

## Material Clauses in Koring Language

Ejiofor, Eugene Uchechukwu

Department of Linguistics and Nigeria Languages  
Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil  
Kano State

### Abstract

*This paper studies material clause as an aspect of transitivity in Koring. It is based on the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) developed by Halliday. SFG is organized into three modes of meaning. These include textual mode, interpersonal mode and experiential mode. The system of transitivity is the focus of the experiential mode. Both paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of the experiential grammar of the Koring clause is examined. Data used in the analysis were generated from oral utterances made by some native speakers of the Koring language. The data are analysed by categorizing them into participant and process, which are core elements of transitivity on the perspective of SFG. It is discovered that, like many languages of the world, material clause of transitivity on the perspective of SFG theory applies in the Koring language. However, the behaviour of processes in the language, as it concerns transitivity, has some interesting unique features. For instance, a material process may involve two participants. There are some processes that accommodate three participants. Moreover, processes with three participants do not give room for the use of prepositions. It is also observed that while every intransitive verb in Koring can be used as a transitive verb, not every transitive verb can be used as an intransitive verb. The study will go a long way into contributing to the study and development of the language. The study will also contribute immensely to the study of Nigerian languages and African linguistics in general, especially as it concerns the application of SFG theory.*

**Keywords:** Koring grammar; transitivity in Koring, material clause/process in Koring

### Introduction

This study is limited to the analysis of Material clauses in Koring language. Material clause is one of the six aspects of transitivity in Systemic Functional Grammar. The study is targeted at observing, analysing and arriving at a conclusion on the material clauses in the Koring language. SFG framework is adopted for this study in view of the position of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 20) that "languages evolve - they are not designed, and evolved systems cannot be explained simply as the sum of their parts. Our traditional compositional thinking about language needs to be, if not replaced by, at least complemented by a 'systems' thinking whereby we seek to understand the nature and the dynamic of a semiotic system as a whole". This model of grammar perceives language as a functional system.

According to Butt and colleagues (2000), "Systemic Functional Grammar is a way of describing lexical and grammatical choices from

the system of wording so that we are always aware of how language is being used to realize the meaning". Lamidi (2008:17) states that "Halliday considers grammar to be a network of systems of interrelated contrasts. Here particular attention is paid to semantics and pragmatics in the expression of meaning such that the theory cannot be separated from daily experience". Systemic Functional Grammar is a viable framework for describing and modelling language, and also a potent resource for making meaning and choices. This theoretical model treats language beyond its formal structures and takes the context of culture and the context of situation in language use (Halliday 1985, 1994, Matthiessen 1995, Martin & Rose 2003).

Systemic Functional Grammar is a form of grammatical and meaning description, and is a part of the systemic functional linguistics which is a social semiotic approach. Systemic Functional Grammar is a theory of grammar based on the view that language is a system for



making meaning. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:23), "Systemic theory gets its name from the fact that the grammar of a language is represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures". The term **systemic** refers to the fact that every grammatical structure of a language involves a choice from available sets of options, against the earlier notion that grammar is a composite of rules. **Functional** stands for the fact that every time we make a choice from the available options, we are doing so in order to fulfil a communicative purpose; while **grammar** refers to the fact that there is an overall organisation to the possible options. The adoption of the SFG, no doubt, increases and diversifies the number of grammatical theories that have been applied on the study of the Koring language.

### **The Koring Language**

Koring is one of the developing languages spoken by some minority groups in Ebonyi State, Southeast Nigeria and in Benue State, North-central (Middle Belt) Nigeria. It is an endangered language (Anagbogu 2005:132). There are four Koring speaking communities in Ebonyi State. These communities are made up of Okpoto, Effium and Ntezi in Ishielu Local Government Area, and Amuda in Ohaukwu Local Government Area of the state. In Benue State, Koring is spoken in Offia and Utonkon which are in Okpokwu Local Government Area. It is estimated that the number of Koring native speakers are more than 224,000 people. Williamson and Blench (2000: 3) place Koring as belonging to the Upper-Cross group of the Delta-Cross sub-branch of the Cross-River language family.

### **Meaning of Transitivity**

Transitivity is "the set of options relating to cognitive content, the linguistic representation of extra linguistic experience, whether of the phenomena of the external world or of feelings, thoughts and perceptions" (Halliday 1967:199). Transitivity analysis is the realisation of the experiential strand of ideational metafunction (Martin et al 1997). The other strand of ideational metafunction is logical strand. By experiential strand, a clause is construed as a representation of

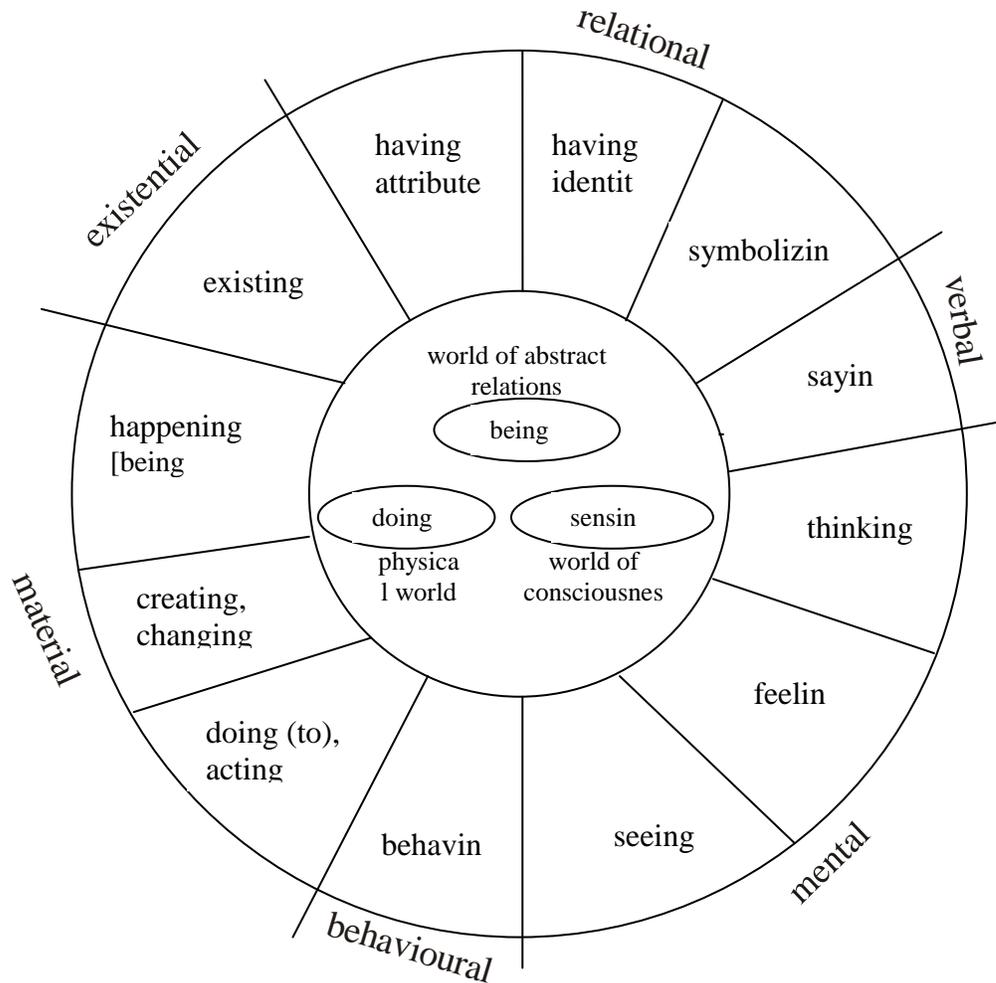
experience. It is used to explore the content or the experiential meaning in a clause. A clause is defined as a realization of events. The role of transitivity in a clause is summarised by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) who argue that the system of transitivity provides the lexicogrammatical resources for construing a quantum of change in the flow of events as a figure – as a configuration of elements centred on a process. It also accounts for "who or what does what to whom or what?" (Iwamoto 2008). Thompson (2013: 95) describes transitivity as "a system for describing the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its objects" and compares transitivity in SFG and transitivity in TGG by stating thus "it does, though, share with the traditional use of focus on the verbal group, since it is the type of process which determines how the participants are labelled (Thompson 2013: 95).

Transitivity system takes care of the doings, happenings, saying, sensing, beings and existence in a clause. Transitivity analysis is helpful in revealing the participants involved in an action, how they relate to others and if they take an active or passive role in a clause (Nguyen, 2012). Transitivity covers all phenomena and anything that can be expressed by a verb: event, whether physical or not, state, or relations (Halliday 1985, 1976:159). Transitivity is represented as a configuration of a **process**, **participants** involved in the process, and ways in which the participants may unfold called **circumstances**.

Transitivity in SFG is a summation of process types. The process, which makes up the nucleus of the clause, is realised by the verbal group. Halliday (1994, 2014), Thompson (2013), Eggins (2004) and Martins et al (1997) have identified three major processes to include material process, mental process and relational process; and three other process types which include verbal process, behavioural process and existential process. As mentioned earlier, the length /nature of this paper does not allow full discussions of the six process types required for a complete study of transitivity in the Koring language on SFG perspective. Consequently, figurative and tabular summary of the six process



types is provided; while the material processes, which is investigated, is discussed.



**Figure 1. Types of process in English (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014:216)**

In figure (1), the outer ring displays the six types of process - relational, verbal, mental, behavioural, material and existential, while the inner ring shows the descriptions of the processes: relational process is described as verbs of having and symbolizing; verbal process is described as verb of saying; mental is described as verbs of thinking, feeling and seeing; behavioural is described as verb of behaving;

material is described as verbs of happening, creating and doing; while existential process is described as verb of existing. The centre indicates the core areas of processes which are those of "being" (world of abstract relations), "doing" (physical world) and "sensing" (world of consciousness). Similarly, Halliday (1994) summarized the six process types and their participants in table (1).

**Table 1. Process types and their Participants (Halliday 1994)**

Process type	Meaning	Participants
Material:	`doing'	actor, goal
action	`doing'	range, beneficiary (recipient & client)
event	`happening'	
Behavioural:	`behaving'	behavior
Mental:	`sensing'	senser, phenomenon
perception	`seeing'	
affection	`feeling'	
cognition	`thinking'	
Verbal:	`saying'	sayer, target, verbiage, receiver
Relational:	`being'	token, value
attribution	`attributing'	carrier, attribute
identification	`identifying'	identified, identifier
Existential:	`existing'	existent

**Material Processes: Processes of "Doing"**

Material process forms a material clause which accounts for the outer world of actions and events. Material process represents “doing or happening”. It involves physical actions which makes it to correspond with the traditional definition of verb as a 'doing word' (Thomson 2004:90). Examples of material process include the following verbs: running, throwing, eating, dancing, walking, playing, etc. A material clause

is usually made up of an **actor** (the participant who does or performs the action of the process), a **goal** (the participant that is impacted by the action) and at times a **beneficiary** (a participant benefiting from the action). Some material clauses have a **range/scope** participant (which specifies the scope of the action). A material clause can be probed with the questions "What did *x* do?" and "What happened to *x*?" Where *x* is a participant.

1.     The man           flogged the boy.  
      Actor            M.pr            Goal
2.     The boy           was flogged    by the man.  
      Goal            M.pr            Actor
3.     Franklin         gave    Paul            a pen  
      Actor            M.pr    Beneficiary    Goal
4.     The President   celebrated    his homecoming.  
      Actor            M.pr            Scope

Examples (1), (2), (3) and (4) are material clauses. Example (1) can be probed with the

question "What did the man do?", example (2) can be probed with "What happened to the boy?",



example (3) can be probed with the question "What did Franklin do", while example (4) can be probed with "What did the President do?". "The man", "Franklin" and "the president" are **Actors** because they are participants which respectively perform actions in those clauses; "the boy" and "a pen" are **Goals** as a result of being the participants which are affected by the action of the **Actors**; "his homecoming" is **Scope** because it limits the celebration of the President to a particular event; "Paul" is **Beneficiary** because he enjoys or benefits the action of Franklin in (3); while "(was) flogged", "gave" and "celebrated" are Material processes because they indicate actions performed by "the man", "Franklin" and "the President", respectively.

### Analysis of Material Processes in Koring

Material processes are processes that express the fact that an entity does something. Material processes usually indicate physical actions or happenings. The actions may or may not be done to an entity to another entity. The processes are analyzed based on the following three analytical areas:

- Verbs classified as material processes in Koring
- Participants that are used with material processes in Koring
- How material processes in Koring are probed

### Verbs Classified as Material Processes in Koring

Material processes are verbs of actions and happenings. They include such verbs as in table (2).

**Table 2. Examples of Material Processes in Koring**

S/N	Verb	Gloss
1.	ùkwuelè	open
2.	ugbirì	stop
3.	ọlùrà	pour
4.	wùjì	eat
5.	ùre	buy
6.	ùtǎñ	sell
7.	ìnǎñ	make
8.	ònyien	give

### Participants Involved in Material Processes in Koring

Material processes may involve only a core participant **Actor** (the doer entity in the material clause) as in examples (5) and (6) below: "Kèmèmà" and "Le mma" are the Actors. They consciously perform or unconscious initiate the action of a Material Process. "Ugbirì" and "ùkwuelè" are Material Processes which communicate the activities of the Actors in examples (5) and (6), respectively.

5. Kèmèmà      ugbirì.  
Car            past + stop  
Actor           Material Process  
"A car stopped"
6. Le mma      ùkwuelè.  
The door      past + open  
Actor           Material Process  
"The door opened"

Material processes in Koring may involve two participants - obligatory **Actor** and **Goal** (entity that suffers or bears the action of the Actor) as in examples (7) and (8). "Kpesùme" and "Ànyio" (the Actors) perform the actions which affect "gbanyi" and "tèree" (the Goals) through "ọlùrà" and "ònuarè" (the Processes) in examples (7) and (8), respectively.

7. Kpesùme      ọlùrà                      gbanyi.



Kpesùme      pour + past      water  
Actor          Material Process      Goal  
"Kpesùme poured some water."

8.      Ànyìọ ònuarè      tèree.  
We      break + past      stick  
Actor      Material Process      Goal  
"We broke a stick."

Moreover, material processes in Koring may involve three participants - obligatory *Actor*, optional *Goal* and optional *Beneficiary* (the entity which benefits from the material process or the entity for whom or to whom the material process is said to take place) as in examples (8) and (9). "Ùkwùre" and "Agbọ" are the receivers (Beneficiaries) of the actions of "Ogba" and "Ovie" (the Actors) through "ùre" and "ùtàn" (the Material Processes) which affect "Àgasu" in examples (9) and (10), respectively.

9.      Ogba ùre      Àgasu      ùkwùre.  
Ogba      past+buy      Àgasu      bag  
Actor      Material Process      Beneficiary      Goal  
"Ogba bought a bag for Àgasu."

10.      Ovie ùtàn      Àgasu      agbọ.  
Ovie      past+sell      Àgasu      banana  
Actor      Material Process      Beneficiary      Goal  
"Ovie sold bana to Àgasu."

Unlike what we have in the English language where *Beneficiary* and *Goal* are reversible, the Koring language does not allow any structural reversal of *Beneficiary* and *Goal*. This is demonstrated in table (3), where the reversals of Goal and Beneficiary in table (3) render the structures in Koring ungrammatical.

**Table 3. Illustration of Non-Reversal of Beneficiaries and Goals in Koring**

S/N	The Koring language	The English language
1a.	Ogba ùre      Àgasu      ùkwùre. Ogba      past+buy      Àgasu      bag Actor      M.Process      Beneficiary      Goal "Ogba bought a bag for Àgasu."	Ogba bought      a bag      for Àgasu Actor      M.Process      Goal      Beneficiary
1b.	* Ogba ùre      ùkwùre Àgasu Ogba      past+buy      bag      Àgasu Actor      M.Process      Goal      Beneficiary "Ogba bought a bag for Àgasu"	Ogba bought      Àgasu      a bag Actor      M.process      Beneficiary      Goal
2a.	Ovie <u>ùtàn</u> Kpesùme      agbọ. Ovie      past+sell      Kpesùme      banana Actor      M.Process      Beneficiary      Goal "Ovie sold banana <u>to</u> Kpesùme"	Ovie sold      banana <u>to</u> Kpesùme Actor      M.Process      Goal      Beneficiary



2b. *Ovie <u>ùtàn</u>	agbo	Kpesùme.	Ovie sold	Kpesùme	banana
Ovie past+sell	banana	Kpesùme	Actor	M.Process	Beneficiary Goal
Actor	M.Process	Goal	Beneficiary		
“Ovie sold banana Kpesùme”					

In table (3), while the reversals of **Goal** and **Beneficiary** in (1a, b) and (2a, b) of the English language do not affect the grammars or change the meanings of the clauses, the case is not the same in Koring. The reversals of **Beneficiary** and **Goal** in (1a, b) and (2a, b) of the Koring language render the clauses in (1b) and (2b) of the Koring language ungrammatical and meaningless. The cause of the non-reversibility of Beneficiary and Goal is attributable to non-separation of Beneficiary and Goal with a preposition (or other grammatical element) and later removal of the preposition as obtainable in the English language.

Another peculiar feature of material processes in Koring is that not all material processes can accommodate both a single participant in a clause and more than one participant in another clause. While some material processes like *ugbirì* (stop), *ùkwuelè* (opened), *ọlùrà* (pour), and *ònuarè* (break) can accommodate only one participant in a clause and as well accommodate more than one participant in another clause, other material processes like *ùre* (buy), *ùtàn* (sell), *ùzaa* (wash), and *ùcham* (sweep) can only accommodate not less than two participants in a clause. That is, in generative grammar parlance, while some verbs like *ùre*, *ùtàn*, *ùzaa*, and *ùcham* can only be used as transitive verbs, other verbs like *ugbirì*, *ùkwuelè*, *ọlùrà*, and *ònuarè* can be used both as transitive and intransitive verbs.

11i).	Kèmèmà	ugbirì.	ii).	Àgasù	ugbirì	kèmèmà.
	Car	past+stop		Àgasù	past+stop	car
	Actor	M. Process		Actor	M. Process	Goal
	“A car stopped”			“Àgasù stopped a car.”		
12i).	Le mma	ùkwuelè.	ii).	Ovie	ùkwuelè	le mma.
	The door	past+open		Ovie	past+open	the door
	Actor	M. Process		Actor	M. Process	Goal
	“The door opened”			“Ovie opened the door.”		
13i).	Gbanyì	ọlùrà.	ii).	Kpesùme	ọlùrà	gbanyì.
	Water	pour+past		Kpesùme	pour+past	water
	Actor			Actor	M. Process	Goal
	“Some water poured.”			“Kpesùme poured some water.”		
14i).	Tèree	ònuarè.	ii).	Ànyìọ	ònuarè	tèree.
	Stick	break+past		we	break+past	stick
	Actor	M. Process		Actor	M. Process	Goal
	“A stick broke.”			“We broke a stick.”		
15i).	Ọgba	ùre	Àgasù	ùkwùre.		
	Ọgba	past+buy	Àgasù	bag		
	Actor	M. Process	Beneficiary	Goal		



“Ogba bought a bag for Àgasu.”

ii). \*Àgasu ure.

Àgasu Past+buy  
“Àgasu bought”

16i). Ovie ùtãñ Àgasu agbo.  
Ovie past+sell Àgasu banana  
Actor M. Process Beneficiary Goal  
“Ovie sold bana to Àgasu.”

ii). \* Àgasu ùtãñ.  
Àgasu past+sell  
“Àgasu sold”

17i). Ànyìò ùzaa ìtam.  
We past+wash pot  
Actor M. Process Goal  
“We washed a pot”

ii). \* Ìtam ùzaa.  
Pot past+wash  
“Pot washed”

18i). Kpesùme ùcham ìmareè.  
Kpesùme past+sweep house  
“Kpesùme swept the house.”

ii). \* Ìmareè ùcham.  
House past+sweep  
“House swept”

From examples (11) to (14), the involved material processes have only the core participant - Actor - in examples (11i), (12i), (13i) and (14i), respectively. The processes also accommodate two participants in examples (11ii), (12ii), (13ii) and (14ii), respectively. However, the case is different in examples (15) to (18). The involved material processes accommodate two participants in examples (15i), (16i), (17i) and (18i), respectively. However, the accommodation of only the core participant - Actor - in examples (15ii), (16ii), (17ii) and (18ii), respectively, makes the clauses ungrammatical and meaningless in the Koring language.

### Probing Material Processes in Koring

Material processes are probed with 'nadi (what)' and 'nyiledi (who)' questions. For instance, the material processes in examples (19a) and (20a) can be probed with 'nadi' and 'nyiledi' questions in examples (19b, c) and (20b), respectively.

19a. Ànyìò uzaa Kèmèmà. b. Ànyìò uzaa nadi.  
We wash+pst car we wash+pst prn+Q  
Actor Material Process Goal "We washed what?"  
"We washed a car."

c. Nadi oghene Ànyìò uzaa?  
prn+Q that we wash+pst  
"What did we wash?"

20a. Ovie ure Kpesume agbo.  
Ovie buy+pst Kpesume banana  
Actor M. Process Beneficiary Goal  
"Ovie bought banana for Kpeume."

b. Nyiledi ure Kpesume agbo?



Wh-prn+Q buy+pstKpesume banana  
"Who bought banana for Kpesume?"

The two forms of 'nadi' questions in (19b, c) can activate the material clause in (19a). Similarly, the 'nyiledi' question in (20b) can lead to the realization of the material clause in (20a).

### Summary and Conclusion

Material Processes are verbs of doing. Participants in material clauses are Actor, Goal and Beneficiary. They are nominal group, just as Processes are verbal group. Among the three participants, Actor is the core participant which can as well be a sole participant in some material clauses. Specifically, Beneficiary in Koring is usually an animate nominal. The popular reversibility of Goal and Beneficiary in many languages of the world does not apply in the Koring language. It is also discovered that every material process in the Koring language does not accommodate equal number of participants. While some of the material process can accommodate only two participants in a clause, others can accommodate both a single participant in a clause, on one hand, and two or more participants in a clause on the other hand. Moreover, processes with three participants do

not give room for the use of prepositions that are usually required in the English language. They make the use of prepositions unnecessary. On probing of Material Processes in Koring, the use of the question pronouns 'nadi' and 'nyiledi' is more conventional in the language.

This paper has further contributed in bringing the Koring language to the limelight by widening its areas of study. To fully appreciate the application of transitivity in the Koring language on the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar (the experiential mode of the language), further studies on Verbal Processes, Mental Processes, Relational Processes, Behavioural and Existential Processes will be made in subsequent papers on SFG transitivity in Koring. The paper has also demonstrated the non-exemption of the Koring language as a unique entity.

### References

- Anagbogu, Philip. 2005. Pluralization in Koring. In Anagbogu, Philip (ed). *Awka journal of linguistics and languages*. Awka: Mercury Bright Press. Vol 1.
- Butt, David; Fahey, Rhondda; Feez, Susan; Spinks, Sue & Yallop, Colin. 2000. *Using functional grammar: An explorer's guide*. (2nd ed.). Sydney: Macquarie University, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Eggs, Suzanne. 2004. *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. (2nd ed.). London: Continuum International.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1967. Notes on transitivity and theme in English. Part 2. *Journal of linguistics* 3/2, 199-244.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1976. A brief sketch of systemic grammar. In Kress G. (ed.) *System and function in language*. London: Oxford University Press. 3-6.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1994. *Introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K. and Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M. 2014. *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Iwamoto, N. 2008. Stylistic and linguistic analysis of a literary text using systemic functional grammar. Available online at <<http://human.kanagawa-u.ac.jp/gakkai/publ/pdf/no162/16209.pdf>>
- Lamidi, M.T. 2008. *Aspects of Chomskyan grammar*. Ibadan Nigeria: University Press PLC.
- Martin, J.R; Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M. & Painter, Clare. 1997. *Working with functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.



- Martin, J.R. & Rose, D. 2003. *Working with discourse: meaning beyond the clause*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Matthiessen, Christian M.I.M. 1995. *Lexicogrammatical cartography*. Tokyo, Tapei and Dallas: International Language Sciences Publishers.
- Nguyen, Hanh Thu. 2012. Transitivity analysis of heroic mother by Hoa Pham. *International Journal of English Linguistics*. Canada: Canadian Center of Science and Education 2 (4), 85 - 100.
- Thompson, G. 2013. *Introducing Functional Grammar* (3rd ed). London/New York: Routledge.
- Williams, Kay and Blench, Roger. 2000. Niger-Congo. In Hein, Bernd and Nurse, Derek (ed). *African language: An introduction*. UK: Cambridge University Press.