

## **Transitivity Dynamics: The Representation of Resistance in the Discourse of Iranian Spokesperson Ebrahim Zolfaghari**

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### **Abstract**

The conflict dynamics in the Middle East involving the United States, Israel, and Iran have generated extensive global controversy. Beyond triggering political and economic instability in various countries, this conflict has also evolved into a discursive arena characterized by competing narratives that attract international public attention. In this context, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, has frequently delivered statements via social media regarding the ongoing situation and his country's stance in relation to Iran, often aimed at garnering global sympathy. Conversely, the Iranian spokesperson, Ebrahim Zolfaghari, has consistently responded to such statements, which are perceived as marginalizing Iran. Although conveyed in a predominantly informative tone, these responses implicitly construct Iran as a resilient and capable nation prepared to confront conflict. This study employs the framework of M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with a particular focus on transitivity analysis to uncover the meanings realized within each clause of Zolfaghari's discourse. The data consist of speech transcripts delivered by Zolfaghari, which are subsequently analyzed through clause-level segmentation. This analysis aims to identify the types of processes, participants, and circumstances employed in representing discourses of resistance, as well as to reveal how such linguistic constructions function as strategic tools of political communication within the context of international conflict.

**Keywords:** *Dynamics, Transitivity, Representation*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The conflict in the Middle East involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has triggered significant political and economic instability, particularly in relation to rising global oil prices. As a party under attack, Iran has adopted a strategic response by threatening to detain oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz. This action has the potential to disrupt global commodity routes and destabilize energy supplies worldwide. Such developments have raised serious concerns for the United States, which holds substantial interests in industrial and transportation sectors heavily dependent on oil. In response to this situation, the President of the United States,

Donald Trump, has frequently delivered speeches and statements characterized by a confrontational, assertive, and at times threatening tone toward Iran.

These strong statements have inevitably provoked responses from Iran. Through its governmental and military spokesperson, Ebrahim Zolfaghari, Iran has consistently issued counter-discourses that emphasize resistance and the defense of national sovereignty. The Iranian spokesperson has argued that the threats articulated by Trump reflect a lack of understanding of Iran's historical resilience and strategic capabilities, while asserting that the country's domestic stability remains robust and resilient.

Furthermore, Iranian military representatives have expressed firm and confrontational positions, emphasizing that any form of aggression, particularly those targeting civilian infrastructure, would be met with even broader and more decisive retaliation. In this regard, threats from the United States are interpreted as manifestations of strategic desperation, reflecting limitations in maintaining influence within the Middle East. This exchange of rhetorical statements indicates that the conflict extends beyond military and economic dimensions, entering the realm of political communication. Speeches from both sides function as instruments for constructing narratives, projecting power, and influencing international public opinion, thereby intensifying the complexity of the conflict.

This phenomenon illustrates that political communication between the two parties is characterized by recurring patterns of threatening rhetoric. Such patterns are reflected in the use of strong, symbolic, and persuasive language to assert power positions while simultaneously producing psychological effects on opposing actors. These threats are not always intended as direct indications of imminent action; rather, they function strategically to project strength and send implicit signals to other nations that remain undecided in their alignment.

Within this context, rhetorical construction serves as a form of diplomatic instrument. The messages conveyed aim to influence opponents strategically without necessarily initiating immediate military action. Both the United States and Iran utilize public discourse as a medium to demonstrate military readiness, political firmness, and both domestic and international legitimacy. However, the persistent use of threatening rhetoric also increases the risk of escalation into direct conflict and prolonged confrontation. Ambiguous and confrontational language may lead to divergent interpretations, thereby heightening the possibility of misperception. Consequently, such rhetoric not only reflects efforts to defend national interests but also contributes to escalating tensions and hindering peace initiatives in the Middle East.

This phenomenon can be further examined through the transitivity framework proposed by M. A. K. Halliday within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach. In this framework, language is understood as a representation of experience through three main components: processes, participants, and circumstances. In the context of transitivity, the threats articulated by the United States and the responses from Iran are prominently reflected in the dominance of material processes, as evidenced by action verbs such as *attack*, *retaliate*, and *block*. These material

processes involve key participants, particularly state leaders, who act as primary agents capable of executing concrete actions toward specific targets. Thus, linguistic constructions not only represent actions but also function to construct images of power and readiness in the eyes of both adversaries and the international audience. Through Halliday's transitivity analysis, threatening rhetoric can therefore be understood not merely as a sequence of words, but as a systematic construction of meaning that represents actions, establishes power relations, and shapes audience perception. This underscores the role of language in political conflict as a strategic instrument that contributes to shaping social reality and international dynamics.

Based on this perspective, language is utilized across various contexts. In this study, language within the context of conflict functions as a means of constructing meanings related to power, threat, and legitimacy. Through language, actors involved in the conflict communicate strategies, reinforce political positions, and influence public perception at both domestic and international levels. Additionally, language serves as a tool of propaganda, mobilization of support, and affirmation of identity among nations aligned either in support or opposition. In this regard, Systemic Functional Linguistics, as developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how language operates within social and communicative contexts. SFL employs text as its primary analytical unit and offers robust tools for examining language use across diverse contexts.

Preliminary observations conducted by the researcher indicate that Iranian military spokespersons deliver speeches as official representations of the government's stance, policies, and responses to international issues, particularly in the context of conflict with the United States and its allies. Within the framework of political communication, the spokesperson acts as a mediator of information between the Iranian government and the global public, while simultaneously reinforcing the nation's political narrative in response to external threats. These speeches are analyzed using transitivity analysis, which, according to Lubisa et al. (2023), examines texts in terms of experiential representation and communicative effectiveness, focusing on participants, processes, and circumstances. Such analysis reveals how speakers construct and influence audiences within specific contexts.

Halliday (in Marbun & Vianus, 2002) further explains that language embodies three metafunctions: (1) ideational meaning, which represents experience through processes, participants, and circumstances; (2) interpersonal meaning, which manages social relations through expressions of attitude, demand, or exchange; and (3) textual meaning, which organizes information within discourse. Within the ideational metafunction, transitivity plays a central role in representing actions and processes. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) classify transitivity into several process types, including material, mental, relational, verbal, and behavioral processes, each contributing to the construction of meaning in discourse.

Unlike typical image construction shaped by media bias, this phenomenon demonstrates that Iranian spokespersons deliberately record and disseminate speeches globally through

television and social media, resulting in distinct communicative effects. As noted by Widdowson (2010), texts can be categorized into spoken and written forms, each differing in production and interpretation. Furthermore, Halliday and Hasan (1989) emphasize that understanding the context of situation, comprising field, tenor, and mode, is essential for interpreting meaning within a text.

Previous studies have examined transitivity in political discourse to reveal ideological meanings and linguistic representation strategies. For instance, Fadilah and Kuswoyo (2021) investigated transitivity patterns in the Trump–Biden presidential debate, emphasizing how linguistic processes shape political positioning in electoral discourse. Similarly, Alharbi (2021) employed Halliday's transitivity system to examine how discourse strategically transforms controversial issues and constructs ideological meanings. In the Iranian context, Beidollahkhani (2022) explored political discourse formation in Iran through digital platforms, particularly focusing on political dissent and communication practices. However, these studies mainly focused on electoral debates, controversial discourse, or digital political communication, while limited attention has been given to the linguistic construction of resistance narratives in official wartime speeches delivered by military spokespersons. Furthermore, previous studies on Iranian political discourse have not specifically examined how transitivity structures are employed in official military communication to construct national resistance narratives. Therefore, this study differs from previous research by specifically analyzing the transitivity dynamics in the discourse of Ebrahim Zolfaghari as an Iranian spokesperson in the context of international conflict. The novelty of this study lies in the application of Hallidayan transitivity analysis to uncover how linguistic processes construct, legitimize, and communicate Iran's resistance narrative in official wartime discourse.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study focuses on how transitivity dynamics in the discourse of Ebrahim Zolfaghari represent Iran's resistance narrative in the context of international conflict. Specifically, it examines: (1) the dominant types of transitivity processes employed, (2) how participants are constructed to reflect power relations and ideological positions, and (3) how circumstances contribute to meaning construction within clauses. By applying the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, this study also explores how linguistic choices function as strategic tools of political communication in constructing Iran's image of power and legitimacy before the global audience.

In transitivity analysis, examination is conducted at the clause level, which serves as the fundamental unit of ideational meaning. According to Gerot and Wignell (1994), clauses are categorized into minor and major clauses. Minor clauses lack a predicator, whereas major clauses contain one. In spoken discourse, minor clauses often function to reinforce or emphasize meanings expressed in major clauses. Major clauses may further be classified into independent and dependent clauses, where independent clauses stand alone as complete units of meaning, while dependent clauses rely on others to form a complete interpretation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The analysis in this study employs the referential method as proposed by Sudaryanto (1993). This method is used to identify words or phrases within the text in order to reveal the ideational meanings represented in the discourse. Through this approach, each linguistic element is analyzed by referring to its extralinguistic referent, allowing the meanings embedded in the text to be understood more deeply in accordance with their contextual usage.

In addition, this study also utilizes the distributional method, in which the primary focus of analysis lies within the linguistic system itself. This method enables the researcher to examine the relationships among linguistic elements without relying directly on external context, thereby allowing the structure of language to be analyzed in a more systematic and detailed manner. The combination of these two methods is expected not only to provide a comprehensive description of the data but also to reveal how the linguistic choices employed by the Iranian war spokesperson reflect his stance in responding to the statements of the President of the United States, Donald Trump.

The data collection technique in this study was conducted through the transcription of spoken texts in the form of speeches delivered by the Iranian spokesperson, Ebrahim Zolfaghari. These speeches, originally delivered in Persian and subsequently translated into Indonesian through television news coverage, were recorded and then transcribed into written form to facilitate linguistic analysis. The transcription process was carried out meticulously while preserving the integrity of meaning and the authenticity of linguistic features in the translated discourse, ensuring that the data obtained are both accurate and reliable. Sudaryanto (1993:31) further proposes a technique known as Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA). This technique involves dividing the data into constituent elements based on predetermined analytical criteria, allowing each clause to be decomposed in order to identify its structure and meaning in a more detailed and systematic manner.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the data collected, the speech discourse of the Iranian spokesperson, Ebrahim Zolfaghari, is classified into three main sections. This classification is intended to systematically demonstrate the organizational structure of the speech text and to illustrate the flow of message delivery from beginning to end. Accordingly, this division facilitates a clearer understanding of how each section performs distinct communicative functions while collectively contributing to the overall meaning of the speech. The first section generally serves to establish an initial rapport with the audience and to introduce the main topic to be addressed. The subsequent section, which constitutes the body of the speech, represents the core component containing statements of position, explanations, and responses to the issues under discussion, particularly those related to geopolitical conflict. The final section functions to reaffirm the central message and formally

conclude the speech. Thus, these three sections demonstrate that the structure of the speech is not merely formal in nature but also strategic in conveying political and ideological positions. The data analyzed in this study are presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Data of Research**

Part	Data of Research
First	The enemy has fired its final shot. They believed that by eliminating the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, they could wound the soul of this nation. Yet they fail to understand that the blood that has been shed will render this land more fertile, and from it, countless seeds of resistance will continue to grow. For them, assassination is not a sign of strength; it is an admission of weakness. They resort to killing because they no longer possess the means to confront the greatness of Iran under the leadership of our leader.
Content	The enemy arrives with terror and violence, believing they can strike at the will of a nation. Yet they are those who do not understand the history of Iran. They must realize that by targeting our leader, they cannot extinguish the aspirations of a nation shaped under his guidance. This nation has risen from the flames time and again, has embraced martyrdom repeatedly, and each time has stood even stronger. The enemy, cruel and ruthless, remains powerless, for they have come to recognize that no weapon can prevail against our resistance.
Closing	Today, we say to the enemy: you may have targeted one individual, but millions stand in resistance against you. Iran may be wounded, but it will never surrender. We will make the enemies of this nation, especially the criminal United States and the wicked Zionist regime, regret their actions through the strength of our resilience and the unwavering support of our noble people. We will continue along the path of our wise and steadfast leader until the very last drop of blood is shed and until the enemies are brought to submission.

The transitivity system within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework proposed by M. A. K. Halliday conceptualizes meaning representation through three core components: processes, participants, and circumstances. Transitivity analysis enables the identification of the types of experience constructed within discourse. In this study, the analytical procedure is presented in tabular form, outlining these three components in order to systematically examine the linguistic structures under investigation. The format of the analysis is illustrated as follows.

*Clause 1*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: Material</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Circumstances: extent (temporal)</b>
The enemy	fired	shot	its final

*Clause 2*

<b>Senser</b>	<b>Process: Mental</b>	<b>Circumstance: Manner</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>
They	think	that by eliminating the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution,	they can wound the soul of this nation

*Clause 3*

	<b>Senser</b>	<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>
But	they	do not understand	that the spilled blood will make this land more fertile and that more seeds of resistance will grow within it

*Clause 4*

<b>Circumstance: Role</b>	<b>Carrier</b>	<b>Process: Relational</b>	<b>Attributive</b>
For them,	killing	Is not	a sign of strength

*Clause 5*

<b>Carrier</b>	<b>Process: Relational</b>	<b>attributive</b>	<b>Circumstances: manner</b>
This	is an	admission	of weakness

*Clause 6*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>goal</b>	<b>Circumstances: manner</b>
They killings	carry out	killing	because they no longer have any way to fight Iran's greatness under the leadership of our leader.

*Clause 7*

<b>Senser</b>	<b>Circumstances: manner</b>	<b>Process: mental</b>	<b>Phenomenon</b>
The enemy,	comes with terror and violence	thinking	that they can attack the will of a nation

*Clause 8*

	<b>Senser</b>	<b>mental</b>	<b>phenomenon</b>
However,	those who are unaware of Iran's history	must understand	that by targeting our leader, the aspirations of a nation that has risen under his guidance cannot be attacked

*Clause 9*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process: material</b>	<b>goal</b>
The nation	has risen	from the flames many times and has been martyred many times.

*Clause 10*

<b>Circumstances: manner</b>	<b>behavior</b>	<b>behavioural</b>	<b>phenomenon</b>
Each time it rises more firmly	the evil and cruel enemy	becomes powerless	because they realize that no weapon is successful against our resistance.

*Clause 11*

<b>senser</b>	<b>mental</b>	<b>phenomenon</b>
They	realize	that no weapon is successful against our resistance.

*Clause 12*

<b>Circ: time</b>	<b>Sayer</b>	<b>verbal</b>	<b>verbiage</b>
today	We	say	To enemy

*Clause 13*

<b>actor</b>	<b>material</b>	<b>goal</b>	
you	target	one person	but

*Clause 14*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>material</b>	<b>goal</b>
Millions of people	stand against	you

*Clause 15*

<b>manner</b>	<b>actor</b>	<b>material</b>
Let it be known that Iran may be wounded	but Iran	will never surrender

*Clause 16*

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Cir: manner</b>	<b>material</b>	<b>goal</b>
We	with the strength of resilience and the support of the noble people	will make regret	the enemies of this nation, especially the criminal United States and the evil Zionist regime

*Clause 17*

<b>actor</b>	<b>material</b>	<b>goal</b>	<b>Cir: manner</b>
We	will continue	the path of that wise and strong leader	until the last drop of blood and the surrender of the enemies.

**Table 2: Research Findings**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Material	8
2	Mental	5
3	Verbal	1
4	Behavioural	1
5	Relational	2

**Table 3. Participants in Text**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Participant</b>
1	The Enemy
2	We
3	Iran
4	You
5	Million People
6.	They

Based on the transitivity analysis table, material processes emerge as the most dominant, with eight occurrences, significantly surpassing other process types. This indicates that the text primarily focuses on the representation of concrete actions, such as *shooting*, *killing*, *rising*, and *continuing the struggle*, which collectively reflect a narrative of resistance and physical action. In addition, mental processes appear quite prominently, with five occurrences, suggesting that the text also constructs the thoughts, perceptions, and awareness of participants, as reflected in expressions such as *thinking*, *not understanding*, and *realizing*. This reinforces the ideological dimension of the text, in which the "enemy" is consistently portrayed as misguided and incapable of comprehending Iran's strength.

Other process types appear in more limited numbers. Relational processes occur twice and are used to define or identify concepts, as in the clause "*killing is not a sign of strength*," which serves to assert the ideological stance of the text. A behavioral process appears once, depicting the condition of the participant, specifically the enemy described as "*powerless*." Meanwhile, a verbal process also occurs once, as in the clause "*we say to the enemy*," emphasizing the function of the speech as a direct and assertive statement addressed to the opposing side.

Based on the transitivity analysis conducted using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework proposed by M. A. K. Halliday, the speech text exhibits an uneven distribution of process types. Material processes dominate with eight occurrences, followed by mental processes with five, relational processes with two, and both behavioral and verbal processes with one occurrence each. This distribution reflects the text's strong character as a discourse of resistance and ideological mobilization.

The dominance of material processes indicates that the narrative is constructed around the depiction of concrete actions. Actions such as *shooting*, *killing*, *rising*, and *continuing the struggle* position participants as active agents (actors) engaged in purposeful movement. Notably, material actions are not attributed to a single party. The "enemy" is represented as the actor in destructive actions, such as targeting leaders and committing violence, while "we" and "Iran" are constructed as actors engaged in heroic and resolute actions. Thus, material processes function to reinforce the moral contrast between the two opposing sides presented in the text.

Mental processes, which appear five times, play a crucial role in ideologically delegitimizing the enemy. Through processes such as *thinking*, *not understanding*, and *realizing*, the text portrays the enemy as holding flawed beliefs and ultimately being compelled to recognize their own errors. The senser in these mental processes is predominantly "they" or "the enemy," consistently positioned as misinterpreting Iran's strength and resilience. This reinforces the propagandistic dimension of the text, suggesting that the enemy's defeat is not only physical but also ideological and psychological.

Relational processes, occurring twice, serve to explicitly assert ideological positions. Clauses such as "*killing is not a sign of strength*" and "*it is an admission of weakness*" utilize relational processes to redefine the meaning of the enemy's actions, transforming what appears

as strength into evidence of weakness. Meanwhile, the behavioral process (*"powerless"*) and the verbal process (*"we say to the enemy"*) each appear once to complement the textual construction: the former emphasizes the helpless condition of the enemy, while the latter reinforces the function of the speech as a direct and assertive declaration addressed to the opponent.

Overall, the transitivity analysis demonstrates that the text systematically and strategically constructs two opposing representations. On one hand, "we," "Iran," and "millions of people" are portrayed as strong, active, and dignified forces. On the other hand, "the enemy," "they," "you," including the United States and the Zionist regime, are constructed as weak, misguided, and powerless. This polarization is not incidental but results from deliberate linguistic choices through the distribution of processes, the selection of participants, and the use of circumstances. Therefore, the speech does not merely convey information; rather, it actively functions as an instrument of propaganda and ideological mobilization aimed at strengthening the spirit of resistance while simultaneously undermining the image of the enemy in the eyes of the audience.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study demonstrates that transitivity analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) effectively reveals how speech texts are linguistically constructed to produce a discourse of resistance and ideological mobilization. The dominance of material processes indicates that the text is oriented towards concrete actions, representing conflict dynamics in an active and dynamic manner while constructing participants as powerful and agentive actors. In contrast, the presence of mental processes strengthens the ideological dimension by portraying the opposing party as cognitively misguided and lacking a proper understanding of reality.

Although less frequent, relational processes play a crucial role in reinforcing ideological positioning through evaluative definitions and reinterpretations of actions, while behavioural and verbal processes complement the textual representation by illustrating behavioural conditions and communicative strategies employed in the discourse. Overall, the distribution of process types demonstrates that linguistic choices in the text are not neutral; rather, they are strategically deployed to construct a sharp polarization between "us" and "the enemy."

Accordingly, this study concludes that the speech functions not merely as a medium for conveying information, but also as a mechanism for constructing social and ideological realities. Through the systematic deployment of processes, participants, and circumstantial meanings, the text legitimizes the in-group while simultaneously delegitimizing the out-group. This confirms the role of language as an effective instrument of power in shaping perceptions, influencing public opinion, and mobilizing attitudes within political and resistance discourse. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to the discourse of a single Iranian spokesperson, namely Ebrahim Zolfaghari, which may not fully represent broader patterns of

resistance discourse within Iranian political communication. Second, the study focuses exclusively on transitivity analysis within the ideational meta function, without incorporating interpersonal or textual meta functions that may provide a more comprehensive understanding of meaning construction. Third, the analysis is based on a specific conflict context and a limited corpus of speech data, which may restrict the general of the findings to other political or geopolitical settings. Future research is therefore recommended to expand the scope of analysis by examining a wider range of political speeches, including comparative studies across different spokespersons, countries, or conflict settings. Further studies may also integrate other dimensions of Systemic Functional Linguistics, such as interpersonal and textual meta functions, critical discourse analysis, or multimodal approaches to provide deeper insights into how political and resistance narratives are linguistically and ideologically constructed in global communication contexts.

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