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Transitivity and Narrative Voice: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Haruki Murakami's Short Stories

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Abstract

This study examines how narrative voice and transitivity patterns intersect in four of Haruki Murakami's short stories, i.e. "Cream," "With the Beatles," "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova," and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" as translated into English. Using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as the framework, eighty clauses from each story (320 clauses total) were analyzed to uncover how Murakami's narrators construct experience through process types, participant roles, and circumstances. A mixed-method approach combined quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative stylistic interpretation. Findings reveal that material and mental processes are consistently prominent, encoding the narrators' actions and introspections in tandem. Transitivity profile of each story aligns with its thematic focus: self-reflection in "Cream," nostalgia and memory in "With the Beatles," imaginative speculation in "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova," and confessional dialogue in "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey." Despite being English translations, the clauses maintain Murakami's distinctive narrative voice, characterized by a blend of the mundane and the surreal. The narrators frequently serve as both Actors and Sensers, linguistically foregrounding their subjective reality. The study concludes that Murakami's transitivity patterns encode a first-person narrative ethos: mundane actions and psychological perceptions intertwine to produce the author's signature tone of subdued alienation and "dreamlike" realism.

Keywords: Haruki Murakami; Narrative Voice; Transitivity; Systemic Functional Linguistics; Stylistics; First-Person Narrative; Translation Studies

Introduction

Japanese author Haruki Murakami is renowned for fiction that blends the ordinary and the surreal. His storytelling is inventive and adaptable, captivating readers worldwide with a "poetic elegance" that merges real and imagined realms (Zolkin, 2023). Murakami's narrators are typically anonymous middle-aged men who recount unexplainable events in a detached, first-person tone, incorporating psychological reflection into seemingly straightforward language. While themes of alienation, memory, and temporality in Murakami's work have long attracted critical attention, the linguistic mechanisms underpinning these effects have received less focus. In particular, how Murakami's narrative voice is constructed through grammar remains unexplored. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing the transitivity patterns in four stories from First Person Singular (2021): "Cream," "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova," "With the Beatles," and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey." All four are told in first-person, a perspective that Murakami uses to blur the line between personal confession and philosophical rumination. By examining transitivity structures in these stories (how actions, perceptions, and descriptions are grammatically encoded), present study seeks to understand how Murakami creates narrators that are introspective, reserved, and yet intimately engaging to the reader. This combined linguistic-stylistic approach will reveal how subtle grammatical choices contribute to Murakami's characteristic narrative tone of subdued surrealism and emotional ambiguity.

Halliday's transitivity system as outlined in SFL is used as the analytical framework for the study. Each of the 320 clauses is analyzed in terms of:

Process Type: Identifying the process type (Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, Existential) based on the main verb or verb phrase and its context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).. For example, "I remembered her face" would be classified as a Mental process (cognition), whereas "He opened the door" is Material (action). In some cases, deciding on process type required interpretation such as, whether "I listened to the music" is a Material process of doing or a Behavioral process of sensing sound. Halliday's guidelines were followed for ambiguous cases, considering context. For instance, listening was treated as a Material action (intentional act of listening) unless it clearly described a physiological behavior.

Participants: Identifying the participant roles associated with the process. For Material clauses, identifying the Actor (agent of the action) and Goal (entity affected). For Mental clauses, identifying the Senser (experiencer of sensation/thought) and Phenomenon (thing sensed/thought). For Relational clauses, identifying the Carrier and Attribute, or Identified and Identifier Identifying Sayer, Receiver for Verbal processes; Behaver for Behavioral; Existent for Existential) Special attention was paid to the narrator's role in each clause, i.e. in first-person stories, the narrator ("I") often appears as a participant in most clauses, typically as Actor, Senser, or Sayer. Identifying these roles helps reveal how central the narrator is to each experiential event. Other participants (like other characters) were also noted to see whether they appear as agents of actions or mostly as objects of the narrator's perception.

Circumstances: Recording any circumstantial elements in the clause, such as expressions of time ("in the afternoon"), place ("at the mountain hall"), manner ("quietly"), cause ("because I was curious"), accompaniment ("with a friend"), etc. Circumstances provide context and often carry significant narrative information (for instance, setting details or motivations). Circumstances were categorized according to the typical SFL categories (Location, Time, Manner, Cause, Accompaniment, etc.) and their presence or absence noted. Murakami's style can sometimes be sparse in detail, so it was useful to see when and how often he grounds a scene in concrete circumstantial detail versus when he leaves things unsaid or abstract.

Research Questions

How do transitivity patterns (process types, participant roles, and circumstances) encode the narrative voice in Haruki Murakami's short stories?

What correlations exist between the distribution of process types and Murakami's recurring themes (e.g. memory, identity, the surreal)?

How does variation in transitivity structures across the four stories reflect different narrative functions or emphasis?

Literature Review

Systemic Functional Linguistics and Transitivity Theory

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a network of choices that serve three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The ideational metafunction specifically, its experiential component deals with construing human experience in language. In Halliday's framework, transitivity is the principal system of the experiential metafunction, defining how clauses represent "who does what to whom, where, when, and how" in a

given process. Each clause is categorized by a process type (the verb and its configuration) alongside associated participants (roles like doer, receiver, experiencer) and circumstances (adverbial adjuncts of time, place, manner, etc.). Halliday (1994) identifies six major process types, each encoding a different domain of experience:

Material processes – processes of doing or action (e.g. run, make).
Mental processes – processes of sensing (perception, cognition, emotion; e.g. see, know, love).
Relational processes – processes of being and identifying (intensive attribution or identification; e.g. is, become).
Verbal processes – processes of saying or telling (e.g. say, ask).
Behavioral processes – processes of behaving physiologically or psychologically (at the boundary of mental and material; e.g. laugh, sleep).
Existential processes – processes of existing or happening (typically beginning with "there is/are").

Each process type imposes its own set of participant roles (for instance, Material clauses have an Actor and often a Goal, Mental clauses involve a Senser and a Phenomenon, etc.), as well as expectations for circumstantial details (Material clauses commonly include location or manner, Mental clauses might include cause or content as Phenomenon, and so on). The distribution of process types in a text thus reveals its experiential profile. For example, a predominance of Material processes suggests an action-oriented discourse, whereas a preponderance of Mental processes foregrounds inner experience. Relational and Existential processes often mark states of being or the presence of entities, contributing to themes of identity and existence, while verbal processes structure dialogue and the exchange of information. As transitivity patterns link grammar to semantics, they effectively bridge language and psychology, making transitivity analysis "an invaluable tool for literary stylistics". Scholars of stylistics have long leveraged this tool to dissect literary texts: Simpson (2004) and Toolan (2016), for instance, demonstrate how choices in transitivity can shape narrative perspective and affect.

Moreover, transitivity analysis continues to evolve. Recent work has addressed its cross-linguistic applicability and limitations. Chayani (2025) critiques the classical Halliday's model for relying too heavily on English grammar, which can "compromise its analytical performance" on other languages. By proposing an expanded model that operates at the intersection of grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, Chayani argues that transitivity analysis can be made more adjustable to languages beyond English. This is particularly relevant when analyzing translated texts: the act of translation may introduce subtle shifts in transitivity patterns due to structural differences between languages. Despite such concerns, the Halliday's framework remains the foundation for many discourse analyses. It provides a systematic way to quantify and compare how different texts encode reality. In this study, the standard transitivity system to English translations of Japanese stories will be applied, with an awareness of its English-centric origins and a careful eye for any "transitivity shifts" that might arise from translation. Overall, by combining quantitative counts with qualitative interpretation, a broad tradition in functional stylistics will be followed by using linguistic evidence to gain insight into literary meaning.

Transitivity in Narrative and Stylistic Studies

Transitivity analysis has been widely employed to uncover how linguistic patterns shape narrative voice, character depiction, and ideology in texts. Fowler's pioneering work in critical linguistics showed that transitivity choices can indicate underlying ideological stances, determining "who acts, who perceives, and who is silenced" in a narrative (Fowler, 1996). In a similar vein, transitivity has been applied to literature to reveal viewpoint and psychological depth. For example, Semino (2002) observed that a high frequency of Mental processes in free indirect discourse corresponds to a deep access to a character's mind, grammar gives us a lens into a character's interiority. Modern and postmodern writers often manipulate transitivity to blur agency and perception, reflecting fragmented or multi-layered consciousness in their narratives.

In recent years, there has been a surge of studies using SFL to analyze literary works across genres. Many have reinforced the notion that patterns of processes are meaningfully related to theme and tone. For instance, Jesudas and Mohammed (2025) investigate transitivity in Isabel Allende's short story "And of Clay Are We Created." Their analysis highlights how Allende deploys transitivity processes to depict tragedy and emotional struggle: material actions (efforts to rescue a girl trapped in mud) interplay with mental states (the reporter's fears and hopes), crafting a powerful commentary on human empathy. Such work demonstrates the continued relevance of Halliday's framework for literary analysis, including contemporary texts. Other studies have used transitivity to examine war narratives, children's literature, and even political speeches, proving its versatility (Alhumsi & Alsaedi, 2023). These applications underscore that systematic analysis of process types can illuminate how authors encode worldviews and invite readers into particular experiential positions.

Despite the growing body of stylistic research using transitivity, analyses of Murakami's fiction through this lens are scarce. This study extends that research by focusing on Murakami's narrative technique. However, it is worth noting a methodological consideration, i.e. transitivity analyses of translated texts must be cautious. As recent SFL-informed translation studies have shown, translators often strive to reproduce the experiential meaning of the source text, but differences in grammar can lead to transitivity shifts (Chen & Zhong, 2022). For example, an existential construction in Japanese might become a relational clause in English, or an implicit subject might be made explicit, therefore, potentially altering the pattern of participant roles. Present analysis remains attentive to such possibilities when drawing interpretations from the English versions of Murakami's stories.

Murakami's Narrative Voice and Criticism

Haruki Murakami's narrative style has attracted extensive commentary in literary criticism, although often with emphasis on themes and cultural context rather than grammatical form. Critics like Rubin (2012) and Strecher (2014) characterize Murakami's typical first-person voice as "cool," detached yet intimate. These narrators speak in a plain, unadorned style about extraordinary events, creating a paradoxical effect, i.e. emotional proximity through linguistic distance. The syntax tends toward simplicity as Murakami uses short, clear sentences, even as the content hints at profound existential questions. An example is the way Murakami's narrators often describe doing very ordinary things ("I sat there for a while, thinking of nothing in particular") in contexts that are far from ordinary, thereby cultivating a calm intensity in tone.

One reason for Murakami's stylistic simplicity can be traced to his own writing practice. Murakami has noted that he taught himself to write by writing in English first and then translating back to Japanese, which forced him to "express thoughts and feelings with a limited set of words" and avoid complex literary flourishes (The Guardian, 2022). The result is prose that is transparent and rhythmic, unburdened by the weighty stylistic conventions of traditional Japanese literature (The Guardian, 2022. Indeed, Murakami's style in Japanese has been famously described as "neutral" or even "translation-like." Kojin Karatani once attributed Murakami's international success to the "non-Japaneseness" of his Japanese, i.e. a clarity and directness reminiscent of translated English texts (Karatani, 2020). This so-called "translationese" makes his writing feel accessible and natural. Ironically, Murakami's original Japanese is influenced by English, and present study will analyze English translations of those Japanese texts, creating a full circle of cross-linguistic interplay. Critics have debated this aspect: while some fault Murakami for lacking a distinct Japanese voice, while others point out that his Japanese readers often find the style perfectly natural, suggesting that Murakami forged a new narrative voice within Japanese, which is inspired by foreign literature yet authentically his own (Ono, 2020).

Murakami's thematic concerns such as alienation, memory, the search for identity, and the intrusion of surreal elements into everyday life are well documented (Strecher, 2014; Ada, 2020). However, how these themes are realized through language is less often systematically shown. A few scholars have touched on linguistic features: for instance, anecdotes in interviews note that Murakami's first-person narrators resemble the "I-novel" (shishōsetsu) tradition in Japan, which features confessional, autobiographical storytelling. Yet Murakami's approach is more playful and metafictional. He uses the first-person perspective not to divulge personal truths, but to create a mirror-like narrative space where the self is both subject and object of reflection. This study approaches Murakami's narrative voice through the concrete lens of transitivity, examining how choices like an abundance of Mental processes or specific Participant roles can generate the effects that readers and critics have observed more impressionistically. By focusing on four representative short stories from First Person Singular, present study aims to provide a detailed account of Murakami's stylistic techniques. In doing so, it will build on prior Murakami criticism by adding a linguistic dimension. Present study will show that a "detached, introspective" narrator is constructed grammatically, and themes of memory and reality-blurring are supported by patterns in clause structure.

Methodology

Data and Sampling

This research examines four stories from Murakami's collection First Person Singular (Murakami, 2021) in their official English translations by Philip Gabriel. The stories "Cream," "With the Beatles," "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova," and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" are selected for their shared narrative perspective (first-person singular) and their variety of themes. Focusing on one short story collection provides a cohesive basis for comparison, as all narrators have a similar voice (presumably Murakami's own narrative persona) yet each story introduces a different context and emphasis. Analyzing the English versions allows us to study the texts as experienced by a global readership. A sample size of 80 clauses per story was

selected culminating in a total corpus of 320 clauses by using stratified random sampling. Each story was first divided into several segments for ease of analysis. From each segment, approximately 20 clauses were randomly selected, yielding about 80 clauses per story. It should be noted that by using the English translations as data, Gabriel's rendition of Murakami's voice is effectively analyzed. However, Gabriel is a long-time Murakami translator who is known for preserving the spirit and tone of the original (Lofgren, 2021). In "Cream," for example, the reason for the abundance of Material processes and their effect on effect on the story. It may be observed that the narrator's physical journey up the mountain, the waiting, etc., are described in matter-of-fact action clauses, and ground the story's bizarre encounter in concrete reality (p.16). At the same time, a significant number of Mental clauses reveal his perplexity and introspection during this journey (p.7). This intermingling may be interpreted as reflecting the story's theme: the coexistence of an inexplicable philosophical insight with mundane actions like traveling and waiting).

In "With the Beatles", high frequency of Mental processes (remembering, knowing, wondering) underscores the narrator's nostalgia and the act of recollection itself as a central "action" of the story (pp.78-79). Material processes, although present, i.e. meeting the girl's brother, later meeting him again in Tokyo (pp.93 115), are often secondary to the psychological reflection.

In "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova," The dominance of Material processes (listening to records, writing an article, going to a shop) was examined and how these create an almost journalistic realism, against which the Mental processes (thinking, imagining, questioning one's memory) produce a surreal twist (pp.55,63, 71). This balanced intermingling of external action and internal speculation mirrors the story's play between reality and fantasy.

In "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey," There is an overwhelming presence of Verbal processes (said, asked, replied: the dialogue between narrator and monkey) and how they construct narrative voice (pp.133-134,136-137). Here, the narrator's role is often that of a Sayer or Receiver in conversation, rather than solely an Actor or Senser. It may be observed how this shift in dialog affects the tone. The story reads almost like a mini-play, highlighting themes of communication and confession

Procedure

The study follows an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. A quantitative analysis of the transitivity patterns in the sample is followed by qualitative interpretation of those patterns in context.

Cross-Story Comparison: After analyzing each story individually, the findings were compared to address the research questions on a broader level. A comparative view of the four narratives was constructed, i.e. which process types are common to all Murakami's narrators and which are story-specific. It may be observed that all four narrators share a baseline of frequent Material and Mental processes, i.e. they act and they reflect, reinforcing Murakami's blend of external and internal storytelling. However, each story had a distinguishing feature, for instance, "Cream" and "Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova" have an excess of Material Processes; whereas, "With the Beatles" have an abundance of Metal Processes and "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" demonstrates Verbal Processes in excess. The overall percentage of each process type across the whole corpus of 320 clauses was tabulated to see Murakami's

general tendencies. Observations about participant roles across stories was also synthesized, for instance, the narrator "I" is almost always present as a participant, suggesting a very self-centered narrative universe: everything is filtered through the narrator's experience, a hallmark of Murakami's first-person style.

Discussion and Interpretation: Finally, how these transitivity patterns encode narrative voice and theme was interpreted, tying the linguistic evidence back to literary analysis. This stage is presented in the Discussion section of this paper. A dedicated reflection on the role of translation is also incorporated: to what extent these patterns may be influenced by the fact that we are reading English texts. Insights from translation studies were used to contextualize our findings.

Data Description

All four stories are narrated in the first person by a male narrator, presumably reflecting Murakami's quintessential narratorial persona: introspective, observant, and detached.

Analysis

Using Transitivity analysis, key components of transitivity such as, process types, participant roles, and circumstances were identified. Distribution of process types in each story and across the stories were analyzed, followed by examining how participants (especially the narrators) were configured in these processes, and finally considering the use of circumstances. Quantitative findings (frequencies, percentages) will be complemented with qualitative examples from the stories. The objective is to show concretely how Murakami's grammatical choices encode the narrative voice as identified.

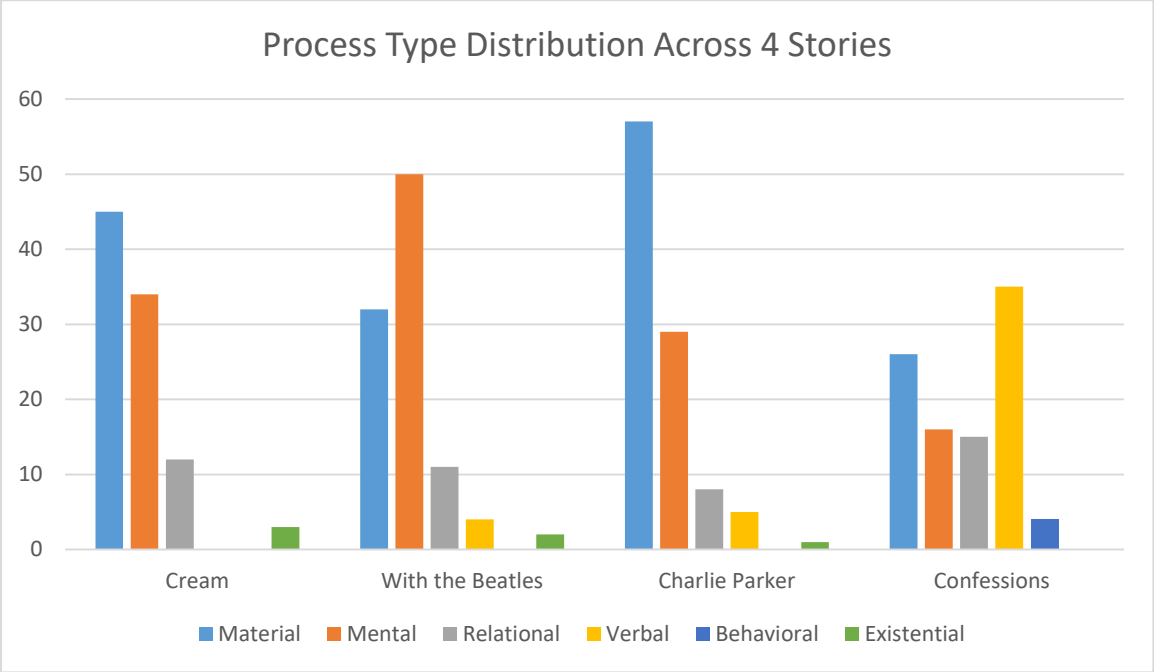
Process Types Distribution

Dominant Process Types All four stories exhibit a mixture of process types, but certain types clearly dominate, reflecting Murakami's blending of action and reflection in narrative voice.

Table 1. Process type frequency by story

Process Type	Cream (%)	With the Beatles (%)	Charlie Parker (%)	Shinagawa Monkey (%)
Material (action)	45%	32%	57%	26%
Mental (perception/cognition)	34%	50%	29%	16%
Relational (being)	12%	11%	8%	15%
Verbal (saying)	0%	4%	5%	**35%**

Process Type	Cream (%)	With the Beatles (%)	Charlie Parker (%)	Shinagawa Monkey (%)
Behavioral (behaving)	0%	0%	0%	4%
Existential (existence)	3%	2%	1%	3%



From these patterns, a few observations can be made:

Material processes are prominent in **three** of the four stories. In "Cream" and "Charlie Parker," they form roughly half of all clauses (the highest proportions among the stories). Even "With the Beatles" has a substantial amount (32%). The only story where Material is not dominant is "Shinagawa Monkey," where action is relatively minimal (26%). Murakami's narrators, therefore, do not just passively reflect. They are frequently depicted doing things. This abundance of Material clauses gives the narratives a sense of concrete realism, grounding the otherwise introspective or fantastical content in tangible activities. For example, in "Cream" the narrator receives an invitation, travels up the mountain, waits, meets an old man (pp.4,6,16). All incidents are described through Material clauses like "I took the Hankyu……", "I received an invitation" (p.4), "The large steel gate was locked"(p.9) . These actions scaffold the story's philosophical dialogue. In "Charlie Parker," the narrator writes an article, goes to a record store, picks up an album, travels to places, again Material actions that frame the imaginative premise. The high frequency of Material processes in these stories indicates that Murakami's first-person voice, even when musing on abstract ideas, remains connected to the physical world and daily life.

Mental processes (perception, thought, emotion) are the other major category, especially in "With the Beatles," where they are the single most frequent type (50%). This aligns perfectly with the story's focus on memory and inner reflection. The narrator in "With the Beatles" is constantly remembering, knowing, wondering, for example, "I remember well…"(p.78), "I knew it…"(p.79), "I scanned my memory…"(p.97). These mental clauses bring the reader directly into the narrator's mind. In "Cream," mental clauses are also abundant (34%), second only to material. We see the young narrator questioning his memory of the girl and pondering the meaning of the old man's words – e.g. "I didn't particularly want to see…." (p.7), "Why in the world…..?"……., "Why was I spending……?"(p.7). Similarly, "Charlie Parker" has 29% of Mental Clauses, often the narrator thinking or imagining, for example, "Feeling uneasy…,"(p.59), "I totally forgot…,"(p.61) "I assumed…."(p.64). Even in "Shinagawa Monkey," which is primarily in dialogue form, some Mental clauses occur as the narrator processes the monkey's story, for example, "It felt like…" (p.151). Overall, Mental and Material together account for the majority of clauses in all stories, therefore, confirming that Murakami's narrators are both actors in the world and thinkers in their inner world. This dual dominance encodes the introspective yet active quality of Murakami's narrative voice[64]: the narrators experience events externally and internally at once.

Relational processes (clauses of being and identifying) are present at moderate levels (11–15% across the board). They often appear in descriptive passages. For example, in "Cream," relational clauses describe states like "It was a chilly……. "(p.7)or "She was attractive"(p.4), giving background information or setting a scene. In "Charlie Parker," a relational clause occurs when stating "That was the setup….." (p.55), highlighting the ontological theme. In "With the Beatles," relational clauses identify relationships or attributes, e.g. "She was a beautiful…." (p.79)or describing the girl as "petite and charming"(p.85). These clauses, while not as dynamic as material or as revealing as mental, serve an important role in establishing context, identities, and qualities of characters or objects. The consistent but not dominant presence of relational processes signals Murakami's interest in states of being: identity and memory are often explored through what something is.

Verbal processes show a stark contrast between "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" and the other three stories. In the monkey story, Verbal processes make up nearly half of the clauses (35%), far more than any other type.The story's confessional dialogue structure, for example, "I said……"(p.137), " the monkey asked"(p.133), "Everyone calls me ____,", "I asked"(p.139).The abundance of speech acts drives the narrative and shares the narrative control between narrator and monkey. In the other stories, Verbal clauses are minimal (4–5%). They appear occasionally as in "With the Beatles", for example, "She told me…" (p.91), or the narrators reporting speech/thoughts as quotes (e.g. quoting the old man's words in Cream, or quoting song lyrics in Charlie Parker

But for the most part, "Cream," "Beatles," and "Charlie Parker" are not in dialogue form; rather, they are first-person recollections or descriptions, so few explicit Verbal processes. The comparison highlights how Shinagawa Monkey stands out as an outlier in narrative mode; its heavy use of Verbal processes creates an interactive tone distinct from the introspective monologues of the other pieces. It may be concluded that the variation in transitivity structure reflects different narrative functions, i.e. a confessional dialogue vs. reflective memoirs.

Behavioral processes were effectively negligible in our samples (4%). Clauses that might be considered behavioral (physiological acts like sighing, laughing, sleeping) were rare and often could be classified as either material or mental with little issue. For instance, when the "Shinagawa Monkey" relates the monkey"happily gulped back"(p.140) was treated as a Material action (drinking) rather than a separate behavioral category. The near absence of behavioral clauses indicates that Murakami's style does not dwell on involuntary bodily actions. He focuses more on deliberate actions and inner thoughts

Participant Roles and Narrator Perspective

While process types tell us about the kinds of experiences foregrounded, participant analysis reveals who is instigating or undergoing those experiences. In first-person narratives, a critical question is how dominant the narrator "I" is in grammatical terms, versus how much agency or presence other characters have. We analyzed participants in each clause, focusing on the narrator's role and notable patterns for other participants. Table 2 provides a qualitative summary of dominant participants in each story and their typical roles:

Table 2. Dominant participants and roles by story

Story	Dominant Participants	Typical Roles in Clauses	Narrative Implication
Cream	Narrator ("I"), the unnamed girl, the old man (philosopher)	Narrator as Actor & Senser; Girl as Phenomenon (remembered figure); Old man as Sayer/Phenomenon	Experience is filtered entirely through the narrator's perception and actions. Other characters appear mostly as objects of memory or dialogue, not independent agents.
With the Beatles	Narrator ("I"), Sayoko (the girl with the record), Sayoko's older brother	Narrator as Senser & Actor; Sayoko as Phenomenon (image in memory); Brother as Sayer (in memory conversation) and Actor in later meeting	The narrator's memory constructs agency. He is the one remembering (Senser) and also the one who acted (went to meet, etc.). Others exist primarily as remembered figures or interlocutors. The girl is almost entirely a memory

			object, highlighting his subjective nostalgia.
Charlie Parker Plays Bossa Nova	Narrator ("I"), Charlie Parker (in imagination), various readers/audience	Narrator as Actor, Senser; "Charlie Parker" as Carrier in hypothetical statements or Goal of narrator's actions; Readers as Receivers (of the article)	The narrator defines his identity in relation to an imagined other (Charlie Parker). Parker, in reality deceased, appears grammatically in relational clauses ("Charlie Parker is long dead") and as an imagined participant in mental clauses ("I imagined he would be pleased"). Real people (readers, record shop owner) are minor. This highlights the narrator's internal dialogue with a legendary figure which is an act identification. The narrator's acts (writing, searching) revolve around Parker's phantom presence.
Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey	Narrator ("I"), the Monkey, unnamed women (victims of monkey's theft)	Narrator as Sayer, Senser, occasional Actor; Monkey as Sayer (dominant), also Actor in his stories (stealing names); Women as Phenomenon (talked about, targets of action)	Dialogue distributes the narrative voice: the Monkey temporarily takes over as Sayer, conveying his story. The narrator here often functions as Receiver or Respondent in conversation, not just an active doer.

			This sharing of agency via dialogue creates an empathy between narrator and monkey.

Across all four stories, a common pattern emerges: the narrator "I" is the pervasive participant. The narrator appears in an overwhelming majority of clauses, either as the grammatical subject (Actor/Senser/Sayer) or as a possessive (my memory, my mind) or object of reflection. This is expected in first-person stories, but the degree is noteworthy: even clauses describing other characters are often framed through the narrator's perception. For instance, "What pulled me in was…….", "I have a clear……..."(p.84) where the narrator's cognitive act is the main clause and the other person is embedded within it . This consistently organizes the clause around the narrator's consciousness. Grammatically, Murakami's narrators are subjective filters for the story's events. To put it another way, the participant analysis confirms a kind of thematic solipsism in Murakami's style, i.e. the world is largely presented as it impinges on or is processed by the narrator. In "Cream" and "With the Beatles," for example, the young women who catalyze the memories (the invitation girl, Sayoko) are not given agency of their own in the narration. They are Phenomena of mental processes (the narrator remembers them, thinks about them) or Goals of material processes (the narrator goes to meet them or about them). Even when they perform actions (Sayoko's firm grip on the record is an action), it's described from the narrator's viewpoint (what catches his eye). This one-sided representation is deliberate: it underscores the narrators' isolation. Other characters exist as reflections in the narrator's mind rather than fully realized agents. This narrative strategy ties to Murakami's theme of loneliness and the unreachable other – linguistically, others are present but grammatically subordinate to the "I."

The participant tables and analysis show that in all four stories, "I" was by far the most common Actor, Senser, and Sayer. In "Shinagawa Monkey," which has a strong secondary character (the monkey), we do see the monkey frequently as Sayer (in quotes). But interestingly, those are embedded in the narrator's reporting clauses "the monkey said", where "monkey" is subject but under the framing of "said" with narrator as overall storyteller. Outside direct speech, the narrator still often interprets what the monkey is: "The monkey was dressed now"(p.140).

Narrator as Actor vs. Senser:

Differences may also be noted in how active the narrator is physically versus mentally across stories: - In "Cream" and "Charlie Parker," the narrator is frequently an Actor (undertaking journeys, writing, doing things) which aligns with those stories' more eventful plots. In "With the Beatles," the narrator is primarily a Senser (remembering, reflecting) since the story's "action" is mostly internal. In "Shinagawa Monkey," the narrator shifts between Senser (he processes the monkey's story emotionally) and Sayer (he responds in dialogue), with only a few material actions such as, enjoying a bath, drinking, etc

This distribution reinforces the narrative voice. For a memory-centric story like "With the Beatles," having the narrator mostly as Senser emphasizes that the real "events"

are thoughts and feelings. For an action-memory hybrid like "Cream," Murakami casts the narrator as both Actor and Senser in almost equal measure, i.e. he is shown not only acting but also reflecting. This duality is what gives "Cream" its peculiar feel of something happening and nothing happening at once. And in the dialogue-driven "Monkey," making the narrator often a Sayer/Receiver yields a more interactive feel, as if the narrator is a character in someone else's story for a change, i.e. listening to the monkey's tale.

Other Participants:

Although the narrator is central, the way other participants are grammatically presented is also revealing: - Nameless or Peripheral Characters**:** Many characters remain unnamed. For instance, the girl in "Cream" is never named, the girl "With the Beatles" record is named Sayoko, but many others like the narrator's girlfriend are not named, for example, in "Confessions……", the monkey's victims are nameless women. This anonymity often correlates with them being participants of lesser focus (Goals, Phenomena). It universalizes them in a sense, i.e. "the girl" could be any girl, which suits nostalgia or fable-like quality. Objects and Concepts as Participants: In "Charlie Parker……," interestingly, inanimate things become important participants. For instance, in "Love has returned", "Love" (abstract) is Actor in a material metaphor(p.53); in "The magazine disappeared" (p.57), disappeared as Material with "magazine" as Actor (p.57), "The price on the record was $35" (relational with "price" as Carrier) (p.63). These clauses give life to non-human entities, which in context adds to the theme of music as a living presence. Parker's ghostly presence is often subject in "Nothing could make me happier", Parker is depicted as Senser in narrator's conjecture (p.71). This is a way for the narrator to breathe life into his imaginative world via grammar, making Charlie Parker an active participant in the narrative despite his factual absence. Dialogue partners: In "Shinagawa Monkey," the monkey becomes a full grammatical participant. The text has many clauses like "the monkey asked"(p.133),"he (the monkey) gulped back….."(p.140). The monkey is given the linguistic agency of an ordinary character, which is crucial for suspension of disbelief. By making the monkey a Sayer and even an Actor (stealing names = Actor with Goal "names"), Murakami's language invites us to treat him as person-like. The narrator's own participant role shifts slightly to accommodate this, i.e. the narrator is seen as the Receiver of questions, for example,"the monkey asked…(p.133) or as Behaver in reactions such as, "I chimed in"(p.136), which is a verbal action of participating in dialogue). This dynamic of participants conveys a shared narrative authority in this story, as reflected by the grammar.

Synthesizing participant patterns across the stories, a clear picture emerges of Murakami's narrative voice: it is intensely first-person centered, with other characters and elements orbiting the narrator's consciousness. The narrators are both agents and experiencers, reinforcing the theme that they are actively engaging with their world but also often alone in their perspective on it.

Circumstances and Setting

Circumstantial elements in a clause provide the "when, where, how, why" details that situate processes in context. Murakami's use of circumstances is selective and often subtle. Murakami provides sparing descriptive detail. Nevertheless, when he does

include circumstantial information, it tends to carry symbolic or thematic weight. Table 3 outlines common circumstances in each story and their narrative function:

Table 3. Predominant circumstances by story and their narrative function

Story	Common Circumstances (Type)	Function in Narrative
Cream	Location (the remote hill/mountain site, empty music hall); Time (a specific afternoon); Manner (quietly, alone)	The physical stillness and isolation of the setting mirror the narrator's existential solitude. The empty hall on a hill becomes a metaphor for the absurdity he faces, i.e. a journey to "nothing." Time of day (afternoon turning to evening) emphasizes the long wait and growing uncertainty. These sparse details intensify the story's atmosphere of emptiness and anticipation. The manner (quietly waiting) underscores the contemplative mood. In short, minimal but pointed circumstances in "Cream" create a stage for introspection.
With the Beatles	Time (the 1960s era, references to historical time like the year a school year begun.Later, "many years later" in Tokyo); Location (a school corridor, Tokyo streets); Cause/Purpose (the nostalgic trigger of the Beatles record)	Circumstances firmly anchor the story in historical time, reinforcing the theme of nostalgia. The mention of the 1960s (e.g. the cultural backdrop of Beatlemania) situates the personal memory in a broader cultural moment. Locations like the school corridor instantly evoke youth and the fleeting nature of that moment. When the narrative jumps forward, "years later in Tokyo" situates the emotion in a continuum of time, highlighting how memory persists.
Charlie Parker…	Manner (dreamlike, hypothetical scenarios); Cause (the power of imagination or artistic inspiration); Accompaniment (music constantly accompanying actions); Location (specific places like New York, a record shop)	This story's circumstances often blur reality. For instance, the narrator describes events in a "dreamlike" fashion or says "In my imagination, ..." – which are effectively manner/cause circumstances explaining that what follows is not real but imagined. The cause is frequently the narrator's creative whim (e.g. "out of curiosity" he wrote the article –

Story	Common Circumstances (Type)	Function in Narrative
		giving a rationale). Music itself functions like a circumstantial backdrop to everything – the story is saturated with references to jazz records, which is like an accompaniment circumstance to the narrator's life (music is always "with" him). When actual locations like New York appear, they ground the otherwise surreal events in real geography, lending credibility to his experience.
Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey	Location (a small hot-spring inn, Shinagawa as the monkey's origin, a bathhouse setting for the talk); Time (night of the conversation); Manner (hesitantly, happily in speech delivery)	The circumstances here accentuate the story's intimate and liminal quality. The meeting happens at night in an isolated inn, which is a classic setup for secrets to be revealed (night as a symbol of vulnerability, inn as a transient space). The bathhouse locale is both mundane and otherworldly (a place of cleansing, where a talking monkey might plausibly appear!). These locations underscore themes of liminality and confession – away from the everyday world. Manner is noteworthy in dialogue tags: the monkey speaks "hesitantly," or the narrator responds "awkwardly," etc., revealing emotional tones. Such circumstantial details about manner make the exchange feel authentic and poignant, emphasizing their mutual hesitation or warmth

Looking across the stories, Murakami's use of circumstances is indeed "minimal yet symbolically dense". Unlike some authors who lavish pages on setting, Murakami drops a few key details that resonate with the story's mood: - In "Cream," the emptiness of the mountain location and the waiting in quiet encapsulate the story's existential puzzle. The lack of extraneous detail (we don't even know the old man's name or much about the environment beyond "chilly air" and "no one around") actually focuses us on the philosophical moment. - In "With the Beatles," the explicit anchoring in the 1960s and the later meeting in modern Tokyo serve to highlight the passage of time. Murakami doesn't describe, say, the weather or the exact look of the

school – he trusts the cultural reference (Beatles record, 1960s) to do the evocative work. The nostalgic cause (the record and song playing) is a circumstance that triggers the entire emotional arc. - In "Charlie Parker," whenever the narrator's imaginative scenario takes flight, he often qualifies it with something like "Let's imagine, for the sake of argument, that…" or "In a dream, Charlie Parker…". These are essentially circumstantial clauses (setting up a conditional context). This technique keeps readers oriented about what's real or not without heavy exposition – a deft use of language to toggle modes. When he returns to concrete reality (like quoting a price, $35, or saying "in New York City"), it jolts the reader pleasantly with realism. The interplay of imagined cause and real location in clauses is a microcosm of the story's theme (imagination vs reality). - In "Shinagawa Monkey," the setting is almost stage-like: an inn and two characters talking. Circumstances of place (the inn's features) are mentioned only as needed (the bathing area where they talk, the room where the monkey does massage – briefly noted). The fact it's Shinagawa (a ward in Tokyo) appears in the monkey's backstory (he's called the Shinagawa Monkey because of where he once was), tying into a realistic detail that makes the surreal scenario oddly specific. Time (night) and manner (hesitant speech) heighten the secretive, vulnerable mood of a confession.

One notable overall pattern is that time and location are not always specific. Murakami often relies on generic references or none at all, unless specificity serves a point. For example, we are not given an exact date for "Cream" or "Monkey," just general time of day or season. In "Beatles," we get an era rather than a date (the start of a school term, 1960s context). This vagueness can make the stories feel more universal or dreamlike. Murakami's worlds are slightly unmoored from strict reality, which is reinforced by minimal timestamps. Yet, paradoxically, when he does mention something like 1964 or mention a real place, it hits strongly because most of the narrative floats free of those anchors. This gives the narratives a hazy temporal atmosphere, aligning with themes of memory and the subconscious.

Discussion

The discussion is organized into two main parts:

Narration, Consciousness, and Thematic Implications

One of the central findings of this study is that Murakami's narrators do not merely think but also act. This is evidenced by the dominance of Material processes alongside Mental ones, and by the participant structure that keeps the narrator's perspective at the forefront. The effect is that the narration often feels like a direct line into the protagonist's stream of consciousness. Readers of Murakami frequently comment on how intimately they get to know the mind of the narrator. Present analysis shows that grammatically, this is achieved by making the narrator the Senser of myriad mental processes and positioning almost all events as things that happen to or are observed by that narrator. For example, in "With the Beatles," instead of writing "The girl stood in the corridor clutching the record," Murakami writes (in translation) a sentence that effectively says "What stays with me is the sight of her clutching that record" (p.78). The latter explicitly casts the event as a memory impression on the narrator, which is a subtle shift but one that reinforces the filter of I. This aligns with Genette's notion of focalization, i.e. everything is internally focalized through the narrator. Transitivity analysis lays this bare by showing that the grammatical subject of most clauses is "I"

and the processes are often perceive/think verbs. This narrative style resonates deeply with Murakami's themes of alienation and subjective reality. The narrators are often isolated figures, not particularly proactive or heroic, but thoughtful and observant. By emphasizing material and mental processes, Murakami linguistically encodes that isolation. Moreover, the frequent material actions that do occur are often mundane or aimless (taking a train to nowhere in "Cream," flipping through records in "Charlie Parker," reading aloud a random story in "With the Beatles"). They are not grand plot-driving actions; instead, they set the stage for introspection or subtle emotional epiphanies. This supports the theme of searching for meaning in the mundane: Murakami's characters carry out ordinary motions, but through those motions they encounter the extraordinary (an inexplicable idea of a "cream" in nothingness, a ghostly record, etc.). The transitivity patterns reflect this by mixing mundane action verbs with introspective mental verbs in close succession, often within the same paragraph. The result is a tone of quiet contemplative action, i.e. events happen, but the real story is how the narrator experiences them internally.

Another key observation from our analysis is the usage of Relational and Existential processes to convey uncertainty and identity issues. In each story, there are pivotal moments expressed through relational clauses. For example, "It was a strange kind of cream" (where an abstract metaphor is given as an identity,p.21) or existential ones like "Maybe the monkey didn't really exist"(p.151). These clauses, though few, jump out because they often encapsulate the inexplicable heart of the story. The "circle with many centers"(p.18) anecdote in "Cream" would ultimately boil down to a relational statement like "A circle with many centers is the cream of the crop of something" (paraphrasing the philosophical point). That is an identity clause tackling a paradox. Similarly, the concluding sense in "With the Beatles" that all that remains is an image. Murakami's persistent theme of identity and the search for self finds linguistic expression here. The narrators often do not assert much about themselves directly, but through the relational clauses describing others or situations, they indirectly comment on states of existence. For instance, the monkey saying "Stealing is the only way" (p.146) is a relational clause at heart (stealing = expression of love), which is a tragic self-definition of the monkey's identity and dilemma. Moreover, abundant use of Verbal processes in "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey" leads to another thematic insight: the importance of communication and confession. By devoting nearly half the clauses to saying and asking, Murakami emphasizes the act of communication as an event in itself. The story becomes a conversation. Thematically, this underscores how connection is formed through sharing stories (the monkey unburdens to the narrator). Verbal processes literalize this theme, i.e. to overcome loneliness (monkey's and perhaps narrator's), they talk. The abundant "he said/I said" structure creates a rhythm of exchange. Our participant analysis also highlighted that this story distributes agency between two speaking beings, which is unique among these stories. It marks a subtle shift from pure solipsism to an intersubjective moment. The narrator steps a bit outside himself to engage with the Other. Most interestingly, right after that conversation ends, the story concludes without resolution, implying that the value was in the exchange itself. From Murakami's recurring motif of yearning for connection in an alienating world point of view, this story's transitivity shows connection is established involving a dialogue,whereas others mostly show isolation (first- person narration).

Correlations Between Process Distribution And Recurring Themes:
each story's transitivity emphasis correlates strongly with its primary theme, for instance, in "Cream", an intermingling of Material and Mental correlates with action vs. insight as well as with the theme, i.e. seeking meaning (insight) in real experiences. The narrator's equal engagement in doing (going to the mountain) and thinking (pondering the meaning) shows this interplay. In "With the Beatles", High Mental correlates with memory and nostalgia. The story is about recollection and emotional longing; hence grammatically it dwells in the mind. The few Material actions (meeting the brother, etc.) serve to reactivate memories, not to advance a plot. Nostalgia is literally relived in thought, so the grammar reflects a mind circling around the past. In "Charlie Parker", High Material and Mental are blended which correlates with creativity and alternate reality. The narrator actively creates (writes, searches, etc.) but also heavily imagines and questions reality. The material processes ground the creative fiction in tangible tasks, while the mental processes allow the narrative to float scenarios and doubt. Together they underscore the story's inquiry: can imagination alter reality? The narration does, by grammar, both making something (article) and doubting something (memory of record). In "Shinagawa Monkey", High Verbal correlates with confession and communication. The theme of revealing one's true self and seeking understanding is carried by interactive dialogue. The grammatical prominence of Verbal processes directly mirrors the plot device (the monkey's confession) and the theme of bridging loneliness via speech.
In all cases, the transitivity profile is not incidental; it's a functional part of conveying the story's core. This strongly supports the SFL idea that form and meaning are intertwined. Murakami chooses clause structures that amplify what the story is "about" beyond plot. For instance, had "With the Beatles" been written with more material events (say, dramatizing the narrator's daily life in the '60s rather than his interior memory), it would feel less wistful and more concrete, likely reducing the poignant nostalgia. But by keeping it a series of recollections and reflections (mental clauses), the very grammar forces us into a wistful mode.
Finally, Murakami's narrative voice across these stories can be characterized as "a tone of subdued alienation with moments of surreal clarity". The subdued part comes from the simplicity and frequency of certain clause types, i.e. a great deal of stating and remembering in simple terms, rarely hyperbolic or exclamatory structures. Even when bizarre things happen, they are described in Halliday's declarative mood, often in past tense, straightforward diction. The alienation comes from the fact that the narrator is grammatically isolated and other human agents are few. The world often reacts to him or he to it, rather than collaborative action. The surreal clarity emerges in those relational clauses and existential moments that suddenly articulate a theme, for example, "Everyone will die", appearing in the "Cream" as a stark existential clause (p.13). In transitivity terms, those moments where a process type or participant configuration shifts (the narrator stating a universal truth, or the monkey speaking like a human) stand out and often coincide with thematic epiphanies. Therefore, the transitivity analysis does not only catalogue linguistic features but it also illuminates how Murakami's storytelling achieves its effects. It shows, concretely, that the narrative voice is encoded by a balance of material action and mental reflection, a dominance of the narrator's subjective role, and a selective use of descriptive context. These are the levers Murakami pulls to create that distinctive feel of his short stories, where the reader floats through a series of recollected or dreamlike events intimately

tied to a narrator's psyche.

Conclusion

This study set out to analyze how narrative voice is encoded through transitivity patterns in four short stories by Haruki Murakami. By examining 80 clauses from each story (320 clauses in total), a detailed Systemic Functional analysis focusing on process types, participant roles, and circumstances was conducted. The findings provide a linguistically grounded characterization of Murakami's first-person narrative style and demonstrate clear links between grammatical choices and literary effect. Murakami's narrative voice in these stories is achieved by a dynamic interplay of process types. Material processes (actions) and Mental processes (internal thoughts/perceptions) dominate the clauses, indicating narrators who are simultaneously engaged in the external world and their inner consciousness. This dual dominance supports the introspective yet active quality of Murakami's storytelling, i.e. the narrators do relatively ordinary things even as they contemplate profound questions. Relational processes, while less frequent, surface at pivotal moments to express states of being or identity, aligning with themes of self and existential reflection. Verbal processes are generally sparse except in "Confessions of a Shinagawa Monkey", where an abundance of speech acts underscores the theme of communication and confession. Behavioral processes were negligible, reflecting Murakami's focus on deliberate actions and thoughts over involuntary behaviors. The participant analysis reinforced that Murakami's first-person narrators are the gravitational center of their narratives. Grammatically, the narrator "I" is nearly always the Actor, Senser, or Sayer, with other characters appearing mostly as objects of the narrator's perception or as interlocutors in conversation. This creates a filtered perspective in which the world is presented through one consciousness. Such a construction resonates with Murakami's recurring motif of isolation. In "Shinagawa Monkey," where another character (the monkey) gains a voice, the analysis shows a rare sharing of agency, which in turn highlights the narrative's theme of empathetic connection. Circumstantial elements in the clauses were used economically but meaningfully. The stories drop a few specific details such as, a location (e.g., a mountain town, a school corridor), a time frame (the 1960s, late at night), or a manner ("quietly," "hesitantly"), that set the scene and tone. This minimalist approach to context actually amplifies the sense of atmosphere. The grammar of circumstances thus supports Murakami's ability to evoke vivid settings and moods with few words, i.e. a kind of linguistic economy that matches his narrative economy. These patterns collectively illustrate how transitivity choices encode Murakami's distinctive narrative voice. The narrators come across as introspective observers of their worlds, sometimes drifting into passivity, yet they undergo meaningful internal journeys. By quantitatively and qualitatively linking process types to story themes, linguistic profile of each story was observed to mirror its narrative focus, therefore, a memory-heavy story uses more mental clauses and on the other hand, a dialogue-driven story uses more verbal clauses, etc. Such alignment is a powerful demonstration of Halliday's principle that form and meaning are congruent (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). From a stylistic perspective, this study contributes evidence of Murakami's "quiet surrealism" in language: the fact that extraordinary events are told through ordinary grammatical constructions (simple past tense, declarative clauses, first-person narration) is what gives his work that matter-of-fact surreal flavor. By keeping

grammar simple even when content is strange, Murakami creates a contrast that makes the reader subconsciously accept the surreal as normal. This underscores Murakami's skill in using a plain style to achieve deep resonance and a dreamlike effect. Ultimately, analyzing narrative voice through transitivity not only answers our specific questions about Murakami but also highlights the intimate connection between grammar and meaning in fiction. Haruki Murakami's stories may be otherworldly in content, but their enduring power lies in a language that is grounded and accessible.

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