hypotactic clauses and 1 embedded clause. Thus, extension is the automatized pattern because the poem is frequently realized by extending paratactic clause. Then, logical meaning is realized by complexing, and the complexing analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Complexing Analysis

No.	Notation	Logical Relation	Clause
1.	1	Main clause	It's a singer [[ 1.1 ]]
1.1	[[ ]]	Embedding	He has heard
2.	+2 $\alpha$	Extension	It's a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird
3.	2 = $\beta$	Elaboration	Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again
4.	1 $\alpha$	Main clause	He says
5.	1 ' $\beta$ 1	Projection	That leaves are old
6.	1 ' $\beta$ 2	Projection	That old leaves are for flowers;
7.	+2	Extension	Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten
8.	1 $\alpha$	Main Clause	He said
9.	1 " $\beta$ $\alpha$	Projection	The early petal-fall was fast

10.	$\beta \times \beta 1$	Enhancement	When pear bloom went down in the flowers
11.	$\beta \times \beta 2$	Enhancement	When a moment seemed fast in sunny days
12.	1	Main clause	Other season comes
13.	+2	Extension	And we name the fall
14.	1	Main clause	The bird will cease
15.	+2	Extension	And the bird will do as other birds
16.	$\times 3 \alpha$	Enhancement	So he knows
17.	$3 \beta$	Projection	That in singing is not to sing;
18.	+4 x	Extension	The question <<19>> is to think of a diminished thing
19.	<< 4 = $\beta$ >>	Elaboration	That he asks in all words.

*Experiential Meaning, Experiential Metafunction or Experiential Semantics*

Experiential meaning is a resource for construing experience (Halliday, 1994: 36) and the experiential meaning discusses a process type (processes). Actually, the poem is encoded by 7 clauses of relational process, 5 clauses of material process, 4 clauses of verbal process, 3 clauses of mental process and 1 clause of behavioral process. Then, the poem is encoded by 13 clauses of present tense, 4 clauses of past tense, 2 clauses of future tense, and 1 clause of perfect tense. Thus, both relational process and present tense are the automatized patterns, because the poem is frequently encoded by those two patterns. Then, experiential meaning is encoded by transitivity, and the transitivity analysis is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Transitivity Analysis

No.	Process	Tense	Clause
1.	Relational	Present	It's a singer [[ 1.1 ]]
2	Mental	Perfect	He has heard
3.	Relational	Present	It's a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird
4.	Material	Present	Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again
5.	Verbal	Present	He says
6.	Relational	Present	That leaves are old

7.	Relational	Present	That old leaves are for flowers;
8.	Relational	Past	Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten
9.	Verbal	Past	He said
10.	Relational	Past	The early petal-fall was fast
11.	Material	Past	When pear bloom went down in the flowers
12.	Relational	Present	When a moment seemed fast in sunny days
13.	Material	Present	Other season comes
14.	Verbal	Future	And we name the fall
15.	Material	Future	The bird will cease
16.	Material	Present	And the bird will do as other birds
17.	Mental	Present	So he knows
18.	Behavioral	Present	That in singing is not to sing;
19.	Mental	Present	The question <<19>> is to think of a diminished thing
20.	Verbal	Present	That he asks in all words.

### *Logogenetic Process*

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1998: 184-5), logogenesis is a process of making meaning through an instantial system (a changing system) when text unfolds (in the unfolding text). The speaker/writer uses the instantial system (the changing system) as a resource to create a text, whereas the listener/reader uses the instantial system (the changing system) as a resource to interpret the text. Moreover, Matthiessen (1995: 40) adds that logogenetic process reveals that lexicogrammatical shift (Cf. Butt, 1988: 83 on "latent patterning") coincides with episodic shift (Hasan, 1988: 60 on "textual structure"). Textual structure is also called narrative structure (O'Toole, 1983), schematic structure (Martin, 1985), staging structure (Plum, 1988) and generic structure (Eggin, 1994). In this poem, shifts (changes) are described as follows:

Shift from verbal process/present tense (clause 13) to material process/future tense (clause 14) coincides with shift from birds start singing in spring to birds cease singing in fall.

Thus, the changing system of process and tense is used to make meanings, and the logogenetic process is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Logogenetic Process

Clause Number	Lexicogrammatical Shift Cf. Latent Patterning	Episodic Shift Cf. Textual Structure
1 13	Relational process/present tense Verbal process/present tense	Birds start singing in spring
14 19	Material process/future tense Verbal process/present tense	Birds cease singing in fall

### *Lexical Cohesion*

A poem is realized by several lexical chains and each chain consists of a number of lexical items. The poem is realized by 11 lexical chains consisting of 41 lexical items. The lexical chains deal with *He* (4), relational process (7), material process (5), verbal process (4), mental process (3), behavioral process (1), repetition (4), synonym (2), hyponym (5), meronymy (2), and comeronym (4). Thus, the three main lexical chains refer to persona, relational process and hyponym and the lexical cohesion is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Lexical Cohesion

No.	Lexical Chain	Lexical Item	Total
1.	He	He, he, he, he	4
2.	Material Process	Is, is, are, are, is, was, seamed	7
3.	Material Process	Makes, went, cease, do, comes	5
4.	Mental Process	Has heard, knows, is to think	3
5.	Verbal Process	Says, said, name, asks	4
6.	Behavioral Process	Is not to sing	1
7.	Repetition	Mid-summer-mid, bird-bird	4
8.	Synonym	Question = words	2
9.	Hyponym	Season = spring, fall, fall, sunny days (summer)	5
10.	Meronymy	Tree - trunks	2
11.	Comeronymy	Leaves - flower, petal - pear	4
Overall total			41

### *Subject Matter*

In section 2.2, experiential meaning is frequently realized by relational process. In section 2.4, lexical cohesion is frequently realized by relational process. Thus, subject matter is frequently realized by relational process. The relational processes deal with Carrier (*a bird*), Relational Process (*is*), Attribute (*a singer*) and Circumstance (*summer and spring*). In short, the subject matter reveals that a bird is a singer in summer and spring. The analysis of relational process is illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: The Analysis of Relational Process

No.	Carrier	Process	Attribute
1.	It	is	a singer
2.	It	is	a mid-summer and mid-wood bird
3.	Leaves	are	old
4.	Old leaves	are	for flowers
5.	Mid-summer	is	to spring
6.	The early petal	was	past
7.	A moment	seemed	fast

### **The Semiotic System of Verbal Art**

#### *Verbalization: the Deep Level of Meaning*

In section 2.1, extension is automatized, so a combination of extension, elaboration, enhancement and projection is foregrounded. Thus, the foregrounding of logical relation takes place in clauses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. In section 2.2, relational process is automatized, so other processes are foregrounded. Consequently, the foregrounding of process occurs in clauses 1.1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. In section 2.2, moreover, present tense is automatized, so other tenses are foregrounded. Accordingly, the foregrounding of tense exists in clauses 1.1, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15. Finally, patterns of foregrounding are mapped out in Table 7.

Table 7: Patterns of Foregrounding

No	Logical Relation	Process	Tense
1.	-	-	-
1.1	-	X	X
2.	-	-	-

3.	-	X	-
4.	-	X	-
5.	-	-	-
6.	-	-	-
7.	-	-	-
8.	-	X	X
9.	-	-	X
10.	-	X	X
11.	-	-	X
12.	-	X	-
13.	-	X	-
14.	X	X	X
15.	X	X	X
16.	X	X	-
17.	X	X	-
18.	X	X	-
19.	X	X	-

Table 7 above shows that patterning of the various foregrounded patterns points toward clauses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. It means that consistency of foregrounding converges toward the last clause complex because of logical relation, process and tense. Then, the consistency of foregrounding makes the foregrounded patterns of the last clause complex produce consistently foregrounded meaning which is also called the deep level of meaning and the first order meaning. In brief, the consistently foregrounded meaning is called the deep level of meaning: the bird will cease and do as other birds so he knows in singing is not to sing; the that he ask in al words is to think of a diminished that he asks in all words is to think of a diminished thing.

*Symbolic Articulation: The Deeper Level of Meaning*

In section 3.1, the deep level of meaning is produced by the foregrounded patterns of logical relation, process and tense. Then, the deep level of meaning functions as the sign, symbol or metaphor of the deeper level of meaning. In fact, the deep level of meaning suggests that the birds do like the season change. In summary, the deeper level of meaning concerns with temporal change.

*Theme: The Deepest Level of Meaning*

The deeper level of meaning creates the deepest level of meaning, which is also called Theme, and the third order meaning. Hasan (1985: 97) states that Theme is the deepest level of meaning in verbal art; it is what a text is about when dissociated from the particularities of that text. In its nature, the Theme of verbal art is very

close to generalizations, which can be viewed as a hypothesis about some aspect of the social life of man. Moreover, Hasan (1985: 54) adds that the deepest level of meaning is a meaning that arises from saying one thing and meaning another. In this poem, saying one thing (*temporal change*) means another meaning (*natural law*). In conclusion, the deepest level of meaning deals with natural law.

### Conclusion

The lexicogrammatical analysis produces semantic components and there are two kinds of semantic patterns such as automatized and foregrounded. On the one hand, the automatized pattern produces the automatized meaning, and in turn the automatized meaning produces subject matter. At the stratum of Verbalization, on the other hand, consistency of foregrounding makes some foregrounded patterns produce consistently foregrounded meaning which is also called the deep level of meaning and the first order meaning. At the stratum of symbolic articulation, the deep level of meaning functions as symbol, sign or metaphor of the deeper level of meaning which is also called the second order meaning and literary meaning. At the stratum of Theme, the deeper level of meaning creates the deepest level of meaning, which is also called Theme, and the third order meaning. In summary, there is a symbolic relation between lexicogrammar and Theme in verbal art. Then the meanings in the poem are outlined in the following table.

Table 8: Meanings of Verbal Art Semiotics

Verbalization	Symbolic Articulation	Theme
Consistently Foregrounded Meaning	Literary Meaning	Theme
The Deep Level of Meaning	The Deeper Level of Meaning	The Deepest Level of Meaning
The First Order Meaning	The Second Order Meaning	The Third Order Meaning

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