

An Ecological Discourse Analysis of Wordsworth's Nature Poetry from a Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective -- Taking Daffodils as an Example

Yijun Shi

Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, 200233

Abstract: The English Romantic poet Wordsworth composed many nature poems. Taking the nature poem "Daffodils" as the research corpus, this paper aims to carry out ecolinguistic analysis from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, mainly focusing on three dimensions: transitivity analysis, agency and causality analysis, as well as grammatical metaphors. The goal is to reveal the poet's ecological consciousness by analyzing the linguistic structure and function of the text. Through the use of non-human and materialistic process participants, special grammatical features of dynamic verbs, and nominalized grammatical metaphors, the relationship between human beings and nature is portrayed as one of harmonious coexistence and equal dialogue. The work manifests a positive ecological view of "the unity of things and the self", showing that systemic functional linguistics provides theoretical support for ecological discourse analysis.

Keywords: Ecological discourse analysis; Systemic functional linguistics; Wordsworth

1. Introduction

Ecolinguistics, an emerging field since the 1970s, explores the intricate relationship between language and ecology. It considers both the ecological traits of language and its impact on ecological factors. Ecological discourse analysis delves deeper, examining language's specific role in the ecosystem and how it shapes human-ecosystem interactions, revealing underlying ecological consciousness^[1]. Arran Stubbe divides discourse into three categories: beneficial discourse, ambivalent discourse and destructive discourse. Taking nature poetry as an example, he points out that it belongs to the category of beneficial discourse^[2].

At present, under the framework of eco-linguistics, the research content of eco-discourse analysis mainly involves news, eco-report and advertisement^[3-5] discourses. However, in terms of nature poetry, except for scholars such as Liu Yumei, Wang Jufen^[6] and Huang Guowen^[7], there is a relative lack of eco-discourse analyses on the unfolding of nature poetry texts.

Wordsworth's Daffodils is an example of nature poetry, and critics usually interpret it from a symbolic or romantic perspective, arguing that the poem expresses the relationship between human beings and nature living in harmony and treating each other as equals. However, the interpretation of how the poet uses language to present his ecological view from the perspective of eco-linguistics is relatively limited, and the research on nature poetry from the perspective of system function is even more rare. Existing research focuses on the meta-functional analysis of Daffodils^[8]. Therefore, this paper tries to reinterpret Wordsworth's masterpiece under the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics in terms of transitive, agentive and causative, and grammatical metaphor, to reveal ecological concepts carried by Daffodils in terms of its linguistic form, and to further illustrate that the specific meanings of the language determine the form of its expression, so as to provide a new perspective for the analysis of ecological discourse of nature poems.

2. Theoretical foundation

The theories of systemic functional linguists such as Halliday provide a practical theoretical framework for ecological discourse analysis. The theoretical support of this paper mainly comes from the systemic functional linguistic analysis of transitivity, the analysis of agency and causality, and the analysis of grammatical metaphors^[9].

As a semantic system, the function of materiality is to categorize all kinds of experiences in the real world through grammar, dividing them into six processes: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential. At the same time, it specifies the "participants" and "circumstantial elements" that are closely related to these processes^[10].

Agency emphasizes the role and impact of actions or processes on things, and causality focuses on revealing the subsequent outcomes triggered by these actions or processes^[11]. By analyzing agency and causality, we can further reveal the implicit presence of actuators and the

causal relationship in the interaction of ecological behaviors in Daffodils, and thus understand the ecological concepts expressed in the work.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics, grammatical metaphor refers to a way of metaphorically expressing meaning through non-consistent forms of lexical grammar. It involves different embodiments of the same meaning^[9]. For example, nouns in grammar usually denote objects and concepts, while verbs denote actions, and when nouns are used to denote actions, the situation is non-consensual^[7]. A material process expressing a mental process in a transitive system is a grammatical metaphor.

3. Introduction to daffodils

On a spring day in April 1802, Wordsworth and Dorothy hiked from their premises in Eusmere back to Dove Cottage in the small town of Grasmere, and this poem is a true account of what they saw on their outing.

The poem consists of four stanzas of six lines each, which are numbered for ease of analysis://(1) I wandered lonely as a cloud (2) That floats on high o'er vales and hills (3) When all at once I saw a crowd (4) A host, of golden daffodils; (5) Beside the lake, beneath the trees (6) Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. lake, beneath the trees (6) Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. -(7) Continuous as the stars that shine (8) And twinkle on the milky way, (9) They stretched in never-never land. They stretched in never-ending line (10) Along the margin of a bay: (11) Ten thousand saw I at a glance, (12) Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. -(13) The waves beside them danced; but they (14) Out-did the sparkling waves in glee: (15) A poet could not but be gay, (16) In such a jocund company:(17) I gazed- and gazed- but little thought(18) What wealth the show to me had brought:-(19) For oft, when on my couch I lie(20) In vacant or in pensive mood, (21) They flash upon that inward eye (22) Which is the bliss of solitude; (23) And then my heart with pleasure fills, (24) And dances with the daffodils dances with the daffodils. //

4. An eco-discourse analysis of Daffodils

The following article intends to analyze "Daffodils" in terms of transitivity analysis, agency and causality analysis as well as grammatical metaphors, in order to reveal the poet's ecological consciousness.

4.1 Transitivity analysis-Nature and the "I" in harmony

Under the analytical perspective of materiality, the ecological view of nature embodied in Daffodils is mainly presented through the depiction of the participants in the material and psychological processes and their environmental components. The transitive processes of "Daffodils" are divided as follows; there are 20 main processes in the poem, and the number and distribution of each process type are as follows:

Table 1 Distribution of process types in Daffodils

	NUMBER	PROPORTIONS
material process	13 (lines 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24)	65 per cent
mental process	3 (line 3, 11, 17)	15%
course of events	3 (lines 7, 15, 22)	15%
course of events	1 (line 5)	5%
aggregate	20	100%

Daffodil, from the opening line "I wandered in solitude" to the closing line "when on my couch I lie" depicts the view of nature as "I" can see it, from the perspective of an actor in the material process:

Table 2 Analysis of the material processes in Daffodils

MATERIAL PROCESS	ACTOR	PROCESS/DYNAMIC VERBS	GOAL
Line1	I	wander	
Line2	cloud	floats	
Line6	daffodils	fluttering and dancing	
Line8	daffodils	twinkle	
Line9	They (daffodils)	Stretched	
Line12	daffodils	Tossing	Their heads
Line13	Waves	Danced	
Line14	(daffodils)	Out-did	Waves
Line18	The show	Brought	Me
Line19	I	Lie	
Line21	They(daffodils)	Flash upon	
Line23	My heart	fills	
Line24	My heart	dances	

From the second stanza, the relationship between actors reverses. In the 13 material processes, "nature" takes the lead in nine, and "Daffodils" alone as a participant in the material processes is higher than that of "I" as a participant in the material processes. As the poet observes nature, "Daffodils" feature more prominently than "I". "I" becomes a bystander, and "nature" takes over.

The 13 processes include 10 non-transitive and 3 transitive verbs (toss, out-did, brought). The transitive verbs reveal connections between entities, e. g. , "out-did" shows daffodils' joy surpassing the waves. "Brought" illustrates nature's gift to humans. The non-transitive verbs reflect the poet's changing mindset, divided into three categories:

(1) The material process of "wandering" depicts the poet's lonely state of mind while wandering. The word "lonely" in "I wandered alone" serves as a complement, which can be better reflected by adding punctuation, and the original sentence can be changed to "I wandered, lonely, as a cloud". It can be seen that the modifying relationship between lonely and "wandering" is much less close than that with "I"^[12], so "lonely" is the initial state of mind of the poet when he was wandering.

(2) Seven material processes with "dance" as the dynamic verb(flutter, dance, twinkle, stretch, toss, dance, flash)highlight the daffodils' vitality, enriching the poet's emotional state.

(3) The intransitive verbs "lie", "fill" and "dance" are a combination of material and mental processes. They reflect Wordsworth's emotional comprehension in describing natural scenes. How can the sight of a daffodil not touch the poet's heart? As Wordsworth defines the nature of poetry in the preface to his Lyrical Poetry: "Poetry is the natural outpouring of strong emotion: it springs from the remembrance of emotion in tranquility." ^[13]

In both the first and second stanzas of the poem, Wordsworth uses the word "saw" (Line3"“When all at once I saw a crowd”, Line11"“Ten thousand saw I at a glance”). The "sudden" sight of the daffodils inspires the poet. This coincides with Wordsworth's view that poetry is a natural outpouring of strong emotions. In conclusion, the natural flow of emotion in Daffodils is expressed through the vibrant nature, the observer's connection to nature, and the direct depiction of the poet's inner emotional world.

Table 3 Analysis of mental processes in Daffodils

MENTAL PROCESS	SENER	PROCESS	PHENOMENON
Line3	I	Saw	A crowd (of daffodils)
Line11	I	Saw	Ten thousand daffodils
Line7	I	Gazed and thought	(daffodils)

Taken literally, the verbs "see", "gaze" and "think" present a relatively static state. However, in a given context, they evoke much more than that in terms of mental activity and evaluative connotations. For example, the word "gaze" implies a lingering and attentive observation, revealing the poet's admiration and awe for the daffodils' beauty and vitality. This kind of gazing is not only an appreciation of external beauty, but also a profound experience and perception of the power of life and the beauty of nature. "little thought" emphasizes the profound and lasting impact of nature on mankind. It suggests that the influence of nature (symbolized by the daffodil) on mankind is not transient but far-reaching.

The poet completes the poem with the three material processes of "lie", "fills" and "dances" to console the lonely state of mind, and his heart is joyful because of Daffodils. Through the mental process and material depiction, the poet shows his joy and admiration for nature. Although the perceiver is human and the object is nature, the core lies in the profound effect of nature on human beings. Paul De Man points out that "the mutual conformity of man and nature"^[14] is the key to Wordsworth's poetics. The poet dances with Daffodils, the subject-object boundary disappears, and nature and the self become one, demonstrating the poet's reverence for nature and ecological awareness.

4.2 Agency and causality analysis – Foregrounding of Nature

Halliday points out that traditional grammar often excludes non-humans as actors, leading to the separation of humans from nature. Nature-as-actor phrases such as "What is the forest doing?" are unpopular^[15]. In Daffodils, Wordsworth breaks this discontinuity through ecological grammar, showing an ecological view of the interconnectedness of man and nature.

In Daffodils, the material process participants include four human subjects (I, my heart) and nine non-human subjects (cloud, daffodils, wave). Daffodils participates in the active form, with verbs such as 'fluttering' and 'dancing' appearing in the active form, demonstrating his ability to act as a doer. Daffodils is often used as a subject in the poem, possessing subjectivity and initiative, initiating activity. Wordsworth gives Daffodils the role of a doer, affirming the independent value of nature and placing it on an equal footing with human beings, reflecting the sense of equality between human beings and nature.

From the perspective of causality, the relationship between man and his environment in Daffodils is consistent with dominance and causality. In "And then my heart with pleasure fills", it is "the bliss of solitude" that makes the poet feel such pleasure, the happiness he feels

when he is alone, and all this is brought to the author by nature. This material process is the result of nature's action, and human beings (poets) are the recipients of nature's ability to act. When nature, i. e. Daffodils, is in the position of object and situation, it mostly appears in the mental process with "I" as the perceiver, and the mental process often contains the poet's evaluative mental activities, at this time, human beings (poets) are the recipients of natural behavioral abilities. For example, in "I gazed-and gazed-but little thought", the poet's state of mind changes through interaction with the environment.

The poet's senses and mind are impacted by the daffodils, which Wordsworth called "wise passiveness" which occurs in "a flash of mild surprise"^[16]. This state reflects the poet's aesthetic acceptance and identification with the daffodils, and his mind is passive due to his strong inner feelings^[17]. In the interaction between the poet and Daffodils, although the poet focuses on "I", in the poem "I" is passive and Daffodils is active, reflecting the blending of object and subject, nature and mind. The poet's mind is passive, and it is because of this passive state that the active role of nature is better reflected.

The active role of nature refers to the description of the participants as actors, making specific social roles significantly prominent, i. e. Foregrounding. Wordsworth breaks through the grammatical boundaries between man and nature, getting rid of anthropocentrism and highlighting the active nature of natural things. This poetic language reinforces the status of nature itself and demonstrates Wordsworth's view of nature as a harmonious symbiosis between man and nature.

4.3 Grammatical Metaphor Analysis - Moving and Contrasting

Halliday divided grammatical metaphors into two categories: ideational metaphor and interpersonal metaphor^[9].

In the poem "Daffodils", the grammatical metaphors are mainly conceptual grammatical metaphors. For example, line 1 (I wandered alone like a cloud) and Line 23 (And then my heart was filled with joy) belong to conceptual grammatical metaphors, which use material processes to express psychological processes. The daffodil's vigor cures the poet's loneliness and fills the poet's heart with joy and spiritual support.

At the lexico-grammatical level, nominalization is a powerful source for generating grammatical metaphors^[18]. Nominalization is the expression in noun form of a process or trait^[19]. Nominalization in poetic language presents a momentary intuition of experience, which is the result of the "sudden intrusion" of the external into the internal world and its instantaneous conjugation^[20].

Nominalization highlights things in Daffodils, not processes. Adjective nominalization shows the state of mind of the perceiver and restores natural information. For example, "Outdid the sparkling waves in glee", the joy of Daffodils is expressed statically by the noun "glee", the dynamic process is stilled, and Daffodils becomes an object that can be "gazed at"; and outdid the dynamic factor and the static object; and outdid the dynamic factor and the static object. "However, with the addition of outdid as a dynamic element, we can still feel the dynamism of the daffodils as they sway in the breeze. "Which is the bliss of solitude", Wordsworth use the nouns "bliss" and "solitude" to staticise the poet's emotion after being inspired by nature. It is evident that when depicting his state of mind, he discards excessive embellishment and strong rendering of emotions, and communicates with nature as an equal, without any superfluous judgement, but only objectively records his aesthetic experience, which reflects Wordsworth's humility of de-anthropocentrism.

The words "fluttering" and "dancing" in "Fluttering and dancing in the breeze" are nominalization of verb and the movement of the daffodil is highlighted as the subject. This is a process of stillness in movement and movement in stillness, which makes the meaning expressed by the verb solid and strong, and deepens and broadens the connection between the daffodil and the world around it.

The two types of adjectives and verbs mentioned above are nominalize highlight things, not processes, with no human focus or subject-object distinction. This reflects Wordsworth's ecological view of holistic interaction. The poem's relationship between man and nature shifts between "nature like man" and "man like nature", embodying man-nature integration. This nominalized structure demonstrates the ecological concept of the "unity of things".

5. Conclusion

This paper analyses Wordsworth's nature poem Daffodils through the lens of ecological discourse analysis, applying transitivity analysis, agency and causality analysis as well as grammatical metaphors in Systemic Functional Linguistics. Wordsworth depicts the harmonious co-existence of man and nature through non-human participants and dynamic verbs, showing his humility and love for nature. The use of agency and causality in the poem gives nature and man equal status, highlights nature's initiative, and reflects the poet's worship of nature. At the same time, the nominalization of adjectives and verbs makes the poem intertwined with motion and static, with no distinction between subject and object of human beings, showing the overall interaction and interconnection between the poet and nature.

By analyzing the language of the poem, we find out how the poet uses language to express ecological concepts and remind people to love and revere nature. The author believes that man and nature should co-exist in harmony, which is also the ecological concept conveyed by

the poem. In addition, this paper provides a novel and practical path for the ecological discourse analysis of nature poetry, demonstrating the operability of systemic functional linguistics in the analysis of literary works.

References

- [1] Xin Zhiying, Huang Guowen. Systemic functional linguistics and ecological discourse analysis[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2013, 34(03):7-10+31.
- [2] STIBBE A. *Ecolinguistics: language, ecology and the stories we live by*[M]. London:Routledge, 2015.
- [3] Dong Dian. Multidimensional eco-discourse analysis of news discourse in the new era[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2021, (01):92-97+15.
- [4] Zhao Ruihua. A multifaceted model of ecological discourse analysis under the perspective of system function:taking the construction of silver hake identity in ecological report as an example[J]. *Chinese Foreign Language*, 2016(5):84-91.
- [5] He Wei, Geng Fang. A Comparative Analysis of the Ecological Nature of English-Chinese Environmental Protection Public Service Announcement Discourse[J]. *Foreign Language E-learning*, 2018(4): 57-63.
- [6] Liu Yumei, Wang Jufen. Ecological Discourse Analysis of Nature Poetry--Taking Thomas Nashe's Spring as an Example[J]. *Foreign Language*, 2019(5):91-97.
- [7] Huang Guowen. An analysis of metafunctional and grammatical metaphors in nature poetry--an example of one of Dickinson's nature poems[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2018, 39(03):1-5.
- [8] Jiang Yi. Ecological Discourse Analysis of Nature Poetry Based on Systemic Functional Linguistics--Taking Wordsworth's Poem "Narcissus" as an Example[J]. *Journal of Heilongjiang Teacher Development Institute*, 2021, 40(05):131-134.
- [9] Halliday M. A. K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar (2nd edition)* [M]. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.
- [10] Hu Zhuanglin, Zhu Yongsheng, Zhang Delu, Li Zhanzi. *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* [M]. Beijing:Peking University Press, 2005:75.
- [11] Miao Xingwei, Lei Lei. Ecological discourse analysis based on systemic functional linguistics[J]. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 2019, 40(01):13-22.
- [12] Yuan Xianjun, "Narcissus" and Wordsworth's Poetic Idea, " *Foreign Literature Studies*, vol. 26, no. 5, October 2004, pp. 56-61.
- [13] Wordsworth, William and Samuel Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1800*. edited by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, Broadview Press, 2008.
- [14] De Man, Paul. "Time and History in Wordsworth. " *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 4, Winter 1987, pp. 4-17.
- [15] M. A. K. Halliday, " New Ways of Meaning", Alwin Fill and Peter Muhlhäusler eds. , *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*, London and New York: Continuum, 2001, p. 194-195.
- [16] *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry*
- [17] Zhang Yuejun. Hartmann interprets Wordsworth's representation of nature[J]. *Contemporary Foreign Literature*, 2009, 30(04):60-68.
- [18] Hu, Zhuanglin. Halliday's model of rubric metaphor [J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2000.
- [19] Hu Zhuanglin, Zhu Yongsheng, Zhang Delu, Li Zhanzi. *Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* [M]. Beijing:Peking University Press, 2005:71.
- [20] Zhao, Kuiying. "Ideological Deception" or "Resources of Green Grammar"? --An Eco-linguistic Re-examination of the "Nominalisation" Controversy and its Eco-Poetic Significance[J]. *Frontiers of Literary Theory*, 2014. (01):117.