

A Transitivity Analysis of the Courtroom Discourse: A Case Study of Jodi Arias Trial

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ABSTRACT

Court discourse is a typical institutional discourse, recently arousing scholars' interest. Systemic-functional approach provides an important perspective to investigate the court discourse, among which transitivity that involves the construal of experiential meaning is a significant tool in the analysis. However, it is still unknown how experiential meanings are construed through different process types in American courtroom discourse. Therefore, this paper will take the case of Jodi Arias' murder as an example and investigate the courtroom discourse from the perspective of transitivity. In this study, two research questions will be focused on: (1) What is the distribution of six transitivity processes in the courtroom of Jodi Arias' murder case? (2) What are the functions of six processes for each courtroom participant in the courtroom of Jodi Arias' murder case? After the detailed analysis, two conclusions are reached: (1) The paper finds that the major processes in the courtroom is the material, mental, relational, and verbal process. The behavioural process and the existential process is least or none in the courtroom discourse. (2) Second, the processes have their own functions in the courtroom discourse. The findings can help improve people's understanding of American courtroom discourse and enhance American courtroom communication.

1. Introduction

Law is closely related to the language. The social function of law has to be realized through language; theory of law has to be created through the language; Legal reasoning, legal interpretation, court debates all have to be carried out through the use of language (Marmor, 2008). Among legal languages, court discourse is a typical institutional discourse. It refers to utterances conveyed by court participants actively or passively according to specific rules and procedures in the court to achieve a purpose and interest (Wagner & Cheng, 2016).

Recent studies have investigated the language in the courtroom from several angles. Scholars pay attention to several aspects in courtroom discourse and their linguistic resources, such as the speech of certain role in the trial (e.g. Cui & Miao, 2009), interaction in the courtroom (e.g. Tkačuková, 2010; Winięcki, 2008) and closing arguments (e.g. Chaemsaitong, 2018; Walker, 2014). Many scholars focused on the interaction in the cross-examination and direct-examination (e.g. Hobbs, 2003; J. Li & Sun, 2018). As language is often manipulated strategically for various purposes in courtroom discourse (Bartley, 2018), various linguistic phenomena such as vagueness, presupposition, and appraisal resources are studied in different approaches such as in pragmatic, cognitive, systemic-functional approach.

Transitivity analysis is a significant tool in the systemic-functional approach, which is an important perspective in analysing legal language. Transitivity analysis can help delve into how people construe the experiential meaning in courtroom situations by analysing process types, participants and contexts of the processes. Bartley (2018) investigated the closing arguments of a rape case that resulted in a wrongful conviction, focusing on the transitivity pattern and analyzed why the defendant finds himself wrongly convicted of sexual assault. Wang (2015) analyzed the transitivity of lawyer discourse, figuring out the stylistic features

of lawyer discourse in the courtroom. Shi (2010) explored the transitivity system in Chinese courtroom discourse, arguing that different process types' frequencies positively correlate with their functions in the courtroom. However, there is little study on America courtroom discourse to figure out the transitivity patterns. It is still unknown how experiential meanings are construed through different process types in American courtroom discourse, which may differ from the Chinese courtroom discourse. Therefore, this paper will take the case of Jodi Arias' murder as an example and investigate the courtroom discourse from the perspective of transitivity, aiming to find out what kinds of process types and participants are favored in American courtroom discourse. Specifically speaking, the paper aims to get the distributional rule of processes and features of the six processes in function.

This study is of both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the paper can be helpful to extend the research on courtroom discourse from the perspective of transitivity, especially concerning the American courtroom discourse. It also sheds light on the study of functional linguistics in forensic linguistic study. Practically, this study can be helpful to enhance the efficiency of communication in the courtroom and thus have implication for lawyers, plaintiffs, defendants, prosecutors, etc., in various stages of legal proceedings to use the language mechanism better to achieve law justice.

Brief introduction to Jodi Arias' murder case: the case of Jodi Arias' murder received widespread media attention. Travis Victor Alexander was an American salesman who was murdered by his ex-girlfriend, Jodi Ann Arias in his house in Mesa, Arizona. Alexander and Arias began dating in February 2007. Alexander and Arias dated intermittently for a year and a half, often in a long-distance relationship, taking turns travelling between their respective Arizona and California homes. Arias moved to Mesa to live closer to Alexander. In March 2007, she moved to Yreka, California, and lived there with her grandparents. After they broke up, they still kept in touch and had a sexual relationship. Jodi had a strong desire for control and was homogamous in their relationship. According to Alexander's friends who knew Arias and observed them together, they tended to have a negative opinion of her, stating that the relationship was unusually tumultuous and that Arias' behavior was worrying. Alexander was murdered by Jodi on June 4, 2008. At the time of the murder, Alexander sustained multiple knife wounds and a gunshot to the head.

2. Literature Review

Transitivity is the grammatical system of experience. It involves the organization of the clause to realize the experiential meaning, in which the choice of process implicates associated participate role and configuration (Eggins, 2004). As the cornerstone of the semantic organization of experience, transitivity includes all experiential functions related to the grammar of the clause (Halliday et al., 2014, p. 170). Transitivity has been a powerful tool for analyzing the text.

In transitivity, the flow of events is "chunked into each quantum of change by the grammar of the clause", and each quantum of change is conveyed through a process, participants and sometimes circumstances (Halliday et al., 2014, p. 213). That is, in order to represent how people, construe reality in language, a configuration of elements centred on a process is provided by the transitivity system as the lexicogrammatical resources for construing a quantum of change in the flow of events. (ibid.). In systemic-functional linguistics, It has been claimed that transitivity can show how speaker constructs their mental and physical world through different linguistic choices and how they account for their experience around them.

According to Halliday et al. (2014), people can divide human beings' experience into six different process types through the transitivity system: material process, relational process, behavioural process, verbal process, mental process, and existential process. The material process is a process of doing something. This process usually includes an actor, an action verb (e.g. cancel, kick, open) and the goal of the action. The actor is the logical subject of the sentence. The goal is the logical, direct object. They are usually a pronoun (e.g. she, they) or a noun (e.g. wall, book) (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 72). If a material process has an actor and a goal of the action, this clause can be either active voice or passive voice. The relational process is the process that reflects the relationship between things, or it can be a process of being or becoming. The relational process has two types: attributive and identifying. The former refers to which attribute an entity has or which type it belongs to. Its formula is that a is a kind of x. The latter one identifies two entities' properties. Each of the two types can be further separated into three types: intensive, circumstantial and possessive (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 75). The behavioural process is a process of behaving that has something to do with physiological activities. The common verbs used are "laugh", "cry", "dream" and "cough". Only one participant, or we call it behavior, can be seen in the behavioral process and the behavior is usually human being (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 78). The verbal process is a process of saying to exchange information. Sayer, verbiage and receiver are the main participants. The sayer is not necessarily a person. The common verbs used in the verbal process are "tell", "talk", "speak" and so on (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 79). The mental process is a process of reaction, cognition, and perception relevant to mental activity. Two participants are included in mental process, senser and phenomenon. The common verbs used in the mental process are "hear", "understand", "hate", "like", "notice" and so on (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 73). An existential process is a process of existing. There is an existent in every existential process. The common verbs used in the existential process are "arise" and "exist". What's more, the sentence pattern often appears in the existential process (Hu & Jiang, 2002, p. 80).

In written legal English, transitivity has been employed to explore the difference and similarity of the Chinese and American Constitution (Han, 2013) and Marriage Law (Huan & Yuan, 2011). Through the comparison of law between Chinese and other countries, the language difference and its respective features and culture differences are revealed, and the relationships between language and culture within a language are elaborated by means of transitivity (Han, 2013; Huan & Yuan, 2011). Li (2009) analyzed how power awareness is realized in the legal text through transitivity. In legal news discourse, a paper investigates the social ideology news reports of different types of law cases convey and communicative functions those intend to reach by means of transitivity (Zhang, 2010). The video courtroom discourse has been studied from the perspective of transitivity to investigate the language features and functions of different roles in courtroom discourse (Zeng, 2012). However, the data the study uses is not authentic, just artworks from televisions. Besides, from the literature we reviewed, there is little study about American courtroom discourse from the perspective of transitivity. Therefore, in order to bridge the gap, the paper will take Jodi Arias' murder case as an example and investigate the American courtroom discourse, aiming to find out the distribution of six processes of transitivity and the features of the six processes in function in the courtroom of Jodi Arias' murder case.

3. Methodology

This study uses the qualitative and quantitative method. First, two excerpts were collected from Jodi Arias' murder case. The first excerpt is the collected transcript showing that the defendant Jodi is directly-examined by her defendant attorney. The second excerpt is the collected transcript that the defendant Jodi is cross-examined by the prosecutor Martinez. Two excerpts are all around 1000 words. Second, the process types will be calculated for each excerpt and every courtroom participant occurring in two excerpts. Third, the features of distributions and functions will be analyzed in two excerpts.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Brief Description and Analysis of the Data

According to the statistic we collected, the distribution of six processes for two excerpts is illustrated.

Table 1: The distribution of six processes in excerpt one: the direct examination between the defendant attorney and the defendant

Process/ people	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential	Total
Defendant attorney	16	6	10	15	0	1	48
Percentage (%)	33.3	12.5	20.8	31.3	0	2	100
Defendant (direct examination)	30	9	25	5	0	3	72
Percentage (%)	41.7	12.5	34.7	6.9	0	4.2	100
Judge	9	0	0	2	0	0	11
Percentage (%)	81.8	0	0	18.2	0	0	100

Table 2: the distribution of six processes in excerpt two: the cross-examination between the prosecutor and the defendant

Process/ people	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential	Total
Prosecutor	21	13	20	20	0	1	75
Percentage (%)	28	17.3	26.7	26.7	0	1.3	100
Defendant (cross examination)	4	7	5	1	0	0	17
Percentage (%)	23.5	41.2	29.4	5.9	0	0	100
Judge	3	0	1	0	0	0	4
Percentage (%)	75	0	25	0	0	0	100

Table 3: the distribution of six processes for the defendant in two excerpts

Process/ people	Material	Mental	Relational	Verbal	Behavioral	Existential	Total
Defendant	34	16	30	6	0	3	89
Percentage (%)	38.2	18	33.7	6.7	0	3.3	100

Table 4: the distribution of six processes for the judge in two excerpts

Process/ people	Material	mental	relational	verbal	behavioral	existential	total
judge	12	0	1	2	0	0	15
Percentage (%)	80	0	6.7	13.3	0	0	100

We can get the general distribution rule of six processes in the two excerpts from the four tables above. It is clear that the major processes in the courtroom is the material, mental, relational, and verbal process. The behavioral process and the existential process is least or none in the courtroom discourse.

First, for the material process, we can find material processes take the highest percentage in the utterance of the judge in both excerpts, the utterance of defendant attorney and defendant in excerpt one of direction examination, and that of prosecutor in excerpt two of cross-examination (defendant attorney only occurs in the excerpt one of direction examination and prosecutor only occurs in the excerpt two of cross-examination). For the utterances of the defendant, though the material process takes the highest percentage in the direct-examination, it takes the third-highest percentage in the cross-examination. Second, the defendant in the cross-examination uses the highest frequency of mental processes for the mental process. For the defendant in the direct examination, it ranks third among the frequency of six processes. Overall, as for the defendant, the mental process ranks third for the frequency of usage; for the defendant attorney and prosecutor, it ranks fourth. The judge does not use the mental process in her utterances. Third, for the relational process, prosecutor, judge in the cross-examination, defendant in cross-examination and direct-examination used the second-highest frequency of relational process among the six processes. It takes the third-highest percentage in the utterances of defendant attorney. Judge did not use the relational process in the direct examination. Fourth, for verbal process, judge in the direct examination, defendant attorney and prosecutor used the second-highest frequency of verbal process. The verbal process used by the defendant in the cross and direct examination ranks fourth among six processes. The judge in the cross-examination did not use the verbal process in her utterance. Fifth, we can find that

nobody used the behavioral process in the courtroom. Sixth, for the existential process, the defendant attorney, prosecutor, defendant in the cross and direct examination used the existential process, but it is the least frequent used process. Judges did not use the existential process in her utterances.

Halliday and Hasan (2014, pp. 327-328) maintain that linguistic analysis of a text is not the interpretation of that text; it is an explanation of why and how it means what it does. Next, the paper will analyze each process's functions, which is also "an explanation of why and how the text means".

4.2.1 Material Process

Material processes are processes of doing. The process is expressed by an action verb, an actor and the goal of action. As the analysis of distribution in the previous section, material processes take the highest percentage in the utterance of the judge in both excerpts, defendant attorney, prosecutor and defendant in the excerpt one of direct examination, For the utterances of the defendant, though the material process takes the highest percentage in the direct-examination, it just takes the third-highest percentage in the cross-examination. Next, the study will give an explanation.

First, as for the prosecutor, his duty in the court is to determine whether the defendant is guilty. Therefore, in the courtroom, the prosecutor Martinez tried to ask questions about what the defendant and the dead had done, confirm whether her behavior had the tendency to break up the law and ask for the validity or more detail about more evidence. The material process is the major process used by the prosecutor, as a material process refers to the process of doing and indicates something has happened, which was commonly used for his intentions in the courtroom. Two examples will be illustrated next.

Example one:

Martinez: Exhibit 452 also features the color of your hair, doesn't it?

Jodi:Yes. A different part of my hair.

Prosecutor Martinez: And this was taken sometime in May of 2008, correct?

In this example, prosecutor used the material process for the purpose of asking for the detail of the evidence, which can help the further investigation of whether the defendant is guilty or not.

Example two:

Prosecutor Martinez: Now with regard to this name-calling, one of the things that we've heard in the text message was that you were upset at some point because Mr. Alexander said that you were going to turn out like your mother ; you were acting like your mother (Material process). Do you remember that text message, ma'am?

For the second example, the prosecutor described the text message Alexander once sent to Jodi and used the material process to describe the Alexander's attitude about Jodi's action. "You" is the actor; "were acting" is the material process, "like your mother" represents the circumstantial. By presenting Alexander's pejorative comments towards the defendant, the prosecutor showed the motivation of the defendant's murder to the hearers and asked for confirmation.

Second, the defendant attorney aims to argue the defendant is not guilty or tries to mitigate the defendant's punishment. Generally speaking, the defendant explains what the defendant did and what the plaintiff did is acceptable and managed to prove that what the defendant did is not guilty. In the Jodi Arias's murder case, the defendant used the material process to elicit Jodi's answer to describe the childhood's life to get the sympathy from the hearer. The example will illustrate it.

Example 3:

Defendant attorney: you said they started spanking in (Material 1)

Jodi: well I was spanked before on occasion just it seemed like the frequency and the intensity of it increased around that age

In this example, the defendant attorney used the material process to elicit the Jodi to give more descriptions about her miserable childhood life, which intends to get more sympathy from the hearer. in this sentence, "they started spanking in", 'they' is the actor, "started spanking in" is the material process.

Third, for the special participant in the courtroom, judge's duty is to give out the instruction and maintain the court order. What judges says is always meant to ask somebody doing something or stopping something. The material process is a process of doing something; so, the judge uses the material verb to control the courtroom. The example illustrates this:

Example 4:

Judge: you may come forward and take a seat please.

In this example, the actor is “you”; material process is “come forward and take a seat”. Judge uses the material process to give out the instruction to the courtroom participants, which helps the court run smoothly.

Fourth, the defendant, in the direction examination, used the highest frequency of material process, while she just used the third highest frequency of material process. That’s because in the direct examination when she was faced with the examination of defendant attorney, she would get a lot of chances to describe what she had did experienced and did her best to defend for herself, as the defendant attorney would provide her with a number of opportunities to talk for herself. However, when faced with the cross-examination of the prosecutor, she tended to give a little information to prevent from making mistakes, as the prosecutor intended to prove she was guilty. The defendant Jodi used a lot of material processes in the direct examination, as she used the material verbs to describe her experience to get the advantage for her. The example illustrates this

Example 5:

Defendant attorney: you said they started spanking in.

Defendant Jodi: well I was spanked before on occasion just it seemed like the frequency and the intensity of it increased around that age.

The underlined part shows the Jodi’s descriptions for her miserable childhood’s life. She used two material processes to arouse hearer’s sympathy for her miserable experience.

4.2.2 Mental process

The mental process is a process of sensing. There are three types of mental processes and they express such mental phenomena as perception, affection and cognition. A mental process involves two participants, senser and phenomenon. As the previous section mentioned before, the defendant in the cross-examination uses the highest frequency of mental processes in terms of the mental process. The defendant in the direct-examination just uses the third highest frequency of mental processes. Overall, as for the defendant, it ranks the third among the frequency of six processes; for the defendant attorney and prosecutor, it ranks fourth. The judge does not use the mental process in her utterances. Next, I will explain the distribution and function of the mental process.

First, I will explain that the defendant used a lot of mental process in the cross-examination, which even ranks the first, while the defendant in the direct-examination does not use so much. In the cross-examination, the prosecutor intended to prove she was guilty. Out of self-protection and mitigating the utterance’s responsibility, the defendant Jodi used a number of mental processes, as the mental process gave people a feeling that the speaker is also not sure. The example will illustrate this.

Example 6

Martinez: And this was taken sometime in May of 2008, correct?

Jodi: This exhibit?

Martinez: No, number 452.

Jodi: I only remember it was the spring, I think.

In this example, the prosecutor asked the defendant Jodi the picture’s time-- exhibit 453. Jodi used the mental process to answer. “I” is the senser; “think” is the mental process; “I only remember it was the spring” is the phenomenon. By using the expression “I think”, the defendant can prevent from taking the responsibility due to the false memory or explanation. Therefore, she used the most mental processes in the cross-examination.

Second, I’ll explain the phenomenon that the defendant attorney and prosecution also used some mental processes. On the one hand, for the defendant attorney and prosecution, they all use a mental process like “do you remember that” “do you know that” to lead the answerer to consider the question and make the answerer jump into the framework the asker set. For the prosecutor, the framework is a trap prepared for the defendant; he intended to elicit the defendant to agree on something or speak out something that can prove her guilt. For the defendant attorney, his intention is to allow the defendant to express herself and say something advantageous for her. On the other hand, they used the mental process, aiming to affect the emotion and judgement of the judge and jury. That’s because the use of the mental process is a strategy to express perception, affection and cognition. I will give an example to illustrate this.

Example 7:

Martinez: Do you remember that you tape-recorded that conversation?

Jodi: Yes.

Martinez: And during that conversation isn't it true that you said I honestly think talking about Angela she's a little bit dumb you said that, right?

Jodi: Yes. I called her dumb and stupid.

In example 7, the prosecutor used the mental process "do you remember". In fact, it was used to present the information to let the hearer know Jodi recorded the conversation that contained the Jodi's pejorative comments towards her sister. , which will give the judge and jury the bad impression of the defendant Jodi.

Third, there is no distribution of mental process for judge. That's because judge's main job is to give out the instruction and maintain the order, which does not need the mental process.

4.2 relational processes

The relational process is those of being. In relational clauses, there are two parts to the "being": something is being said to "be" something else. According to the analysis in the previous section, for the relational process, prosecutor, judge in the cross-examination, defendant in the cross-examination and direct-examination used the second-highest frequency of relational process among the six processes. It takes the third-highest percentage in the utterances of defendant attorney. Judge did not use the relational process in the direct examination. Next, I will explain the distribution and function of the relational process.

First, as for the fact that the frequency of relational process takes the second-highest percentage in the utterances of prosecutor, the defendant in the cross-examination and direct-examination and for the defense attorney, it still ranks the third, that's because the core of court is to figure out what is the truth. The prosecutor, the defendant, and the defense attorney all need to state the different relation between the defendant and the dead, matters, facts. The prosecutor and the defense attorney may use the form of questions to seek to clarify the relationships between them. The relational process is to reflect the relation between matters, so the court speech is closely related to the relational process. The example illustrates this:

Example 8:

Defendant attorney: did you kill Travis Alexander on June 4th 2008

Jodi: Yes, I did

Defendant attorney: Why

Jodi: the simple answer is that he attacked me and I defend myself

In example 8, the defendant Jodi used the relational process to explain her alleged case history and the reason for her murder. This sentence is the intensive identifying process. "the simpler answer" is the token, and "is" represents the intensive identifying process, which is one of the relational processes. "That he attacked me and I defend myself" is the value. By using the relational process, Jodi gave the hearer a sense of objectivity, as the relational process reflects the relation between matters.

Second, as for the judge in the cross-examination courtroom, she uses two sentences of relational process. Obviously, the judge's relational processes still function as the instructions and reminder in the courtroom.

Example 9

Judge: Arias you are still under oath, okay?

Jodi: yes.

In example 9, the underlined sentence is the attributive process. "you" is the carrier; "are" is the attributive process, which is one of the relational processes; "under oath" is the attribute. The judge used the relational process to remind the state of the defendant in the court, which urged the defendant to keep to the law.

4.4 Verbal process

Verbal processes are processes of saying. "Saying" not only refers to people's utterance of words; instead, it should be interpreted in a broad sense, which refers to any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning such as "the story tells us a lesson". According to the previous analysis, for verbal process, judge in the direct examination, defendant attorney and prosecutor used the second highest frequency of verbal process. The verbal process used by the defendant in the cross and direct examination ranks fourth among six processes. Judge in the cross-examination did not use the verbal process in her utterance. Next, I will give the explanations.

First, verbal processes are processes of saying. It is inevitable to quote other people's utterances in the courtroom. The prosecutor frequently used the verb to confirm some points the defendant had said before. Besides, he commonly quoted what the defendant Jodi had said before to find the contradiction between what she said before and what she said at that time to

prove she was not credible. For the defendant attorney, he commonly used the verbal process to guide the answer of the defendant and clarify things the defendant attorney needs. The defendant used the verbal process to restate the words or to express what she wanted to say. The examples illustrate these.

Example 10:

Defendant attorney: well, let's back up a little bit and then talk about your family who is in your immediate family.

Jodi: um my immediate family consists of ..., I'm the oldest of my parents; they also have had another son about two years after I was born my brother.

In this example, the defendant attorney used the verbal process to guide the answer of the defendant. In this example, the sayer is "us"; the verbal process is "talk about"; and the verbiage is "your family". After hearing the hint, the defendant would talk about her family.

Example 11

Martinez: So, you can tell us for example, what kind of coffee you bought (at Starbucks back on June 3rd of 2008, but you can't tell us what you said yesterday or the day before.

Jodi: I always got the same drink at Starbucks.

The prosecutor used the verbal process to illustrate the contradictions of the defendant's words at two times. There involve two verbal processes. The sayer is the "you"; the verbal process is realized by "can tell" and "can't tell". The verbiage is "what kind of coffee you bought" and "what you said yesterday or the day before" respectively. The contrast of two verbal processes shows the incredibility of the defendant.

Second, as for the special role of judge, the verbal process is also used for giving instructions. The example illustrates this:

Example 12

Judge: Mr. Turner, calling your client.

In example 12, the judge gave direct instruction which complied with the procedures in the courtroom. The Judge asked Mr. Turner to call his client. The sayer is Mr. Turner. The verbal process is "calling"; the Verbiage is "your client".

4.5 Behavioral process

Behavioural processes are processes of physiological and psychological behavior, like breathing, coughing, dreaming, crying. There are no clearly defined characteristics for this process, which is the least distinct of all the six process types. According to the statistics, there were no courtroom participants using the behavioural process. There are some reasons. First, the behavioural process is not one of the main types of process in the English transitivity system. Second, it is difficult to clarify whether it was the behavioral process in the courtroom. Third, the behavioral process is not a powerful process to convince the hearer.

4.6 Existential process

The existential process represents that something exists or happens. The object or event which is being said to exist is labeled as existent. In every existential process, there is an existent. In principle, any kind of phenomenon can be construed as a "thing", human being, object, abstract things, etc. According to the analysis, for the existential process, the defendant attorney, prosecutor, defendant in the cross and direct examination used the existential process, but it is the least frequently used process. Judges did not use the existential process in her utterances. Based on these, two aspects will be elaborated on in the following.

On the one hand, for the existential process used by the defendant attorney, prosecutor, defendant, they use the existential process to present what really existed or happened or to ask whether there really existed or happened something. The following example illustrates this.

The example 13:

Defendant attorney: Miss Arias I want to clarify another thing as well and we're talking here your name has been pronounced most of this trial, Arias, is there another way of pronouncing you?

Jodi: I've heard it pronounced about seven different ways; I say Arias as does the rest of my family

The example shows the defendant attorney asked whether another way of pronouncing Arias existed and used the existential process. In this underlined sentence, "another way of pronouncing you" is the existent. "is" represents the existential process.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that the frequency of existential process for the utterance of defendant attorney, prosecutor, defendant is the least among six process type. There is even no existential process in the utterance of the judge. Because existential processes represent what really existed or happened, courtroom participants are prudent and discrete to use existential clauses, or they will turn out to be wrong and lose their credibility. When they are certain about what happened and existed, they will choose the existential process to represent.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

The paper attempts to explore the courtroom discourse from the perspective of transitivity, aiming to get the distributional rule of processes and features of each courtroom participant's six processes in function. The major findings of this research are as following points.

First, we find that the major processes in the courtroom is the material, mental, relational, and verbal process. The behavioural process and the existential process is least or none in the courtroom discourse. Material processes take the highest percentage in the utterance of the judge, defendant attorney, prosecutor and defendant in the direct-examination. The difference between the frequency of material processes the defendant used in the direct examination and cross-examination is due to the change of language circumstances. Besides, the behavioral process and the existential processes are least or none in the courtroom discourse due to its process features and special courtroom settings.

Second, the processes have their own functions in the courtroom. The material process enables the judge to maintain the court order, the prosecutor to ask about evidence and defendant's action, the defendant to argue for herself and the defendant attorney to prove what the defendant did is not guilty. The mental process enables the defendant to protect herself in the court, the defendant attorney and the prosecutor to set a framework the answerer will jump into. The relational process enables the prosecutor, the defendant, and the defence attorney to state the different relation between the defendant and the dead, matters, facts. The verbal process enables courtroom participants to quote other people's utterances in the courtroom. The existential process enables courtroom participants to present what really existed or happened or to ask whether there really existed or happened something

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the intensive efforts, there are still some limitations in the present study.

On the one hand, some other courtroom participants, such as witness expert and the jury, are not studied in this paper. Therefore, it is an outlook for future research to study their courtroom discourses from the perspective of transitivity.

On the other hand, the data of courtroom discourse are not large enough, which may be not representative. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers in the future can establish a larger corpus.

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