

Textual Analysis of Transitivity in UNHCR Reports on the Ukrainian Refugees

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الكلمات المفتاحية: عمليات متعدية الفعل، اللغويات الوظيفية النظامية، المفوضية السامية لشؤون اللاجئين، اللاجئين الاوكرانيون، الحرب الروسية الاوكرانية.

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الملخص

يهدف التحليل النصي لتقارير المفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين حول اللاجئين الأوكرانيين لمعرفة كيفية تمثيل هؤلاء اللاجئين في هذه التقارير. تبنت هذه الدراسة نهج هالدياي ومائيسن (٢٠٠٤، ٢٠١٤) في النحو الوظيفي النظامي، ولاسبما العبارة الفعلية كاداة تمثيل وظيفية. تفحصت الدراسة الأنواع الستة لعمليات صيغة التعدي: المادية والوجودية والعلائقية والسلوكية واللفظية والعقلية، للبحث في تكرارات هذه العمليات وكيفية توظيفها في خطابات المفوضية السامية لشؤون اللاجئين مع استمرار الحرب. تم جمع البيانات عبر الإنترنت من الموقع الرسمي للمفوضية حيث تم اختيار خمسة تقارير بشكل عشوائي لتغطية فترة الحرب منذ اندلاعها في ٢٤ فبراير ٢٠٢٢. واتبعت الدراسة إجراء نوعي كمي لإظهار الهدف من تكرار عملية معينة أكثر من غيرها وأظهرت النتائج أن العملية المادية كانت الأكثر استخداماً من بين العمليات الأخرى، مما يدل على دور المفوضية في اتخاذ إجراءات لمساعدة اللاجئين ودورها في سرد الظروف الحقيقية للاجئين. غير أن جميع العمليات الست استخدمت في تقارير المفوضية بتكرارات مختلفة، وكشفت النتائج أن استخدام متعديات الفعل الست كان مفيداً جداً في نقل المعنى المقصود.

Abstract

The textual analysis of UNHCR reports on the Ukrainian refugees was conducted here to find out how those refugees have been represented in such reports. This study adopted Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, 2014) systemic functional grammar approach, in particular, the clause as a representation. The study looked into the six types of transitivity processes: material, existential, relational, behavioral, verbal, and mental, to investigate their frequencies in these reports and how they function as the war continues. The data were collected from the UNHCR's online official website. Five reports were selected randomly to cover the period of the war from its breakthrough on 24th. February 2022 to September 21, 2022. A quantifying qualitative procedure was followed to show the aim behind repeating a certain process more than others. The findings showed that the material process was the most frequently used among others, signifying the UNHCR's role in taking action towards aiding refugees and their occupation in narrating refugees' real conditions. However, the six processes were all used in the UNHCR reports with different frequencies, and the findings have revealed that the use of the six transitivity processes served well in conveying the intended meaning.

1. Introduction

Language, in its two major forms, written and spoken, is considered to be the most dominant means of communication. Language is what people rely more on to communicate their intended meaning; it is employed differently to achieve its user's communicative function. In this regard, Discourse analysis is an approach for dealing with language's choices and the way they contribute to the construction of meaning, in addition to understanding language's organization and functions (Bazerman, 2003).

Accordingly, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is considered a contemporary method for understanding a text's meaning through its structure. The functions of each component in relation to the clause structure are the main focus of SFG, in contrast to traditional grammar, which helps in the description of each component in the clause structure (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). According to Halliday and Metthiessen (2004, 2014), understanding grammar can aid in the analysis and interpretation of texts. They describe language as an *architecture* and provide an explanation of how grammatical pieces interpret semantic relationships. They claimed that a sentence has a variety of functional configurations, such as language as a message, a clause as an exchange, and a clause as a representation.

Several studies have examined refugee discourse employing the transitivity system. As an example, Ali (2018) conducted a study using Halliday's SFG (2004, 2014) to analyze media reports on Syrian refugees, identifying the transitivity patterns in the texts. The aim of the study was to explore how media constructs the representation of Syrian refugees and the role that language plays in shaping public opinion. The study analyzed a corpus of 30 media reports from four different English-language newspapers published in the United Kingdom during the period between 2015–2017. Cheng and Li (2020) conducted a study

aimed at critically analyzing media representations of Syrian refugees using a systemic functional linguistics approach. Specifically, the study sought to explore how media constructed discourses around Syrian refugees and the underlying ideologies that were present in these discourses. The researchers collected data from two British newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*, from January 2015 to December 2018. They selected 80 news articles that were related to Syrian refugees and conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) using SFL.

In a related issue, Alshammari (2021) conducted a study aimed at analyzing the representation of the Syrian refugee crisis in Germany in media discourse using Halliday's SFG (2004,2014) approach. The study focused on how media reported and portrayed the Syrian refugees in Germany, specifically in terms of their identity, social status, and cultural background. The study collected data from online news articles and reports published by three German newspapers over a period of four years, from 2015 to 2018. The data were analyzed using Halliday's transitivity system (2004,2014), which involves identifying the types of processes, participants, and circumstances in a text

Existing research has called for further research into the way writers employed transitivity processes to achieve intended meaning. Unlike the aforementioned studies, the current study seeks to examine the media reports about Ukrainian refugees, which is considered a significant issue that preoccupies the media in all its means. Besides, it is not only after investigating how UNHCR represents Ukrainian refugees; rather, it tries to examine how processes employed to reflect refugees' conditions after fleeing war. SFG theory is used to analyze the data, more specifically the transitivity system, as part of the ideational meaning, assuming that it is a plausible tool for investigating

the language of UNHCR reports, since it describes the refugees' situation, what they do, how they feel, how they behave, what they say, and where they exist. Thus, the six processes: material, behavioral, relational, mental, verbal, and existential are investigated in those reports, examining their functions and frequencies to demonstrate how UNHCR reports make use of various kinds of processes. To this end, the current study attempts to answer the following question: To what extent are transitivity processes used in the UNHCR reports on Ukrainian refugees, and how do they contribute to the representation of those refugees and portraying their condition?

2. Theoretical Framework and the Model of Analysis

SFG is a prominent theory that provides tools for analyzing texts dealing with grammar as a system of choice used to communicate different meanings and ideologies. SFG does not provide a rule of correction as traditional grammar does; rather, it helps in the task of interpreting texts in terms of what and how they are so. Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (1997) stated that SFG is significantly more semantically rich than formal and traditional grammar. As a result, the analysis is more insightful in terms of text interpretation. Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (1997) added that SFG, more than any other grammar, offers the most accurate assessment of a person's communication skills in terms of semantics, discourse, and subjectivity. It is focused on language's use, meaning, and textual organization. It did its investigation by looking at how social and cultural contexts underpin the choice of a specific lexico-grammar.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) proposed the SFG illustrating the way meaning is construed via language and other semiotic systems, which they described as "a network of interrelated contrasts" (p. 47). According to systemic theory, text is a type of language employed in a certain situation. According to this view, language is a tool for making meaning, and text is a strategy for making meaning in a specific setting; thus, this theory is based more on functional than formal considerations (Halliday, 1994).

• Meta-functions

According to Halliday (1994), language has three metafunctions, namely: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Those metafunctions are what relate the text with the outside world, reflected in a massive system of meaning potentials. According to Halliday (1994), language is used for two main functions: It serves as an instrument for both

reflection and action, and this is what the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions are for. The textual function serves to combine those two components presenting them to the world; thus, textual metafunction concern the constructions of texts. In other words, our experience of the outside world in our surroundings is explained by the ideational function of the text, which expresses the experiential and logical content. On the other hand, interpersonal function deals with the social and power connections among language users. It links participants' situational roles to the discourse produced.

As for the textual function, it organizes and structures the linguistic information in the clause in order to produce cohesive and coherent texts (Halliday, 1981). Language users are able to produce utterances and writings that transmit their intended meanings thanks to the generalized meta-functions of the language that connect it to the outside world, where people perform social roles. (Haratyan, 2011). Instead of the limited sense of function, which generally refers to how we use language or its intended application, the term meta-function is proposed to convey the meaning of language's functionality as an essential and fundamental component in the theory (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

- **Ideational Metafunction**

The ideational component of language has the function of representing reality. The ideational function of the sentence is also known as the experiencing function of the clause. According to Halliday and Mathiessen (2014: 106) "It's a technique of describing patterns of experience". As for Downing and Locke (2006), the ideational meta-function enables us to encode a semantic and syntactic mental representation of the real world as well as the imaginative world. The experiential element is realized through transitivity. It

describes the way meanings are conveyed in language and how different types of processes are represented in clauses (Simpson, 2004).

- **Transitivity processes**

Transitivity generally refers to the way that a clause's content is represented and encoded. The perception of experience is that it consists of a flow of things happening (happening, doing, sensing, saying, being, or having). In addition to individuals who are actively participating in this process in some way, all figures including circumstances that can be related to time, place, cause, method, or one of a few other sorts are involved. These conditions are more of an accompaniment to the process than a direct part of it. The syntax of the clause organizes all of these figures. As a result, the clause serves as both a means of action, giving and demanding products, services, and information, and a means of contemplation, putting order on the unending variety and flow of occurrences. This is accomplished using the grammatical construction of the system of *transitivity* (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004). Halliday (1994: 107) states that "transitivity translates the world of experience into a manageable set of processes".

According to Halliday (1985), transitivity defines the various processes that are organized in the language and the structure through which they are expressed. According to him, a process has three parts: the actual process, the participants, and the context in which the process is taking place (circumstances). In the nominal group, *participants* are actualized. The transitivity system serves as an orientation for processes. *Processes* are strongly connected to verbs. Adverbial groupings and prepositional phrases are used to communicate *circumstantial meaning* (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004).

Process, which relates to the semantic verbs doing, happening, feeling, perceiving, saying, behaving, and being, is a key part of the

transitivity system. It also refers to objects that express events, relations, physical, mental, or emotional states that are categorized in the semantic structure of the clause. According to Halliday and Mathiessen (2014), it can be divided into material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. The types of the transitivity processes will be explained below according to Halliday and Mathiessen (2014):

A. Material process: the act of doing something, especially something physical or concrete. In this process, the actor and the goal are the two participants involved. It's about what's going on in the outer world, about the experiences we come through as actors in action. Material processes are about the external world, hence the outer world.

B. Mental process: It is a sensory process with the sensor and the phenomena as its two participants. It's not about what's happening in the outer world; it's about what we feel and what's there inside ourselves as imagination, feelings, and perception. The 'inner' experience is more difficult to categorize; nonetheless, it is partially a replay of the outer world, recording, responding to, and commenting on it, and partly a separate knowledge of our states of being. Mental processes are about the processes of consciousness, our inner world.

C. Relational process: This process means to relate one part of experience to another, as this is a sort of other. The language recognizes a third form of process, that of identifying and categorizing; these are called relational process clauses. It consists of identifying and attributive procedures. Attributives consist of Carrier and attribute, while identification consists of Token and Value as their participants.

D. Behavioral process: It is not as clearly distinguished but nevertheless recognizable in the language as intermediate between the distinct pairings, sharing some characteristics of each and therefore establishing an identity of its own. Behavioral processes exist on the

borderline between material and mental, representing the outside manifestations of inner workings, the acting out of processes of awareness, and physiological states. Behavior is an essential participant in this process.

E. Verbal process: The concept of verbal processes exists on the boundary between *mental* and *relational* processes: symbolic relationships established in human awareness and carried out in the form of language, such as saying and meaning. They have three participants: Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage.

F. Existential processes: It lies between the *relational* and the *material* processes. the processes associated with existence, the existential, through which events of all types are simply acknowledged to 'be' to exist, or to occur. It should contain an Existent. The following figure shows the transitivity processes proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014):

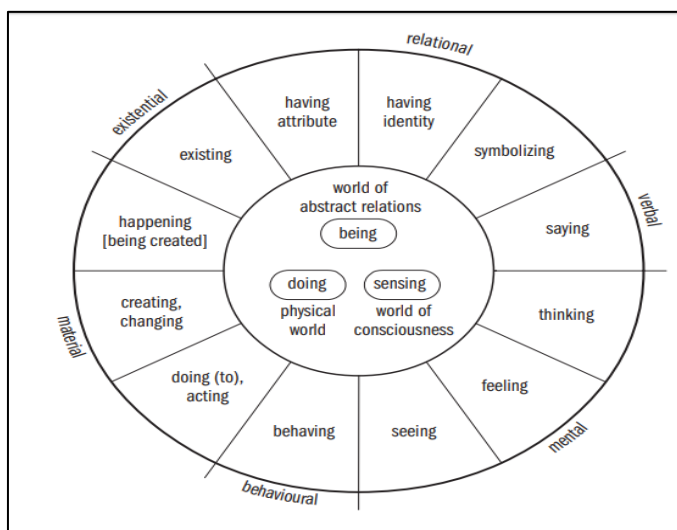


Figure (1)

Types of transitivity processes based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: p. 216)

3. Methodology

The qualitative study followed a textual analysis to the UNHCR reports based on Halliday and Mathiessen's (2004, 2014) transitivity processes. The data were five reports collected randomly from the official UNHCR websites (Appendix) covering the period between 24th February, 2022, the war broke out, and 21th September, 2022. The study employed a quantifying qualitative procedure to find out manually the frequencies, and percentages of each process type using Excel program. The qualitative analysis is conducted to provide an in-depth analysis to unravel the process function and meaning, which contribute to the representation of Ukrainian refugees.

4. Findings

By breaking down texts into clauses, the analysis of texts begins by classifying transitivity process types: material, mental, behavioral, relational, verbal, and existential. Depending on how frequently they appear in the reports, the processes in these clauses are calculated to indicate their intended meaning. The results are displayed in the table and figures below. In these texts, 345 processes are recorded. With 209 occurrences, the material process has the highest frequency of all the others, at 60.58%. Mental processes occurred 47 times, for a rating of 13.62%. In respect to the number of occurrences for the relational process, it occurred 35 times, and it rated 10.14%. As for the behavioral process, it occurred 24 times, for a rate of 6.96%. The verbal process occurred 27 times, for a rate of 7.83%. The last type, existential processes, gets the lowest frequency as compared with other types, accounting for 0.87% with 3 times of occurrence. The below table shows the individual and total frequencies of processes in all texts where Frq. =frequency and T= text

(Table): Frequencies of each process type in each text

<i>Process Type</i>	<i>Frq. of T1</i>	<i>Frq. of T2</i>	<i>Frq. of T3</i>	<i>Frq. of T4</i>	<i>Frq. of T5</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Material</i>	27	76	46	33	27	209
<i>mental</i>	3	6	18	9	11	47
<i>Relational</i>	4	11	7	3	10	35
<i>behavioral</i>	0	3	2	9	10	24
<i>verbal</i>	2	2	9	7	7	27
<i>existential</i>	0	0	1	1	1	3
<i>Total</i>	36	98	83	62	66	345

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the overall and individual percentages of transitivity processes in the five reports respectively.

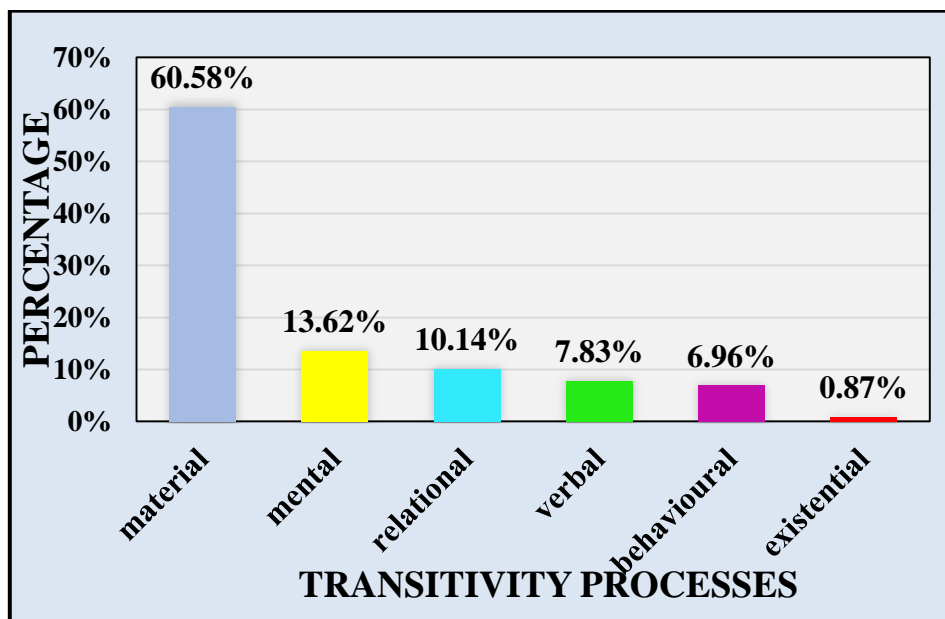


Figure (2)

Overall Percentages of Processes Types in The Five Reports

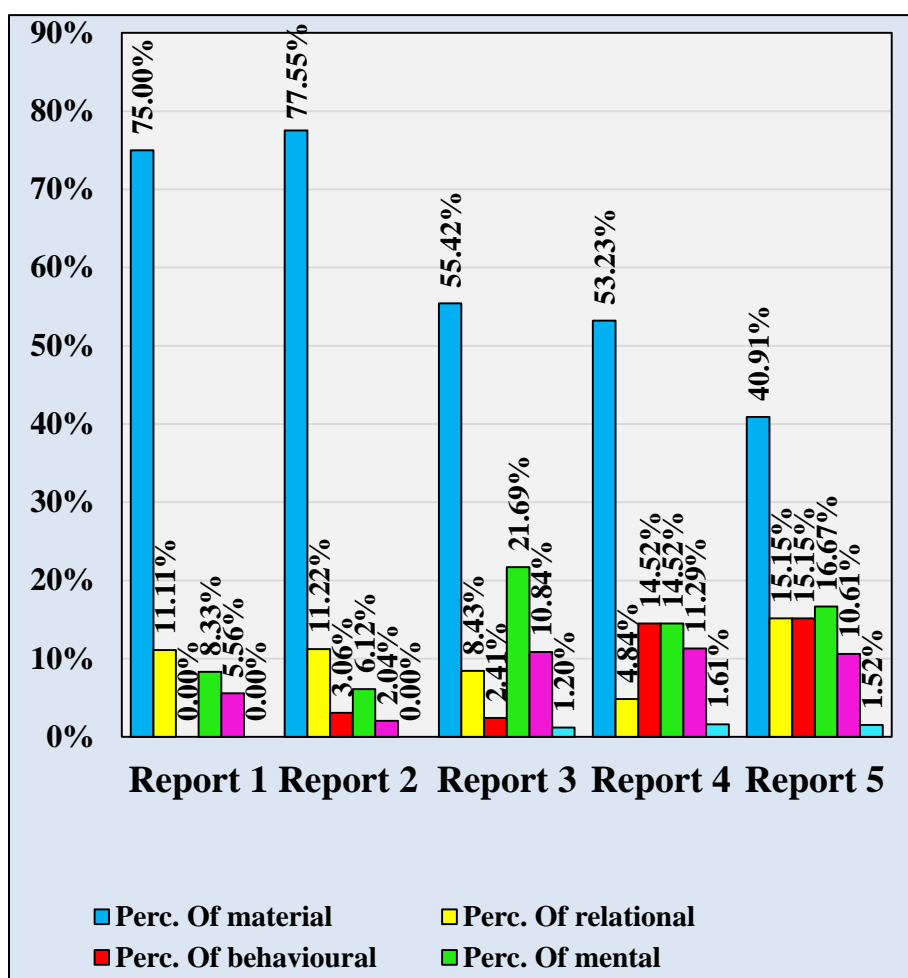


Figure (3)

Percentages of Transitivity Processes in Each Text

The findings showed that material processes between the happening and doing functions are mostly used, which can signify the active state of UNHCR reports in representing the real condition of refugees (happening) and the UNHCR's real intention for providing help and support for those fleeing the war (doing). As a result, material processes are used to showcase the efforts of humanitarian

organizations, governments, and local communities in providing tangible support and assistance to refugees by highlighting material actions such as providing shelter, distributing aid, or organizing transportation. The excessive use of material processes also suggests the nature of such reports concerning refugees and their preoccupation with portraying refugees' experiences; thus, such reports have an action-oriented focus. Additionally, reports about refugees often serve as sources of news and information, reporting on the circumstances, movements, and conditions of refugees. Material processes allow writers to present concrete details, events, and actions in a factual and objective manner. Furthermore, material processes help describe the physical realities of the refugee experience, such as fleeing conflict, crossing borders, seeking shelter, accessing humanitarian aid, and engaging in survival activities. These processes provide vivid and concrete descriptions that help readers visualize the challenges faced by refugees. To add further material processes, emphasize the actions and intentions of the UNHCR organization in shaping the narrative or outcome. For instance, the clause "UNHCR established..." is repeated many times, emphasizing the active role of UNHCR and their contribution in providing aid for refugees.

In Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) SFG, the terms *actor*, *goal*, and *carrier* refer to different types of participants involved in a material clause. An actor-participant is the one who performs the main action or process described in the clause. They are typically the central agent or doer of the action. A goal participant represents the entity or recipient that the action is directed towards. It is the target or endpoint of the action. A carrier participant refers to the entity or object that carries or undergoes the action but is not directly affected or changed by it.

In the analyzed text, the actor participant used more than the goal and carrier participants. This suggests a focus on the agentive aspect of the action. The reports emphasize the individuals or entities that are actively involved in performing actions or processes. By prioritizing the actor role, the report highlights the agency and responsibility of the participants in driving the events or behaviors described. It personalizes those refugees by giving them the actor role, giving them the role to narrate their stories; this makes the reader more empathetic with them. By focusing on the actors and their experiences, the articles create compelling narratives that engage the readers and provide a deeper understanding of the refugee situation.

Mental processes have considerable importance in those reports being analyzed; they have been utilized many times to describe what those refugees feel and experience during their better experience in the war and their obsession with thinking about their uncertain future. Verbal processes are also utilized to quote the exact saying of the involved participants; for instance, *"I really love plants and flowers," she says, eyes glancing skyward. "I have lots of tulips. I also have a lot of lilies, as tall as a person." "That was my life until the war started."* These sentences and many others said in text 5 by the old widow woman describing her lifelong full of flowers home with grief refer to her normal life before war started. These quotes give more concrete evidence about the case being reported. Most narration in the reports includes indirect speech quoted from the refugees themselves, portraying their experience. This is done intentionally to attract people's attention and make the reader sympathize with them.

Relational processes are employed with a humble percentage mostly to describe the state of being and having of refugees being described for instance to concentrate on describing refugees as being displaced, many adjectives are used to describe their condition as well

as describing UNHCR organization as being supportive. Behavioral processes were also utilized via verbs such as (*close, sleep, sit, surprise, watch, talk, wait, speak,*) etc. when describing refugees' actions, signifying the personalized way in which they are portrayed. Existential processes weren't frequently founded, suggesting the refugees' condition as being displaced.

5. Discussion

The study's question has been answered by adopting the transitivity system as part of the ideational meaning of SFG theory. The findings showed the power of those reports' structures in conveying their intended meaning. The condition of refugees and what happened to them while fleeing the war are perfectly represented via the six transitivity processes. Employing the six processes has made the language used very appealing and convincing. Utilizing the processes at different frequencies suggests the writer's manipulation capability in convincing his readers of what he wants to convey. For instance, material processes were the most commonly utilized among the others, which highlights the UNHCR's contribution towards taking action to aid refugees and their special interest in presenting the refugees' state to the world. The common thread among the analyzed reports is their focus on the refugee crisis and displacement caused by the conflict in Ukraine. Each report sheds light on different aspects of the situation and highlights the efforts of UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and other organizations in responding to the needs of Ukrainian refugees and displaced individuals.

The titles of the reports being analyzed are so appealing and attract the readers' attention. For instance, the titling of the second text, "UNHCR mobilizing to aid forcibly displaced in Ukraine and neighboring countries," focuses on UNHCR's mobilization efforts to provide aid and support to forcibly displaced individuals in Ukraine and neighboring countries. It likely discusses the organization's response to the crisis, including the provision of essential services and protection. Another title, "Aspiring Ukrainian architect is building her future in a Polish school," tells the story of an aspiring Ukrainian architect who has found an opportunity to build her future by attending a Polish school. It highlights the resilience and determination of

individuals affected by the conflict to pursue their dreams and rebuild their lives. "War uproots Ukrainian widow from lifelong home in Mykolaiv": This title tells the story of a Ukrainian widow whose life is upended by the war, forcing her to leave her lifelong home in Mykolaiv. It highlights the personal impact of the conflict on individuals and their displacement.

As for the study's relation to previous studies, it is different in its findings. For instance, Ali's (2018) study revealed that the media reports predominantly used a negative representation of Syrian refugees, depicting them as passive, helpless, and dependent on aid. The study found that the language used in the reports was often dehumanizing and objectifying, which reinforced negative stereotypes about refugees. Moreover, the study also identified that the media reports rarely provided any context or background information about the Syrian crisis or the refugee situation, which further contributed to a narrow and biased portrayal of the refugees. On the contrary, Ukrainian refugees in the UNHCR reports were represented in a positive, individualized, and personalized way to gain world support. And a focus is placed on reflecting their real conditions via those processes.

With respect to Cheng and Li's (2020) study, who collected data from two British newspapers and showed that the two newspapers used different discourses to represent Syrian refugees. The Guardian adopted a humanitarian discourse, emphasising the plight and suffering of Syrian refugees and their need for help and protection. The Daily Mail, on the other hand, used a negative discourse that framed Syrian refugees as a threat to the host society, highlighting their potential for terrorism, crime, and cultural differences. The current study's findings are in line with the findings of the Guardian newspaper investigation, which employed a humanitarian discourse highlighting the refugees'

sufferings and need for help. While it opposed the findings of the investigation of the second newspaper, the Daily Mail, which provided a negative discourse, the current study findings showed the other way around: they represented refugees in a positive and empathetic way.

Finally, Alshammari's (2021) study showed that the media represented the Syrian refugees in Germany as victims of war and displacement but also as a burden on the German economy and social system. The study found that the media often used negative adjectives to describe the refugees, such as *illegal*, *unskilled*, and *uneducated*, which contributed to their negative representation. Overall, the study concluded that the media discourse on the Syrian refugee crisis in Germany reflected a negative bias towards the refugees, which perpetuated negative stereotypes and contributed to their marginalization and stigmatization in German society. The opposite is proved in the current study, where Ukrainian refugees are represented as part of Europe and are welcomed anywhere. Refugees' feelings were voiced and presented in quite attractive narrative language.

6. Conclusion

Following a textual analysis based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, 2014) SFG, the study focused on investigating the representation of Ukrainian refugees in the UNHCR reports by examining Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004, 2014) transitivity processes and their frequencies employed. The findings show the power of the language of UNHCR reports in providing considerable representation to the Ukrainian refugees utilizing the six transitivity processes. The transitivity processes demonstrate the effectiveness of the UNHCR reports' structural elements in expressing their intended message providing a clear understanding to the refugees' situation. The six transitivity processes properly capture the situation of refugees and what occurred to them as they fled the violence.

Utilizing the transitivity processes at different frequencies suggests various interpretations. Material processes are the most frequently used among other processes suggesting UNHCR's real intention towards taking action in providing help for those fleeing the war and their preoccupation with presenting the way people act after being refugees to seek shelter and help. Unlike previous studies, which showed negative tendencies towards portraying refugees, the findings of this study show how positively the Ukrainian refugees have been depicted in a way that can gain the world's sympathy and support. In this sense, the study portrays Ukrainian refugees as part of Europe that are welcomed anywhere as victims of war who need the world's support.

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Appendix

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