

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
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**LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF PROCESSES
IN TEACHER – STUDENT CONVERSATIONS IN THE
MEMOIR “TEACHER MAN” BY FRANK MCCOURT
IN LIGHT OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

In the discussion about Functional Grammar (FG), Halliday (2004) explains that functional grammar looks at language as consisting of units of meanings rather than chunks of forms. Functional Grammar is one of the grammatical paradigms in the sense that everything in it can be explained. The term “functional” is used because it describes the chief principle of the approach to grammar, which sees grammatical categories in terms of their communicative function. Functional Grammar, as its name suggests, explains the ways a sentence functions by linking words that share a purpose.

With other three grammatical paradigms (Traditional Grammar, Structural Grammar and Transformational Generative Grammar), Functional Grammar has developed ceaselessly and admittedly has had a significant impact on the teaching and learning English for many years. Such development puts the knowledge of working of English in a much higher demand. This prompted me to make a decision on choosing Functional Grammar as the area of study for my M.A. Thesis.

Functional Grammar helps teachers to improve students' ability to analyze discourse so that they will be able to use English to achieve successful communication. In order to communicate effectively and successfully, we should take careful consideration of every aspect of a language such as syntactic, semantic or pragmatic features by choosing effective words or structures to express exactly and vividly what we experience not only in the reality of the world

around us but also in the inner world of our thoughts for different purposes and in different situations.

Conversation is a form of communication; however, it is usually more spontaneous and less formal. We enter conversations for purposes of pleasant engagement in order to meet new people, to find out information and to enjoy social interactions. As regards types of conversation, they vary anywhere from intellectual conversations and information exchanges to friendly debate and witty banter.

Conversations between students and their teachers become extremely important for a successful relationship through the entire time of a school year. The conversations between the students and the teacher in *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt serve as a connection between the two, which provides a better atmosphere for the classroom environment. Of course, a teacher is not going to understand every problem for every student in his or her classroom, but will acquire enough information for those students who are struggling with specific tasks. The more the teacher connects or communicates with his or her students, the more likely they will be able to help students learn at a high level and accomplish quickly. Teachers who communicate effectively with their students should give appropriate and helpful feedback to their students.

As a teacher of English, I realize that the use of language in teacher – student conversations is one of the indispensable issues in the teaching field. Also the conversations between the students and the teacher contain a lot of linguistics features of processes from the perspective of Functional Grammar. This is also the main reason why I chose the topic entitled “**Linguistic Features of Processes in Teacher**

– **Student Conversations in the Memoir *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt in Light of Functional Grammar**” for my M.A thesis.

In my study, I present the notion of processes and the linguistic features of processes in English and enclose examples to illustrate the theory that I mention. The research results can hopefully make some minor contribution to present linguistic knowledge about the usage of processes in English conversations. Moreover, the findings on the linguistics features of processes of the teacher - student conversations analyzed in the study will probably be of some help for English learning and teaching.

1.2. WORKING DEFINITIONS

What is a process?

The term “*process*” is understood in its broad sense and its narrow sense. Firstly, in its broad sense, “*process*” is a clause that functions as the representation of activities. A process consists potentially of three components, namely the *process itself*, *participants in the process* and *circumstances with the process*.

Secondly, in its narrow sense, “*process*” is a verbal element. “*Process*” refers to semantic verb and anything that it expresses like event, relation, physical, mental or emotional state when sorted in the semantic system of the clause is classified into material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes.

1.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.3.1. Aims of the study

This study is aimed at providing an analysis of types of the processes used in the teacher – student conversations (TSCs) in the memoir *Teacher Man (TM)* by Frank McCourt as well as describe the linguistic features of the processes in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by

Frank McCourt. Accordingly, I makes some suggestions for EFL teaching and learning for communicative purposes.

1.3.2. Objectives

Based on the view of Functional Grammar, the objectives of this thesis are:

- To identify types of processes in the conversations between the teacher and the students in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt.
- To identify and describe the syntactic features and the semantic features of processes in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt.
- To make some implications for English learning and teaching, especially for those who wish to understand and grasp the processes in Functional Grammar.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. What types of processes are used in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt?
2. What are the syntactic features of the processes used in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt?
3. What are the semantic features of the processes used in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt?

1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Because of the limited research time and my own ability, this thesis is restricted to the study of types of processes used in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt as well as a description of some

linguistic features of the processes in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt. Specifically, I would like to focus on a detailed description of the syntactic and semantic features of processes used in TSCs in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt.

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.7. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The thesis consists of five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1, Introduction

Chapter 2, Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3, Research Methodology

Chapter 4, Findings and Discussion

Chapter 5, Conclusions and Implications

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

In recent decades, there have been a lot of researchers on processes in the sense of F.G. they have studied the structures of each process separately in many grammar books at various levels. However, nobody has discoursed about the investigation into linguistic features of processes used in the teacher – student conversations in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt.

The grammarians have done many researches on the idea of the role of clauses in processes. Halliday [6], in "*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*", introduced six types of processes in the part of clause as representation. He explained, illustrated and analyzed for every process. He mentions the most powerful conception of reality consisting of "goings-on": of *doing*, happening, feeling, being. These goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause. The basic semantic framework for the representation of process potentially consists of three components: the process itself, the participants (Roles) in the process, the circumstances associated with the process.

He provides readers with a wide range of participants involved in different processes. He also shows that the concepts of process are semantic categories, which explain in the most general way how phenomena of the real world are represented as linguistic structures. Moreover, he explores the different types of process that are built into the semantic of English, and the particular kinds of

participant role that are systematically associated with each. He also states that language has three main functions: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metal functions. Each element, in his book, can be explained by reference to its functions in the total linguistic system.

According to the aim of the study, "*process*" is the object under study in this research. Traditional grammarians have done many researches on the idea of the role of clauses in processes. Halliday [9], in "*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*", introduces six types of processes in the part of clause as representation. He explains, illustrates and analyzes for every "*process*". He mentions the most powerful conception of reality consisting of "goings-on": of *doing, happening, feeling, being*. These goings-on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause. The basic semantic framework for the representation of process potentially consists of three components: the process itself, the participants (Roles) in the process, the circumstances associated with the process.

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book, can be explained by reference to its functions in the total linguistic system.

Halliday [9, p.144] sees language as a system of interrelated categories; he pays much attention to details of language, the "*restriction of their attention to one language that had led them to concentrate on linguistically marginal features and they lack a coherent view of the working of the language as a whole*".

According to Bloor [1, p.2], some linguists have tried to account for formal aspects of the grammar of language largely divorced from meaning. Others have started out by looking at words and sentences (language form) and asking how the forms of the language represent meanings

Lock [14] with *Functional English Grammar* explores the experiential resources of clauses in English. The action in the clauses is a kind of process such as doing, happening; the doer and the receiver of actions are kinds of participants; how can described as a kind circumstances. In everyday, language, the process is represented by the verb and the participant is represented by the noun. In Lock's opinion, grammar is viewed as a source for creating meaning in spoken and written discourse.

Bloor [1] mentions the grammar tools to take samples of English apart and find out how the language works and how people use language in social communication through the process of analysis. He also presents a short account of systemic Functional Grammar. It provides readers with a tool needed for analyzing real samples of English and the book is a guidebook for analyzing English in systemic functional approach.

Butt and others [2] base on Halliday's theory of FG to offer a book-length study. The study reaffirms that grammar is a means of explaining the significant and functional patterning of words. At the end of each chapter, there is a section "Implications for language teaching", which is directly aimed at language educators and students. Hence, the study can serve as a base for designing language curriculum.

Up to now, "*process*" has attracted much attention of linguists and linguistic researchers. In addition, process has been the objects of study. Thus, in the University of Foreign Language Studies of Da Nang University, Nguyễn Thị Xuân Thủy [29] conducted thesis with the title "*An investigation into Distinguishing Features Between Material and Mental Processes in English and Vietnamese*". The study examined Material and Mental Processes in order to find out their differences and similarities in English and Vietnamese.

"*An Investigation into Linguistic Features of Goal and Range in Material Processes in English and Vietnamese*" was the title of an M.A thesis by Phan Đức Vỹ An [24]. The study was carried out with the aim to describe the features of two participants: Goal and Range appearing in Material Processes semantically, syntactically and pragmatically in English and consider applicable features in Vietnamese. It also found out the usage of these two participants in English and Vietnamese novels, stories, newspapers and poems.

Nguyễn Thị Bích Phượng [30] carried out a thesis entitled "*An Investigation into Syntactic and Semantic Features of Proverbs Expressed in Relational Attributive Processes in English and Vietnamese*". The thesis was conducted with the aim to find out the

similarities and differences in Relational Process between English and Vietnamese.

Nguyễn Thị Thuý Hoa [27] conducted the thesis entitled “*An Investigation into Syntactic and Semantic Features of English and Vietnamese Proverbs Expresses in Relational Identifying Processes*”. The study was aimed at finding out the semantic and syntactic feature of proverbs. It also found out the similarities and differences of Relational Identifying processes in English and Vietnamese proverbs.

“*An Investigation into Linguistic Features of Material and Behavioural in Processes in English and Vietnamese*” was conducted by Võ Ngọc Hải [25]. The thesis presented the notion and linguistic features of Material and Behavioural Processes. It also found out their similarities and differences in English and Vietnamese.

Nguyễn Hoàng Uyên Phương [28] conducted the thesis with the title “*An Investigation into Syntactic and Semantic Features of Multi-Word Verbs Denoting Verbal Process in English and How to Translate Them into Vietnamese*”. The thesis was carried out with the aim to examine the semantic features of English multi-word verb denoting Verbal Processes derived from *Say, Speak, Tell* and *Talk*. However, the study did not cover all the linguistic features of processes in conversations.

In general, there have been a number of researches related to processes in both Vietnamese and English. However, up to now, there have not been any pieces of research which carries out an investigation into linguistic features of processes used in the teacher – student conversations in the memoir *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt. I hope that this study will probably bring some significance

to the literature of the issue, and helps the English learners minimize confusion among various structures.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Memoir

a. What is a memoir?

b. Characteristics of Memoir

2.2.2. Conversations

a. What is conversation?

b. Turn-taking

c. Conversations in Teacher Man

2.2.3. Functional Grammar and Transitivity

a. Functional Grammar

b. Transitivity

2.2.4. Process and Process Types

a. What is a process?

b. Process Types

i. Material Processes

ii. Mental Processes

iii. Relational Processes

iv. Verbal Processes

v. Behavioural Processes

vi. Existential Processes

2.2.5. Experiential Structure of the Nominal Group

2.3. SUMMARY

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2. RESEARCH METHODS

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

3.5. RESEARCH PROCEDURE

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. SEMANTIC FEATURES OF PROCESSES IN TEACHER-STUDENT CONVERSATIONS IN *TEACHER MAN* IN THE VIEW OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

4.1.1. Semantic Features of Material Processes in TSCs in the memoir *Teacher Man*

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher's Life and People in Ireland

i. Intransitive Material Processes

Intransitive transformative clauses is expressed by the following example:

(4.1) *Teacher: (...) I was leaving now. (...) [38, p.116]*

(4.2) *Student: (...) Aw, man. Mr.McCourt, you ever in the army? You fight in Korea? (...) [38, p.38]*

Table 4.2. Intransitive Material Processes

No.	Actor	Process	circumstance
(4.1)	<i>I</i>	<i>was leaving</i>	<i>now</i>
(4.2)	<i>You</i>	<i>fight</i>	<i>in Korea?</i>

ii. Material Processes with Goal

(4.6) *Teacher: (...) **He hit the basket.** (...)* [38, p.17]

(4.7) *Student: (...) Hey, Mr. McCourt, did you ever do real work, not teaching, but, you know, real work?*

*Teacher: I told them, after college **I passed the exams** for the teacher's license but I didn't think I (...)* [38, p.57]

(4.8) *Teacher: (...) Wouldn't know what to say to you. Dockside work was easier. ... **We swung our hook.** (...)* [38, p.57]

Table 4.3. Material Processes with Goal

No.	Actor	Process	Goal
(4.6)	<i>He</i>	<i>hit</i>	<i>the basket</i>
(4.7)	<i>I</i>	<i>passed</i>	<i>the exams</i>
(4.8)	<i>We</i>	<i>swung</i>	<i>our hooks</i>

iii. Material Processes with Beneficiary

The Material Processes with beneficiary is expressed in McCourt's stories and they are analyzed by the table below

Table 4.4. Material Processes with Goal and Beneficiary

No.	Actor	Process: Material	Beneficiary	Goal
(4.9)	<i>You</i>	<i>give</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>the pass</i>
(4.10)	<i>They</i>	<i>threw</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>a line</i>

b. Processes in Conversations about Lesson Content

i. Intransitive Material Process

ii. Material Process with Goal

iii. Material Processes with Beneficiary

4.1.2. Semantic Features of Mental Processes in TSCs in the Memoir *Teacher Man*

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher's Life and People in Ireland

- i. Perception Mental Process*
- ii. Cognition Mental Process*
- iii. Affection Mental Process*

4.1.3. Semantic Features of Relational Processes in TSCs in the Memoir *Teacher Man*

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher's Life and People in Ireland

- i. Intensive Process*
- ii. Circumstantial Process*
- iii. Possessive Process*

b. Processes in Conversations about Lesson Content

- i. Intensive process*
- ii. Circumstantial Process*
- iii. Possessive Process*

4.1.4. Semantic Features of Behavioural Processes in TSCs in the Memoir *Teacher Man*

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher's Life and People in Ireland

b. Processes in Conversations about Lesson Content

4.1.5. Semantic Features of Verbal Processes in TSCs in the Memoir *Teacher Man*

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher's Life and People in Ireland

- i. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with 'Say'*
- ii. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with 'Tell'*
- iii. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with 'Talk'*

b. Processes in Conversations about Lesson Content

i. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with ‘Say’

ii. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with ‘Tell’

iii. Semantic Features of Verbal Process with ‘Talk’

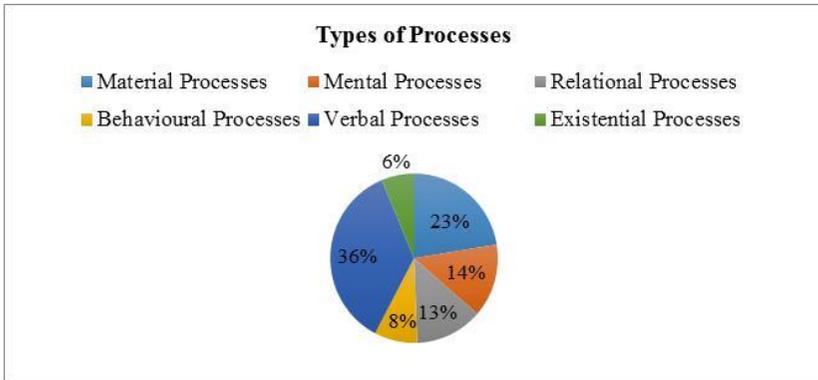
4.1.6. Semantic Features of Existential Processes in TSCs in the Memoir Teacher Man

a. Processes in Conversations about Teacher’s Life and People in Ireland

b. Processes in Conversations about Lesson Content

Table 4.33. Frequency of Processes in TSCs in the Memoir Teacher Man

Processes	Topic A		Topic B		Total	
	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age
Material Processes	29	21,7%	34	23,1%	63	22,5%
Mental Processes	24	17,4%	20	11,8%	44	14,3%
Relational Processes	18	13%	21	12,4%	39	12,7%
Behavioural Processes	12	8,7%	15	8,9%	27	8,8%
Verbal Processes	50	32,7%	69	37,9%	119	35,5%
Existential Processes	9	6,5%	10	5,9%	19	6,3%
Total	142	100%	169	100%	311	100%



*Chart 4.1. Frequency of Processes in TSCs in the
Memoir Teacher Man*

4.2. SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF PROCESSES IN TEACHER-STUDENT CONVERSATIONS IN *TEACHER MAN* IN THE VIEW OF FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR

4.2.1. Experiential Structure of the Nominal Group: the Thing

a. Nominal Group in form of Material Process

b. Nominal Group in form of Mental Process

i. Perception Mental Process

Table 4.36. Transitivity Analysis of Nominal Group

No.	Nominal group	Process:	Phenomenon
	Sensor	Perception	
(4.99)	<i>you</i>	<i>see</i>	<i>the signs</i>
(4.100)	<i>I</i>	<i>feel</i>	<i>honored you told me about your family</i>
(4.101)	<i>They</i>	<i>'d like to hear</i>	<i>like themselves talking</i>

Table 4.37. Nominal Group in Terms of Thing

No.	Thing
(4.99)	<i>you</i>
(4.100)	<i>I</i>
(4.101)	<i>They</i>

ii. Cognition Mental Process

Table 4.38. Transitivity Analysis of Nominal Group

No.	Nominal Group	Process: Cognition	Phenomenon
	Senser		
(4.102)	<i>she</i>	<i>knew</i>	<i>you</i>
(4.103)	<i>He</i>	<i>doesn't understand</i>	<i>something</i>
(4.104)	<i>I</i>	<i>can't believe</i>	<i>you're telling me this</i>

Table 4.39. Nominal Group in Terms of Thing

No.	Thing
(4.102)	<i>she</i>
(4.103)	<i>He</i>
(4.104)	<i>I</i>

iii. Affection Mental Process

Table 4.40. Transitivity Analysis of Nominal Group

No.	Nominal Group	Process: Affection	Phenomenon
	Senser		
(4.105)	<i>She</i>	<i>hated</i>	<i>me</i>
(4.106)	<i>You</i>	<i>enjoy</i>	<i>yourselves</i>
(4.107)	<i>They</i>	<i>like</i>	<i>it</i>

Table 4.41. Nominal Group in Terms of Thing

No.	Thing
(4.105)	<i>She</i>
(4.106)	<i>You</i>
(4.107)	<i>They</i>

c. Nominal Group in form of Relational Process

d. Nominal Group in form of Verbal Process

4.2.2. Experiential Structure of the Nominal Group: the Qualifier

a. Nominal Group in form of Material Process

b. Nominal Group in form of Relational Process

c. Nominal Group in form of Existential Process

Table 4.54. Nominal Group in Terms of Thing and Qualifier

Noninal Groups	Occurrence	Rate %
Thing	625	92%
Qualifier	54	8%
Total	679	100

4.3. SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes all the findings that appear in the conversations between the teacher and the students in terms of syntactic and semantic features. As regard to the semantic features, I investigated into Material Processes, Mental Processes, Relational Processes, Behavioural Processes, Verbal Processes and Existential Processes that are six types of processes. With the syntactic features, I studied the experiential structure of nominal group in terms of thing

and qualifier which are commonly used in the processes. Finally, the most interesting finding is the Verbal Processes, which account for the highest rate in the six types of processes. It is hoped that these findings will help us have a deep understanding about the function of process in TCSs.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis entitled “*Linguistic Features of Processes in Teacher – Student Conversations in the Memoir Teacher Man by Frank McCourt in Light of Functional Grammar*” is a study of linguistic features processes in TSCs. With this aim, in the light of FG of Halliday, the analysis of processes has been conducted to find out the semantic features and syntactic features. The study makes a contribution to the theoretical study of process in TSCs and valuable contribution to English learning and teaching, especially in learning Functional Grammar. The findings presented below are inferred from the analysis of collected data.

In terms of semantic features, the processes are composed of six types including the Material Processes, Mental Processes, Relational Processes, Behavioural Processes, Verbal Processes, Existential Processes. From the data, Verbal Processes with 119 occurrences and make up to 35,5%. Their main function is to tell the stories about the writer’s life of teaching. The verbs like *Say, Tell, Talk*, which are typical verbs of Verbal Processes, are found so frequent in these processes with the unique function of reporting what the characters in the stories said. Besides, Material Processes appear frequently with the function of describing what happened in the writer’s life by make a question *What did X do?* The statistics show that other process types like the Mental Processes (44 with 14,3%), Relational Processes (39 with 12,7%), Behavioural

Processes (27 with 8,8%), and Existential Processes are also found but with the lowest rate (19 with 6,3%)

In terms of syntactic features, the processes in teacher-student conversations in the memoir *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt are recognized in the view of Functional Grammar. The nominal groups in terms of thing and qualifier are commonly used in processes of TSCs. The nominal groups in terms of thing outnumbers with 625 instances (92,04%) compared to 54 instances of nominal groups in terms of qualifier (7,96%). Particularly, the nominal groups in terms of thing with personal pronouns like *I, You, We, They, She, He, It* are found very common. Furthermore, the nominal groups in terms of qualifier of prepositional phrases and relative clauses are also the structures commonly used in participants of processes in TSCs. These diversified nominal group types not only make the conversations be clear but also enhance the characteristics of processes in TSCs.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

When dealing with processes in the memoir *TM* by Frank McCourt, I realize that processes are so enormously used in conversations that students majoring in English normally have difficult in grasping the semantic features as well as the syntactic features of processes to use them effectively. From discussion of finding on processes, I hope that some implications for language teaching and learning as follows enable to help learners of English get better of using processes in conversations.

Firstly, overview of the processes in transitivity to help students to understand well about FG at school is the teacher's ambition. It is students that are more conscious of meaning and

function than form in their own language. In addition to that, to some students, the structural patterns are considered arbitrary rather than being related to meaning and function. In teaching grammar, the purpose is clear that not only the function and purpose of grammar are described but also the way of it should be designed and showed in the light of the Experiential Grammar. Therefore, it is important and useful for teachers to implicate FG in English teaching and learning and guide the students to make grammatical analysis when learning grammar.

Secondly, in order to avoid some mistakes when dealing with processes, learners should be provided not only well-rounded knowledge of processes but also opportunities to practice them in context. Through practicing processes regularly, learners gradually master and use them more effectively.

Thirdly, processes in experiential meaning under the light of Functional Grammar are discussed as an attempt to bring learners to comprehend the analyses of complete meaning processes in the transitivity system. It is hoped that the insights provided here will prove helpfulness to learners of English.

Lastly, learning language which involves learning how to use the language in a way that makes sense to other people who speak language is more important than leaning vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, it is possible for teachers to introduce students explicitly and systematically to many choices available for making meanings about human experience in an English clause.

5.3. LIMITATIONS

The thesis only focuses on the common syntactic and semantic features of processes in TSCs. Due to the lack of linguistic

knowledge, reference material and the shortage of the time, I have not examined all the syntactic features of processes such as all types of process elements like subjects and prepositional phrases. That made the analysis has not reached a deep and thorough level as expected.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

For the sake of making further investigation, I would like to offer some suggestions for further research:

1. An Investigation into Participants of Processes in TSCs.
2. An Investigation into Circumstances of Processes in TSCs.