

Language and Cross-Cultural Construction: A Systemic Functional Interpretation of Hiroko Tanaka in Shamsie's Burnt Shadows

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Abstract

This study interprets and explains Hiroko Tanaka one of the major characters of Burnt Shadows from the perspective of cross-cultural construction by using Transitivity which is a major system for the explanation of experiential metafunction at the level of clause in Systemic Functional Grammar. Shamsie's Burnt Shadows (2009) covers five countries and fifty-six years. The novel is about diverse cultures and significant historical periods of the world represented through the intimate relations among the characters. Systemic Functional Linguistics describes language in four hierarchical levels, and the relation among these levels is that of realization/actualization of higher strata realized in the next lower level. This study exploits this realization from the lower level of lexicogrammar up to the higher level of Semantics and fictional Context created within the novel. The results obtained by applying this analytical framework. Transitivity Concordance and Role Dynamism equip a researcher with some objective grounds (to some extent) for the subjective interpretation of a discourse. This study is not just segmentation or a paraphrasing identical to close reading; rather it is an interpretation of divergent ideologies that underpin cultural constructions. This approach proves that studying literature through its language is more rewarding than paraphrasing.

Key Words: Systemic Functional Linguistics, Transitivity System, Concordance, Role Dynamism, Experiential Metafunction

Introduction

Shamsie's Burnt Shadows is a cross-cultural construction whose plot covers five countries' diverse cultures and fifty-six years' time span. Characters from different countries and cultures mingle with each other same as in The English Patient (Ondaatje, 2009). These characters develop intimate relations amongst themselves but sometimes, cross-cultural intermingling becomes such a complex phenomenon that it creates chaos. Occasionally, these divergent cultures play a

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positive role in developing a harmony through dialogue but mostly competing ideologies and opposing histories disrupt social milieu. Japan 9 August 1945, 1947 India, 1982-3 Pakistan-Afghanistan, and 2001-2 America – Afghanistan suggest competing histories and discourses underpinned by diverse cultural ideologies. In 1945, two A-Bombs dropped by Americans, justified by an American doctor when he said to Hiroko Tanaka that, *'And then one day – near the end of '46 – the American with the gentle face said the bomb was a terrible thing, but it had to be done to save American lives.'* (Shamsie, p.52) and Hiroko thought – *'It was impossible, really, to hold anyone responsible – the bomb was so - t seemed beyond anything human'* (Shamsie, p.51). One can discern how harmony is offered by the weak. There is a dialogue between these voices. These are the competing discourses in the novel for cross-cultural construction and this the construal of this cross-cultural fictional reality is researched and interpreted in this study. Similarly, very crucial historical periods like India 1947, the end of the Raj, Pakistan, and Afghanistan at the time of Russian invasion of Afghanistan and US involvement in it, and America after the attacks of 9/11 on the Twin Towers are symbolically mingles in the novel to make sense of the present day situation in the world. This is a novel about the interplay of history and the individual lives and it shows how individuals carry history with them wherever they go and how diverse cultures construct contrasting meanings to the same events across the borders. Hiroko Tanaka is the only character who survived the whole of the novel. Hence, the cross-cultural construction studied through her character. King (2016) opined that in *Burnt Shadows* the writer has enlarged the horizon to include the American use of the atomic bomb in Japan and the effects of US foreign policy on non-Americans. This cross-cultural construction of Hiroko's character investigated in this study. How the clauses' segmentation and interpretation in Transitivity System paves the way for subjective interpretation of the novel? The story centred around the life of Hiroko Tanaka, a victim of Atomic bombings by the superpower. So, this investigation is done through her character because she is the only one and central character who takes through the whole novel. Hiroko Tanaka, A Japanese Woman, Konrad Weiss, a German, James Burton and his Wife Elizabeth, and their Son Henry Burton are British living in Delhi at the end of the Raj, and Henry's daughter Kim Burton American and Sajjad Ali Ashraf an Indian Muslim migrated to Pakistani, Raza – Hiroko and Sajjad's son, and Abdullah an Afghan emigre in Pakistan – all these are representations of cross-cultural mingling. These characters made the canvas of the novel a cross-cultural complex. Hiroko has survived the bombings on Nagasaki but got two bird shaped scars on her back which defined her in the rest of the novel. she has been reduced to a word, *'hibakusha'*, an explosion-affected person (Shamsie, 2009. P. 49). *'I (Hiroko) hate that word. It reduces you to the bomb'* (Shamsie, p. 84) she refused this judgement and never lived under the survivor's guilt which haunted many bomb victims.

The clause is the basic unit in SFG, whereas in traditional grammars it is sentence. This process of construction analysed and interpreted by segmenting the clauses of the selected passages in to their constituents. The lexicogrammar stratum of SFL is the level of grammar which realises the two above strata Context and Semantics and itself actualises in the lower level of phonetics and phonology.

Thompson (2014, p.256) averred that in literature language use is constitutive, an essential part, of it. Stylistics, study of discourse in any literary genre, performed successfully only if it is based on the understanding of what is happening at the lexicogrammatical level. Language use carry all the effects of literature. So, this investigates how the patterning of clause patterns construe Hiroko's character in relation to context of diverse cultures. She has lost everything, every relation, her home and her identity to the atomic-bomb. *'So the story of Hiroko Ashraf's youth was not a story of the bomb, but of the voyage after it'* (Shamsie, 2009. p. 223).

Hiroko Tanaka crosses all the cultural borders, travelled to India in the last days of the Raj, migrated to Pakistan after marrying Sajjad Ali Ashraf. Raza, their son, travelled to Afghanistan to a mujahidin training camp in 1980s but ended up as a prisoner in Guantanamo bay. Hiroko travelled to America to meet Elizabeth Burton after the murder of her husband Sajjad and then lived there permanently. Hiroko wanted the world to stop being such a terrible place to live, but in her last dialogue with Kim Burton realized that it is not possible to make the world understand terrorism from the victim's point of view, *'Hiroko stood up and walked slowly over to the window. Outside, at least, the world went on'*(Shamsie, p.352).She born all these atrocities, but bird shaped scars are always there to haunt her, to define her and to marginalized and reduced her to word hibakusha, Hiroko realized that being a hibakusha is better than being a nothing.

The novel divided into four sections; I, The Yet Unknowing World: Nagasaki, 9 August 1945, II, Veiled Birds: Delhi 1947, iii, Part – Angel Warriors: Pakistan, 1982-3, IV, The Speed Necessary to Replace the Loss: New York, Afghanistan, 2001-2. The historical thematic significance is obvious from period of each section. These sections correspond to divergent cultures in different countries. The characters from these countries brought their own histories to understand, interpret and reflect upon a conflict. The collection of data for analysis matches to these four sections to uphold the cultural differences of each section. The passages related to the narrator, to the dialogues of the characters, and to the interaction of the community members are chosen carefully from the novel. Then these passages are segmented into clauses for the analysis and interpretation. There are various approaches which interpret a literary text from above, for example from the context of creation, historical period, psychological theories perspective etc. etc. for interpretation, but in this study an approach from below, from language used in the creation of a literary text, from clauses of sentences, from lexicogrammar, is adopted to interpret a literary specifically *Burnt Shadows*. The characterisation in a fiction is the process of representing characters' being in all dimensions such as

doings, happenings, thinking, sayings, behaviours, inner and outer experiences through language. In representing all these sayings, thinking, behaving, etc., the writer exploits the Experiential Metafunction of language according to Halliday (Halliday, 1971) as termed in SFL. SFL, as an approach, is clearly in harmony with the aims of discourse analysis. Halliday (1994: p.xvi) argues forcefully that 'a discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all'; and this view has become increasingly accepted mostly by discourse analysts. Thompson (2013) also expressed similar views and affirms that interpretation of any text needs to be firmly based on an understanding of what is happening at the lexicogrammatical level. All the effects of literature are created by the language used (Thompson, 2013, p.256).

Transitivity system is the set of various choices for the construal of such events in language (Eggs, 2004, p. 206). The Process Types (Verbs) are divided into six types; Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioural, and Existential. The classification of the process types into six types is based on the semantics of these Processes (Verb). This system is related to the traditional notion of Transitive and Intransitive Verbs, but this system includes the whole clause instead of just verb and object relation. It includes subject and object which are termed as Participants in SFG. The participant roles (Subject/Object) are also divided into various categories which agree to the semantic base of Process types.

Material process construes the physical actions, doings, and happenings, in clauses and the Participant roles are called Actor (doer), Goal (done to), Range, and Scope. Mental process construes the inner world and in this process the participant roles are Senser and Phenomenon. Relational processes serve to identify and characterise ((Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p.256). Carrier and Attribute. and Token and Value are the participant roles in Relational processes. Verbal processes are the processes of 'sayings' and the participants are termed 'Sayer' and 'Verbiage.' Behavioural processes are the representation of psychological and physiological actions such as dance, laugh etc. behavior is the participant roles in these processes. Existential processes merely indicate existence of anything, any phenomenon or any person etc. and normally these types start with introductory there. These are the six process types in the system of Transitivity of SFG. Transitivity system is widely applied in a literary text and other texts for the interpretation and analysis of implicit ideologies and characterisation.

Halliday himself, first of all, has applied the system of transitivity for the interpretation of different world views of the Lok and the Inheritors in Goldings's *The Inheritors* (Halliday, 1971). Fowler (1988) also demonstrated that the study of Literature through linguistics is better and it is best if studied through the application of Transitivity system. Hasan (1989) has demonstrated the utility of this framework by analysing the eponymous Widower in Les Murray's *The Widower in the Country*. These studies have applied this system of Transitivity as

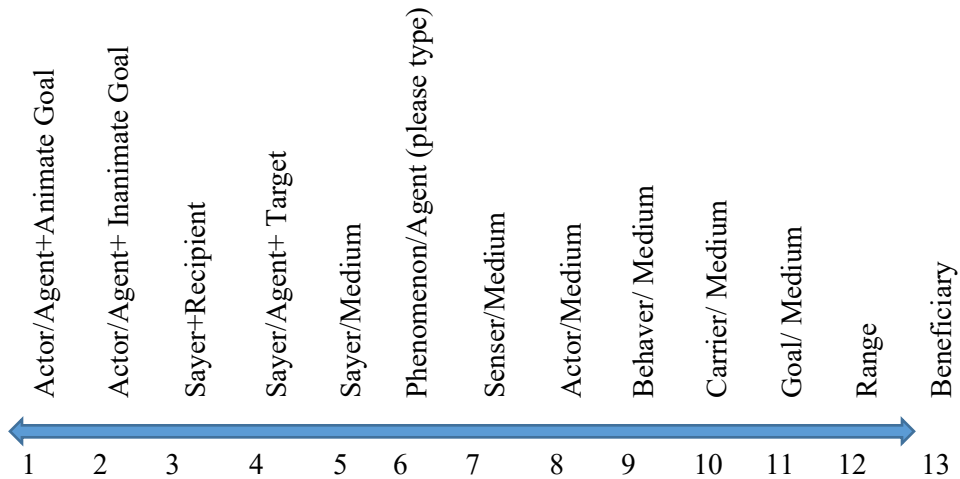
an analytical tool for grammatical analysis but the cline dynamism along with this analytical tool is not applied for the interpretation of complex literary character in a fiction.

SFL is applied in the study of literature by various SFL scholars (Halliday, 1971, Hasan 1989, Fowler, 1988, Butt, 2016) and specifically the system of Transitivity is employed as an analytical tool by Burton, 1996, Hubbard, 1999, Geoff Thompson, 2008, Iwamoto, 2008, Wulansari & Prasasti, 2016.

Martin (2016) averred that the description of grammar as meaning making resource is the most distinctive feature of SFL and this distinguishes SFL from the rest of the theories of language. SFG is evolved as a powerhouse of meaning making in SFL. However, the development of SFL theory is evolutionary as it developed the existing ideas and not a revolution in linguistics. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 220) described the realisation of Transitivity system in traditional terminology as Processes, Participants, and Circumstance which are realized by Verbal Groups, Noun Phrases and Prepositional Phrases or Adverbs in Traditional grammars, respectively.

The second part of this analytical tool is the Cline of Dynamism which is developed by Hasan (1985). This cline is based on the participant's roles. The dispersion of Participants' roles along the continuum is based on the sematic institution of dynamic and least dynamic participant roles.

Dynamic Passive



The Cline of Dynamism (Hasan, 1985, p. 44)

On this continuum the participant roles are slightly different from the next but there is apparent difference on the ends, for example, Actor/Agent is the most dynamic and Beneficiary is the least dynamic from the point of view of Semantics.

Thompson (2008) has employed this concept of the cline of dynamism but in a slightly different way as he adopted it from Driscoll and McLaughlin (2009) to analyse the construal of two queens; Queen Elizabeth-I of England, and Queen Mary of Scotland in the popular and academic history texts.

Like Halliday, Kennedy (1982) has analysed only one passage from Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* in which Mrs. Verloc has killed her husband Mr. Verloc. Kennedy analysed the process types for interpretation of the characters' representation through language in the novel. Similarly, many other literary scholars have applied this system (Burton, 1996, Hubbard, 1999, Iwamoto, 2008.)

Burnt Shadows' interpretation and analysis is mostly done from the thematic point of views. No study has been done from the point of view of linguistics. This study investigates the thematic progression from below, from lexicogrammar stratum, from clauses' segmentation, to the upper levels of Semantics and Context as these strata outlined in SFL. The themes associated generally in post 9/11 fictions are of uprooting, disjuncture, metamorphosis, etc. (Rushdie, 1991), and same themes are symbolised in *Burnt Shadows* which are of migration, uprooting, disjuncture, metamorphosis, home, nation, diaspora, and foreignness, etc.(Karim, (2011), King, (2011) Ahmed, Morey, & Yaqin, (2012), Gamal, 2013). These are some of the recurrent themes in the novels written after attacks on twin towers in US and which relate countries and civilizations and the themes of immigrants. *Burnt Shadows* represents these recurrent themes by bringing together characters from different nations such as from Japan, Germany, Britain, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and America. Let us explore these themes section wise.

The first section, 'The Yet Unknowing World: Nagasaki, 9 August 1945' is about Nagasaki. There is one outsider who directly interacts with her, Konrad Weiss, A German. Here, Hiroko Tanaka is in her country, in her own village, amongst her own people, but she is an outsider as she supports her father who is an outspoken critic of the Emperor. *He has seen this neighbourhood girl—the traitor's daughter (Shamsie, p.7)*. She is an insider but turned to be an outsider, as she openly supports her father and mostly wanders with Konrad Weiss. Hence, she is an outsider. The analysis of clause reveal that she has occupies the maximum space of narration (67%) whereas the other characters have 16% space in participant roles. This establishes her as the main character and the focus of narration. In this first section the most prominent process types are Mental processes. This signifies that most of the time characters are engaged in making sense of the world around them. Figure 1 shows the participant roles on the cline. This shows that in this section most of the roles are Senser and Sayer which fall in

the middle of dynamism. Therefore, no character is dynamic or effectual. They do not know this type of bomb, The New Bomb! the old man thinks! (Shamsie, p.10).

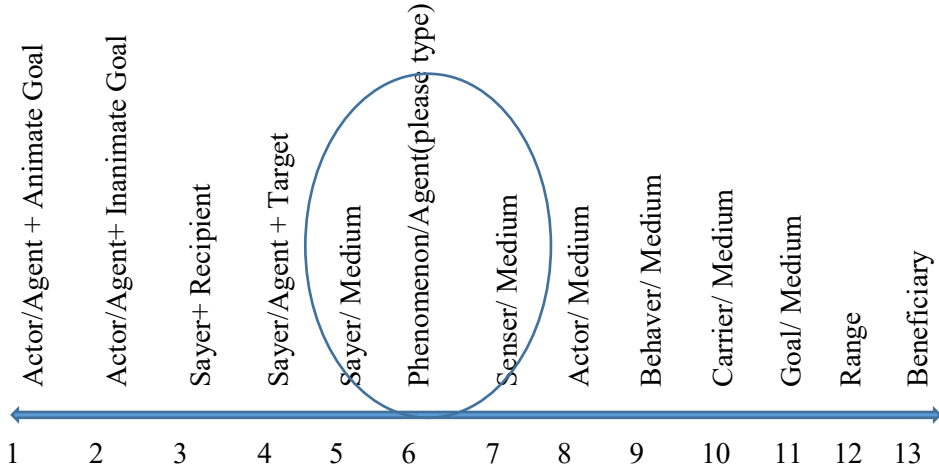


Figure 1

Most of Participant roles are described in the clauses which are goal-less so the main theme is the construal of a world which lacks physical activity as all the world around them is shattered into pieces due to the war and atrocities of the Emperor. Hiroko is forced to work in an ammunition factory.

In the second part, 'The Veiled Birds, 1947' the mostly occurring process types are Material (20%), Mental (24%), Verbal (33%), which show a contrast when compared to first part. Whereas, in the first dominant process type was mental types only but there are other types too. This variety of more types of processes tell us that life is getting normal as compared to Nagasaki section. Characters involved in all types of activities as though life is normal. Hiroko travelled to India, met James and Elizabeth Burtons, and Sajjad Ali Ashraf, learnt Urdu from Sajjad. Sajjad is James dogsbody. James exploited him by pretending that he is getting law education from him and James will set him as lawyer, a typical colonizer's motives theme. Elizabeth lived under the shadow of her powerful husband James and despite her objections, James had sent their son Henry Burton to America for study. Elizabeth is marginalized and colonized like Sajjad. Let us now examine these interpretations from below, clauses segmentation in Lexicogrammar.

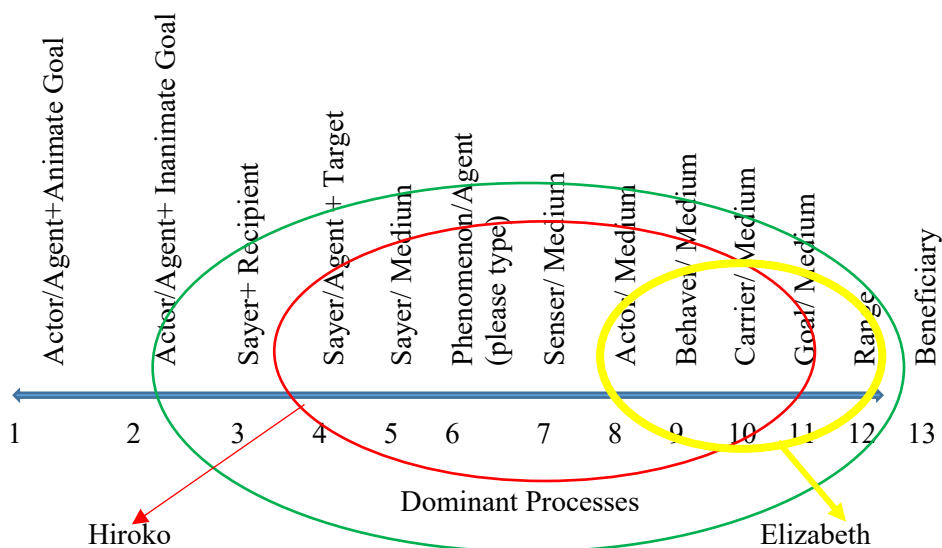


Figure 2: Veiled Birds Dynamism

Figure II, *Veiled Birds*, 1947, the context of this section is quite different, here Hiroko is an outsider both physically and politically, she was an insider in the first section but turned out to be an outsider due to the politics. Elizabeth colonized by her husband. Hiroko's representation is quite different from Elizabeth. Hiroko is socially not bound to anybody, hence she is dynamic and have her voice heard. She has the most space of narration alike in the section I and here she is more dynamic than the previous one. She is most dynamic in comparison to Elizabeth Burton. Elizabeth became helpless and ineffectual due her dominating husband James Burton.

Third section, *Part- Angel Warriors: Pakistan, 1982-83*, Hiroko migrated to Pakistan after getting married to Sajjad Ali Ashraf. Sajjad works in a factory but murdered by a criminal. Raza, Hiroko's son, travelled to a training camp in Afghanistan. In this section Hiroko has a home but this too proved fragile again the due to birds which haunt her everywhere. It is her history which mostly defines her, her relationship with her surroundings. Let us examine, analyse and interpret from clause segmentation.

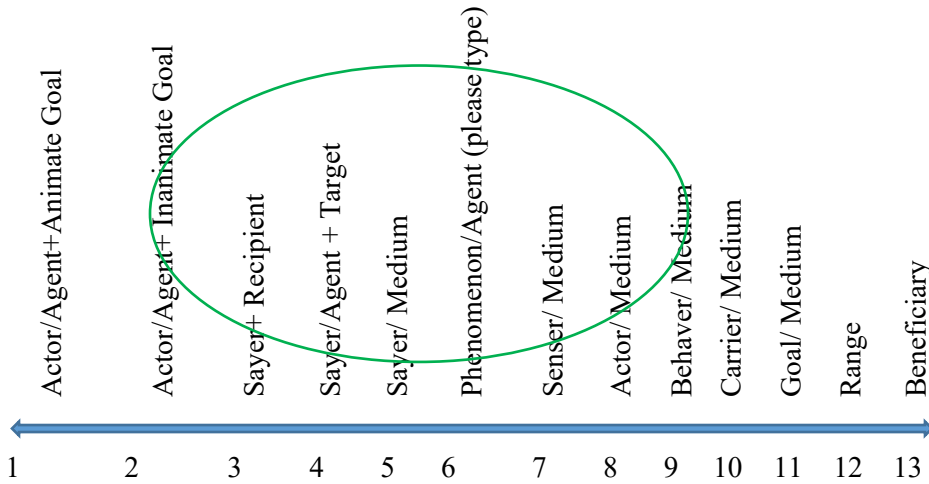


Figure 3

The most process types are Material, Verbal, Mental, and Behavioural. The characters are engaged in actions, doings, and happenings. All the characters are equally dynamic.

The fourth and the last section, *The Speed Necessary to Replace the Loss: New York, Afghanistan, 2001-2*. America declared war on terror and invaded in Afghanistan and Iraq. The novel ends somewhere in between New York and Afghanistan. Hiroko travelled to America, met Kim Burton. Raza imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay. Hiroko told Kim Burton that, *Kim, you are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb.* (Shamsie, p.299). They stopped talking to each other because of the dark birds of history are between them. The clause segmentation for this section shows that the most process types are goal-less Materials, Verbal, and Mental. The characters are engaged again mostly in thinking and saying. There is no resolution but a deep silence that ensued between Kim and Hiroko. Kim Burton appears as the dominant character of the section. The results on the cline repeat the pattern of Figure III.

The overall processes types in the analysed text are mostly Mental, Verbal, and Behavioural. The male characters are more dynamic than females. In the female characters Hiroko is more dynamic but this can be due to fact that Hiroko is the only character who survived the whole novel.

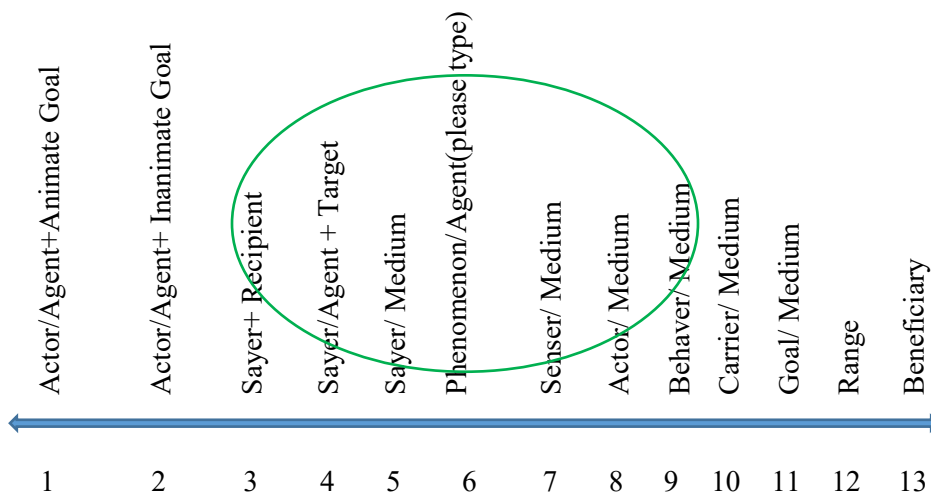


Figure 4

It can be concluded that this novel focus more on dialogue than on doings and happenings. The characters engage more in Mental and Verbal processes than any other types. Making sense of the world is of primary importance for the characters and can be metaphor for the world. The start of the novel from a past event of 1945 reflects that we need to revisit history, re-think our past to make this world a better place as wished by Hiroko Tanaka, “I want the world to stop being such a terrible place to live in (Shamsie, pp. 293, 294). Figure V gives the overall picture of analysed clauses related Hiroko.

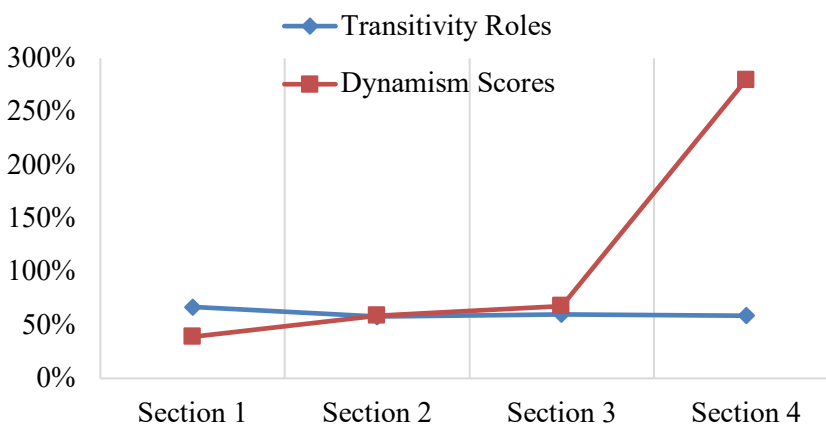


Figure 5: Role Dynamism Vs Participant Roles of Hiroko

It is obvious that though the Participant roles are slightly different in all the sections, but Hiroko has turned out to be a dynamic character. Hiroko represented as a doer instead of done to character.

This study showed that it supplied some objective grounds for the interpretation and analysis of a literary text. The context created in the novel interpreted from the system of Transitivity which helped in understanding the implicit ideologies which modulate the interpretation of any text. In this study only one system of Experiential Metafunction of SFL is applied, but if along this the other two metafunctions, Interpersonal and Textual, are applied simultaneously then the results can provide more grounds to the researcher for analysis and interpretation of any literary text.

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