

A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT AQUINO'S INTERNATIONAL NEWS INTERVIEW ON THE TYPHOON YOLANDA DISASTER

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Abstract

The late former Philippine president Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III has been known for his diplomatic, cordial demeanor and deliberate explanation of issues whenever he would speak either in front of audiences as guest speaker or on television and/or radio as an interviewee. He is also remembered for his straightforward and deliberate yet polite replies as well as his wry humor, which he would deliver in Filipino especially when interacting with audiences who are composed of either civil servants or the general public. The study explored the various transitivity processes in the context of his worldwide interview with renowned British-Iranian broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour, which focused on the effects of Typhoon Yolanda and the government's disaster response. The interview was part of Ms. Amanpour's program on the international edition of Cable News Network (CNN). Ramos utilized as his theoretical framework the Transitivity Analysis Theory by Halliday (in Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014). The overall results of the research revealed that material and relational processes were the most prevalent of all transitivity processes. In terms of personality and ideology, it was revealed that President Aquino reflected inclusivity and forthrightness as two of his dominant characteristics. The current study recommends that political interviews in the vernacular be utilized for further research on transitivity analysis and that a series of broadcasted interviews by the same president or other contemporary presidents serve as data to determine patterns in terms of transitivity processes as well as indicators of personality and political ideologies.

Keywords: *discourse analysis, media discourse, political discourse, systemic functional linguistics, transitivity analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

Every head of state and/or government, such as a monarch, a president, or a prime minister, is expected to not only develop expert facility in governance but also diplomacy in terms of interacting with the general public, whether local or foreign. One of the responsibilities of a head of state and/or government is to exercise honesty and accountability in overseeing the affairs of the state; another is to represent his/her country with dignity and tact when interacting with foreign counterparts, diplomats, other authority figures, and even the general population of a host country. Another responsibility of a head of state and/or government is to exercise transparency and temperance in addressing the general public, especially concerning issues of national and international scope and interest, such as disasters. Moreover, s/he is also expected to be well-versed, strategic, and deliberate not only in politics and governance but also in conflict management, disaster reduction, finance, economy, public health, national security, and even international law. One internationally respected Filipino head of state and/or government is Benigno Simeon "Noy" Aquino III. He initially became a representative of his congressional district in Tarlac province, which is located in Central Luzon, and was then elected senator. Known for his eloquence in English and Filipino, his mild-mannered demeanor, cordiality with local and international media practitioners, serious and amiable manner of speech, and wry sense of humor both in English and Filipino, President Aquino was renowned during his six-year presidential term for implementing reformist economic policies, establishing cordial diplomatic relations with various nations, and instituting other reforms in education, public health, law enforcement, governance, and other sectors.

The current study is anchored on Halliday's Transitivity Analysis (in **Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014**), in which various processes related to performatives, perception, existence, sentience, attitudes, and associations are explored through individual clauses, particularly in spoken and written discourses such as media interviews, public speeches, and other similar types of literature; language users' concept formation, emotional states, and behaviors are also examined, as asseverated by **Tsirogianni and Sammut (2014)**. Previous research investigations on politician-generated discourse have been reported. In the Western context, **Al-Saffar and Abbas (2015)** investigated American presidential candidates' utilization of words related to relaying commitments to their constituents; one of the significant results was that the candidates who were the subjects of the study were discreet in terms of relaying their commitments and that their expression of commitment was more of one that they deemed realistic and achievable according to their skills and experience. **Hidayat, Nababan, and Djatmika (2019)** conducted a comparative transitivity analysis of presidential speeches by former American presidents Barack Hussein Obama and Donald Trump as translated to Bahasa Indonesia; one of the major findings was that various types of translation techniques were instrumental in determining changes in transitivity processes, especially in terms of syntax and word category. **Linares and Xin (2020)** examined the various processes found in the acceptance speech of a former president of the South American nation of Colombia, and it was revealed through the results that the material transitivity process category was the most prevalent in terms of occurrence, mainly due to the subject's recounting of his achievements as a president in sustaining order and security in his country. **Herrero (2020)** analyzed former United Kingdom prime minister Theresa May's Brexit addresses, and the results showed numerous clauses related to material processes, owing to Prime Minister May's desire to connect with the audience as well as to display solidarity with her fellow United Kingdom citizens. As for the Asian context, particularly in Indonesia, **Guswita and Suhardi (2019)** studied the prevalent transitivity processes present in election speeches of two prominent presidential candidates, and the results demonstrated that material processes were most prevalent, mainly

due to the candidates' intended programs should they be declared the winning presidential candidate based on votes. Another investigation by **Megah (2019)** explored the transitivity processes in President Joko Widodo's public speech, and the results depicted the presence of material processes as the most prevalent type of transitivity process, mainly due to President Widodo's sharing of his platforms and programs for the benefit of the Indonesian citizenry. In the Philippine setting, **Manzano and Orquijo (2020)** explored the processes in presidential speeches, and the results obtained reflected that material processes were the most prevalent, mainly due to the presidents' desire to introduce reform through their proposed programs, followed by relational processes, which depicted the speakers' desire to establish rapport with the general public. **Salvaleon (2019)** focused on President Rodrigo Duterte's annual national speeches in his transitivity analysis investigation, and the results revealed that the material process was the most dominant, mainly due to President Duterte's revelation of his present and future programs for Filipino citizens, followed by verbal and relational processes. The research gap of the current study is the lack of studies on transitivity analysis of Philippine presidential interviews conducted by international media organizations, especially in the context of discussing national disasters that are also of international awareness and concern.

Objectives

The general objective of the current study is to analyze an interview with a former Philippine president using Halliday's (in Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014) Transitivity Analysis. One of the specific objectives of the current research is to determine the prevalent types of transitivity processes in President Aquino's CNN interview with British-Iranian broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour on the Typhoon Haiyan disaster that affected Tacloban City, Leyte and the Aquino government's disaster responses. Another specific objective is to determine the personality of President Aquino and his ideologies as a political leader.

The following research questions are based on the specific objectives of the current study:

1. What are the prevalent transitivity processes found throughout President Aquino's responses to questions by Ms. Christiane Amanpour during the interview on Typhoon Haiyan?
2. How do the clauses reveal the following aspects of President Aquino, as manifested throughout the interview with Ms. Amanpour:
 - a. Personality
 - b. Ideology as a political leader

METHODS

Data description

The utilized data for the purpose of the current study is the Cable News Network (CNN) interview of multi-awarded British veteran broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour with former Philippine president Benigno Simeon C. Aquino. The televised interview occurred on November 12, 2013 and the topic of the interview was on the effects of international super typhoon Haiyan (local nomenclature: Yolanda) on Tacloban City, the capital and one of the major cities of Leyte province. The total length of the video footage is 12 minutes and 48 seconds.

Method of analysis

The study utilized the mixed-method analysis. For the qualitative part of the analysis, the researchers used document analysis since the data set was transcribed and obtained directly from **Amanpour (2013)**. Focusing on the quantitative part of the analysis, the researchers utilized simple percentages by counting the number of transitivity

process categories occurring throughout the interview. The transitivity process categories were devised by the researchers not only for classification but also for the purpose of counting the number of occurrences per category.

Procedures undertaken

In analyzing the data, the researchers obtained only the online, transcribed speech of President Aquino, since he is the subject of the interview as well as of the study. As part of identification of the transitivity processes, every clause was classified and then labeled using one of the researcher's codes, the letters of which were taken from the words themselves. The transitivity process types were labeled by the researchers using three letters, based on the transitivity processes identified by **Halliday and Matthiesen (2014)**: a) Material (MTR); b) Relational (RLT); c) Mental (MNT); d) Existential (EXS); e) Behavioral (BHV); and f) Verbal (VRB). In order that the transitivity processes were to be verified, the researchers analyzed the sentences more than twice in order to assign the applicable transitivity process for every clause. A total of 84 clauses, which were counted manually by the researchers, were yielded upon final counting and were based on President Aquino's responses to Amanpour (2013) as transcribed. The number of occurrences for every transitivity process category was obtained, along with its corresponding percentage, in order to determine how often every transitivity process type occurred. As for the reflection of the clauses on then-President Aquino's personality and political ideology, the researchers selected the clauses with the words that best reflected the subject and described these in detail in terms of the relation of the words to the president's personality and political ideology.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. What are the prevalent transitivity processes found throughout President Aquino's responses to questions by Ms. Christiane Amanpour during the interview on Typhoon Haiyan?

Table 1

Transitivity Process Types and their frequencies of occurrence

Transitivity process type and researcher-provided code	n	%
1. Material (MTR)	37	44.05%
2. Relational (RLT)	20	23.81%
3. Mental (MNT)	15	17.86%
4. Existential (EXS)	7	8.33%
5. Behavioral (BHV)	4	4.76%
6. Verbal (VRB)	1	1.19%
Total	84	100.00%

Table 1 depicts the number of occurrences across all clauses according to transitivity process. Based on the results above, material, relational, and mental transitivity processes, in descending order, were revealed to have been the most frequently occurring types of processes. One of the possible reasons behind the yielded results could be that the focus of the interview was on the palpable effects of Typhoon Haiyan on Tacloban City, which President Aquino explained based on reports by government agencies responsible for managing the disaster that devastated Tacloban City. A second possible reason could be that President Aquino also focused on the efforts of his government in addressing issues related to disaster management through concrete actions benefitting the residents and other occupants of Eastern Visayas city. A final, plausible reason behind the general results could be that as the then-incumbent chief executive of the Philippines, President Aquino also intended to share his sentiments on the occurrences related to disaster relief efforts as well as his assumptions on various issues related to Typhoon Haiyan.

Focusing on the prevalence of material processes, the results in this research are congruent with those by **Guswita and Suhardi (2019)**, **Megah (2019)**, **Salvaleon (2019)**, **Linares and Xin (2020)**, and **Manzano and Orquijo (2020)**, especially in terms of President Aquino's reporting of developments related to disaster response in the context of Typhoon Haiyan. Megah's research on then-President Joko Widodo's presidential speech presenting his governmental platforms and Salvaleon's transitivity analysis on then-president Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses are similar to that of the current study in terms of the dominant transitivity process type, since in the current study, President Aquino stated his then-current response to the Typhoon Yolanda disaster. Also similar in terms of the dominant type of transitivity process was the study by **Herrero (2019)** on then-United Kingdom Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit-oriented speeches, which also illustrated May's desire to seek support from her compatriots despite reporting on a crucial national issue. The results of the current study are in contrast, however, to the results of the study by **Hidayat, Nababan, and Djatmika (2019)**, for the dominant transitivity processes were mental and attributive, which could be attributed to President Obama's and President Trump's emphases on remembering history and recalling efforts of American patriots, which were present in their inaugural speeches, and since both presidents had little to almost nil mention of their concrete actions in office.

One of the material processes found in the sample clauses focused on the then-president's responses to Amanpour's (2013) question on how infrastructure and access to food in Tacloban City were being restored to functional normalcy:

We're **already working** on the secondary roads.

(CLBA-22, par. 31)

We are -- **we are tasked** to provide something like 50,000 family food packs every two days.

(CLBA-25, par. 32)

Other examples of material processes focused on the Philippine government's assumption of responsibility in alleviating the deleterious effects of Typhoon Haiyan on Tacloban residents as well as those from adjacent municipalities, such as scarcity of food and water, deaths among Tacloban residents, the inability of the local government unit of Tacloban City to respond to urgent concerns of residents, and other similar issues related to Typhoon Haiyan:

... and that's why we **are trying to fast-track** the situation...

(CLBA-46, par. 46)

...where national government **takes over these local government functions**...

(CLBA-47, par. 46)

...so that order **is restored**...

(CLBA-48, par. 46)

...and people are -- **gain the confidence** *that their needs are being addressed and will be addressed fully.*

(CLBA-49, par. 46)

In terms of relational processes, one of the functions is to determine the classification of a specific type of event under a more general type, as in the case of climate change being discussed by President Aquino as a ubiquitous weather-related occurrence among Filipinos in relation to the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan disaster, as depicted by two examples (**Amanpour, 2013**):

Well, I think it's already an accepted reality *for the Filipino community*...

(CLBA-50, par. 51)

...that global climate change **is a reality**...

(CLBA-51, par. 51)

Another function of relational processes is to describe attribution (**Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014**), as in the case of the following clauses, which focused on the change in state of weather in the contexts of global warming and the 2013 Haiyan disaster (**Amanpour, 2013**):

Areas are -- times when it should be raining suddenly **become** *dry*.

(CLBA-53, par. 51)

The dry months suddenly **become** *very, very wet*.

(CLBA-54, par. 51)

As for the mental processes found throughout the clauses, one of the functions that was noticed was to depict emotions felt by various participants over the effects of Typhoon Haiyan on Tacloban City, as answered by President Aquino when Ms. Christiane Amanpour asked him about the affect-related perceptions of the Tacloban residents on the apparent inefficiency of the Tacloban city government in addressing urgent disaster-related matters, as well as the president's own perception of the disaster relief responses by his administration and the local government unit of Tacloban:

And unfortunately, two or three **were simply overwhelmed** *by the degree of this typhoon that affected us.*

(CLBA-10, par. 21)

Employees of the city government have been -- **have been also affected**...

(CLBA-16, par. 28)

We're hoping to be able to contact something like 29 municipalities left...

(CLBA-33, par. 37)

Another function of mental processes is to describe one's mental estimation of an event that would serve as a subsequent action to mitigate the effects of a disaster, as shown by the following clause as spoken by President Aquino himself during the interview with Christiane Amanpour (in Amanpour, 2013):

Well, right now I **think** the challenge for us after we -- *after relief efforts will be to rebuild the houses of tens of thousands of families affected, quite a major outlay and then construction has to be better to withstand the ravages of this climate change.*

(CLBA-82, par. 70)

The clause in the previous paragraph depicts President Aquino's estimation of the difficulty of the subsequent responsibilities that his administration would execute as part of the long-term rehabilitation of Tacloban City and other adjacent municipalities affected by Typhoon Haiyan. Such also manifests the president's admission of difficulty in managing climate change, especially in the context of typhoons and other related weather-related phenomena.

The results focusing on the analysis of President Aquino's personality and ideology as a leader are shown by the second research question.

2. How do the clauses reveal the following aspects of President Aquino, as manifested throughout the interview with Ms. Amanpour?

a. Personality

Focusing on relational transitivity processes, the results revealed President Benigno Simeon Aquino III's forthrightness in terms of reporting the results of the disaster efforts by his administration, as represented by various governmental agencies. Forthrightness, as expected of a head of state and/or government, refers to one's transparency in revealing facts about a phenomenon affecting one's country as well as sincerity in assuming responsibility for one's management of the affairs of the country, admission of one's deficiencies in governance and management, and one's intention to concretize one's plan of action or revelation of actually implemented policies and actions in order to solve problems pertinent to both local and international contexts and scopes. The results of the study are contrary to those by **Al-Saffar and Abbas (2015)**, in which President Trump shared not actual, concrete, and implemented plans of action but mere plans that were about to be implemented, and by **Guswita and Suhardi (2020)**, in which there were no actual implemented policies since the presidential candidates featured in their study were merely candidates.

As shown in his interview with Ms. Amanpour, a manifestation of President Aquino's straightforwardness is his revelation of current phenomena within the Philippines and of actual issues as consequences of the devastation of

Typhoon Haiyan on Tacloban City, as evidenced by the following clauses below (**Amanpour, 2013**) with their respective types of transitivity processes:

Table 2

Sample clauses that reflect President Aquino's forthrightness

Clause Code	Clause	Transitivity Process Category
CLBA-03	... <u>typhoons</u> are not <i>an unusual occurrence for the Philippines.</i> (par. 19)	RLT
CLBA-04	<u>We</u> get visited <i>by about 20 of them every year.</i> (par. 19)	MTR
CLBA-05	But this <u>year</u> has been <i>an exceptionally bad year, more than 20.</i> (par. 19)	RLT
CLBA-20	What hampers the effort is that the <u>typhoon</u> wrought havoc <i>on the power lines and also the communications facilities, giving us immense difficulty in identifying needs and thereby dispatching the necessary relief supplies and vital equipment.</i> (par. 30)	MTR

Based on the results in terms of the transitivity processes analyzed throughout and across the clauses, another manifested personality of the president is his proactivity in terms of delegating responsibilities as well as implementing plans of action, in the context of the Typhoon Haiyan disaster. Proactivity, in the context of governance by a head of state and/of government, refers to implementing deliberate decisions in order to redound to solutions to national and local issues and to provide the general public with services such as infrastructure, shelter, nourishment, public medical assistance, and other similar services. It also refers to intending to implement future plans of action. The results of the study in terms of the revealed personality are similar to those by **Salvaleon (2019)**, in which the clauses in President Duterte's State of the Nation speeches revealed his actual management and implementations of national policies and projects; however, the results of the current study in terms of personality are in contrast to **Hidayat, Nababan, and Djatmika (2019)**, for there were no actual, concrete, and implemented actions in the speeches by former American presidents Barack Hussein Obama and Donald Trump, since the speeches they delivered occurred before they actually implemented their respective self-initiated and approved national policies.

The following sample clauses reveal President Aquino's proactivity as one of the two personalities that were reflected in the clauses:

Table 3

Sample clauses that reflect President Aquino's proactivity

CLAUSE CODE	CLAUSE	TRANSITIVITY PROCESS CATEGORY
CLBA-22	<u>We're</u> already working <i>on the secondary roads.</i> (par. 31)	MTR
CLBA-33	<u>We're</u> hoping <i>to be able to contact something like 29 municipalities</i>	MNT

	<i>left...(par.37)</i>	
CLBA-34	...wherein <u>we</u> still have to establish <u>their numbers</u> , <i>especially for the missing.</i> (par. 37)	MTR
CLBA-43	Well, <u>we</u> have deployed <u>an additional 2,000 personnel</u> <i>to these affected areas, to restore order.</i> (par. 37)	MTR

The results pertaining to President Aquino's ideology as a political leader are found in the next item.

b. Ideology as a political leader

In terms of President Aquino's ideology as a political leader, one manifestation is that he tended to be inclusive and collaborative in terms of policy conceptualization and implementation, especially in the context of disasters. Such ideologies are reflective of democratic heads of state and/or government since public participation is encouraged (Tsirogianni & Sammut, 2014). One of the possible reasons could be that the president desired to establish solidarity with the general public, particularly the citizens and occupants of Tacloban City and other nearby towns, not only through his actual actions but also through his revelation of his government's disaster relief efforts in order for him to encourage his fellow Filipinos to be knowledgeable and well-informed of current situations in Tacloban City in light of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda). Other possible reasons could be President Aquino's intention to commiserate with the typhoon victims and his desire to assume responsibility in managing disaster relief efforts and in working together with his subordinates. The results of the study are congruent with those by Herrero (2020), Salvaleon (2019), and Manzano and Orquijo (2020), in which the heads of state that they analyzed expressed cooperation with stakeholders such as fellow government workers, local and national government administrators, media practitioners, and the general public.

The following clauses reflect President Aquino's ideology of being inclusive and collaborative in responding to disasters:

Table 4

Clauses that reflect President Aquino's inclusiveness and collaboration as ideologies

CLAUSE CODE	CLAUSE	TRANSITIVITY PROCESS CATEGORY
CLBA-06	<u>We</u> have been able to demonstrate <i>as a government and as a people collectively...</i> (par. 20)	BHV
CLBA-07	...that <u>we</u> take care <i>of each other.</i> (par. 20)	MTR
CLBA-09	Our ability to take care of our problems rather quickly, except in this particular case, the <u>foundation</u> of our efforts rely <i>(sic) on the local government units.</i> (par. 21)	MTR
CLBA-19	Hence, <u>the national government</u> had to not just augment <i>what the local government could do, but actually replace</i> <u>a lot of the</u>	MTR

personnel with personnel from other regions to take care of government vital functions.(par. 29)

The dominant use of the pronoun *we*, as in the case of President Aquino and of the presidents in the previously cited studies, is one of the manifestations of the former Philippine president's political ideology, which focuses on empathy, collaboration, and solidarity in terms of disaster relief efforts. *We* as a pronoun also pertains to President Aquino's citation of his team's efforts and actions to mitigate disaster-related after effects, which pertain normally to geographic, psychosocial, economic, governance-related, and other pertinent issues that warrant major attention and action. A final manifestation is the use of active verbs, especially those pertaining to actions related to collaborative governance such as **demonstrate**, **take care**, **rely**, **augment**, and **replace**, with the last two verbs used in the context of disaster management, particularly the November 2013 Typhoon Haiyan disaster that caused extensive damage to Tacloban City and other adjacent towns.

CONCLUSION

The current study utilized Halliday's (in Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014) transitivity analysis in order to determine the transitivity processes in clauses as sourced from President Benigno Aquino III's international interview with Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast journalist Christiane Amanpour. The results of the transitivity analysis revealed the presence of material, relational, and mental processes in a majority of clauses. As for the personality and the political ideology of President Aquino, sample clauses revealed the president's proactivity and forthrightness both as an individual and a national executive; in terms of political ideology, other sample clauses revealed that President Aquino adheres to collaboration and inclusiveness in executing plans of action as part of governance and of the alleviation of disaster-related effects, such as physical ruins manifested by edifices; psychosocial issues experienced by typhoon victims and even government frontliners; economic instability caused by massive pilferage of business establishments by certain entities; and, logistical issues experienced by local and national government units within the duration of implementing disaster relief efforts throughout the existence of the typhoon.

A major implication for pedagogy and research is the utilization of political discourse in teaching not only the rudiments of language but also the semantics and pragmatics of political discourse. Another implication for pedagogy is the intensification of efforts in teaching learners how to analyze political discourse not only at the surface level but also at the metadiscourse level in order for both learners and teachers to be able to develop further understanding of strategies in conveying meaning, emotions, and concepts by political stakeholders to various types of audience. Finally, an implication for research could be the use of online political discourse as a means of determining discourse-related trends and patterns in terms of transitivity, theme, and other similar discourse-related aspects.

One of the recommendations for further research is for future researchers to utilize contemporary political interviews in order for them to conduct transitivity analyses and to compare them with political discourse from the past. Moreover, it is also recommended that political discourse in the vernacular languages be used so that the results would be quite applicable in the local setting; examples are speeches by local candidates, privilege speeches, and other similar political discourse types. Lastly, it is recommended that more political interviews, particularly in the

Philippine setting, be used in order to establish patterns not only in terms of transitivity processes but also in terms of personality, ideology, and strategies in presenting ideas and conveying emotions to audiences.

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